

WBPSG8

PAPER TO NOTE: B

Swansea, 8th July 2009

A NEW ALL -WALES FUND FOR BIODIVERSITY ACTION

Background/Progress

A consultation, to investigate the level of support for a new all-Wales biodiversity funding scheme, was undertaken by CCW between July 2008 and April 2009 and involved a range of public and non-governmental organisations. Drawing on the experience of the participants, key characteristics of such a scheme have emerged.

The consultation revealed unanimous support, amongst those interviewed for the establishment of a new all-Wales biodiversity funding scheme.

The main findings in relation to the scope, focus, eligibility and management of the scheme were as follows:

Scope and focus

- A long term scheme, focussing solely on delivering biodiversity benefits.
- A scheme that prioritises national and local BAP action towards agreed habitat and species targets and supports projects offering the most scope for increased ecological connectivity.
- A scheme suitable for both small positive actions by individuals on their 'holdings' but also for large scale collaborative projects on multiple 'holdings' where appropriate.
- A scheme that recognises the need to support geodiversity, environmental awareness initiatives and biodiversity research, but only if they help achieve direct, site-based biodiversity outcomes.

Eligibility

- Respondents identified 'agri-environment gaps' (i.e. ineligible/non-registered/ non-agricultural holdings) but also the need for a scheme to act as an 'taster' for owners/ occupiers who might be uncertain about entering a whole farm scheme or as an 'interim' scheme for those on waiting lists for schemes.
- Respondents suggested that while the 'eligibility' net for potential applicants should be cast wide, clear criteria would be needed to help prioritise applications and to ensure a consistent approach across Wales.
- Suggested criteria fell into 3 main categories:
 - Value for money (e.g. long term viability of the project, contribution to strengthening habitat connectivity and delivering BAP priorities, whether the project is isolated or part of a cluster);
 - Additional benefit (e.g. raising public awareness of biodiversity, public participation);
 - Need - is an applicant able to obtain funds elsewhere for the work?

Scheme management

- The majority view is that the scheme management needs a mix of centralised coordination, for efficiency reasons, and local liaison, to offer advice and knowledge to ensure maximum biodiversity gain.

- The consistent view is that face-to face advice to applicants, rather than just written guidance is vital, as well as ongoing support and interest to develop a good working relationship. Involvement of appropriate personnel would be critical to the success of the scheme.
- The conditions associated with any award of funding should include entry onto the land for monitoring and recording purposes. The scheme should link to both BARS, for reporting purposes and LRCs/NBN, for data holding.
- The most appropriate length of time for individual projects was felt to be 5 years.
- The scheme should have the clear backing and involvement of WBP, WAG and CCW.
- Outcomes should be synchronised with those for agri-environment schemes as far as possible.
- The scheme should be launched with an adequate numbers of skilled staff to begin delivering across Wales.

Issues/Concerns

Respondents raised the following issues and concerns, should the scheme be developed further:

- A new scheme should bring in funds additional to those from existing sources for biodiversity work, and not reduce them.
- A new scheme should be simple and flexible and avoid unnecessary bureaucracy.
- A new scheme should balance the need for central coordination with the desirability of using local biodiversity expertise to ensure maximum gain.
- It should involve the new Wales Species Expert and Ecosystem Groups in decision making.
- That no additional sources of funding for a new all-Wales scheme were identified during the consultation, although a number of local and national funding sources were flagged up.
- About the adequacy of current biodiversity information for the purpose of taking decisions about where to target funding. Respondents felt that the work of Econet and the Ecosystems Groups, along with CCW's updated Phase 1 information, in conjunction with the Local Records Centres could effectively underpin the scheme.

Plan/Proposals

Given such strong support for establishing a new biodiversity-focused grant scheme, it is recommended that it is developed further in 2009-10. Key areas of development work include identifying strategic and complementary linkages with other schemes and plans (e.g. Glastir, spatial plans, Networked Environment Regions); establishing a sound information base that can underpin the scheme delivery; establishing roles and management structures; identifying sources of funding for a minimum of 5 years.

The following specific projects should be pursued in the next 12 months:

- Identify and collate information on sources of biodiversity information required to underpin the scheme.
- Undertake a desktop review of similar schemes in Wales and in other parts of the UK to identify best practice/prescriptions that could be adopted for an all-Wales biodiversity scheme.
- Develop a preferred and costed option for the management of the scheme.
- Develop detailed scheme criteria to assist a national, standardised approach.

- Develop an application process and support materials for both applicants and scheme managers.
- Develop promotional material with a view to launching in 2010 (subject to availability of funding and recruitment of personnel).
- Define roles and working relationships of all key players (e.g. WBP support team, CCW, WAG, LBAP officers and Wales Ecosystem Groups).
- Identify resources to launch and manage a scheme for Years 1-5.
- Ensure that the WBP website provides a one-stop shop for sources of advice on habitat and species management by the end of 2009.

Decision Points

- a) To comment on and amend any of the above principles or details as necessary.
- b) To approve the development, led by CCW with support from WAG, of a grant scheme along these lines, drawing on the consultation feedback as outlined above.

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