



Big Tree Plant Assessment Panel

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

Date and time: 24th April 2011 - 10.00am – 5.30pm

1. Attendees:

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

- Hannah Clay (HC) - Groundwork London
- Mark Durk (MD) - Forestry Commission
- Edward Dyson (ED) - Defra
- David Edmonds (DE) - Groundwork London - GIS presentation.
- Vinny Ganley (VG) - Groundwork London
- Nerys Jones (NJ) - Strategic Greenspace Consultant
- Alison Millward - Alison Millward Associates Ltd

Apologies:

Tony Kirkham (TK) – Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew

2. Introductions

PW welcomed all to the meeting and extended a special introductory greeting to Alison Millward who had recently accepted an invitation to join the panel. Alison provided a brief summary of her background and her specific areas of expertise.

3. Briefing

MD made reference to the analysis of Rounds One and Two of Big Tree Plant funds committed and the report recently circulated from Groundwork which had been made available to all members. The Forestry Commission provided an indication of progress made in the first season's tree planting and it was noted that the next phase of analysis would focus on the results from the recent planting season and completed projects.

MD provided a briefing to the panel members on the latest guidance for assessing applications in Round III. The key elements that were highlighted were as follows:

(i) The strategic approach for the Scheme remains to achieve the 1m tree target at an average grant cost of £4.00/ tree. MD highlighted a further need to reduce the overall unit cost to the Scheme, but confirmed that there was some flexibility to support small scale applications at higher unit costs where their inclusion would not significantly impact on the average grant cost to the scheme.

(ii) Decision making should concentrate on both levels of deprivation and community engagement. It was agreed that applications would be reviewed in order of unit cost, followed by priorities in these two areas, with deprivation and community engagement aspects highlighted for all projects considered for funding.

(iii) The panel should be sympathetic to projects in rural areas having low costs per tree where measures of deprivation may be more subjective. The

panel highlighted the importance of recognising aspects of rural deprivation such as access to nature and amenity as well as economic sustainability.

(iv) Large projects (> £25,000) should be approved provided they meet the scheme's criteria. A discussion was held around the decision to fund larger projects following some concerns raised outside the panel about the impact this may have on the availability of funding for smaller groups and applications. The panel were reassured that although there were a number of large applications at this round, if the agreement was to fund all these applications, there would still remain a good proportion of funds available for smaller groups in future rounds. ED also highlighted that, for larger schemes there were clear mechanisms in place (as with smaller projects), for performance management, to ensure rigorous assessment of the applications post-approval.

4. Q & A from the Panel:

Will future funding rounds run until the end of the programme? ED informed the panel that both the project board and DEFRA consider that the scheme needs to be managed within a comfortable timescale to ensure that the overall programme targets are met by the end of March 2015. There was no specific pressure to retain a proportion of funds until the last year of the scheme and provided that a good balance of small and larger schemes was achieved the scheme could finalise grant commitments over the course of the next 12 months, providing the quality of applications was of a good standard.

What is the position on funding for repeat applicants? The panel confirmed that there were no particular issues around re-funding applicants, providing the case made was sufficiently robust and included a strong level of community engagement and public benefit. It was also suggested through the course of the meeting, that it was crucial that for applicants managing current projects, that the ongoing objectives, planting sites and delivery mechanisms should be fully established before further funding was awarded. There should also be no ambiguity around how the applications would tie together, or any overlap in delivery.

Are there are particular target areas for the scheme? It was noted that there was a shortage of applications from the North East in previous rounds, as well as a reduced number from East of England. MD confirmed that depending on the outcome of this panel, there may be a need to review marketing activity for future rounds with an intention around specific area targeting to address this.

How should the panel deal with applications from schools, given the question of public access from previous rounds? It was highlighted that several schools applications had been turned down in the past due to inadequate public access or benefit. The panel agreed to review any new applications within the same criteria to ensure consistency. Where applicants could demonstrate wider public use, or where planting locations were visible from street level, school based applications would be viewed positively.

5. Grants Decisions

Please see accompanying spreadsheet for the outcome of all grant panel recommendations.

All potential for conflicts of interest were highlighted when discussing and approving applications. It was also noted that all decisions would be ratified by Dominic Driver, of Forestry Commission, following the meeting. Furthermore, due to the absence at the meeting of TK, it was agreed that Groundwork would seek advice from him in all cases where there were concerns around appropriate species selection.

6. Date of future meetings

The next meeting date was suggested for the 19th September, at the usual Groundwork London address.