



Report of the Cabinet Member for Environment Enhancement and Infrastructure Management

Cabinet - 17 June 2021

Sustainable Landscapes, Sustainable Places (SLSP) and Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) – Gower AONB – Offer of Additional Welsh Government Funding

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| Purpose: | <p>To seek Cabinet approval to accept two offers of funding from Welsh Government for specified projects totalling £325,000 in accordance with Financial Procedure Rule 5.7</p> <p>The funding is offered at 100% of project costs, with no match funding required.</p> |
| Policy Framework: | <p>SLSP: Funding of £225,000 - the purpose is to support the following capital projects during 2021/22:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clyne Valley Country Park Regeneration• Fairwood Common – Sustainable Management• Improvements in Port Eynon & Horton• Reynoldston and Cefn Bryn access• Pennard Castle <p>The projects were developed by the Gower AONB Partnership through the Welsh Government “Sustainable Landscapes, Sustainable Places” scheme, and the National Designated Landscapes Partnership (NDLP).</p> <p>SDF: Funding of £100,000 – the purpose is to operate the Sustainable Development Fund grant scheme within the AONB on behalf of Welsh Government. The fund aims, through partnership, to support projects that work to conserve and enhance natural beauty, wildlife, landscape, land use, culture and community on Gower.</p> |
| Consultation: | <p>Local Members, Access to Services, Finance, Legal</p> |

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| Recommendation(s): | It is recommended that: |
| 1) | Approval is given to accept both offers of funding (totalling £325,000) from Welsh Government, to enable the projects to be developed and delivered within 2021/22. |
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| Finance Officer: | Liz Bennett |
| Legal Officer: | Caritas Adere |
| Access to Services Officer: | Rhian Millar |

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Welsh Government - through the “Sustainable Landscapes, Sustainable Places” (SLSP) programme for Welsh AONBs and National Parks - has made a grant offer of 100% funding towards five projects, based upon discussions with the Gower AONB Team. The funding totals £225,000 and is for implementation in 2021/22.
- 1.2 In addition, the Welsh Government has made an offer of £100,000 to enable Gower AONB Partnership to continue the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) grant scheme, during 2021/22. This is also funded at 100%, and is administered according to guidelines set out by Welsh Government.
- 1.3 The projects and funding all lend support and contribute to the Welsh Government’s “Valued and Resilient” priorities for the Welsh AONBs and National Parks, as well as Council policies contained within the LDP and the Gower AONB Management Plan. The projects improve the provision of local access to green spaces and their sustainable management.
- 1.4 The projects will be coordinated by the Natural Environment Section, with works being implemented by agreement with other Council teams and appropriate local stakeholders. Officers are drawing up detailed specifications and work plans for each project.

2.0 SLSP Programme (£225,000) - Project outlines

- 2.1 **Clyne Valley Country Park (£50,000)** is a continuation of last year’s works to improve the Country Park and its sustainable management. The Country Park - on the eastern fringe of Swansea - is one of the largest contiguous areas of land in the stewardship of Swansea Council (over 300ha). Clyne Valley has multiple special features and assets (historical and ecological) and is an area easily accessible to much of the city’s population. Several visitor attractions and assets operate adjacent to the

Country Park, including Blackpill Lido, Clyne Gardens, the Railway Inn, and Clyne Farm Centre.

- 2.2 Welsh Government support in 2020/21 funded capital works and improvements to the network of footpaths and bridleways, including the installation of new and replacement bridge structures. Heritage assets have also been improved/restored and interpreted.
- 2.3 Further heritage and access improvements will be undertaken in 2021/22. Nature Recovery actions will focus on further Invasive Non- Native Species control – particularly control of Rhododendron on the west side of the valley, and treatment of Japanese Knotweed along watercourse corridors.
- 2.4 **Fairwood Common (£50,000)** - Fairwood Common is one of the largest areas of open common land in AONB at 524ha. Owned by Swansea Council, it is used for livestock grazing by a declining number of commoners. Fairwood Common is part of Gower Commons SAC and is also SSSI and SINC - with a mosaic of bog, wet and dry heath, ponds, scrub, and woodland habitats.
- 2.5 The Common surrounds Swansea Airport and there is extensive public open access. Fairwood Common is the gateway to Gower and a first feature for many people entering Gower from Swansea – certainly one of Gower’s iconic open commons. However, there are long standing issues which are leading to the deterioration of this iconic Gower landscape – issues around a lack of graziers (and barriers to releasing livestock out on the common), wildfires, increasing scrub cover and loss of biodiversity and ecological resilience.
- 2.6 This project aims to tackle these problems, by equipping those involved to reverse some of the changes, improving public access facilities, and by raising awareness amongst visitors and locals of the important role that the commons play.
- 2.7 **Pennard Castle (£30,000)** - Pennard Castle is a Scheduled Monument owned by Pennard Golf Club, who manage their golf course on Pennard Common. The Common is Access Land, with a network of rights of way and other routes (including links to the Wales Coast Path) that make Pennard Castle easily accessible for local communities and visitors. Pennard Castle overlooking Three Cliff Bay is one of the most instantly recognisable images of Gower and the area receives high numbers of visitors, particularly so in 2020. Undesirable visitor behaviour – including climbing on the castle walls and illicit fires within the castle walls – is a cause for concern for the Scheduled Monument condition.
- 2.8 This project will work with Pennard Golf Club to deliver capital works on improving three main aspects:
 - The physical condition of the Scheduled Monument

- Community/visitor engagement to communicate the value of the castle and its landscape – and how to look after it – including interpretation assets and events
- Access and waymarking improvements of routes toward and around the castle

- 2.9 **Port Eynon & Horton (£75,000)** - A 2019 feasibility study commissioned by Swansea Council started the comprehensive assessment of the foreshore and the management of the area for visitors. The carparks and toilet blocks at both sites, along with the slipway at Port Eynon, are owned by Swansea Council. The authority also manages the dune system which extends from Port Eynon to Horton and the Salt House Scheduled Monument.
- 2.10 The study found that Port Eynon is under considerable pressure during the height of the season and the main issues relate to: the management of the carpark; inadequate quality of the toilets; traffic congestion; and boat launching. There were also concerns about the large number of signs on the seafront, the road layout near the disabled car parking bays and the quality of the litter bins. In summary, Port Eynon appears neglected and under resourced and continues to deteriorate.
- 2.11 The main issues for Horton village are car parking, the condition of the toilet block, pedestrian access to the beach, the condition of boardwalks and the interpretation of the dunes.
- 2.12 Complementary to the ongoing project developing the concept design of a new public building in Port Eynon, this SLSP project will enable some of the smaller scale public realm improvements for Port Eynon and Horton as identified in the feasibility study recommendations.
- 2.13 **Reynoldston/Cefn Bryn Public Access (£20,000)** - This project is for public access and interpretation, improving the links between Reynoldston village and the historic landscape of Cefn Bryn. Reynoldston village is a popular visitor destination on Gower, with a busy pub, holiday accommodation and village shop. Cefn Bryn Common - the central ridgeline and historic landscape dominating the Gower skyline - lies immediately above and adjacent to the village, with Arthur's Stone (Neolithic burial chamber and one of the key historic features) just a short (under 1-mile) walk across the common.
- 2.14 Recent works to limit off-road parking at the summit of Cefn Bryn (completed by SLSP in 2020-21) – whilst completely necessary - are expected to increase the number of visitors stopping in Reynoldston and wanting to get to Arthur's Stone. Although there is open access across the common and a network of rights of way, routes are poorly surfaced, with little waymarking towards features of interest. There is no on-site visitor information on the historic landscape and its archaeological features, nor the importance of the common for biodiversity and its grazing management.

2.15 This project will plan, enable, and implement footpath improvements and waymarking between the Reynoldston and the historic landscape of Cefn Bryn. The project will also plan and enable interpretation and visitor engagement/information on the area.

3.0 Sustainable Development Fund Grant Scheme (£100,000)

3.1 The Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) provides grants for innovative, sustainable, environmental projects, which involve local communities in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs), and National Parks. The SDF aims, through partnership, to support projects that work to conserve and enhance natural beauty, wildlife, landscape, land use, culture and community on Gower.

3.2 The grant scheme (now in its 20th year) is administered locally by the Gower AONB Partnership, on behalf of Welsh Government. A grant panel, which includes Councillors and other local representatives, oversees the scheme. The Welsh Government funding for the scheme includes a 10% management fee to cover the Council costs.

4.0 Legal Implications

4.1 The Council must comply with the grant offer terms and conditions and must ensure that any procurement of goods, works or services complies with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules and Procurement Regulations.

5.0 Integrated Assessment Implications

- 5.1 The Council is subject to the Public Sector Equality Duty (Wales) and must, in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to:
- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimization and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
 - Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
 - Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
 - Deliver better outcomes for those people who experience socio-economic disadvantage.

 - Consider opportunities for people to use the Welsh language.
 - Treat the Welsh language no less favourably than English.

 - Ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

- 5.2 Integrated impact assessments (IIAs) are a legal requirement within both the Equality Act (Public Sector Equality Duty and the socio-economic duty), the Well-being and Future Generation Act 2015 Welsh Language (Wales) Measure. The legal obligations put a specific requirement on us to undertake integrated impact assessments (IIA) as a way of examining whether a new or existing function, service, policy, procedure, strategy, plan or project affects any person or group of persons adversely.
- 5.3 An IIA Screening Form has been completed with the agreed outcome that the acceptance of the offer of Welsh Government funding does not require a full IIA report. The individual projects will be subject to individual IIA screening, once more details are available. The Welsh Government offer is specifically for these projects, which are fundamentally to address existing maintenance and safety issues. In developing the projects, the increased provision of access and the removal of barriers will be a fundamental consideration. The recognition of “least restrictive option” approaches is fundamental to the work of the Teams involved, leading to the provision of “all-ability access” wherever possible. Our approach will ensure that consultation takes place at the most appropriate stage.

6.0 Financial Implications

- 6.1 The Authority already has responsibilities in these areas, and this offer of funding will assist the Council in achieving its ambitions as set out in a number of plans and policies (for example the Local Development Plan and the Gower AONB Management Plan). The funding has been offered at 100% and is expected to cover the costs of the projects.

Background Papers: None

Appendices:

- Appendix A - SLSP Grant Offer Letter 2021/22
- Appendix B - SLSP IIA Scoping Report
- Appendix C - SDF Grant Offer Letter 2021/22
- Appendix D - SDF IIA Scoping Report