

RAPC 529-24

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

RESOURCES, AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE MEETING – 4 MARCH 2024

Grant funding and the Team New Forest approach

Report by: Hilary Makin, Communications Manager and Fiona Wynne, Grants Officer

Summary:

The New Forest National Park Authority has a strong track record of securing grants to deliver our Partnership Plan work and leverage our defra National Park Grant. We regularly submit bids of more than £750,000 to appropriate funding sources and this has enabled us to secure a total of £15 million for the Forest since 2010. This paper provides an update to Members on our approach to maximising external funding and how this supports the objectives of the Partnership Plan (through Team New Forest). The paper also requests members' approval for application to several upcoming grant funded opportunities.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that:

- 1 The content of the report be noted.**
- 2 The submission of up to three applications to the National Grid Landscape Enhancement Initiative as outlined in the report be supported, and that authority be delegated to officers to take all action as necessary to input these bids and, if successful, to complete the projects.**

INTRODUCTION

1. Aims and purpose

- 1.1 The Authority has always had a strategic focus on securing external funding to support our work in delivering our core purposes and socio-economic duty and to deliver the objectives of the Partnership Plan. Our annual target is to achieve 25%+ of income derived from sources other than the Defra National Park Grant. So far this year our half-year result is already 31%. Since 2010 we have secured £15 million. These funds support the work of the Authority and its partners to deliver landscape-scale improvements. This collaborative approach is a key part of our Team New Forest objectives.

2. Context – the funding landscape

- 2.1 In 2008 the Authority prepared a funding strategy as a framework for fundraising activities to support the work of the Authority in delivering its core purposes and socio-economic duty. The strategy considered the most likely options for fundraising open to

the Authority including grants, corporate sponsorship, donations, legacies, and sales. The strategy was reviewed in 2015 and further discussed with Members in 2017. In 2019, the Authority set up an internal funding group focused on making strategic decisions about where our time and effort is best spent. In 2021 members approved a [fundraising strategy](#) and a further [update](#) was provided in March 2023.

- 2.2 Priorities for funding bodies generally change on a three-to-four-year cycle. In 2020, the focus of many funding bodies shifted to mitigating the immediate impact of the pandemic. This included redirecting and increasing the availability of funds, providing greater flexibility in grant-making practices and reporting requirements, and collaborating with other funders to make money go further. Beyond the immediate impact of the pandemic, continued economic instability and the rising cost of living means that funding bodies are increasingly aware of the need for applicants to improve their organisation's sustainability during and beyond the funded period. This includes supporting organisations to work collaboratively wherever possible so that benefits go further and provide more impact in the wider community. Pooling resources to deliver overlapping priorities also allows projects to be delivered to a higher quality and within shorter timescales.
- 2.3 Monitoring of funding sources has shown a much greater commitment to nature recovery and net zero as well as the need to support and improve people's connection to nature. There is also more emphasis on building community resilience by improving health and wellbeing, developing green skills, and using creative approaches that support people to participate and thrive in their communities.
- 2.4 Grant applications remain the most likely source of fundraising for the Authority and offer the best return on investment for the resource and time committed. This is also where we have the most experience and track record. For these reasons, grant-seeking is the primary focus.
- 2.5 The National Park Authority is only able to apply for grants available to the public sector which restricts us from many large-scale funding streams which only accept applications from registered charities. Principal sources of grant funding available to the Authority continue to be government departments and agencies and the National Lottery. Government funds tend to be mostly short-term with very tight timescales to apply and are very competitive. Schemes also often require around 40% match funding to be successful, which is challenging to find.
- 2.6 A Corporate Partnerships programme was established in 2013 with a target to generate more than £50,000 per annum in income through company sponsorship. Securing direct financial contributions proved challenging and initial income projections were not met. Resource to establish and manage these relationships as well as delivering the volunteering elements and/or marketing rights many businesses seek as part of the partnership could not be justified due to the low levels of sponsorship attracted. However, we continue to accept small amounts of sponsorship from time-to-time in line with our ethical sponsorship policy. More significant commercial opportunities for National Parks are now undertaken at a national level through National Parks Partnerships (NPP).
- 2.7 Since the Authority was created there have been many attempts to generate income from the Authority's activities to recover costs and support the delivery of the National Park purposes. Members task and finish groups have overseen this work on several

occasions, and this has achieved a mixture of successes. Opportunities for income generation from investment and sales have been examined in previous years but no clear projects were identified. The Authority has no directly managed retail outlets so any returns would be small.

- 2.8 The Authority has a donations page on its website but has only received a handful of small donations in the last five years; it has however received several donations for talks by staff members each year.
- 2.9 Other forms of fundraising such as legacies and major donors require investment from skilled fundraisers with a longer-term and less certain return than seeking funding through grants.
- 2.10 For a number of years we have supported the New Forest Trust charity's visitor giving scheme 'Love the Forest' with communications and some business development to encourage more businesses to collect donations from visitors. The charity's aims are to secure the future of the Forest through education, conservation and commoning projects. With more staff resource we could in future support the charity to apply for grants which the NPA is unable to apply for as they are not open to public sector bodies and which, if bids were successful, could then be allocated to Partnership Plan projects.

3. How we are organised

- 3.1 In 2019 the Authority set up an internal funding group focused on making strategic decisions about where to focus our time and effort and advise on funding priorities, themes, projects, and resources. The group meets monthly and is comprised of several members of SLT (Nigel Stone, Paul Walton, Hilary Makin, Jim Mitchell) and the grants officer (Fiona Wynne) which is the only role in the organisation with a primary focus on grants. Specialist support comes from other NPA staff who provide input into developing projects and bids when required.
- 3.2 Member involvement is through the Resources and Performance Committee which is asked to consider and sign off grant bids of over £50k.
- 3.3 In 2020 a process was developed to bring forward potential projects suggested by staff and a prospectus of over 100 potential projects was compiled. A priority scoring system was developed (based on the Partnership Plan, Government's 25 Year Environment Plan, and the Glover Review of protected landscapes) and around 30 projects were prioritised for funding bids. A number of these have since been successfully funded.
- 3.4 To help develop these priorities further in 2022 we commissioned a consultant to talk to partner organisations about their current and future project ideas and write a report setting out the key priorities and how these would help to deliver the five themes of the Partnership Plan. Partner organisations were mainly drawn from the Legacy Landscape Partnership Board which was formed by the 10 key organisations involved in the Our Past, Our Future Landscape Partnership Scheme. The scheme was supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and one of its key successes was the value of partnership working in delivering landscape-scale projects. Establishment of the Board reflects the partners' commitment to continue working together beyond the life of the scheme including identifying and developing joint funding bids.

- 3.5 During 2022 organisations involved in the Wildlife Roundtable worked together to identify priorities for nature recovery in the National Park. This led to the development of a portfolio that indicated the scope of the opportunity for improving nature at scale in the National Park. Both portfolios have helped to inform the content of several recent funding bids and potential future opportunities.
- 3.6 Since 2010 the Authority has received around £15 million income from grants (see Annex 1 for successful applications since 2010 and live projects).

4. Developing bids

- 4.1 Our priorities are driven by Government strategies, the Partnership Plan, Business Plan, the Legacy Landscape Partnership Board set up after the Our Past Our Future scheme ended, and members' input, particularly with bids over £50k requiring members' scrutiny and approval.
- 4.2 Projects are considered against:
- Key and emerging priorities including the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan and the work of the Partnership Plan
 - Return on investment
 - Likelihood of success
 - Timescale (we have seen a proliferation of specific, very short-term, and competitively accessed grants, often with only a month to put a bid together).
- 4.3 Match funding is still a requirement of all funding bids and although the threshold is often lower than it was before the pandemic, we try to aim for between 20-40% wherever possible. There is also increasing need for match funds to be cash from non-government sources. Working in partnership enables us to achieve this as our partners can often access funding sources that we simply cannot as a public sector organisation.
- 4.4 Rejected applications are never wasted with the learning developed often built into future bids.

5. Benefits of partnership delivery

- 5.1 The Authority has a central role in the delivery of the Partnership Plan. Our collaborative approach is a key strength and enables us to seek funding for programmes that help deliver Partnership Plan actions. We have a strong track record in developing and leading multi-partner landscape-scale programmes as well as the strategic reach and vision. We have developed our role as facilitator and convenor enabling others to use their expertise, knowledge, and experience to deliver for the landscape. Partners' work is often defined by charitable or operating objectives, therefore in most instances no other organisation can take on the role of lead other than the NPA.
- 5.2 Without this collaborative approach to funding, projects and initiatives might happen in isolation, missing opportunities to maximise efficient use of resources, funding and time. Engagement with some key audiences may be missed. This approach is widely supported and encouraged by funding bodies.

5.3 Which partners do we work with?

- Statutory bodies
- Trusted delivery partners who have been involved in previous schemes, have a good track record and can show good governance (eg registered charity).
- Organisations and community groups that we have worked with previously and their involvement can help widen knowledge and expertise.

Partners are required to sign an agreement at the start of any project which stipulates financial, governance, reporting and evaluation requirements.

5.4 Since 2019, we have secured £2.7m for NPA projects which averages an £18 investment in the Forest for every £1 we invest in these projects (up from £14 previously). As well as driving investment into the Forest and delivering project outcomes, the value of partnerships goes beyond purely financial benefits. Joint bids strengthen the role of partners, help smaller organisations to develop, and enable skills to benefit the Forest as a whole. Partners involved in NPA schemes have gone on to work together in other ways.

5.5 While choosing to be lead partner in driving joint funding schemes, we are required to be the lead partner in two government initiatives:

- Defra's Farming in Protected Landscape (FiPL) programme
- National Grid's Landscape Enhancement Initiative

5.6 We are also involved as a partner in several major funding schemes but are not the lead:

- Verderers of the New Forest Higher Level Stewardship Scheme
- New to Nature (interns through the Groundwork charity)
- Culture in Common (Arts Council England-funded arts development programme).

6. Upcoming applications

6.1 We wish to apply for three landscape improvement grants of up to £300k each via the National Grid's Landscape Enhancement Initiative. The first project is working with Hampshire County Council on the Breamore Railway line, near Fordingbridge. The second project is with Forestry England at Fawley and Dibden Inclosures, Dibden Bottom and the wider Beaulieu Heath landscape. A third project to continue landscape enhancement and rhododendron removal at the RSPB's Franchises Lodge Reserve is also to be worked up over the coming year. More details of these are in Annex 2.

6.2 There is also the opportunity to apply to an Active Travel Fund, which will be discussed in a Part 2 paper.

7. Looking ahead

7.1 Taking into account gaps in funding for Partnership Plan work; our priorities and those of our partners and grant themes prioritised by funding bodies, our current focus for new applications is:

- nature recovery and delivering the ambitions of the Re:New Nature partnership
- health and wellbeing
- developing green skills.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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Papers:

Annex 1 - Decisions awaited and major grants received

Annex 2 - Upcoming applications

Previous papers:

RAPC 466/21 Funding Approach and Strategy

RAPC 505/23 Funding Update