

DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET MEETING

10 September 2013

Report of the Acting Strategic Director – Environmental Services

**HIGHER LEVEL ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP
AGREEMENT (JOBS, ECONOMY AND TRANSPORT)**

(1) **Purpose of the Report** To seek Cabinet approval to accept the offer of a Higher Level Environmental Stewardship Agreement from Natural England for the management of countryside sites in the west and south of Derbyshire.

(2) **Information and Analysis** The Higher Level Environmental Stewardship Scheme (HLS), managed by Natural England, provides funding towards agreed management for the benefit of wildlife and landscape character over a ten year period. The Council was invited by Natural England to submit an application to the HLS for the management of land of biodiversity value on its countryside sites across South Derbyshire, Erewash, Amber Valley, High Peak and Derbyshire Dales Boroughs/Districts. The Council appointed a consultant to prepare its Farm Environment Plan (FEP) and draft a list of possible stewardship options which following discussions, was submitted to Natural England.

Natural England has now offered the Council an HLS Agreement, starting from 1 November 2013. The acceptance of the Agreement would support the Council's existing management to maintain or enable it to improve the value of important hedges, species rich grassland, lowland heath, and ponds on 21 countryside sites, whilst not adding to the Council's ongoing commitments. The Agreement covers both annual management for the full ten years and a four year work programme to restore boundary features, such as dry stone walls and stock fences, to carry out tree works, scrub removal and the eradication of invasive weed species. The work programme also includes funding for the restoration of the historic Cromford and High Peak Railway wheel pit at High Peak Junction workshops as an item under the Historic and Archaeological Feature Protection heading.

Public

Several of the County Council's landholdings in the north-east of Derbyshire are already being managed under an existing HLS Agreement, which was approved by Cabinet on 14 September 2010 (Minute No. 283/10 refers).

(3) **Financial Considerations** The Agreement offered by Natural England would pay £13,583.85 in year one and then £13,768.85 per annum from year 2 to year 10, for carrying out the annual management on the sites. Over the period of the Agreement, this funding would amount to £137,503.50. The Agreement also offers additional funding of £101,177.52 for the four year work programme, of which £35,600 is 100% funding for the restoration of the Cromford and High Peak Railway wheel pit. It is proposed to add the wheel pit restoration funding to the Council's capital programme for the financial year 2015/2016 and bring a report for the appointment of a contractor on this scheme to a future meeting.

(4) **Legal Considerations** The Council has a duty under Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, in exercising its functions, to have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity". The proper management of its land specified in the Agreement will fulfil this duty. Some of the work is also to maintain populations of protected or priority species listed in Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, including the great crested newt and various butterfly and bird species.

(5) **Environmental and Health Considerations** The work under the Scheme will continue and improve the Council's management to enhance the biodiversity value of the sites. This will maintain the status of those sites that have been notified Local Wildlife Sites by Derbyshire Wildlife Trust and the designated Local Nature Reserves at Pewit Carr and Mousley Bottom. Also, it will improve the management of Breadsall Cutting Site of Special Scientific Interest, which has high nature conservation value, both on a national and regional context.

(6) **Property Considerations** Where applicable, conditions compliant with the management in the Agreement will be incorporated into agricultural tenant's Farm Business Tenancies.

In preparing this report the relevance of the following factors has been considered: prevention of crime and disorder, equality and diversity, human resources and transport considerations.

(7) **Key Decision** No.

(8) **Call-In** Is it required that call-in be waived in respect of the decisions proposed in the report? No.

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(9) **Background Papers** Existing HLS Agreement for north-east countryside sites approved by Cabinet on 14 September 2010. (Minute No.283/10 refers).

http://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/images/Env%20Stewardship%20Ag_tcm44-147771.pdf Officer contact details - Justine Spencer, extension 39651 and Chris Monk, extension 39678.

(10) **OFFICER'S RECOMMENDATIONS** That Cabinet

10.1 Gives approval to the signing of a 10 year Higher Level Environmental Stewardship Agreement between the County Council and Natural England for funding of £238,681.02 for the management of land at Countryside Sites in the west and south of Derbyshire.

10.2 Accepts grant funding totalling £238,681.02, spread over ten years, for the carrying out the Higher Level Environmental Stewardship works.

Mike Ashworth
Acting Strategic Director – Environmental Services