

ANGUS COUNCIL

COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE – 15 AUGUST 2023

ANGUS COUNCIL NATURE RESTORATION FUND ALLOCATION 2023/24

REPORT BY ALISON SMITH, DIRECTOR OF VIBRANT COMMUNITIES AND SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

ABSTRACT

This report updates the Committee on the capital grant allocation of £306,000 to Angus Council from the Scottish Government for the Nature Restoration Fund for the 2023/24 financial year. It seeks delegated authority to the Director of Vibrant Communities to allocate to projects, recommended by officers, in line with the terms of the funding.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Committee:

- (i) delegate authority to the Director of Vibrant Communities and Sustainable Growth to agree the list of projects/proposals for the Nature Restoration Fund allocation of £306,000 for delivery within the 2023/24 financial year;
- (ii) delegate the signing and issue of any sub-agreements to project partners to the Director of Vibrant Communities and Sustainable Growth following consultation with the Director of Legal and Democratic Services; and
- (iii) note that an update on the delivery of projects through this funding will be provided to Elected Members through our biodiversity reporting.

2. ALIGNMENT TO THE COUNCIL PLAN

Commitment to delivery of this project contributes to the following priorities in the Angus Council Plan 2023-2028.

Caring for our Place

- Take action to mitigate against climate change by delivering our Transition to Net Zero Action Plan: 2022 to 2030 and leading on the delivery of a Sustainable Energy Climate Action Plan (SECAP) for Angus to reduce area wide emissions
- Enhance and restore Angus Biodiversity, corporately and with a range of stakeholders

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Established by the Scottish Government, the Nature Restoration Fund (NRF) is a capital fund designed to help projects that will deliver nature restoration and tackle the causes of biodiversity loss due to climate change. It is a multi-year programme to specifically target nature restoration projects.
- 3.2 All Local Authorities, plus the National Parks, receive a capital allocation directly from Scottish Government. The total value of the allocation to Local Authorities for the 2023/24 financial year is £10 million. This is a 100% increase on the previous financial year and sees the fund complemented by an additional £5million with a specific focus on developing projects which will contribute to establishing Nature Networks. The distribution methodology is based on: 50% on 'area of natural greenspace' and 50% on NatureScot composite indicator.

- 3.3 The allocation of funds for Angus Council in 2023/24 is £0.306 million rounded (£306,000), paid as a General Capital Grant.
- 3.4 The draft Scottish Biodiversity Strategy sets out the need, in line with the Edinburgh Process, for a whole-of -society approach to achieving the high-level goals of being nature positive and halting biodiversity loss by 2030 and substantially restoring it by 2045. The strategic goal of the Nature Restoration Fund (NRF) is to catalyse action at scale.
- 3.5 Under the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004, public bodies have a duty to conserve and enhance biodiversity. Angus Council has a strong commitment through the Tayside Local Biodiversity Action Plan 2016-26 which sets out 140 projects to protect the multitude of flora and fauna across the area and brings together organisations, communities, and individuals. Species champions also further support activity across the area. Projects delivered through this funding will delivery Biodiversity Action Plan priorities.

4. CURRENT POSITION

- 4.1 Nature Networks are integral to improving biodiversity and defending against the climate crisis. They help preserve the integrity of ecosystems on which we all depend and provide safe havens to help wildlife move as it adapts to climate change and other pressures.
- 4.2 A Nature Network connects nature-rich sites, restoration areas, and other environmental projects through a series of suitable habitat corridors and steppingstones. Restoring degraded habitats and creating new habitats which connect core assets of high functioning, nature rich sites across Angus is fundamental to our work going forward to meet our public body duty to conserve and enhance biodiversity.
- 4.3 National Planning Framework 4 set out the Scottish Government's expectation that Nature Networks will be put in place in every local authority in order to enhance biodiversity and better connect areas for nature. Local partnerships are needed to drive forward nature network development and Local Authorities can play a key role, facilitating partnership working and involving communities in identifying local priorities for nature, ensuring that local knowledge informs those priority areas.
- 4.4 Nationally NatureScot are working to develop a national Nature Network Tool to provide a connectivity map across Scotland which will also identify opportunity areas. Whilst the data will be open source an additional subscription fee is proposed to access areas of the tool to manage projects and monitor progress through Natural Capital Accounting. Good baseline data is fundamental to underpin this work and our own legislative requirements. Officers within Angus Council have therefore been working to secure external funding to support survey work, are working closely with colleagues in neighbouring authorities and have offered to be involved in any pilot work.

5. PROPOSALS

- 5.1 The timelines for the delivery of capital projects and associated spend for the Fund is very tight. In order to ensure that the council can fulfil the requirements of the grant, the focus has to be on projects that can be delivered within the timeframe and the necessary staff resources available for delivery. As this is multi-year programme a wide-ranging corporate working group was previously setup and developed a long list of proposals which align to Nature Restoration Fund and Biodiversity Action Plan priorities.
- 5.2 Confirmation of the funding allocation for this financial year was only received on 29th June 2023 and therefore officers have not yet had an opportunity to refine or cost those options for delivery within this financial year. Due to the requirement for spend by the end of the financial year delegated authority is sought to allow projects to progress as soon as these are developed. The existing working group, comprising officers, will identify projects from the long list taking in account deliverability and alignment with the nature networks requirement and recommend those which should progress.
- 5.3 Some of these projects will be a continuation of those identified for delivery with the 2022/23 allocation such as the Space for Nature Urban Trees projects ([Report 385/22 refers](#)).

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Whilst there are no direct financial implications as all proposals are contained within the allocated funding, there are indirect financial implications. Any survey or baseline work to help inform the development of Nature Networks or subscription costs to the National Network tool are not included within current revenue budgets. This may impact on our ability to secure future external funding or inform our statutory duty reporting.
- 6.2 Officer resource to support the development of Nature Networks and progress opportunities will require to be prioritised alongside existing responsibilities.

7. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 A screening opinion has been undertaken and no Equality Impact Assessment is required.

NOTE: No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above report.

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Equality Impact/Fairer Scotland Duty Assessment Form

(To be completed with reference to Guidance Notes)

Step 1

Name of Proposal (includes e. g. budget savings, committee reports, strategies, policies, procedures, service reviews, functions):

Committee Report for Communities Committee setting out details of the Angus Council Nature Restoration Fund Allocation for 2023/24 and seeking delegated authority to allocate to suitable projects.

Step 2

Is this only a **screening** Equality Impact Assessment **Yes/No**

(A) If Yes, please choose from the following options **all** reasons why a full EIA/FSD is not required:

(i) It does not impact on people **Yes/No**

(ii) It is a percentage increase in fees which has no differential impact on protected characteristics **Yes/No**

(iii) It is for information only **Yes/No**

(iv) It is reflective e.g. of budget spend over a financial year **Yes/No**

(v) It is technical **Yes/No**

If you have answered yes to any of points above, please go to **Step 16**, and sign off the Assessment.

Step 16: Sign off and Authorisation. Please state name, post, and date for each:

Prepared by: Jill Paterson, Service Leader – Planning and Sustainable Growth
18/07/23

Reviewed by: Antony McGuinness Manager - Dev Plan, Environment & Climate Change
31 July 2023

Approved by: Alison Smith, Director VC &SG 1 August 2023