

**From:** Susan Carey – Cabinet Member for Environment

Barbara Cooper, Corporate Director for Growth, Environment, and Transport

**To:** Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee – 18 March 2021

**Decision No:** 21/000036

**Subject:** Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) Grant Funding - Farming in Protected Landscapes

**Classification:** Unrestricted

**Past Pathway of Paper:** N/A

**Future Pathway of Paper:** For Cabinet Member decision

**Electoral Division:** Countywide

**Summary:** This report seeks approval to accept grant funding from Defra to support rural businesses and communities within the Kent Downs AONB by creating new jobs and also for environmental improvements.

**Recommendation(s):**

The Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee is asked to consider and endorse or make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Environment on the proposed decision attached at Appendix A to

- Accept a Grant from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) 'Farming in Protected Landscapes' funding and
- Delegate authority to Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport to take relevant actions, including but not limited to, entering into contracts and other legal agreements, as necessary to implement decisions to spend the grant.

**1. Introduction and Background**

- 1.1 In the [Agricultural Transition Plan](#) the Government announced a new scheme for Protected Landscapes (AONBs and National Parks) to manage a grant programme to support farm diversification, landscape enhancement, wider environmental enhancements and community engagement in the landscape.
- 1.2 Details of this grant are still emerging but it became clear recently that the scale of the grant requires a key decision.
- 1.3 Authority is needed to receive funding from Defra and for the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Unit, under the KCC Scheme of Delegations to disperse it to farmers and land managers in the Kent Downs AONB in accordance with Defra guidelines.

## **2. Financial Implications**

- 2.1 This is entirely new funding coming from Defra, there is no call on KCC funds.
- 2.2 It has recently become clear that the total new funding is expected to exceed £1m over 3 years and this necessitated a request for a key decision.
- 2.3 There will be new revenue funding available to support the management of this programme of grants as well as to provide new grants.
- 2.4 The AONB Unit will work with (and pay for) the KCC External Funding Team in the management of this new grant scheme and to ensure the grant conditions are met.
- 2.5 The AONB Unit has successfully managed similar grants in the past (the Sustainable Development Fund).
- 2.6 Defra's intention is that this is a 'light touch' fund but they will provide guidance to assist the AONB Unit in managing this fund correctly. The Kent Downs AONB Unit has a long and successful working relationship with the Defra Protected Landscapes team who will manage this project.

## **3. Policy Framework**

- 3.1 The decision supports KCC's priorities to deliver against the economic challenge and environmental challenges set out in the Interim Strategic Plan by attracting investment to support growth and tackling the climate emergency and protecting the natural environment.
- 3.2 This decision would release important new government funding for enhancing the Kent Downs AONB in line with the AONB management plan which is anticipated to be adopted by KCC. The funding provides support for environmental enhancement, public engagement, climate, and biodiversity enhancement and creating new jobs and apprenticeships, it also supports business resilience.

## **4. The report.**

- 4.1 Since the UK left the EU new funding structures are being put in place to support farmers and land managers to enhance the rural environment . Rather than having a centrally managed farm subsidy based primarily on area payments the basis for future farm payments will be providing 'public money for public good'. Public goods include carbon management and climate mitigation, public access to land, enhancement of biodiversity, heritage and beauty, enhancement of the water environment and provision of clean air. Funding can also be provided to support farm business diversification and green jobs.
- 4.2 The new funding arrangements will be provided under the banner of Environmental Land Management (E.L.M.).
- 4.3 An early component of E.L.M. is the 'Farming in Protected Landscapes' Scheme. This was announced in the [Agricultural Transition Plan](#) (ATP - pp 44-45).

- 4.4 There was very little detail provided in the ATP about the working arrangements or funding levels for the Farming in Protected Landscapes scheme saying only that details would be provided in 'early 2021'. National level negotiations between Defra and National Parks, AONBs started towards the end of 2020 and have been ongoing. It was expected that there would be an announcement in mid-February but unfortunately nothing further has yet emerged.
- 4.5 Conscious that there may need to be a Key Decision the Kent Downs AONB Unit has sought as much information as possible and is confident that because AONBs and National Parks have been working collaboratively with Defra the scheme that will emerge will be deliverable and effective. It will draw on the very successful experience of the previous Sustainable Development Fund (also funded by Defra) and AONB team's extensive experience of delivering grant schemes.
- 4.6 It has recently become clear that the funding available to the Kent Downs AONB is likely to exceed £1m over 3 years and so a key decision is required to proceed.
- 4.7 The scheme is set to start in April 2021 when the AONB Unit will be able to increase its capacity to deliver the scheme and set up working arrangements with the External Funding Team . An element of the grant will be required to pay for these mobilisation costs. Grants will start to be distributed from June 2021 and will be available over a 3-year period.
- 4.8 This is a very positive opportunity for Kent and the Kent Downs AONB, especially in the context of Covid recovery. It will provide new funding that will support environmental enhancement, communities, and the local economy.

## **5. Legal Implications**

- 5.1 The management arrangements of the grant scheme will be prescribed by Defra following detailed negotiations with National Park and AONB national teams. The Kent Downs AONB Unit is experienced in successfully delivering grant schemes. The Kent Downs AONB Unit will work closely with the KCC external funding team to ensure that all the due diligence is taken in the management of this grant scheme and that the grant conditions and criteria are met.

## **6. Equalities and data protection implications**

- 6.1 The management of the grant scheme will be taken forward in the context of the Kent Downs AONB Management Plan for which there is a full and approved Equalities Impact Assessment. (EQiA)
- 6.2 Defra has undertaken an EQiA for the grant award as a whole.
- 6.3. Some company data will be collected by Kent County Council as part of the application process. Applicants will be asked to provide consent as part of the application process for KCC to hold their data for the purposes of administering the grant scheme.

## 7. Conclusion

- 7.1 This is an entirely positive step for the Kent and the Kent Downs AONB, a fully funded grant scheme which will help implement the principles of the AONB Management Plan and contribute to social, economic, and environmental recovery in Kent helping to deliver the objectives of the Interim Strategic Plan and the Covid Recovery Plan.
- 7.2 The 'Farming in Protected Landscape' scheme is an early part of the very substantial changes which are coming for farm support in England, the delivery of a successful scheme in the Kent Downs could be the pre-cursor of more funding in the future.

## 8. Recommendations:

The Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee is asked to consider and endorse, or make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Environment on the proposed decision, attached at Appendix A to:

- Accept a Grant from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) 'Farming in Protected Landscapes' funding and
- Delegate authority to Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport to take relevant actions, including but not limited to, entering into contracts and other legal agreements, as necessary to implement decisions to spend the grant

## 9. Appendices

- **Appendix A:** Proposed Record of Decision
- **Appendix 1:** <https://www.kentdowns.org.uk/management-plan-2021-2026/>

## 10. Contact details

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