

Community Grant to Curry Woods Conservation Trust (Executive Decision)

Director: Netta Meadows, Director of Service Delivery
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Purpose of the Report

Councillors are asked to consider the awarding of a grant of £12,500 towards the purchase of Curry Woods in Curry Rivel by the Curry Woods Conservation Trust.

Public Interest

Awarding grants is a key way that SSDC supports and helps to deliver community projects sponsored by Parishes and voluntary community organisations in the towns and villages across the district.

Curry Woods Conservation Trust has applied to the Area North Community Grants Programme for financial assistance with the purchase of Curry Woods. The application has been assessed by the Locality Officer who is submitting this report to enable the Area West Committee to make an informed decision about the application.

Recommendation

That Councillors award a grant of £12,500 to Curry Woods Conservation Trust, the grant to be allocated from the Area North Community Grants Programme and subject to SSDC standard conditions for community grants (Appendix A).

Application Details

Name of applicant:	Curry Woods Conservation Trust
Project:	Purchase of Curry Woods
Total project cost:	£61,000
Amount requested from SSDC:	£12,500
Application assessed by:	Adrian Moore

Community Grants Assessment Score

The table below shows the grant scoring for this application. Applications must meet the minimum score of 22 to be considered for SSDC funding under Community Grants policies.

Category	Score	Comments
A Supports Council Plan/Area Chapter	1	Yes
B Supports Equalities & Diversity	1	Yes
C Supports Environment Strategy	3	

D Need for Project	8	
E Capacity of Organisation	11	
F Financial need	5	
Total	29	

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Somerset County Council is selling approximately 4 hectares of land made up of 2 hectares of mature ancient woodland and 2 hectares of arable land situated at grid reference 3890 : 2640, postcode TA10 0PW in the parish of Curry Rivel, South Somerset District, County of Somerset. It is held with other land registered under the title ST 164473. Curry Woods Conservation Trust has been formed by members of the local community to purchase this parcel of land to preserve it and provide public use. The County Council has set a short time limit for this sale, but has recently extended the time to allow the Trust to raise funds. The Trust's aim is to plant optimal numbers and types of trees to extend and preserve the existing ancient woodland.

Somerset has a relatively low proportion of woodland cover (7% compared to a national county average of 9%), so significant linear woodlands such as Curry Woods and those along the Fivehead and Somerton ridges, with their high proportion of ancient woodland, are of particular value. SSDC has identified an even lower % tree cover in the district (4%). Curry Woods forms part of the ecological network running along the Fivehead-Somerton ridge and is of ancient origin and with a very high biodiversity value. This woodland is unique and irreplaceable once gone, due to the fact that it has taken centuries to develop, becoming home to specialist communities of fungi and invertebrates, birds and mammals.

Curry Woods and the adjoining arable fields is situated at a high point on a ridge between sections of the Somerset levels. The Trust plans to plant new woodland on the former arable fields which will play an important part in the reduction of flooding by holding up water in the upper catchment area during periods of high rainfall. There has been run-off flooding in Curry Rivel village in the last ten years causing serious damage to the Primary School.

The planned woodland management and extensive expansion will help to deliver local government environmental targets through increasing biodiversity, carbon capture/storage and water retention.

Parish information

Parish	Curry Rivel
Parish population	2,148

The Project

The project is to buy the land from Somerset County Council. The project aims to protect, enhance and extend an area of historic woodland, which is recognised as part of a broadleaf ecological network by Somerset County Council. It is important to the community of Curry Rivel for three main reasons:

- It is at the highest elevation in the Parish and it controls water flow into the built environment.
- It includes an area that the community will use to plant up to 1,000 trees to capture carbon.
- It will continue to protect and enhance the existing high level of biodiversity.

Within this broad framework the primary aim of The Curry Woods Conservation Trust is the preservation and enhancement of an area of ancient woodland, pasture and grassland and the conservation of associated fauna and flora designated as either protected, rare or of

conservation value. The project aims to reduce fragmentation and isolation of species by enhancing the existing green networks and creating corridors where possible.

The Aims and Objectives of the Curry Woods Conservation Trust are:

- To conserve the existing ancient woodland, pasture and grassland, collectively known as Curry Woods and its associated fauna and flora.
- To conserve the priority habitats on site and restore and create additional habitat, to the benefit of biodiversity, health and social wellbeing of volunteers and visitors, and climate change carbon sequestration through long-term natural climate solutions.
- To reinstate and maintain through careful and appropriate management practices a public right of way providing continued open access to Curry Woods for the public.
- To engage and inform the public in the conservation of Curry Woods and all its associated fauna and flora. The public will be encouraged to visit and volunteer to help with tree planting, maintenance and conservation activities. Information relating to Curry Woods, its history, fauna and flora and importance as part of the regional ecological network will be made widely available.
- The Trust will continually look to augment its long and short term management plans and knowledge with expert advice and guidance where and when appropriate from partner organisations such as the Somerset Wildlife Trust, The RSPB, Somerset Ecology Services and independent Ecologists among others.

The web of interactions from the existing woodland floor (mosses, lichens, liverworts and ferns) to the understory (hazel, blackthorn, geulder rose, service tree etc.) and finally the climax vegetation (woodland trees like oak, ash, cherry, birch etc.) is essential for the maintenance of a varied biodiversity of insects, mammals, birds, amphibians and reptiles. This interactive ecosystem can capture much more carbon than trees alone. This ancient woodland is much more valuable for fixing carbon than a completely fresh plantation, which will take decades to build up the web of interactions. The newly planted trees in this project will be colonised quickly by the plants and creatures mentioned by gradual migration from the existing adjacent woodland.

Local support / evidence of need

The Curry Woods Conservation Trust has successfully promoted this project using local print, digital media and public presentations. The tremendous local support for this project is evident by the £30,000 donated directly by the local community. This money was raised from a standing start over the last six months. The benefit of this project will be enjoyed directly by the residents of Curry Rivel, particularly by amelioration of flooding to Water Street and the Primary School situated there. The community will have a direct benefit from the interaction with the natural world when tree planting, volunteering with conservation activities and open access to whole site.

Project costs

Project costs	Cost £
Purchase of 4 hectares of land, made up of 2 hectares of mature, ancient woodland and 2 hectares of arable land, from Somerset County Council.	60,000
Legal fees	1,000
Total	61,000

Funding plan

Funding source	Secured or pending	Amount £
Parish Council	Secured	1,000
Own Funds	Secured	2,500
Fairfield Trust	Secured	15,000
Public Donations	Secured	30,000
SSDC	Pending	12,500
Total		61,000

Conclusion and Recommendation

It is recommended that a grant of £12,500 is awarded

Financial implications

The balance in the Area North Capital programme is £132,625. If the recommended grant of £12,500 is awarded, £120,125 will remain.

Grants are awarded subject to all other funding being secured before the commencement of the project and are on a % basis of the full project costs. Payment of the grant cannot exceed the grant award and is proportionally reduced if full project costs are under budget.

Council Plan Implications

Focus 3: Environment

To keep South Somerset clean, green and attractive we will work in partnership to:

- Promote recycling and minimise waste
- Promote the use of 'green' technology
- **Maintain and promote access to our Country Parks and open spaces to promote good mental and physical health**
- Keep streets and neighbourhoods clean and attractive
- **Continue to support long term flood resilience**
- Promote a high quality built environment in line with Local Plan policies
- **Support communities to develop and implement local, parish and neighbourhood plans**

Focus 5: Health and Communities

To build healthy, self-reliant, active communities we will:

- **Support communities so that they can identify their needs and develop local solutions**
- **Target support to areas of need**
- **Help people to live well by enabling quality cultural, leisure, play, sport & healthy lifestyle facilities & activities**
- **Work with partners to tackle health issues such as diabetes and hypertension and mental health**
- Work with our partners to keep our communities safe

Key priorities for Area North - Area Chapter:

Flood amelioration supports these priorities:

Environment

- Support the delivery of a Community / Neighbourhood Plan to address balance of housing / employment land in Curry Rivel.

Healthy, Self-reliant Communities

- Support a range of improvements to community facilities.

Background Papers

None

Appendix A

Standard conditions applying to all SSDC Community Grants

The applicant agrees to: -

- Notify SSDC if there is a material change to the information provided in the application.
- Start the project within six months of the grant offer and notify SSDC of any changes to the project or start date as soon as possible.
- Confirm that all other funding sources have been secured before starting the project, if these were not already in place at the time of the application.
Acknowledge SSDC assistance towards the project in any relevant publicity about the project (e.g. leaflets, posters, websites, and promotional materials) and on any permanent acknowledgement (e.g. plaques, signs etc.).
- Work in conjunction with SSDC officers to monitor and share the success of the project and the benefits to the community resulting from SSDC's contribution to the project.
- Provide a project update and/or supply before and after photos if requested.
- Supply receipted invoices or receipts which provide evidence of the **full** cost of the project so that the grant can be released.

Standard conditions applying to buildings, facilities and equipment

- Establish and maintain a “sinking fund” to support future replacement of the building / facility / equipment as grant funding is only awarded on a one-off basis.
- Use the SSDC Building Control Service when buildings regulations are required.
- Incorporate disabled access and provide an access statement where relevant.

Special conditions