



Report of the Cabinet Member for Delivery & Operations

Cabinet – 16 December 2021

Gower AONB Management Plan 2021/22 - Offer of NRW Funding

Purpose:	This report seeks retrospective approval to accept an offer of funding from Natural Resources Wales (NRW), to support the implementation of the Gower AONB Management Plan.
Policy Framework:	The statutory Gower AONB Management Plan (2017-22) sets out how Swansea Council will deliver its duty to protect Gower, and to promote access and recreation. NRW shares these duties, and has offered grant funding of £108,250 to support the delivery of the management plan (2021/22).
Consultation:	Access to Services, Finance, Legal.
Recommendation(s):	It is recommended that Cabinet: 1) Notes the short timescales for submission of bids as outlined in paragraph 2 and authorises the acceptance of the offer of funding (totalling £108,250) from NRW, to enable the Gower ANOB Management Plan to be delivered.
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1. Background

- 1.1 Gower Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) was the first such area to be designated, in 1956, under the National Parks and Access to Countryside Act 1949. The purpose of the AONB designation is to conserve and enhance natural beauty.

- 1.2 Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and Swansea Council share statutory duties to protect Gower, and to promote access and recreation. This grant funding aims to support the implementation of the Gower AONB Management Plan, which underpins these duties.
- 1.3 NRW provides annual funding specifically for AONBs in Wales, but due to internal issues, the offer of funding has been delayed this year.

2. Funding Offered

- 2.1 NRW have indicated in their allocation letter that a total of £108,250 is available for Gower AONB for the period 2021/22, comprising two separate funding components:
 - £68,250 revenue grant funding at 75%
 - £40,000 capital grant funding at 100%
- 2.2 The allocation letter set a deadline of less than 10 days in which to submit a detailed bid for this funding.
- 2.3 A bid for the funding was submitted, supported by a proposed project outline.

3. Outline of Proposed Projects

- 3.1 The bid sets out a multi-disciplinary programme of projects to conserve and enhance the outstanding landscape of Gower – protecting its landscape, encouraging an understanding and appreciation of its special qualities, and improving access:
 - Monitoring & Planning for Natural Beauty
 - Managing for Nature
 - Enjoying & Celebrating an Outstanding Landscape
 - Accessing a Special Place
 - Enhancing features on Protected sites
- 3.2 The funding, and work, will be split between the AONB, Rights of Way, Nature Conservation and Strategic Planning Teams. This will support existing posts, and enable additional work to be carried out to support the objectives of these teams.

4. Integrated Assessment Implications

- 4.1 The Council is subject to the Equality Act (Public Sector Equality Duty and the socio-economic duty), the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure, and must in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to:
 - Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Acts.

- 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.

4.2 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 mandates that public bodies in Wales must carry out sustainable development. Sustainable development means the process of improving the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales by taking action, in accordance with the sustainable development principle, aimed at achieving the 'well-being goals'.

4.3 Our Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) process ensures we have paid due regard to the above. It also takes into account other key issues and priorities, such as poverty and social exclusion, community cohesion, carers, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and Welsh language.

4.4 The outcome of the screening exercise suggests that the application/acceptance of the offer of funding will not have an adverse effect on the people or communities of Swansea, and that it is likely that the application/acceptance will have a low positive impact on them.

The funding will support the delivery of the AONB Management Plan, which includes proposals to increase the provision of access facilities, visitor information and raising awareness of environmental issues, and the special qualities of Gower. This is available to all, free of charge, and is intended to be as inclusive and open as practically possible.

The Wellbeing of Future Generations has been a core part of the practices of the Teams involved for several years, with our activity and ways of working structured around its themes.

There are risks if the funding is not accepted – to staffing, to the provision of services and facilities, and to the reputation of Swansea Council. For example, the funding underpins the annual Blue Flag awards, which are used in the Councils tourism promotion material.

The cumulative impact of the application/acceptance of the offer of NRW funding is seen as positive – for the work and reputation of the Council, and for the people of Swansea.

5. Legal Implications

- 5.1 The Management Plan will enable Swansea Council to discharge its statutory duty in relation to the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty; it will also facilitate the delivery of national policy at a local level, and ensure the delivery of the statutory AONB Management Plan.
- 5.2 The terms and conditions of the offer of grant funding are likely to be binding. The Council will need to ensure that it complies with the same. The Council will also need to comply with its Contract Procedure Rules and any relevant procurement legislation when utilising the funding to procure any goods or services.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 This funding will enable the AONB, RoW, Nature Conservation and Strategic Planning Teams to carry out their work relating to Gower, and to fulfil the Council's duties towards the AONB, in fulfilment of the AONB Management Plan.
- 6.2 The funding requires minimal match funding (£22,750), which will be a mix of revenue budget and staff costs – this can be easily met from existing budgets.
- 6.3 As the funding has been provided on an annual basis for about 30 years, the established work programmes of the teams would be significantly curtailed without this funding.
- 6.4 The Capital Finance Team have indicated that the elements within the capital funding component are individually below the CCS capitalisation threshold and are more of a revenue nature; therefore can be treated as such.
- 6.5 The acceptance of the offer of funding would not increase the existing or future financial liabilities of Swansea Council.

Background papers: None

Appendices:

- Appendix A - NRW Offer Letter
- Appendix B - Application for NRW Funding 2021/22
- Appendix C - IAA Screening Report
- Appendix D - NGA1