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**REPORT TO: PLANNING AND REGULATORY SERVICES COMMITTEE ON 16  
NOVEMBER 2021**

**SUBJECT: NATURE RESTORATION FUND**

**BY: DEPUTE CHIEF EXECUTIVE (ECONOMY, ENVIRONMENT AND  
FINANCE)**

**1. REASON FOR REPORT**

- 1.1 To inform the Committee of a grant of £101,000 which has been made available to the Council by the Scottish Government from the Nature Restoration Fund and to ask the Committee to agree how the grant is allocated.
- 1.2 This report is submitted to Committee in terms of Section III (E) (1) of the Council's Scheme of Administration relating to the functions of the Council as Planning Authority.

**2. RECOMMENDATION**

**2.1 It is recommended that the Committee:-**

- i) note receipt of the £101,000 grant from the Scottish Government's Nature Restoration Fund; and**
- ii) agree the proposed projects and budgets as set out in para 4 of this report.**

**3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 On 2 August 2021 the Scottish Government wrote to Moray Council detailing the allocation of capital funding from the new Nature Restoration Fund to all Scottish Local Authorities.
- 3.2 The purpose of the fund is to support actions that help nature to recover in Scotland, by either 1) Making Space for Nature (urban focus) and/or 2) Helping Nature to Recover (rural focus).
- 3.3 Projects using the fund must enhance biodiversity and local ecosystems and/or use nature based solutions to mitigate and adapt to the climate emergency and its impacts. Projects should also promote community health and wellbeing and reduce inequalities.

3.4 Projects are required to be completed within this financial year.

#### **4. PROPOSALS**

4.1 The Council's allocation of funding from the Nature Restoration Fund has been discussed between officers from Strategic Planning and Development, Environmental Protection and Education and a number of projects have been identified as suitable for the budget and timescale. The following projects are proposed to receive this funding:

##### **Clovenside Rain Garden £15,000**

4.2 Clovenside Cemetery in Forres was impacted by significant flooding in 2020 and summer 2021, an event that is likely to be repeated due to the increased likelihood of extreme weather events in the future.

4.3 Rain gardens are dry, shallow hollows planted with native plants suited to short term waterlogging. These are designed to capture excess surface water run-off in times of heavy rainfall. The rain garden will look like a small dip planted with meadow grasses and small shrubs. The soil beneath will have high sand content with a deep layer of stone under that to maximise the drainage. Storm water fills the hollow and then drains away safely, filtering pollutants in the process.

4.4 The rain garden is the key project / focus to maximise the drainage capacity during extreme flooding events at the cemetery, already allocated £56,000 and the proposed £15,000 from the Nature Restoration Fund will contribute to this total construction cost. The funds will be used to support the project including final ground preparation and sowing of meadow mix, not only alleviating the problem of standing water after heavy rain but also enhancing biodiversity and adding to the character of the cemetery.

##### **Wildflower Plantings £10,000**

4.5 The introduction of wildflowers plays an important part in improving the biodiversity of our open spaces and in turn helps wildlife, people and the environment in general and is supported by the Moray Local Development Plan and wider legislation.

4.6 The Economic Growth, Housing and Environmental Sustainability Committee approved the introduction of new wildflower sites across Moray on 1 December 2020 (para 19 of minute refers).

4.7 This work is being undertaken by Environmental Protection and the contribution from the Nature Restoration Fund will be used to support resourcing labour and materials to deliver 8 wildflower planting projects across Moray.

4.8 Using feedback received through consultation with Community Councils a draft 3 year programme has been developed and shared with Community Councils. Engagement with communities on the potential projects for the first tranche is taking place this autumn with planned on site delivery programme for early Spring 2022. This includes sites at:

- Queen Street Orchard, Buckie
- Mannachie Park, Forres
- Fiddich Park, Craigellachie
- Provost Christie Drive, Rothes
- Reikit Lane, Elgin
- Cooper Park, Elgin
- Moray Sports Centre, Elgin
- Clovenside Cemetery, Forres

**Site management plans and minor biodiversity enhancements £66,000**

- 4.9 Two areas have been identified that would benefit from improvements, neither of which have been actively managed in recent years.
- 4.10 Millbuies is the only Country Park in Moray, having been taken over by Moray District Council in 1975, and is an excellent amenity resource, offering a picnic area and gentle walks through the woodland around the loch. The varied flora in the park supports native wildlife such as red squirrels and pine marten, with the additional benefit of providing a rich aquatic ecosystem.
- 4.11 The Wards wildlife site is the only area that has received the designation of non-statutory wildlife site by Moray Council, and provides a sanctuary for wildlife within Elgin. It is an important wetland habitat, surrounded on all sides by existing and planned future development, and is also a valuable natural space for the community being in close proximity to Greenwards primary school and Elgin High as well as many residences and the Edgar Road retail area.
- 4.12 Both sites require renewed management in order for the biodiversity and community health and wellbeing opportunities to be maximised. Management plans will be commissioned by Strategic Planning and Development to support Environmental Protection to identify priorities for enhancing each space for the benefit of local biodiversity, and maximising the engagement of residents and communities. These management plans will identify opportunities relating to woodland management, restoration and rewilding, aquatic benefits, access improvements and educational enhancements relevant to each site.
- 4.13 It is proposed that Ecological assessments of each site also be undertaken, providing up to date information that would support working with the North East Scotland Local Biodiversity Partnership to ensure that key species and habitats are protected and promoted. A hydrological assessment of the Wards wildlife site will explore changes to the hydrology of the site, the impacts upon biodiversity and mitigation measures.
- 4.14 Minor biodiversity enhancements will then be actioned with the remaining funds, and the Council will be in a position to action wider improvements identified by the site management plans when future funds become available.

**Education £10,000**

- 4.15 Officers from Strategic Planning and Development will engage with head teachers across Moray to identify priority projects for schools that enhance

outdoor learning opportunities and protect biodiversity, for example through native planting.

## **5. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS**

### **(a) Corporate Plan and 10 Year Plan (Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP))**

Enhancing local biodiversity delivers a wide range of social and environmental benefits, that will support the corporate and community planning objectives.

### **(b) Policy and Legal**

The Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 places a duty on public bodies in Scotland to further the conservation of biodiversity when carrying out their duties.

The projects outlined in paragraph 4.1 will contribute to the Council meeting its biodiversity duty and align with the Council's Climate Change Strategy aim to 'Work to retain, protect and enhance biodiversity across Moray'.

### **(c) Financial implications**

All projects are designed to minimise future maintenance costs. Any ongoing maintenance issues will be managed by Environmental Protection and Strategic Planning and Development within existing budgets.

### **(d) Risk Implications**

If the proposed allocation of funding is not agreed, there is a real risk that this money will not be used due to the limited time available to spend it within this financial year.

### **(e) Staffing Implications**

A Climate Change Officer from within Strategic Planning and Development will manage the budget and work with officers from Open Space to deliver the projects.

### **(f) Property**

All proposals are considered to enhance land owned and/or managed by the Council.

### **(g) Equalities/Socio Economic Impact**

By increasing biodiversity, projects should also contribute to community health and wellbeing and reduce inequalities of access to nature.

### **(h) Consultations**

The Depute Chief Executive (Economy, Environment and Finance), the Head of Economic Growth and Development, Legal Services Manager, Open Space Manager, L Rowan, Committee Services Officer and Equal Opportunities Officer have been consulted and comments received have been incorporated into the report.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

- 6.1 The Scottish Government's Nature Restoration Fund has made available £101,000 to help nature recover in Moray, to be spent in FY 2021/22.**
- 6.2 It is proposed that the projects and budgets outlined in this report are approved, so that Moray can benefit from this much needed boost for local biodiversity.**

Author of Report: Sophie Ward, Climate Change Strategy Officer (Projects, Communications and Funding)

Background Papers:

Ref: