

**7. WARSLOW MOORS ESTATE – COUNTRYSIDE STEWARDSHIP SCHEME-
CAPITAL WORKS GRANT OFFER FROM NATURAL ENGLAND TO
ENHANCE HABITATS ON SEVEN AREAS OF MOORLAND ON THE ESTATE**

1. Purpose of the report

This report seeks approval to:

1. In accordance with Standing Orders Part 7 Delegation of Powers to Officers 7.C-2b), to accept an offer of a Countryside Stewardship capital grant of over £200,000 from Natural England within a prescribed timescale.
2. Subject to compliance with Standing Orders, Part 2 Contract Procedure Rules, to enter into contracts for the delivery of the work described in this report.

Key Issues

- A very significant grant is again being offered by Natural England to carry out the re-wetting, habitat work and Sphagnum planting on seven moorlands on the Authority's Warslow Moors Estate.
- A previous grant of £370,000 was accepted to re-wet the Swallowmoss Moors on the Estate and all that work was undertaken over a couple of years and completed in 2022. This work was explained to Members on site on the Members Tour on 15th September 2023
- This will greatly assist in the Authority meeting Estate, SSSI, and National Park Management Plan and Corporate Strategy targets.

2. Recommendations(s)

- 1. To delegate authority to the Interim Head of Assets and Enterprise or equivalent post to accept a Countryside Stewardship agreement offer by Natural England of capital grant aid of £435,200.50 for the work described in this report.**
- 2. To delegate authority to the Interim Head of Assets and Enterprise or equivalent post, subject to compliance with procurement standing orders, to enter into a contract of £435,200.50 for the delivery of the work.**

How does this contribute to our policies and legal obligations?

The activities described in this report contribute to a number of our policies and legal obligations:

National Park Management Plan (2023-2028)

Aim - The Peak District National Park is more resilient and net-zero by 2040 through its exemplary response to climate change

Objective 2: - to sequester and store substantially more carbon whilst contributing to nature recovery

Target: by 2028 there will be a 2,878 tonnes net increase in carbon emissions for moorlands.

Authority Plan (2023-2028)

Objective E: Assets – to have best practice arrangements in place for the Authority's assets.

Aim: The Peak District National Park is more resilient and net-zero by 2040 through its exemplary response to climate change

Aim: The Peak District National Park is a resilient landscape in which nature , beauty and cultural heritage are enhanced

Objective 4 – to be a place where nature recover and biodiversity flourishes

Background Information

The Authority's Warslow Moors Estate comprises of 2,023 hectares of farmland, woodland and moorland and has been managed since 1986 in particular to enhance its significant conservation value. All the moorland on the Estate is within the Leek Moors Site of Special Scientific Interest designated in 1989.

Prior to the Authority's ownership of the Estate, the moorlands were managed for grouse shooting by the previous owners, the Harpur Crewe family. In 1986, the Authority changed this objective and particularly since the introduction in 2003 of Governments targets to improve the condition of all SSSI's has been working very closely with Natural England to diversify the moorland habitat to eventually meet 'favourable' SSSI condition.

When the Authority became eligible in its own right to enter into the Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier Scheme (HLS), three HLS agreements were concluded with Natural England that included all the moorland on the Estate. The agreements prescribed detailed management requirements that have been implemented. This has included the rebuilding/repair of existing boundary walls., extensive fencing, the introduction of native and other breed cattle grazing, heather cutting, scrub clearance and construction of ponds and 'scrapes'.

The original 10 year HLS agreement which covered these seven moors has expired and an application has been made to Natural England to enter into a new Countryside Stewardship High Tier agreement.

A condition of the application process was to carry out two surveys to inform future management. The first survey was with regard to the raptor population using the moorland and the second was a hydrological survey to consider opportunities to re-wet the moor. The cost of both surveys were 100% funded by NE. External consultants working in close consultation with Authority and NE staff undertook both surveys. Both surveys have been completed and the hydrological survey has identified the very significant opportunities that are considered below.

Proposals

It is proposed to carry out the following work on 215ha (531 acres) of moorland on the Warslow Moors Estate. These moors are shown on the plan at Appendix 1.

Hydrological block works (re-wetting):

The hydrological survey recommends an ‘blocking’ on six moors to achieve the well-known benefits of:

- Reduce erosion pathways developing
- Help slow the flow of water off and across the site (particularly during high rainfall events)
- Help retain water on site
- Reduce fire risk
- Improve habitat resilience and carbon capture and encourage the spread of sphagnum moss
- Enhance and improve the condition of the blanket bog and wet heath habitat.

The work mainly comprises the construction of different types of small dams across ditches and watercourses/water flow tracks. This includes peat, timber, stone and timber and peat combined dams

Habitat works:

Re-profiling and geotextile /seeding work on Orchard Common moor.

Sphagnum planting:

Sphagnum plug and clump planting on seven moors

This is a great opportunity to build on the past of successful management of these moors. It is hoped that this proposal will help to ‘accelerate’ the recovery process to ‘Favourable’ condition status.

Are there any corporate implications members should be concerned about?

None

Financial

Natural England have indicated that a 100% capital grant is available to carry out the work described above. The Authority will need to pay for the work and then re-claim the grant after the work has been completed.

Tenders have therefore been sought for the work. Following the normal procurement process, one tender was received, which has been evaluated by Authority and Natural England staff. It is proposed to enter into a contract for £435,200.50 with the tenderer subject to the approval of this report and the formal offer of the grant from the Rural Payments Agency.

In addition to the capital grant, the new agreement would also attract a revenue payment of around £20,000 per annum over the 10 year term. Officers have delegated authority (Minute 26/22 P&R Committee) to accept the grant offer of revenue payments but not the capital grant which is the subject of this report.

Risk Management:

Actual costs does not come within the allocated budget of Natural England– in this case proposals would be adjusted accordingly to meet the available budget.

Staff time to supervise and monitor the practical work – the Warslow Moors Estate Ranger has experience in this type of work on the Estate and will be able to act as an ‘on the ground’ contract manager in conjunction with Ecology colleagues.

Sustainability:

The proposal will meet several sustainability targets particularly in relation to climate change.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion:

3. None

4. Climate Change

1. How does this decision contribute to the Authority’s role in climate change set out in the UK Government Vision and Circular for National Parks?

a. Educators in climate change

Educators in climate change External funding to manage the Authority’s rural properties will enable the Authority to be educators in climate change through the maintenance, enhancement, restoration, expansion and increased connectivity of its habitats and the maintenance, enhancement, restoration and conservation of its cultural heritage.

b. Exemplars of sustainability

External funding to manage the Authority’s rural properties will enable the Authority to demonstrate how environmental land management and a sustainable approach to farming and land management can lie at the very heart of developing a strong economy and sustaining thriving local communities

c. Protecting the National Park

External funding to manage the Authority’s rural properties will help enable the Authority to protect the special qualities of the National Park

d. Leading the way in sustainable land management

External funding to manage the Authority’s rural properties will help enable the Authority to lead the way in sustainable land management

e. Exemplars in renewable energy

External funding to manage the Authority’s rural properties will help ensure that proposals for renewable energy are not at the expense of other special qualities such as biodiversity and cultural heritage

f. Working with communities

External funding to manage the Authority's rural properties will involve the Authority working with communities and in particular the farming and land management community

2. How does this decision contribute to the Authority meeting its carbon net zero target?

Environmental land management will have positive carbon emissions, sequestration and carbon storage in soils and vegetation implications for the land in its ownership. The Authority may wish to take this into consideration in its own carbon net zero assessments

3. How does this decision contribute to the National Park meeting carbon net zero by 2050?

Environmental land management will have positive carbon emissions, sequestration and carbon storage in soils and vegetation implications across the Authority's rural properties

4. Are there any other Climate Change related issues that are relevant to this decision that should be brought to the attention of Members?

The need for a more sustainable approach to farming and land management in the National Park in terms of the public payments made for the public goods delivered being realistic to enable sustainable and resilient farm and land management businesses.

5. Background papers (not previously published)

None

6. Appendices

Appendix 1- Location plan of moorlands (Map 1)

Report Author, Job Title and Publication Date

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