

CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH BIODIVERSITY PROJECT FUND

Litlington Chalkpit Restoration September 2006

Discussion in Projects Group:

Weldmesh fencing will be used to keep rabbits away from using the site. This will also prevent badgers from using the site. Project support in Phase 1 from the partnership can help establish a budget code for the future management of the site at SCDC. The strategic view in the longer term for the site is possibly to become an LNR.

Pro:

- project could be used as best practice for other districts
- strategic place of the site in Green Corridor (as identified in Green Infrastructure Strategy)
- community element (local management event, and community involvement in work on site)
- innovative approach to rabbit management
- community element

Contra:

- barnowl post causing significant costs without producing clear benefits
- land owned by local authority; therefore, site management should be paid by local authority; unease about partnership money being spent
- project needs to show added value (see under Pro)

The Projects Group suggests to cut down the cost significantly by **leaving out the barn owl post (£750)** and **getting a higher contribution from SCDC**. Instead of the £2000 partnership contribution which was asked for, the Projects Group recommends to give **£900** to the project

Conditions:

- Records to be passed on to the BRC
- Progress reported on Biodiversity Action Reporting System

PROJECT ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

Essential

Project proposals must:

- Be clearly linked to the achievement of targets and/or the implementation of priority actions contained within a Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Species Action Plan or Habitat Action Plan, or to the aims and objectives of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough BAP more broadly;
→ **chalkpit is part of grassland CWS**
→ **contributing to calcareous grassland BAP: positively manage/achieve favourable condition on chalk grassland CWS**

- Demonstrate sound project design and internal logic (i.e., projects should be feasible, have realistic and cost-effective budgets, and demonstrate clear linkages among their objectives, outputs and activities);
 → **trial restoration was undertaken**
 → **project for which application is made is part of bigger 3 year project with realistic workplan and budget**
- Demonstrate partnership working;
 → **links with Green Belt Project & volunteers**
- Demonstrate the use of matching funds or in-kind contributions for all projects seeking £1,000 or more from the Biodiversity Project Fund.
 → **contributions from SCDC (owner of the site) and help in kind from Green Belt Project, WT and volunteers**
- Include publicity and awareness-raising for biodiversity
 → **local management event planned for March 2007**
 → **site is accessible for the public**

Desirable

Where possible and appropriate, project proposals should:

- Encourage local involvement.
 → **work days for members of the local community**

Other Criteria

- Preference will be accorded to innovative and catalytic activities that lever in other funds as well as the involvement of others;
 → **innovative approach to rabbit control**
 → **can be used as best practice by other partners**
- Support will not normally be provided for routine, site management activities;
- Support will not be provided for retrospective activities;
- In reviewing the proposals, the Surveys and Projects Group will try to ensure that a range of different project types is funded, across different Species and Habitat Action Plans.

CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH BIODIVERSITY PROJECT FUND Project Proposal Form

PROJECT TITLE

Litlington Chalk Pit Restoration

1. INTRODUCTION

- *Name of the Group putting forward the proposal;*
- *Brief overview of the origins of the project (including information about liaising with a member of the Surveys and Projects Group).*
- The restoration work would be a project undertaken by SCDC using a local environmental contracting firm.
- The project manager will be SCDC Ecology Officer
- The chalk pit (0.7hec) is owned by SCDC but has been neglected for several decades. This has resulted in scrub dominating parts of the slopes.
- The actual pit is part of a 2 hec grassland County Wildlife Site.
- Extensive rabbit burrows are present which in addition to damaging the chalk flora also cause damage to the neighbouring crops.
- Part of the pit has been used as a rubbish dump. The burrowing of the rabbits brings some of the rubbish to the surface. This presents a hazard as pieces of metal and glass can often be found at the surface.
- The site is accessible to the public via a public bridleway. This has also resulted in the site being used by bikes and motorbikes.
- The local council member and the adjacent farmer welcome the restoration of the pit.
- The parish council have expressed concerns about the site in the past.

2. BACKGROUND AND JUSTIFICATION

- *Brief summary of the reasons for initiating the project;*
- *Identification of the ways in which the proposed project helps to achieve the targets and/or implement the priority actions contained in a Species Action Plan or Habitat Action Plan, or contributes to the overall aims and objectives of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough BAP more generally.*
- The restoration of the chalk pit would enable the site to be positively managed for chalk grassland and people.
- County BAP targets require chalk grassland CWSs to be positively managed in order to achieve favourable condition; and to seek the restoration of 30 ha of calcareous grassland by 2010. The positive management of Litlington Chalk Pit will contribute to these BAP targets.
- The restoration work would fulfil the following SCDC BAP targets:
BAP gr/2 (chalk grassland) and BAP gen/8 (management of own sites)
 - A trial restoration operation has been undertaken in summer 2006 in order to assess the ease of the proposed technique and to assess the length of time that each phase might take. The work was undertaken by the

council's own in-house work force. Unfortunately, they are committed to land drainage work in the winter periods. Thus in order to commence the restoration work during the winter period it is necessary to look to an external contractor.

3. OBJECTIVES

- *Description of the desired state or condition towards which the project is working.*
- Restoration of chalk grassland to the slopes of the pit.
- A pit that is safe for the general public to enjoy.
- A significant reduction in the number of rabbits present at the site.
- Re-graded slopes to restore damage caused by burrowing rabbits.
- Erection of a pole mounted barn owl box.

4. ACTIVITIES AND OUTPUTS

- *Brief description of key project activities and their associated outputs.*
- In order to prevent the recolonisation of the pit slopes by rabbits it is proposed to trial the use of pinned-down weldmesh (or a similar netting product) to prevent new burrows from being created.
- The re-graded and protected slopes will be capped with chalk excavated from the site during the re-shaping of slopes.
- Erection of new signage to warn of hazards and to clarify that no motor vehicles are allowed on the site.
- Volunteer events will continue to be run in order to keep the local community aware of the work and involved at the site.
- Press releases will be put out at appropriate times (the first in expected Sept 06 to report on the trial work and possible support from the Partnership regarding funding).
- The parish council and local farmer will be invited to inspect the site in June 07 to see if concerns regarding safety and rabbit control have been adequately addressed.

5. ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS

- *Identification of lead organisation and lead contact;*
- *Description of the roles and responsibilities of all participating organisations;*
- *For larger projects, a description of formal project structures (e.g., steering committees or advisory groups).*
- The SCDC Ecology Officer will be the project manager and will oversee the work.
- The majority of the funding for the restoration work will come from SCDC.
- A contract will be let for the restoration of the pit's base and one small area of the northwest slope initially.

6. TIMEFRAME AND WORKPLAN

- *Duration of the project;*
- *Key milestones.*
- The restoration work will be spread over a period of 3 years, with the main work split into 2 phases, the southside and the westside slopes.
- It is proposed to work initially on the southside (and a small area of the northwest side). This area has already been largely cleared of scrub by the use of volunteers over several years.

(work plan includes work undertaken this year to show commitment)

- Early April 2006 - rabbit control undertaken.
- Mid July 2006 - regrading and netting of the south slope.
- Mid July 2006 – erection of temporary safety fencing.
- Late Sept 2006 – seeding of re-graded south slope.
- Oct 2006 - low level fencing (of a single rail type to prevent bikes using the slope) to be erected along top of pit edge.
- Oct 2006 – erect suitable signage.
- Oct 2006 – regrade and netting of the pit base and northwest slope, followed by immediate re-seeding.
- March to Aug 2007 – control regrowth of weed species on re-graded slopes.
- Early April 2007 – undertake cut of vegetation on southside slope and retain a close sward throughout the first year's growing season.
- May / June 2007 – assessment of general vegetation growth and effectiveness of the slope re-grade and protection methods.
- July to Aug 2007 – procure local provenance wild flower seed through Wildlife Trust Local Seed project.
- Sept 2007 – regrading and netting of westside slope, followed by immediate reseeding with local seed.
- March to Aug 2008 – control regrowth of weed species on westside slope.
- Early April 2009 – undertake cut of vegetation on westside slope and retain a close sward throughout the first year's growing season.

7. BUDGET

- *Breakdown of anticipated costs by budget line;*
- *Contributions (financial and in-kind) from partner organisations.*
- *External match funding*
- 3 companies were approached for quotes in December 2006 The “informed estimates” of the most cost effective quote are used to guide the budget forecast. In letting any contracts fixed price quotes will be obtained.

Expenditure already committed

- Rabbit control - £763.75 (for spring 06 and immediately prior to works via Five Star Pest Control)
- Netting – £220.02
- Temporary hi-viz safety fencing - £56.72
- One days use of land drainage team – no charge (yet!)
- Cambs Con Vols (scrub wk) - £36.50

- **Total (inc VAT) - £1076.99**

Funding is only requested for phase 1 at present

Phase 1

- Re-grading of slope - (£250 for driver and machine per day)
- 1 days work - £250
- Netting-pinning - £500 (inc installation)
- Strimming of slopes - £450 (3 cuts per year @ £150 per cut)
- Erection of low fence - £750 (inc installation)
- Barn owl box on a pole - £750 (inc installation)
- Seed harvesting - £250 (needs to be finalised with WiT)
- Seed sowing by hand using vols £0
- Scrub removal (2man day) £300
- Rabbit control prior to works - £150
- Warning signs - £100
- Total (for phase 1 only) - £3500
- **Total (inc VAT) - £4112.5**

SCDC contribution - £2112.5

Biodiversity Partnership contribution - £2000

Phase 2

- Re-grading of slope - (£250 for driver and machine per day)
- 1 days work - £250
- Netting-pinning - £500 (inc installation)
- Strimming of slopes - £450 (3 cuts per year @ £150 per cut)
- Erection of low fence - £750 (inc installation)
- Seed harvesting - £250 (needs to be finalised with WiT)
- Seed sowing by hand using vols £0
- Rabbit control prior to works - £150
- Total (for phase 2 only) - £2350
- **Total (inc VAT) - £2761.25**

Help in-kind

- Green Belt Project – 1 day contribution of 2 vols for strimming prior to rabbit control.
- WiT / GBP for monitoring of vegetation recolonisation (due to CWS status).
- SCDC ecologist will run a local management event in March 07 using Cambs Conservation Volunteers with the invites to the parish (this has been run every year since 2004).

8. MONITORING AND EVALUATION ARRANGEMENTS

- *Description of arrangements for capturing lessons learned;*
- *Arrangements for internal/external reviews, where appropriate (e.g., for larger projects);*
- *Identification of indicators and a description of the data gathering strategy that will be used to assess progress (for larger projects only).*
- Fixed-point photography will be used to record the restoration work.

- Vegetation surveys undertaken in June of successive years will record the recolonisation of the flora (WiT already visited the site in 2005).
- The effectiveness of the netting will be judged according to: its use in preventing rabbits from burrowing, its stability, its aesthetics, and its durability over time.
- The restoration of the southside of the pit in the first phase will guide the decision making process for the restoration of the westside.
- The results of the restoration work will be presented to the SCDC Conservation and Design Advisory Group in winter 06/07 in order to consider suitable financial arrangements for the second phase of the restoration work.
- The project will be deemed successful if the following criteria are satisfied:
 - a) the slopes become vegetated with chalk grassland flora (rather than weed species),
 - b) the burrowing and erosion caused by the rabbits is significantly reduced.
 - c) the site is attractive and safe for members of the public to visit with the slopes used by bikers closed off.
 - d) a barn owl occupies the new nest site.
 - e) volunteers from the local community continue to attend work days.