



Big Tree Plant Assessment Panel

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

Date and time: 19th April 2011 - 10.00am – 5.30pm

Attendees:

Chair: Peter Wilkinson (PW)– The Next Field Ltd (Stand in for John Hopkins who was available for the afternoon session only)

-Tony Kirkham (TK) – Royal Botanical Gardens

-Nerys Jones (NJ) – Strategic Greenspace Consultant

-Edward Dyson (ED)- Defra

-Mark Durk (MD) – Forestry Commission

-Sharon Robertson (SR) – Groundwork London

-Vinny Ganley (VG) – Groundwork London

-Katie Faith (KF) – Groundwork London

-John Hopkins (JH) – Olympic Delivery Authority

-Anita Konrad (AK) – Groundwork London (Introductions and briefing sessions only)

-David Edmonds (DE)– Groundwork UK – GIS presentation.

Introductions

Peter Wilkinson kindly offered to chair the meeting as John Hopkins was unfortunately unavailable for the morning session.

Briefing

MD provided a briefing to the panel members explaining the wider context of the Scheme. The BTP Funding Scheme is a component of a large Government strategy, which fully incorporates a “Big Society” approach. The BTP aims to support community groups to apply and is therefore a simple form with minimal bureaucracy for the applicant. The main focus when assessing applications should be to support tree planting where people live and work and in areas of greatest need. The panel should not set the bar too high and be realistic; it would be unfair to place excessive demands on the groups.

Where exact locations and postcodes / grid references have been provided by the applicant they have been mapped against Indices of Multiple Deprivation and Green data sets to guide the Panel. Other things for the panel to consider are the tree species, the survivability of the tree, aftercare provision, organisational and financial risk, community engagement and value for money. The Scheme is looking to achieve an average of £4 per tree in order to meet the target of one million trees. The

Scheme will not support pure hedgerow planting, these projects or elements of projects will be deemed ineligible.

MD reiterated that this is the first round and there will be opportunities to learn and change things moving forward to improve the Scheme both for the applicants and from an administrative perspective.

ED stated that the panel also needed to consider that this is a competitive process and there are targets to be met within budgets, so only the best projects should be supported and the panel should be mindful not to over commit the funding available. It may be the case that there is a need to go back to ministers and highlight the issues in meeting the target with the current budget.

Q&A from the Panel:

- Clarification on the role of the HLF and Tree Council within the Big Tree Plant, The Tree Council chair and the Partnership Advisory Board. There are already trees counted as part of The Big Tree Plant as the Tree Council and Keep Britain Tidy, NHS Forest etc were granted funding to initiate the programme and help start tree planting promptly whilst the BTP Funding Scheme was developed.

- Guidance on what other costs can be funded under the scheme
It was agreed to stay within the parameters of the items listed in the guidance.

- How much detail is it envisaged to go into in terms of project budgets.
It was agreed that the key indicator should be “survivability of the trees in the ground” and that the budgets should stay within the parameters of the guidance and deemed to represent good value on a cost per tree basis to the Scheme.

- There was concern regarding how this Scheme would be viewed and received by the public and professional colleagues. It was therefore deemed important to be justified and transparent in all decision making and that appropriate follow up with projects would be undertaken. The key indicators for performance of the Scheme will be the survivability of the trees in three and five years’ time.

- The panel would recommend considering an evaluation and were reassured that FC / GW will be undertaking 10% site visits as well as monitoring and requesting after photos for all projects.

BTP- Methods (overview of the Scheme, spatial analysis, scoring analysis)

VG presented an overview of the grant application process and Groundwork London’s role within this, the issues raised by applicants regarding the application form and the difficulties this also created in terms of administration and scoring. The scoring form and process was explained and overview figures provided.

DE gave a presentation on the potential to address some of these issues for the applicant and GW by incorporating the application form into a web based design which would compile all the information into reports and map data on GIS, which would also make the Panels role easier in future.

Conflict of Interest and Quorate

It was agreed that individuals would declare an interest prior to a project being discussed and not contribute to that discussion unless asked by other members for more detailed / specific information.

It was agreed the Panel would be quorate as long as at least one advisor from FC / Defra was present and 2 independent Panel members.

Overview of applications and Panel Discussions / decisions

Please see accompanying spreadsheet

Panel recommendations / suggestions from project discussions:

- Design and send a “commitment to appropriate aftercare” template for all projects to sign up to.
- Clarify how the Panel will deal with issues around landscapes, potential conflict of planting the wrong tree in the wrong place
- Need further clarification regarding exactly what the Scheme will fund in terms of “other costs”, in particular training.
- The Panel are aware that decisions must be consistent and transparent
- Provide better guidance to applicants regarding their projects, for example aim to plant an orchard project, not an orchard with some willow and hedge planting as well
- Remove “inappropriate species” heading /theme for future rounds
- Add to all standard conditions that projects must not exceed more than 0.5ha of tree planting
- Request all projects receive support from Local Authority to state planting is appropriate even if LA is not the land owner.

Next steps:

- It was agreed a “wash up” and lessons learnt was needed to be documented and taken forward from this first round. This will be led by FC and GW.
- Analysis of how the Scheme has been advertised and focus on under represented locations and groups to target in future rounds
- Encourage certain types of projects, rather than more orchard and fruit tree planting.
- GW will circulate the minutes, and information on total numbers of projects supported, amount of funding committed and number of trees and request approval prior to contacting projects (FC have requested Panel members respond as a matter of priority)
- A follow up meeting to reassess deferred projects was discussed. GW and FC will agree timescale for deferred projects and advise Panel Members.

Next assessment panel meeting will be confirmed shortly but aiming for beginning of September 2011.