

Rother District Council

Report to:	Cabinet
Date:	11 December 2023
Title:	Coronation Living Heritage Fund
Report of:	Ben Hook, Director - Place and Climate Change
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Field
Ward(s):	All
Purpose of Report:	To present details of the Micro Woods projects and Community Orchard Grants, with a view to gain approval to progress both schemes, assigning the £76,173.50 as awarded by the Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) via the Coronation Living Heritage Fund.
Decision Type:	Key
Officer Recommendation(s):	Recommendation to COUNCIL: That the Micro Woods projects and Community Orchard Grants be included in the Council's Capital Programme with budgets of £27,149 and £49,024.50 respectively.

AND

It be **RESOLVED**: That:

- 1) the Director – Place and Climate Change be authorised to accept the Coronation Living Heritage Fund grants totalling £76,173.50 from DEFRA, for the purposes of delivering the above schemes; and
- 2) the Director – Place and Climate Change be granted delegated authority to procure goods and contracts as necessary for the completion of the Micro Woods projects, and to award Grants as appropriate to deliver the Community Orchard Grants scheme, in consultation with the Cabinet Portfolio Holder Environmental and Climate Change issues.

Reasons for

Recommendations: To deliver both the Micro Woods projects and Community Orchard Grant schemes in line with the Coronation Living Heritage Fund requirements.

Introduction

1. The Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) Coronation Living Heritage Fund (CLHF) has made £2.5m available to enable more trees to be planted in non-woodland locations and close to where people live, providing a visible and lasting tribute to the King's Coronation within local communities. The CLHF is split into two lots.

2. CLHF Lot 1 offers capital grants to local authorities for the planting of Micro Woods and subsequent establishment costs for up to three years.
3. Micro Woods are small urban plots of land (usually around 200m²) densely planted with a variety of native tree and shrubs to create biodiversity-rich woodland habitats. Prior to planting, the ground is prepared by digging to a depth of at least 1m, turning the soil and adding soil improvers.
4. Micro Woods are well suited to urban and degraded soils, where they assist in restoring the soil biome and improving soil carbon sequestration. The intensive soil preparation, mulching, and watering during establishment results in reduced need for ongoing maintenance, fast growth and establishment rates, and increased resilience and survival rates of the trees. Plots should remain chemical and fertiliser free and do not require cutting or pruning as they are able to sustain themselves once established, providing an important role in supporting local biodiversity.
5. CLHF Lot 2 is an onward grant scheme, enabling local authorities to provide capital grants to community groups for the trees and ancillary items required to create Community Orchards.
6. Community Orchard applications must include at least five fruit or nut trees (there is no maximum), with suitable species and an appropriate layout selected for the proposed site. The orchards will bring communities together to plant and cultivate the trees and will ideally provide additional opportunities to learn new skills such as wildlife identification, horticultural skills, and tree maintenance.
7. These are capital grants to cover the cost of trees and ancillary items. Applicants must evidence their plan to provide the appropriate resources and any associated costs for planting, establishment and maintenance, through engagement with the local community.

Details of the Projects

8. The Council was successful in applying for £27,149 of funding from Lot 1 to plant three Micro Woods, one in each of the eligible locations within the district, namely Battle, Bexhill and Rye. Precise locations are yet to be confirmed and will be identified by officers in liaison with the respective Town Councils and local community groups as required.
9. Subject to approval, Micro Woods planting is scheduled to take place in the Winter of 2024/25. The Council's maintenance team will complete the soil preparation works and support tree planting, which will be delivered via a series of community tree planting events. Each site will be dedicated to the Coronation of King Charles III.
10. The Council was also successful in applying for £49,024.50 of funding from Lot 2 for Community Orchard grants. Subject to approval, the grants are scheduled to open for applications from April 2024, for planting in the Winter of 2024/25.
11. It is expected most Community Orchard grant applications would be in the region of five to 15 fruit trees, which would allow for the funding of approximately 20 orchards. Applicants will be required to evidence they have secured the land and resources to plant the orchard in the appropriate time frames, have

sought advice on species selection and layout, and have plans to manage establishment of the trees and their ongoing care.

Conclusion

12. Cabinet approval is sought to accept the funding in order to deliver the three Micro Woods projects and the Community Orchard Grant scheme in line with the CLHF requirements. The funding will achieve environmental benefits and lasting tributes to the King's Coronation.
13. Cabinet is recommended:
 - i) To approve the inclusion of the Micro Woods projects and Community Orchard Grants in the Council's Capital Programme, with budgets of £27,149 and £49,024.50 respectively.
 - ii) To authorise the Director – Place and Climate Change to accept the Coronation Living Heritage Fund grants, totalling £76,173.50, from DEFRA, for the purposes of delivering the above schemes.
 - iii) To grant delegated authority to the Director – Place and Climate Change to procure the goods and contracts as necessary for the completion of the Micro Woods projects, and to award the Grants as appropriate to deliver the Community Orchard Grants scheme, in consultation with the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Environmental and Climate Change issues.

Implications

Financial Implications

14. The Micro Woods projects and Community Orchard Grants would be included in the Council's Capital Programme with budgets of £27,149 and £49,024.50 respectively.
15. Neither scheme requires additional capital investment by the Council over and above the DEFRA grant awards, therefore the impact is neutral to the Council's budgets. Any unused capital funds from the awards are to be returned to DEFRA.

Legal Implications

16. Legal considerations for tree planting include land ownership / tenancy agreements, planning implications and covenants. Consideration should be given to the impact of tree planting on Council owned land in light of any potential future devolvement or development of such land.
17. Community Orchard grants will require compliant application, award and evaluation processes. The existing Community Grants award scheme can be used as a template to produce these.

Human Resources Implications

18. Both the Micro Woods and Community Orchard Grant schemes will be delivered using existing internal resources.

Environmental

19. Trees sequester (segregate) carbon by removing carbon dioxide from the air and storing it, as well as providing natural habitats for many species. They also reduce surface flooding and run off (which helps soil conservation) and can moderate extreme temperatures. Trees also serve to reduce air and noise pollution, and encourage outdoor recreation, contributing to the improved health and wellbeing of our communities.
20. Protecting and enhancing biodiversity is a priority of the Environment Strategy. This commitment is reflected in the Corporate Plan, including a pledge to actively manage green spaces to maximise carbon reduction effectiveness. Additionally, the Local Plan's 'Biodiversity and Green Space policy' states the Council will protect and enhance biodiversity, geodiversity, and green spaces, by multi-agency working where appropriate.
21. The Urban Forest 1066 report and Tree Planting Strategy for Bexhill advocate for planting of young trees to support the existing ageing tree population in the area. The planting of appropriate species in the appropriate locations, will develop the district's urban forests to be more diverse, healthy, and resilient to pests, diseases, and the future climate.
22. The CLHF stipulates that all trees must come from suppliers who can demonstrate they meet the Plant Health Management Standard.

Other Implications	Applies?	Other Implications	Applies?
Human Rights	No	Equalities and Diversity	No
Crime and Disorder	No	Consultation	No
Environmental	Yes	Access to Information	No
Sustainability	Yes	Exempt from publication	No
Risk Management	No		

Chief Executive:	Lorna Ford
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Appendices:	None
Relevant Previous Minutes:	None
Background Papers:	None
Reference Documents:	Urban Forest 1066 Rother District Council: Bexhill Tree Planting Strategy Plant Health Management Standard.