

Agenda Item

Executive Board

12 April 2006

CP



Blackdown Hills & East Devon AONBs Memorandum of Agreements 2005 - 2011

Summary

Both AONB Partnerships have in place Memorandum of Agreements (MoA) which are rolling six year agreements and are reviewed every three years and then extended to cover a further three years. The current AONB Memorandum of Agreements were set up for the period of 2002 – 2008 with a review date in 2005, there has been some slippage in this but it will not affect the current arrangements and funding in place for both Partnerships. It is a condition of Countryside Agency funding that these MoAs are signed by all funding partners to enable a sense of commitment and partnership to the AONBs and the delivery of their management plans. This is in essence a mid term review and there are no significant changes made to the 2002-2008 MOA document.

Recommendation

That Executive Board approves the reviewed Blackdown Hills AONB Memorandum of Agreement 2005 -2011 and the East Devon AONB Memorandum of Agreement 2005 – 2011 and that both documents can be formally signed off.

a) Reasons for Recommendation

It is a condition of Countryside Agency grant funding that all funding partners sign a six year MoA, Countryside Agency funding is set at a maximum of 75% for core costs.

b) Alternative Options

To not sign the MoA would potentially jeopardise the funding arrangements and viability of both the AONB Partnerships

c) Risk Considerations

Countryside Agency funding is made on an annual basis and therefore a six year agreement would be compromised if there were significant changes to that stream of grant aid. The MoA requires each of the core funding partners to indemnify the host authority to their respective percentage contributions for the relevant financial year except the Countryside Agency in respect of a number of matters (outlined in the MoAs) and so there are financial risks associated with this matter.

d) Policy and Budgetary Considerations

The funding allocations have been approved for both AONB Partnerships for 2006/07 and more recently confirmation from the Countryside Agency on their grant in aid which covers core costs for both teams. The Corporate Strategy identifies the need for the Council to conserve and enhance its AONBs because of they are landscapes of national importance.

e) Date for Review of Decision

N/A

Main Body of the Report

1. East Devon DC has a six year agreement with a range of Local Authority partners and Government Agencies for both its AONB Partnerships that is outlined in the MoAs attached to this document. The current agreement period is from 2002 to 2008 and is subject to review in 2005.
2. The agreement states that the local authority contributions should not fall below stated levels of contributions – for the Blackdown Hills this is an inflation linked amount based on the contribution made in 2002/03 of £10,000 and for East Devon AONB it is 12.5% of eligible costs but these can increase with prior consent. The Countryside Agency contribution towards core costs is 75% of total eligible costs .
3. The funding allocations for each AONB are based on a formula developed in 2000 by the Countryside Agency which is benchmarked to size of landscape and number of Local Authorities linked to its geographical and administrative location.
4. Within the lifecycle of the renewed MoA there are a number of issues for Members to be aware of which may or may not have implications on costs and grant in aid matters, these are :
 - Review of AONB Management Plans in 2008/09 – the cost of producing these plans was in the region of £12,000 per AONB in 2004. Both AONB Partnerships have recently been “capped” by the Countryside Agency in relation to their operational costs which could mean a significant gap in funds availability to carry out a comprehensive review of the Plans. It is unclear yet from the Countryside Agency how the costs for Management Plan reviews will be met.
 - The merger of various Government Agencies (including Countryside Agency) to form Natural England from 2006/07 will mean a period of uncertainty surrounding their new priorities and grant in aid settlement from DEFRA.
 - Due to the Countryside Agency channelling funds to core costs for all AONBs nationally to protect staffing costs there has been an overall reduction in funds available for project delivery. This presents challenges for both AOPNB Partnerships to gear in additional project funding from other sources for the future.
5. The work of both AONB Partnerships has been welcomed and enabled resources to flow into the rural communities of East Devon as well as supporting the work of voluntary organisations and the District’s Countryside Service in the delivery of their projects. The recent windfall from DEFRA for the Sustainable Development Fund is a good example of adding value to the work the Council seeks to achieve within its own community programmes.

Legal Implications

There are no apparent legal implications requiring comment

Financial Implications

Both of these items are covered by adequate budget provision in 2006/07.

Consultation on Reports to the Executive

N/A

Background Papers

- Blackdown Hills AONB Memorandum of Agreement 2005 – 2011
- East Devon AONB Memorandum of Agreement 2005 - 2011

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