

RECORD OF EXECUTIVE DECISION TAKEN BY AN EXECUTIVE MEMBER

This form **MUST** be used to record any decision taken by the Elected Mayor or an individual Executive Member (Portfolio Holder).

The form must be completed and passed to the Chief Officer Legal and Democratic Services no later than NOON on the second working day after the day on which the decision is taken. No action may be taken to implement the decision(s) recorded on this form until 7 days have passed and the Chief Officer Legal and Democratic Services has confirmed the decision has not been called in.

1. Description of decision

To agree the acceptance of Forestry Commission funding of £23,398 to complete a project to update historic environment records to inform woodland creation proposals.

2. Date of decision

11 December 2023

3. Reasons for decision

The acceptance of the funding will enable the Council to play an active supporting role to the Forestry Commission in pursuing its key objectives, including: increasing the confidence and certainty of woodland creation proposers; supporting the faster assessment of woodland creation proposals; supporting delivery against government targets for woodland creation; addressing an identified barrier to woodland creation and reducing the number of inappropriate woodland creation proposals received.

4. Alternatives considered and rejected

Not accepting the funding.

5. How decision is to be funded

From Forestry Commission grant.

6. Conflicts of interest

Name of all Executive members who were consulted AND declared a conflict of interest.	Nature of interest	Did Standards Committee give a dispensation for that conflict of interest? (If yes, give details and date of dispensation)	Did the Chief Executive give a dispensation for that conflict of interest? (If yes, give details and the date of the dispensation).

The Mayor has been consulted on this decision

Not Applicable

Signed 

Date: 11 December 2023

Name of Decision Taker: Tom Wootton

This is a public document. A copy of it must be given to the Chief Officer Legal and Democratic Services as soon as it is completed.

Date decision published:11December2023.....

Date decision can be implemented if not called in:21December2023.....

(Decision to be made exempt from call in.....NO.....)

Bedford Borough Council – Report to the Mayor

Report by: Manager for Heritage and Planning Compliance

Subject: Forestry Commission Grant Funding: Updating Historic Environment Records

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Forestry Commission has secured funding from the Nature for Climate Fund to deliver the three-year 'National historic environment datasets for woodland creation' project. This project will make historic environment data available to woodland proposers at the earliest stages of woodland creation.
- 1.2 The data is referred to nationally as SHINE (Selected Heritage Inventory for Natural England) and the Council has previously agreed a project brief to set out how SHINE could evolve to inform woodland creation. This brief will be used to modify the data and a grant of £23,398 has been offered. The project is due to commence on 18th December 2023 and is due to be completed by 15th January 2025. It will be completed by the Council's Heritage & Compliance Team using existing resources.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 **To accept Forestry Commission funding of £23,398 to update historic environment records to inform woodland creation proposals.**

3. REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 Acceptance of funding of £23,398 will enable the Council to play an active supporting role to the Forestry Commission in pursuing its key objectives, including: increasing the confidence and certainty for woodland creation proposers; supporting the faster assessment of woodland creation proposals; supporting the delivery against government targets for woodland creation; addressing an identified barrier to woodland creation and reducing the number of inappropriate woodland creation proposals received.

4. THE CURRENT POSITION

- 4.1 The existing historic environment records and datasets are not suitable to assist woodland creation projects. As a result, they present challenges to being used by those seeking to create areas of new woodland.

5. DETAILS

- 5.1 The report recommends that the Council accept Forestry Commission funding of £23,398 for undertaking *Project K: Creating SHINE data for Low-Sensitivity Areas in England*. Project K was set up to expand upon *Project E: How can the SHINE methodology be updated so SHINE can be used to inform woodland creation proposals?*
- 5.2 SHINE is a single, nationally consistent dataset of non-designated historic environment features. It was originally developed for Environmental Stewardship (ES) and has been used in Countryside Stewardship since 2015. Although SHINE is currently used to inform woodland management funded by Countryside Stewardship, it has long been recognised that, in its current form, SHINE is not suitable for use in woodland creation proposals.
- 5.3 Previously, the Council successfully bid for Project E funding and the findings of that report have been used to develop the methodology for updating the datasets. This funding will allow us to update our SHINE dataset in a now updated, larger Low-Sensitivity zone. This will benefit the Council not only in terms of the woodland creation process, but also in any future agri-environment subsidy applications.

6. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

- 6.1 If the Council were not to accept the funding, it would miss an opportunity to preserve the historic environment and speed up woodland creation.

7. KEY IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Legal Issues	In accepting the payment to them by the Forestry Commission for the sum of £23,398 for undertaking the project, the Council shall be entering a contract to complete the work by 15 th January 2025 to the satisfaction of the funding body. If the Council fails to undertake the work to a satisfactory standard within the agreed timescale and in accordance with the terms and conditions of the Forestry Commission, then it may have to pay back all or part of the funding.
7.2 Policy Issues	There are not considered to be any policy implications in taking this decision.
7.3 Resource Issues	The project will be delivered by existing resources.
7.4 Risks	In accepting the payment from the Forestry Commission for undertaking the project, the Council shall be entering a contract to complete the work in accordance with the timescale set and to the satisfaction of the funding body. If the Council fails to undertake the work to a satisfactory standard by 15 th January 2025, then it may have to pay back all, or part of the funding.
7.5 Environmental Implications	The acceptance of funding will enable the Council to play an active supporting role to the Forestry Commission to pursue its key objectives including: increasing the confidence and certainty for woodland creation proposers, supporting the faster assessment of woodland creation proposals, addressing an identified barrier to woodland creation and reducing the number of inappropriate woodland creation proposals received. This in turn will help support the Forestry Commission in meeting government targets for woodland creation under the England Trees Action Plan and the Council in meeting its net zero carbon targets by 2030 through tree planting.
7.6 Equalities Impact	There are not considered to be any equality implications in taking this decision.
7.7 Impact on Families	There are not considered to be any impacts on families in taking this decision.
7.8 Community Safety and Resilience	There are not considered to be any impacts on community safety and resilience in taking this decision.
7.9 Impact on Health and Wellbeing	The acceptance of funding will have a positive impact on health and wellbeing as it will speed up delivery of woodland and trees.

8. SUMMARY OF CONSULTATIONS AND OUTCOME

8.1 The following Council units or Officers and/or other organisations have been consulted in preparing this report:

Chief Officer for Legal, Performance and Democratic Services
Chief Officer for Finance
Portfolio Holder for Town Centres and Planning
Energy Team

8.2 No adverse comments have been received.

9. CONTACTS AND REFERENCES

Report Contact Officer	<i>Ian Johnson Ian.Johnson@bedford.gov.uk</i>
File Reference	<i>Forestry Commission Project K.</i>
Previous Relevant Minutes	<i>None relevant.</i>
Background Papers	<i>None.</i>
Appendices	<i>None.</i>