

ITEM

ITEM

**Executive – 5 March 2009**

**Report of Head of Landscape & Leisure**

**EU INTERREG FUNDING PROGRAMME: SUSTAINABLE LANDSCAPES**

**Statutory Powers:** Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2000

**Financial Implications:** A South Devon project budget of £370,000 is proposed up until the end of 2012. This would be made up partly of existing AONB Unit staff input worth £85,000, plus AONB Partnership project funding from various sources worth £100,000, and matching Interreg grant drawn down worth £185,000. The AONB team and its work is funded through a partnership arrangement, with the majority of the finance provided by Natural England (the key funder), the County Council and the District Council.

**Purpose**

1. This report seeks to note the urgent action exercised by the Chief Executive in signing a partnership agreement for the AONB Unit to take part in a collaborative project programme part funded by the EU INTERREG programme. The Chief Executive's action was taken under delegated authority as a matter of urgency to meet an application deadline.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

**That the Executive:**

- (i) **notes the urgent action taken by the Chief Executive to enter into a partnership agreement for the AONB Sustainable Landscapes project; and**
- (ii) **authorises the Head of Landscape and Leisure to supervise the agreement on behalf of the South Devon AONB partnership and administer the project and its funds.**

**Background**

2. The INTERREG programme promotes cross-border cooperation, knowledge transfer and sharing of best practice between EU member states. In particular, the INTERREG 4a France (Channel)-England programme is aimed at Southern England and NW France and includes measures and priorities about developing sustainable environmental management and addressing environmental risks.
3. Over the last year, the AONBs of SW England have been exploring common issues and opportunities with three equivalent French protected areas, with the intention of submitting a funding bid to the INTERREG programme by the end of February 2009.
4. The proposal would support CP3 and CP2, particularly contributing towards 'AONB Management Plan' objectives.

## **The Proposal**

5. Eighteen partner organisations are involved in the project application, which (if successful) would total 6.5 million Euros, running up until December 2012. Devon County Council would act as lead accountable body.
6. The programme is essentially about sustainable management of protected landscapes and particularly how to respond to the changing climatic, economic and social pressures. The primary themes are about:
  - Making better use of environmental data, mapping and modelling to inform decision making.
  - Sustainable management of “bocage” landscape (hedges and small woods).
  - Sustainable farming and food.
  - Use of local materials in sustainable building.

## **Participation by South Devon AONB Unit**

7. It is proposed that the South Devon AONB Unit takes part in the programme and becomes a partner in it. A South Devon project budget of £370,000 is proposed up until the end of 2012. This would be made up partly of existing AONB Unit staff input worth £85,000, plus AONB Unit project funding worth £100,000, and matching Interreg grant drawn down worth £185,000. The local funding contribution could be met entirely from within the South Devon AONB Unit's existing budget drawn from a range of different sources.

## **AONB Partnership Committee**

8. The AONB Partnership Committee considered and endorsed the involvement of the South Devon AONB Unit in this programme at its meeting in December 2008. The Committee noted in particular the benefits of sharing experience and best practice, and the need (given financial pressures on project budgets) to seek new external funding opportunities of this kind.

## **Action taken by the Chief Executive**

9. As part of the application process, the South Devon AONB Unit was required to sign a partnership agreement before the 28 February 2009 deadline. In order to meet this deadline, and to ensure that the agreement was appropriately signed by the Council, as accountable body for the AONB Unit, the Chief Executive signed the partnership agreement, exercising his delegated powers for use in urgent circumstances. This action was undertaken following consultation with the Chairman of the Environment Policy Development Group and the Executive Portfolio Holder for a Distinct Environment.
10. This report is presented to Members, as it is a requirement of the Scheme of Delegations that the use of such emergency action by the Chief Executive is reported to the Executive 'as soon as is reasonably practicable' afterwards.

## Risk Assessment

Opportunity	Issues / Obstacles	Benefits
<p>Take advantage of a partnership regionally to attract EU funding of £185,000 in grant support towards a total expenditure of £370,000.</p> <p>To deliver actions identified within the AONB Management Plan</p>	<p>Timescale for grant deadline submission was 27<sup>th</sup> Feb.</p> <p>Chairman of the AONB Partnership is not accountable to this Council so is not eligible to sign required documents.</p> <p>As the District Council is the accountable body for the project in South Hams documents need to be signed by an authorised person and in order to meet deadlines, CX undertook this under delegated authority so not to miss funding opportunity.</p> <p>The opportunity to significantly reduce the level of the Council's input to AONB work prior to 2012 may be constrained by the agreement. However much of the AONB work is a statutory requirement and the grant will provide additional investment in the district.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grant attracted to deliver AONB Actions effecting climate change, economic and social pressures.</li> <li>• Improved environmental data to help management and planning decisions</li> <li>• Woodland and Hedgerow Management</li> <li>• Support for food and farming initiative</li> <li>• Stimulate use of local building materials</li> </ul>

## Conclusion

11. The Interreg programme offers an opportunity to secure external funds to support existing budgets in the delivery of CP3 and in particular, a range of actions which the Council has endorsed through the South Devon AONB Management Plan.

Robin Toogood  
AONB Manager

Executive  
 5 March 2009

Ken Carter  
Head of Landscape & Leisure

## Background Documents:

None