

RURAL DEVELOPMENT FUND – VISITOR TRAILS AND WAYFINDER PROJECT PROGRESS

Head of Service:	Jackie King, Director of Corporate Services
Wards affected:	College Ward; Town Ward; Woodcote Ward;
Appendices (attached):	Appendix 1: Project Map Appendix 2: Images of example project infrastructure

Summary

Following a successful bid to the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), the following report provides an update on the grant award and progress to date.

Recommendation (s)

The Conservators are asked to:

- (1) Note the indicative timeline and project deliverables**
- (2) Note the difference between the Grant Award and the funding allocation sought and the resulting project funding deficit of £10,657.**
- (3) Note the work undertaken to date and confirm support for continuing with the project.**
- (4) Agree to fund the most significant element of the project infrastructure for which funding has not been obtained: the waymarking discs at a cost of £1,216**

1 Reason for Recommendation

- 1.1 To provide formal endorsement from the Conservators of the project, work of the Steering Group to date and to address the project funding shortfall.

2 Background

- 2.1 On 25 August 2021, formal confirmation was received that a bid to the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development had been successful, and that the project was free to begin committing the funds secured.

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Project Timeframe

- 2.2 The formal project completion date has been confirmed by the Rural Payments Agency (the body responsible for administering and monitoring the grant payments) as the 10th of May 2022, by which time all of the project infrastructure must have been fully installed.

Project Finances

- 2.3 A grant award £132,082.60 has been made against an applied for sum of £142,739.60). This leaves a notional project funding deficit of £10,657.
- 2.4 In addition to the Grant Award, the Conservators previously approved a match funding contribution of £20,000 (see report to Conservators in June 2019) and the Jockey Club have also kindly committed to contributing a sum of £7,500 and agreed to provide the general design to be used for the project. The securing of written partner support and 'match funding' was a pre-requisite for being considered eligible to apply for EAFRD grant funding.
- 2.5 The 'match funds' will deliver those elements of the bid not eligible for grant funding, such as: - artwork design, communications & marketing, leaflets & materials, business training and support time to administer the project, many of which are a requirement of the bid and have an output attached within the funding contract.
- 2.6 The difference between the grant applied for and the awarded amount has resulted in a project infrastructure deficit of £10,657 which would have funded:
- 10 x Moveable solid wood A-frame signs (£6,539),
 - 780 x Waymarking discs with fixing holes (£1,216); and
 - 20 x Etched Brass rubbing plaques (£2,900).
- 2.7 The Waymarking discs, in particular, are considered an important part of the Visitor Trails and Wayfinder project by contributing to the overarching objective of providing a clear direction to follow across the Downs. With an appeal for the funding of the discs to be reconsidered by the awarding body being unsuccessful, Conservators are asked to release a further £1,216 to fund the discs.
- 2.8 It should also be noted that the etched brass rubbing plaques (20 at a cost of £2,900), were intended as an integral part of a 'Family' trail and the Jockey Club are kindly considering whether funding for this element can be provided.

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- 2.9 Unfortunately, varying the quantities of project infrastructure items listed within the bid, even if they are not fully funded by the Grant Award, is unlikely to be permissible due to the grant conditions and funding contract. The provision of 'A' frame (signage) is still under discussions with the Steering Group.
- 2.10 Similarly, the project suppliers cannot be varied unless there is an issue around bankruptcy and the project outputs cannot be varied due to the grant conditions.

Project Deliverables

- 2.11 The overarching aim of the project is to: “celebrate the rural nature and equestrian heritage of the Epsom & Walton Downs, promoting the area as an all-year visitor destination through innovative signage, landmark gateways, visual interpretation and branding. Stimulating economic activity both up on the Downs and linking to nearby Epsom town”
- 2.12 The physical outputs from the project, which once delivered using the grant and match funding secured, will help to deliver and articulate the strategic aim of the project as set out in 2.11 above, are as follows:
- 25 x Finger Posts – solid oak, routed, painted with agreed icon/ image
 - 150 x Ground Posts – ‘waymarking posts’ solid oak
 - 52 x Information signage boards – quality hardwood
 - 24 x ‘Entry Interpretation’ boards – quality hardwood
 - 8 x ‘Viewpoint Interpretation’ boards – quality hardwood
 - 4 x picnic table bench sets – quality hardwood construction
 - 5 seats with backrest + 5 seat only – quality hardwood
 - 15 litter bins - located at picnic area, car parks, main exits, views
- 2.13 Appendix 1, attached, provides a Project Map indicating the approximate locations of the various infrastructure referred to above.
- 2.14 Appendix 2 also includes some example images of the types of signage, finger posts, ground posts, bench seats, picnic benches and litter bins to be installed.
- 2.15 There are also expectations around the development and delivery of a cohesive branding and marketing campaign, to be embedded through training and the distribution of marketing materials, including leaflets.

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Project Steering Group

- 2.16 In order to guide and inform the delivery of the project, a Steering Group has been established comprised of representatives from the Conservators. The following individuals are members of the Steering Group:

Councillor Liz Frost

Councillor Jan Mason

Councillor Steven McCormick

Councillor Clive Woodbridge

Stephen Wallis - The Jockey Club

Simon Durrant – Epsom Downs Racecourse, Jockey Club

- 2.17 The Steering Group is supported by the Clerk to the Conservators, relevant Council Officers and representatives from Matthews Associates.

- 2.18 The Steering Group meetings to date have focussed on outlining the theme and concept for the visitor trails and branding.

- 2.19 The key messages discussed for the project infrastructure and branding campaign have been:

The Downs is a Racehorse Training Centre of Excellence

The Downs is private land owned by The Jockey Club

Promoting Epsom's horse-racing history and heritage

The unique habitat

Visit after 12.30

RESPECT

- 2.20 Work has commenced on planning out the Heritage Trail and the Biodiversity Information Boards together with working up ideas around the three Visitor Experiences. This work was informed by a site visit by the Steering Group to the Downs to ensure heritage trails and proposed markers would not impinge upon the safety of racehorses in training.

- 2.21 The Jockey Club have kindly volunteered to progress the design based around racehorses travelling at speed.

3 Risk Assessment

Legal or other duties

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3.1 Impact Assessment

3.1.1 None arising from the contents of this report.

3.2 Crime & Disorder

3.2.1 None arising from the contents of this report.

3.3 Safeguarding

3.3.1 None arising from the contents of this report.

3.4 Dependencies

3.4.1 None.

3.5 Other

3.5.1 Not applicable.

4 Financial Implications

4.1 Should Conservators wish to fund the circular discs an extra £1,216 will be required to be withdrawn from reserves.

4.2 **Section 151 Officer's comments:** The Conservators working balance reserve currently holds an uncommitted balance of £31,056. Funding the circular discs at a cost of £1,216 would reduce this uncommitted balance to £29,840.

5 Legal Implications

5.1 Compliance with the grant allocation is being monitored by Matthews Associates, reporting to the Clerk to the Conservators and the Conservators if and when necessary.

5.1 **Legal Officer's comments:** As Members are aware that grant funding has been secured from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). The Council has therefore entered into grant agreement with them governing the award of such funding. Failure to observe grant conditions may lead to a requirement to repay grant funding and regular financial appraisals are essential to mitigate the risk.

5.2 Additional funding is requested to be released from reserves as some infrastructure items are not covered by the grant agreement.

6 Policies, Plans & Partnerships

6.1 **Council's Key Priorities:** The following Key Priorities are engaged: not applicable.

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- 6.2 **Service Plans:** The matter is not included within the current Service Delivery Plan.
- 6.3 **Climate & Environmental Impact of recommendations:** none applicable.
- 6.4 **Sustainability Policy & Community Safety Implications:** none applicable.
- 6.5 **Partnerships:** n/a.

7 Background papers

- 7.1 The documents referred to in compiling this report are as follows:

Previous reports:

- [RURAL DEVELOPMENT GROWTH PROGRAMME FOR ENGLAND APPLICATION FOR FUNDING, Conservators, June 2019](#)

Other papers:

- [Full Application Status Report - 7 June 2019](#)