

RAPC 416/20

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

RESOURCES, AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE – 3 February 2020

GRANT FUNDING FOR HERITAGE WALKS

Report by Adam Vasey

Summary:

The New Forest National Park Authority is putting together a capital funding bid for landscape and access enhancements on the Waterside as part of National Grid's Landscape Enhancement Initiative. Match funding will be sought from the Rural Development Programme for England Growth Programme.

1 Heritage Walks

- 1.1 We are developing a series of new accessible self-guided walks along existing rights of way in and around the New Forest National Park as part of the Our Past, Our Future landscape partnership scheme. The routes provide communities with short walks that they can do from their front door. Both the Landscape Enhancement Initiative and the Growth Programme are ideally placed to provide funding to support these routes.
- 1.2 A funding bid to National Grid's Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI) would focus on improving the existing path surfaces and drainage, above and beyond the statutory duty of the Local Authority to manage the rights of way designation. The landscape quality would be improved by restoring and creating hedgerows and planting trees along the routes. This would enhance the landscape in areas affected by the electricity transmission infrastructure and offset its impact and improve wildlife features.
- 1.3 A funding bid to the Rural Development Programme for England's Growth Programme would provide new signage to assist navigation and update the New Forest Routes website to help tell the story of the landscape and the heritage it contains. The improvements would help make the area more attractive for walking and give local communities and visitors the confidence to explore and enjoy the National Park from their doorstep.
- 1.4 The new walks would add value to the existing rights of way network and encourage the use of such routes by the public. This would encourage recreation away from sensitive, designated habitats into robust areas along existing rights of way which can be accessed directly from residential areas. This would fulfil key actions within the Recreation Management Strategy to protect and enhance the New Forest's working and natural landscape and provide alternative to walks in the open Forest.

- 1.5 We would like to seek funds of £75,000 from the Landscape Enhancement Initiative towards the cost of contractors as well as ongoing maintenance for up to three years. The remaining match funds of £25,000 would be sought from the Growth Programme.
- 1.6 The project would be managed by the NPA's access officer with assistance from the NPA's interpretation officer and funding support from the NPA grants officer. Specific advice on enhancing landscape character would be provided by the NPA's landscape officer.
- 1.7 Both applications require an initial expression of interest to be submitted in mid-February. Once these have been approved, full applications will be required. Should these be approved, it is likely that work will start around January 2021.

2 About the LEI Scheme

- 2.1 National Grid's Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI) is a grant scheme aimed at supporting projects that can deliver localised visual improvements and landscape enhancement schemes in English and Welsh AONBs and National Parks which contain or are impacted by National Grid's transmission infrastructure. Applications must be submitted and managed by National Parks and AONBs.
- 2.2 The LEI grant scheme has a budget of £4 million per year with up to £200,000 available per project, which is the maximum 75% grant. The remaining 25% must be provided via cash or in-kind contributions from volunteers.
- 2.3 The Authority has progressed three applications to date:
 - 2.3.1 Working with Fawley Parish Council to manage woodland and provide wild play facilities at Warrens Copse, Holbury: £35,000
 - 2.3.2 Working with Wiltshire Wildlife Trust to improve access and land management at Landford Bog Nature Reserve: £29,000
 - 2.3.3 Working with RSPB to enhance the landscape at Franchises Lodge: £200,000.

3 About the RDPE Growth Programme: Rural Tourism Infrastructure Grants

- 3.1 RDPE's Growth Programme is a grant scheme aimed at supporting projects that create growth in the rural economy. The grants are funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) which is part of the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) and delivered by the Rural Payments Agency (RPA). Projects must meet national and local priorities for funding.

- 3.2 Local funding priorities are set by ESIF sub-committees in Local Enterprise Partnership Areas. In the Solent the priority is for capital investment to develop and grow tourism in rural areas, for example by creating new visitor attractions, extending the visitor season and increasing visitor spend, and investing in visitor activities that show collaboration with other businesses. This can include new and improved footpaths to create easily accessible routes for walking which can help make existing tourism more sustainable.
- 3.3 The Growth Programme has a budget of £35 million with up to £175,000 available per project. The minimum grant is £20,000 and for projects that generate no income up to 100% funding is available. The UK Government will guarantee funding for projects that are approved.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Committee note the report and approve the submission of the applications to the LEI and the Growth Programme.

Contact:

Adam Vasey

Tel 01590 646641

Adam.vasey@newforestnpa.gov.uk

Equality Impact Assessment: **The proposed project will improve access to the natural environment for a greater diversity of people. There are no other equality or diversity implications arising directly from this report.**