



Big Tree Plant Grants Panel Meeting

Venue: 18 – 21 Morley Street, London, SE1 7QZ

Date and time: 4th July 2011 - 10.00am – 1.30pm

Attendees:

Chair: John Hopkins (JH) – Olympic Delivery Authority

- Peter Wilkinson (PW) – The Next Field Ltd
- Tony Kirkham (TK) – Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew
- Nerys Jones (NJ) – Strategic Greenspace Consultant
- Edward Dyson (ED) - Defra
- Mark Durk (MD) – Forestry Commission
- Vinny Ganley (VG) – Groundwork London
- Katie Faith (KF) – Groundwork London

Background

MD provided a briefing to the panel members on events since the last panel meeting in April 2011. The panel were informed that all applicants had received a call and a follow up letter explaining the panel decision. VG noted that a significant number of approved projects which carried conditions had satisfied Groundwork that they had met their conditions. MD also took the panel through the updates on Big Tree Plant developments, the first of which was that the revised application form and guidance notes had been prepared and were ready to put on the website.

MD explained to the panel that work to refine and review the application form and guidance (with emphasis on value, supporting areas of greatest need and improving clarity of information) should improve how Round Two operates.

MD also updated the panel on the development of a set of FAQs based on a question and answer session at a recent Tree Warden Members meeting and enquiries dealt with through The Big Tree Plant telephone line and email.

Members of the panel were interested in developments to ensure that the Big Tree Plant funding will target deprived areas around England. The panel believed that it is more important that a project is judged on need rather than whether it is urban or rural, as long as it meets the 'place where people live and work' eligibility criteria. It was agreed that mapping locations was important to make decisions on projects.

JH informed the panel that he will not be available for future meetings due to professional reasons. MD and ED to look into the protocol of finding another person to chair.

Q&A from the Panel:

- Has any progress been made in reaching those most deprived areas and is the IMD (Index of Multiple Deprivation) and Green score representative? It was agreed that IMD and Green score is still useful as tool to assist decision-making
- How will analysis help us to target under represented locations and groups to target in future rounds? The panel were informed that the Forestry Commission and Defra were looking into this with the help of Groundwork London; and this would underpin efforts to contact and work with organisations throughout England. Various proposals have been put forward to spread the message and the Defra communications team is involved.

Process for agreeing the deferred applications

VG presented an overview of the deferral process and Groundwork London's role within this, helping applicants understand and where possible address the panel's reasons and recommendations for deferral. VG noted that a few applicants had realised their projects were not ideally suited to the scheme's aims and had withdrawn their applications. Some applicants had been resistant to advice from the Panel. TK noted a common misconception among applicants that trees usually required staking. In fact 90% of trees do not need staking, and this should be made clear through advice and guidance to applicants. This should also help reduce their costs. The Panel considered that there may be a need to challenge some misconceptions, and noted that the revised guidance should help address these problems.

MD pointed out that the deferred schemes need to be measured against the criteria as set out in the original application form, and that in order to be fair to the deferred schemes we should treat them on the same basis as the earlier projects.

The panel agreed to the following process:

Work from the lowest unit cost applications first and approve those of sufficient quality with a check kept against the cumulative average unit cost which the panel agreed should not be exceeded. As this threshold is approached, approve those projects that best meet the aims of the scheme with careful analysis of the overall unit cost after each application.

Overview of applications and Panel Discussions / decisions

Summary table available but not included

Next steps:

- The Panel agreed that the deadline for Round 2 applications would be 17:00 on 5th September 2011. The Panel meeting would be on 23rd September 2011, and they would meet again to discuss deferred applications on or

around the 8th November. Provisionally the Round 3 Panel meeting would be in March 2012.

- It was agreed that a national map showing project locations would be beneficial for the next panel meeting. This would aid analysis of under-represented locations and groups to target in future rounds
- A re-think on presentation of projects to the Panel. Groundwork will provide samples of an A4 sheet that represents applications with summary, data and a location map.
- Groundwork would circulate to the Panel the minutes and information on total numbers of projects supported, amount of funding committed and number of trees and request sign-off from FC prior to contacting projects.
- Groundwork would clarify potential VAT issues on the decisions spreadsheet.
- Forestry Commission and Defra would make arrangements for replacement of John Hopkins as chair of the panel.
- An overview/review of the figures from all projects will be provided with panel papers at the Round 2 Meeting.
- The Panel agreed that a summary of their discussions could be made public with the provision that Panel members' comments would not be attributed and project confidentiality would be respected. Comments made by the panel would be superseded by 'The panel felt' or the panel recommended that...'