

NATURE RESTORATION FUND – SPEND OPTIONS

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 In July 2021 the Scottish Government launched the Nature Restoration Fund, which provided £10 million in the financial year for projects addressing biodiversity loss and climate change, half of which was delivered via Local Authorities.
- 1.2 The Nature Restoration Fund aims to support large-scale, multi-year, multi-partner projects, which deliver transformative change to drive forward nature recovery.
- 1.3 Following on from the Policy and Resources Committee in October 2023, officers sought suggestions from Elected Members in relation to projects relating to Nature Restoration. Appendix 1 of this report sets out the projects submitted by Elected Members, and Appendix 2 provides details of the projects which officers recommend be taken forward.
- 1.4 The Scottish Government have a further fund available to Local Authorities and Scotland's National Parks for local nature restoration projects. This is a bidding process which is open to the Council, and is also open to projects that help Scotland's species, woodlands, rivers and seas back on the road to recovery.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 It is recommended that Policy and Resources Committee:-
 - a) Note the remaining allocation of Nature Restoration Funding;
 - b) Note the suggestions received by Elected Members in Appendix 1;
 - c) Agree to the recommended projects as set out in Appendix 2 of this report.

3.0 DETAIL

3.1 The proposed strategic goal for the Nature Restoration Fund is “*to catalyse action at scale to protect and restore nature and Scotland’s biodiversity in land and at sea*”. The fund has an increased focus on outcomes which address the main drivers of the decline in biodiversity – on land, over-exploitation of the natural environment and addressing its consequences, habitat loss and fragmentation, and invasive non-native species – particularly rural biodiversity.

3.2 The Fund has four strategic themes to be delivered across all the funding streams:-

- Habitat restoration – management for enhancement and connectivity
- Freshwater restoration, including hydrological change
- Eradication of invasive non-native species impacting on nature
- Coastal and marine management to promote restoration and resilience

3.3 The Council has been allocated £835,000 of funding since 2021.

2021/22	£108,000
2022/23	£238,000
2023/24	£489,000

3.4 The current remaining funding for Argyll and Bute Council totals £577,000. If the Policy and Resources Committee were minded to agree to the projects set out in Appendix 2 of this report, this would leave a surplus of £2,000 of funding.

3.5 Officers have reviewed the suggestions submitted by Elected Members, and have concluded that one of the proposals fits with the Nature Restoration Fund criteria, as set by the Scottish Government. All suggestions received and officers’ conclusions are set out in Appendix 1 of this report.

4.0 CONCLUSION

4.1 This report recommends that the Council take forward a number of deliverable projects, utilising the Nature Restoration Fund allocated by the Scottish Government.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Policy - There are no policy implications arising directly from this report.

5.2 Financial - There are no direct financial implications arising from this report, however, it should be noted that some of the projects do remove a financial cost to the Council, and therefore can be classed as cost avoidance for the Local Authority.

5.3 Legal - There are no legal requirements arising directly from this report.

5.4 HR - There is a resource requirement for staff to implement the projects.

5.5 Fairer Scotland Duty

- 5.5.1 Equalities – Protected Characteristics – None.
- 5.5.2 Socio Economic Duty – None.
- 5.5.3 Islands - None arising directly from this report.
- 5.6 Risk - There is a risk of loss of funding should the Council not spend this funding allocated by the Scottish Government.
- 5.7 Climate Change - The Nature Restoration Fund aims to support large-scale, multi-year, multi-partner projects which deliver transformative change to drive forward nature recovery and address biodiversity loss and climate change.
- 5.8 Customer Service – communities across Argyll and Bute will benefit from this funding.

Kirsty Flanagan, Executive Director with overall responsibility for Development and Economic Growth, and Road and Infrastructure Services

Douglas Hendry, Executive Director with overall responsibility for Commercial Services

Policy Lead for Climate Change and Environment Services, Councillor Ross Moreland

Policy Lead for Planning and Regulatory Services, Councillor Kieron Green

For Further Information:-

Fergus Murray, Head of Development and Economic Growth
Fergus.Murray@argyll-bute.gov.uk

Jim Smith, Head of Road and Infrastructure Services
Jim.Smith@argyll-bute.gov.uk

Ross McLaughlin, Head of Commercial Services
Ross.McLaughlin@argyll-bute.gov.uk

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – List of Projects submitted by Elected Members

Appendix 2 – List of recommended projects

APPENDIX 1 – LIST OF PROJECTS SUBMITTED BY ELECTED MEMBERS

Suggestion	Comments
<p>Backs Water - formal response from SEPA Lochgilphead relating to recent works relating to clearing the watercourse and banks maintenance. This is something that is done every 10years which impacting on the habitat that handrails the watercourse.</p> <p>Though present fish stocks are unknown, work is restricted to March - September due to trout and salmon migration.</p>	<p>This is an interesting proposal along with the history of this water course, however the Nature Restoration Fund is for works to be carried out on council land or land controlled by the council. Officers would advise that the land owner engage with NatureScot or RPIDD directly to seek funding to restore the habitat(s).</p>
<p>On Bute there is a potential project on Bute. Restoration of Tom's Cuts under the criteria of water ways. It could reduce risk of flooding at Rothesay Joint Campus, reduce risk of flooding at the Meadows area, improve amenity at Lovers Lane, and support improved water flow.</p>	<p>Officers recognise the proposal would have positive effect on the Rothesay Joint Campus and the Meadows, this requires further investigation however to establish ownership, costings and deliverability.</p>
<p>I have been concerned for some years now about the condition of the former skating pond in Helensburgh. When it was originally redesigned it had new islands built for the safe breeding of water fowl and there was plenty of swim space safe from foxes and other hunters. Over the ensuing years the pond has become so overgrown that you can probably walk to the islands with comparative ease and there I very little swim space left.</p> <p>It would like to see some of this money used to restore the habitat and ensure the continued breeding of wild ducks, moorhens and visits by herons which were common place as well as a good look at ways of enhancing the whole area for wild life habitat. I am aware that there was an upkeep agreement between the council and the water authority when the original changes were made but that that seems to have vanished into the archives.</p>	<p>Proposal for opening up some areas of vegetation to allow wildlife and other users (pond boats and ice-skating if the weather permits) access to open water. The proposal fits with the criteria set out in the Nature restoration Fund. We will work up a project brief to deliver this proposal. An initial £50k has been identified to take a phased approach with this project.</p>

APPENDIX 2 – LIST OF RECOMMENDED PROJECTS

<u>OPTION</u>	<u>INDICATIVE COST</u>	<u>COMMENT</u>	<u>CATEGORY</u>
Control of invasive non-native species on Council assets (spraying or removal Japanese Knotweed, Rhododendron ponticum etc).	£100k	It's a legal requirement to control INNS. Proposed four year eradication plan based on repeat applications of Glyphosate or other approved chemical to target hotspot areas of worst species with the aim to be successful. Applications generally need to be made over a 3 - 4 year period. This proposal will be carried out within the road corridor or other areas of Council controlled land but with a requirement for adjacent landowners to carry out treatments to land which they control. Locations are extensive across Argyll and Bute. The intention would be to carry out the majority of these works deploying Council trained resource. However, in extremely dense areas, where there will be a need to carry out some works through stem injections, a contractor would be sought due to the intense labour requirement for this task.	Cost avoidance / benefit on council assets, community, place and biodiversity.
Tree Planting Fund	£75k	Competitive fund to grant funds to local groups, schools or community organisations to plant native trees across Argyll and Bute.	Community / place / biodiversity- habitat creation/enhancement / carbon sequestration.
Play park enhancements	£80k	This proposal is to complement the ongoing	Benefit to council assets, cost

	(total based over 2 – 3 year programme)	Play Park Renewal Fund and would further enhance that programme by converting some areas of tired and aged hard landscaping to meadow. The additional areas of grass cutting would be negligible and this proposal would remove long term maintenance costs associated with hard paving and also approve the local aesthetics.	avoidance, carbon sequestration, water absorption, community, place and biodiversity in terms of habitat creation that benefits pollinator's.
Woodland clearance and native replanting at Kilmory Estate / Kilmory Business Park	£50k	Woodland creation in and around Kilmory Estate and Screening Business Park over mature and likely require felling and re-planting. Using a mix of native species that will enhance local biodiversity. Note that in October 2023, the P&R Committee agreed to £50k of funding – this brings the total of this project to £100k of funding as it better reflects the scale of the works involved.	Habitat Restoration- removal of INNS and native tree planting which will contribute to biodiversity and carbon sequestration for climate change.
School food waste composting	£60k	In schools that don't have food waste uplift investigate setting up of local composting solutions to be used onsite.	Education / minor cost avoidance on waste front/ organic fertiliser for school plantings.
Woodland Planting at Dalinlonghart Dunoon	£100k	Previous forested area was harvested, there is an obligation on the part of the Council to replant this site which is adjacent to the landfill site currently operated by Renewi (which will transfer back to the Council at the end of the PPP contract in Sept 2026). This will remove a future financial pressure for the cost of the planting and will also produce a long term income source when the timber can be harvested and sold to the commercial market.	Nature Restoration - Benefit to Council assets, cost avoidance, carbon sequestration for climate change and woodland biodiversity.
Peat Bog Restoration	£60k	As above	Community / Place, Carbon

			sequestration which helps to address climate change and Biodiversity.
Former skating pond in Helensburgh	£50k	Opening up some areas of invasive vegetation to allow wildlife and other users access to open water.	Nature restoration/water quality.
TOTAL SPEND:	£575,000		

The costings associated with each project in Appendix 2 are estimates, and may be subject to change as projects develop.