



Big Tree Plant Grants Panel Discussion

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

Date and time: 22ndth September 2011 - 10.00am – 5 pm

Attendees:

Chair: Peter Wilkinson (PW) – The Next Field Ltd

- Tony Kirkham (TK) – Royal Botanical Gardens
- Nerys Jones (NJ) – Strategic Greenspace Consultant
- Edward Dyson (ED) - Defra
- Roisin Sharkey (RS) - Defra
- Mark Durk (MD) – Forestry Commission
- Vinny Ganley (VG) – Groundwork London
- Kieron Hardie (KF) – Groundwork London

Introductions:

Since John Hopkins' departure from the Panel, **PW** has kindly taken over responsibility for chairing the meeting. **RS** was observing the panel meeting in her role as Defra's Project Manager of The Big Tree Plant campaign.

Briefing:

Summary Update

MD presented an overview summary paper to the panel reviewing progress in Round 1 and highlighting key issues for the Panel.

ED commented that it would be worth identifying case studies of best practice from applicants - including an analysis of value for money for different kinds of planting. Referring to the type and location of projects, a key focus of the Big Tree Plant is on promoting 'Community Leadership' and projects from disadvantaged communities with a lack of access to green space. **PW** noted it was reassuring that approved projects did follow a trend and had a good spread of where 'people live and work' across England.

Considerations for Round 2

MD summarised what the panel should consider when making decisions in round 2.

- The overall unit cost is higher than £4 and we should look at addressing this not just in this round, but over the course of the scheme.

- £1.6 million is committed to projects, but not yet spent and care was needed to consider the implications of committing large sums of money with several worthy schemes coming forward.
- Over £4.2 million worth of projects had come forward (including those approved and those waiting for a decision in round 2) making this is a very competitive round.
- The panel should note the need for 25% match funding in the criteria set out in the BTP guidelines.
- Clear decision-making and consistency is paramount.
- The panel should only consider deferring a project where there is no other option otherwise it should seek to approve with conditions or reject with full explanation and potential encouragement and support to re-submit.
- A high proportion of funding has been approved for larger schemes and the panel needed to be aware that this may exclude smaller organisations.

The panel agreed that there must be consistency of approach in dealing with schemes, with the panel's expectations of applications relative to the size and scale of project and applicant.

Delivery plans for large projects in Round 1

PW had analysed delivery plans for the larger schemes. He suggested that the panel needed to receive delivery plans of a consistently high quality and this may be aided by two processes; 1/ giving schemes access to an example of a good delivery plan 2/ creating a pro-forma to help applicants. Larger schemes need to be able to provide detail of locations and specific tree numbers and species to give the panel the confidence that grants will be well spent. **The panel** agreed and highlighted that this would make the decision process clearer, give the BTP fund more confidence that committed expenditure will be spent and ensure that the BTP scheme is fulfilling its requirement to work in socially deprived areas.

Street trees

NJ requested a guide on approving street trees, including criteria and unit cost. **ED** commented that there is a commitment to planting street trees within the scheme in 'deep urban' locations. It was agreed that Street Trees would be welcomed provided their costs were comparable to similar schemes, were affordable to the BTP scheme, were in a location of greatest need or lacking in tree cover and access to green space.

Locations and mapping

The panel agreed it was essential to have clear locations for all schemes and multiple maps for larger schemes in order to visualise proximity to areas with high IMD and Green Scores.

Q&A from the Panel:

- Have many enquirers asked whether the money for the BTP was only available for this parliament? **Response:** Several people believed that this round would be the final round as this was their interpretation of the information on the website. They had been reassured there were subsequent rounds.
- The term 'deep urban' has been used in relation to Street Trees, is there a specific definition? **Response:** the term has no agreed definition, but indicates urban areas with a lack of tree cover and access to green space.

- Have forms been sent to applicants notifying them that landowners must agree to support trees on their land after the programme has closed?
Response: This is something that groups sign up to as part of the agreement and offer, but Groundwork London will reinforce this message.
- Could the panel be provided with further basic details e.g. geographical details, breakdown of match funding through the summary reports?
Response: Yes, these elements will be included.
- Will the panel exist after the funds have been allocated to projects?
Response: Panel meetings will continue in order to ensure that; 1/ The schemes are closely monitored and it can advise on decisions such as modifying grant offers or withdrawing funding, 2/ If any significant committed funds are unspent by projects, these can be redistributed. The Panel itself will be reviewed after two years.

Next steps:

- The panel recommended consistent and robust monitoring of projects. Detailed plans for tree planting should be in place given the proximity of the planting season 2011/12. Any projects not reaching the level of preparation appropriate to the scale of their grant should be flagged up.
- It was agreed that certain successful applicants should be contacted and requested to re-submit delivery plans using an agreed pro-forma, which would be developed by Groundwork London in consultation with MD.
- The panel agreed to forgo a special deferment panel meeting and deal with any deferments at the next panel meeting.
- Groundwork London would review the scoring system, and the format of the summary information presented to the Panel, in time for the next Round.
- **VG/MD** would examine the terms and conditions with regard to potentially clawing back or reallocating funding.
- **VG** will prepare an analysis of the number of street trees funded through the programme to date; an analysis of the level of targeting of deprived areas (Index of Multiple Deprivation); and an analysis of best practice among project proposals so far, including costs for different types of planting (street trees etc).
- **MD** to confirm next deadline for applications.
- Dates for next year's grants panel meeting to be confirmed.