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| Report To: | Environment & Regeneration Committee | Date: | 27 October 2022 |
| Report By: | Interim Director, Regeneration & Environment | Report No: | ENV035/22/KL |
| Contact Officer: | Kenny Lang | Contact No: | 01475 7125906 |
| Subject: | Nature Restoration Fund | | |

1.0 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

1.1 For Decision For Information/Noting

1.2 The purpose of this report is to make Committee aware of the proposals regarding the Nature Restoration Fund and to seek approval to progress the projects identified.

1.3 The Nature Restoration Fund supports projects which are designed to tackle both climate change and the loss of biodiversity, through projects that restore the local natural environment. Projects can include habitat and species restoration, coastal and marine protection, eradication or replacement of non-invasive species and works that support these aims. Inverclyde have funding of £248k in 2022/23 to support such schemes.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 It is recommended that the Committee note the funding available for Nature Restoration Projects.

2.2 It is recommended that the Committee agree that officers progress the projects identified.

2.3 It is recommended that the Committee note that further progress on these projects will be reported through the regular Environment and Regeneration Capital Programme reports.

Gail MacFarlane
Head of Shared Services – Roads & Environmental Services

3.0 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- 3.1 The Scottish Government have identified funding for projects that improve biodiversity and the impact of climate change through the Nature Restoration Fund. This fund is managed by Nature Scot through a grant process.
- 3.2 Funding of £13.5m was identified for 2023 with Inverclyde Council receiving an allocation of £248k. Minor works have been carried out with path improvements at Cornalees and some naturalised seeding beds in various locations.
- 3.3 Further funding will be available in 2023 with an anticipated total allocation of £65m during this parliamentary term. It is anticipated that further funding will align with the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy 2022 and fit with the current priority themes for funding which are as follows:-

Habitat and species restoration: Management for enhancement and connectivity
Freshwater restoration, including restoration of natural flows in rural catchments
Coastal and marine initiatives which promote restoration, recovery, enhancement or resilience
Control of invasive non-native species (INNS) impacting on nature
Urban: Enhancing and connecting nature across, and between, towns and cities.

- 3.4 Officers have identified a number of projects which align to some of the priority funding themes and have discussed the opportunities for developing the schemes, and the potential of attracting further investment with the Green Action Trust.

4.0 PROPOSALS

- 4.1 Following discussions there are three main projects which could be delivered and which would have significant and positive benefits locally. These projects are :

Peatland Restoration Project

Detailed reports have been prepared by 3E consultancy on the potential for two locations in the Clyde Muirshiel Park area in proximity of two Farms Dowries and Hardridge. Both these farms are tenants of Inverclyde Council. The report identifies a minimal impact on any farming activity throughout the life of each project.

The works would reduce the impact of erosion and restore drainage features to natural peatland. Peatland is acknowledged to provide a valuable carbon sink which can reduce flooding by slowing water from travelling downhill and providing a flood plain storage, and which supports a wide variety habitat and nesting for birds.

The report aimed to identify the scale of works and potential costs and these are detailed below

| Location | Ares (Ha) | Cost | Time in days |
|----------|-----------|-------|--------------|
| Dowries | 191 | £135k | 81 |
| Hardgate | 954 | £741k | 512 |

Discussions with the report author have identified some potential cost reductions but these are not confirmed as yet.

It is proposed to work up a plan for the Dowries area and progress this as a 1st stage and that further funding bids will be made through the Nature Restoration Fund to expand the scheme to include Hardgate in future years. If approved officers will develop a working plan and consult

with the farmers regarding the scale and extent of the works and any opportunities to support the activities if relevant.

Tree Growing and Reforestation

The Council's Net Zero Action Plan has identified a target to increase the tree canopy in Inverclyde from 17% to 20%. Officers have engaged with Clyde Climate Forest and will build on plans to extend tree planting and growing throughout Inverclyde. In the first instance we will meet with Clyde Climate Forest to identify suitable areas and native species and develop a plan for wider tree planting in Inverclyde.

In line with the proposal would also include a local tree growing project including schools, volunteers and Parklea Branching Out Project. To date we have sourced 500 trees from The Conservation Volunteers and these initially will be used around Cornalees. Our rangers supported by volunteers are also now actively collecting seed from native species trees with a view to supporting local schools to grow on seeds and which fits with the environmental aspects of the school curriculum which can be integrated with the John Muir Award Scheme and Junior Forester Award and Duke of Edinburgh awards. Discussions have taken place with Education Services on developing this project.

Officers would support the schools with potting material and advice and the trees could then be grown on to maturity and planting height through Parklea Branching Out Project maintaining the locality objective of the project. The project has a further advantage to mitigate the impact of Ash dieback with replacements from more vigorous and disease resistant native trees, it would be anticipated that this project could deliver 20,000 new or replacement trees over the next few years.

Increasing biodiversity and naturalised planting

A further project will be the expansion of biodiversity and naturalised planting in low amenity or low use areas. A number of small trial planting schemes have been introduced and these have resulted in a significant increase in pollinator insects adding to the increase in biodiversity.

Sites will be identified and planted up in consultation with elected members and wider community where appropriate. Feedback has been largely positive after some initial concerns and we will look to ensure that local communities are informed of our plans.

Development of the Upper Greenock Green Network Strategic Delivery Plan

The Central Scotland Green Network is a national planning priority which was identified in the third National Planning Framework. To meet this aim Inverclyde Council must consider how it will identify, protect and enhance its local Green Network as part of that wider initiative. The greater Greenock area was identified as one of these "Strategic Delivery Areas" and a report was produced identifying 3 potential projects

Coves Local Nature Reserve - Development and delivery of a range of access and habitat improvements to enhance the conservation, heritage and amenity potential of the site.

Open Space Improvement Project - Project to explore opportunities for access, habitat and amenity improvements to a range of council owned sites including Gourock Park, Tower Hill, Lyle Hill and Greenock Cemetery.

Heritage Park - Explore the potential of formulating a Phase 1 Heritage Lottery Fund bid to develop the concept of creating a Heritage Park to enhance, link and promote a number of open space sites throughout Gourock and Greenock.

These plans are ambitious and require additional support not available internally, therefore it is proposed that officers engage with the Green Action Trust, the main body responsible for facilitating and delivering the Central Scotland Green Network. Given the scale and nature of these proposals further project specific reports will be presented to committee.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The table below shows whether risks and implications apply if the recommendation(s) is(are) agreed:

| SUBJECT | YES | NO | N/A |
|--|-----|----|-----|
| Financial | x | | |
| Legal/Risk | | x | |
| Human Resources | | x | |
| Strategic (LOIP/Corporate Plan) | x | | |
| Equalities & Fairer Scotland Duty | | | x |
| Children & Young People's Rights & Wellbeing | | | x |
| Environmental & Sustainability | x | | |
| Data Protection | | | x |

5.2 Finance

One off Costs

| Cost Centre | Budget Heading | Budget Years | Proposed Spend this Report (£000s) | Virement From | Other Comments |
|-------------------------|----------------|--------------|------------------------------------|---------------|---|
| Nature Restoration Fund | | 2022/23 | £135 | | Peatland Restoration |
| | | 2022/23 | £30 | | Tree Growing & Reforestation |
| | | 2022/23 | £40 | | Increasing biodiversity and naturalised planting |
| | | 2022/23 | £30 | | Development of the Upper Greenock Green Network Strategic Delivery Plan |

Annually Recurring Costs/ (Savings)

| Cost Centre | Budget Heading | With Effect from | Annual Net Impact | Virement From (If Applicable) | Other Comments |
|-------------|----------------|------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------|----------------|
| N/A | | | | | |

5.3 Legal/Risk

There are no Legal Implications arising from this report.

5.4 Human Resources

There are no HR implications arising from this report.

5.5 Strategic

The proposals fit with Inverclyde Alliance Outcomes Improvement Plan 2017/2022- Environment Culture and Change priorities.

5.6 Environmental/Sustainability

These proposals are in line with the National and Local actions on Carbon management, sustainability, biodiversity and environmental improvements.

Has a Strategic Environmental Assessment been carried out?

| | |
|---|--|
| X | YES – assessed as relevant and a Strategic Environmental Assessment is required. |
| | NO |

6.0 CONSULTATION

6.1 Consultation has taken place previously with Education, Clyde Climate forest and the Green Action Trust and will be developed further to project inception if approved.

7.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

7.1 Nature Restoration Fund - <https://www.nature.scot/funding-and-projects/nature-restoration-fund/nature-restoration-fund-how-apply>

Clyde Murishiel RP - Peatland Restoration Feasibility Study – 2022

Clyde Climate Forest Brochure - <https://www.gcvgreennetwork.gov.uk/publications/794-clyde-climate-forest-brochure>

Clydeplan Green Network Spatial Strategies – Upper Greenock