

9 ELEMENTS OF LIFE PROPOSAL (KM)

1. Purpose of the report

The purpose of this report is to ask this Committee to approve the continuation of the Authority's work on European Union funded projects, specifically to the development of a LIFE application for the continuation of Moors for the Future Partnership's work across the South Pennine Moors to be submitted in January 2019.

Key issues

- The previous legacy of atmospheric pollution from coal fired industries has weakened the blanket bog habitat's resilience and its situation (close proximity to large urban populations) has produced a high incidence of summer wildfires.
- The risk of future wildfires remains high (as we have seen on the Stalybridge and Winter Hill Moors) especially in the face of predicted climate change scenarios for the region, if the hydrology of the bog is not improved.
- The Moors for the Future partners have a good understanding of the ecological and ecosystem service baseline for the South Pennine Moors SAC and, through the MoorLIFE 2020 Project we are developing a good understanding of engagement with the habitats concerned. We know how big a threat wildfire is to the Natura 2000 site and that most of the wildfires which have occurred in the South Pennine Moors are started by people, either deliberately or accidentally.
- The project will work with communities across the SAC to protect the blanket bog near them, with activities including a programme of volunteer conservation work. The concept is developed from the US FireWise programme which works with communities affected by wildfire to reduce wildfire risk.
- The development of this proposal offers a significant opportunity to secure a viable means of continuing the build the resilience of the uplands in the face of climate change.
- If the application is successful it would make a significant contribution to the Government's 25 year Environment Plan.

This funding application is in line with the Business Model, in the Moors for the Future Partnership Business Plan, approved by this Committee.

2. Recommendation

- 1 That the Audit Resources and Performance Committee approves this request to develop a full proposal for the Elements of LIFE project.**

3. How does this contribute to our policies and legal obligations?

This project will support all 7 special qualities and will directly benefit the strategic outcomes of this Authority; contributing to National Park Management Plan 2018-2023 Intentions: 1.1, 2.2, 3.1, 3.3.

Intention 1.1: Reduce the effects of climate change on the special qualities. This project will aid climate change resilience and enhance carbon sequestration.

Intention 2.2: Ensure that the management of upland moors delivers environmental, social & economic benefits

1. Visitor engagement
2. Fire risk
3. Resilient sustainable moorland
4. Moorland birds

Actions to support these four areas of focus are to be developed through-out the life of the Management Plan and these proposals will support that intention.

Intention 3.3: Maintain existing landscape scale delivery. Develop a clear long term vision, plan and have funding in place for the Dark Peak and South Pennines to 2050.

To assess the delivery this intention the National Park Authority and its partners have committed to the following targets relating to the percentage of blanket bog in the Dark Peak and South Pennines in improved ecological condition;

- 30% of Blanket Bog across the Southern Pennines to be in state 6 by 2050
- 90% of Dark Peak Blanket Bog moved out of state 2 by 2023, (bare peat to be revegetated)
- 25% of the Southern Pennine Blanket bogs to be moved out of state 2 by 2023.

(measure used is the 6 states of peat from the Moorland Managers' Guidance)

This project will also build upon the Authority's good engagement with several major partners (Severn Trent, United Utilities, Yorkshire Water, RSPB, National Trust, Environment Agency and Natural England) who have significant influence over the management of the moorland landscape. Within this partnership, significant positive changes to the nature of the South Pennine Moors Special Area of Conservation have been achieved and will continue to be delivered.

4. Background

MFFP's principal activity is to deliver moorland restoration together with associated research and education across the South Pennine moorlands. It was set up in 2003 and has been delivering projects, such as the one being proposed, since then.

A principal aim of this project would be to safeguard this and previous restoration efforts undertaken by the Moors for the Future partners over the last 15 years. The key factors in protecting the Blanket Bog into the future are to prevent both desiccation of the peat body and reduce the risk of fire. This proposal aims to do this by:

1. Increasing water levels through grip, gully and peat pipe blocking;
2. Preventing loss of the peat body through erosion of bare peat;
3. Increasing the amount of Sphagnum mosses, which will ensure the surface of the peat remains wetter throughout the year;
4. Raising awareness amongst the wider public of the significance of Blanket Bog for ecosystem services and biodiversity by involving communities in concrete conservation actions. A key feature of this will be to raise awareness of the importance of reporting fires quickly and reducing the risk of accidental ignition.

One of the key features of this project will be in highlighting the socio-economic benefits of the Natura 2000 site, specifically blanket bog, to local communities in order to encourage them to protect it. The ecosystem services of peat are well understood, this project will help communities to develop shared ownership of these ecosystem services with land owners and managers, in order to further protect them (a key risk to the South Pennine Moors SAC is human-caused wildfires).

Community activities will also reduce the risk of wildfire, by establishing sphagnum moss, blocking gullies and an active acrotelm and developing community focussed monitoring of sites, looking at both the Natura 2000 features and ecosystem services provided. We will run a programme of events to raise awareness of the environmental problems within the SAC and working with the communities to deliver appropriate activities. It will inform and educate citizens to adopt a more environmentally friendly approach to reduce the threat of wildfires. This high level of engagement will also foster a sense of cooperative ownership with community peatland “guardians”.

Management of the application project

The funding application will be managed by Kate Morley, Conservation and Land Management Project Manager (Moors for the Future), within the current Moors for the Future programme. Overall supervision will be provided by the MFFP programme management team with the Head of Programme Delivery (MFFP) representing the co-ordinating beneficiary and as chair of the steering group – consisting of co-financers and associated beneficiaries and with advice from stakeholders and regulators.

Timescale

If successful at concept note stage, in October 2018 we will be invited to submit a full proposal to the European Commission. The deadline for submission of full proposals is January 2019.

5. Financial

The application work for the project will be undertaken by the Moors for the Future Programme Managers, supported by the Project Manager and Moors for the Future partners.

Co-financers and potential Associated Beneficiaries will be determined during this application phase, however for the previous LIFE funded applications three water companies have all made significant financial contributions.

Should the application be successful, as Coordinating Beneficiary, the Authority would be expected to make a financial contribution to the project (as with MoorLIFE and MoorLIFE 2020). A Committee Report, should the application be successful, will be brought to this Committee for approval.

An outline cash flow forecast for the delivery phase of the project is attached as Appendix 2.

6. Risk Management

Exit from the European Union

Moors for the Future Partnership is well placed to be invited to submit a full proposal and to secure another LIFE grant, following the success of MoorLIFE and MoorLIFE 2020. As the competent authority for the UK, Defra must endorse all proposals at application stage by signing the A8 form included within the proposal. Defra has already written to all current LIFE recipients stating that they will underwrite all live projects following the UK's exit from the EU.

The joint report from the negotiators of the European Union and the United Kingdom Government published on 8th December 2016 stated that UK entities' right to participate in EU MFF 2014-2020 programmes will be unaffected by the UK's withdrawal from the EU. This means that UK based organisations will be able to bid for funding, participate in and lead consortia, in 2018, 2019 and 2020, and will continue to receive funding for the lifetime of the projects. It remains the case that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed, which is why in 2016 the government committed to protect projects that were successful in securing EU funding before exit day¹.

On the 24th July 2018 the Government announced that any funding secured through EU programmes, from now until the end of 2020, will be guaranteed by the UK government even in a no deal scenario. This new guarantee means that successful bids for EU funding until the end of 2020 will receive their full financial allocation and will continue to receive funding over a project's lifetime².

Prior to acceptance of an offer of funding we would seek the same level of assurance as current live projects. This would entail a specific underwriting of the delivery costs of the project by Defra or another government department, should the funding for the project become unavailable part way through delivery due to the UK exit from the EU.

Sustainability

Placing this within the context of the NPMP (2018 - 2023) the ability of this project to deliver the environmental benefits highlighted, places this project directly in line with area of impact 1.1; Reduce the effects of climate change on the special qualities.

The external funding enhances long term financial stability in line with Intention 3.3: Maintain existing landscape scale delivery. Develop a clear long term vision, plan and have funding in place for the Dark Peak and South Pennines to 2050. The work also helps to consolidate past investment in landscape restoration improving the legacy impact.

Business Sustainability

If successful, this project will prevent a significant reduction in resources and provide a major spinal column project to build other work around. As such it forms important business support for this Partnership.

7. Background papers (not previously published) – None

Appendices –

1. Elements of LIFE Concept note (submitted June 2018)
2. Elements of LIFE project cash flow forecast (2020 – 2025)
3. Submission Schedule

Report Author

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Moors for the Future Partnership

¹ UK LIFE National Contact Point: Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC)
<http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=7121>

² HM Treasury 24th July 2018 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/funding-from-eu-programmes-guaranteed-until-the-end-of-2020>