

**REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEVELOPMENT  
TO THE EXECUTIVE ON 22<sup>ND</sup> SEPTEMBER 2004**

**NEROCHE PROJECT**

**This matter is the responsibility of Executive Cllrs Bishop and Cavill**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Forest Enterprise is co-ordinating a project bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for the northern part of The Blackdown Hills. "The Neroche Project", as it is called, would help to restore important historic landscapes, improve access to and interpretation of the wildlife, landscape and culture of the area, provide training opportunities and apprenticeships in rural skills and create an infrastructure to encourage visitors, benefiting local tourism operators and private landowners who wish to diversify.

The Borough Council, along with other partners, is being asked to support the project in principle and to contribute towards its implementation over a five year period from 2006/07 to 2010/11. The bid has to be submitted in October 2004.

**1.0 Purpose of the Report**

- 1.1 To seek an in principle commitment towards providing £73,500 in contributions towards a £2,000,000 Neroche Forest Heritage Lottery Fund bid being promoted and co-ordinated by Forest Enterprise. The funding would be spread over 5 financial years from 2006/07 to 2010/11.

**2.0 Background**

- 2.1 Forest Enterprise is co-ordinating a project bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund. The bid, known as the 'Neroche Project', will include programmes to:
- Restore and conserve the natural and man-made features which combine to create the historic character of the landscape;
  - Encourage more people to access, learn about and become involved in their landscape heritage;
  - Provide training opportunities and apprenticeships in woodland skills; and
  - Create an infrastructure which will encourage visitors to the area benefiting local tourism operators and private landowners who wish to diversify.
- 2.2 70% of the project area (18,500 acres) falls within the Taunton Deane administrative boundary with the remainder within South Somerset and Mid Devon. It is estimated the total catchment for the project within 10 miles is 213,850 people.
- 2.3 Wide consultation with local communities, landowners, organisations and trusts has already taken place and the response has generally been very positive. Main

partners to date include Forest Enterprise, English Nature, English Heritage, Environment Agency, Somerset County Council, Taunton Deane Borough Council, South Somerset District Council, Mid Devon District Council, Devon County Council, Blackdown Hills Rural Partnership, National Trust, Devon and Somerset Wildlife Trusts and Crown Estate.

2.4 The Heritage Lottery Fund priorities for funding are:

- Conserving or restoring the built and natural features that create the historic character of the landscape.
- Conserving and celebrating cultural associations of the landscape area.
- Encouraging more people to access, learn about, become involved in and make decisions on their landscape heritage.
- Improving understanding of local craft and other skills by providing training opportunities.

These priorities closely mirror the Neroche Project bid above.

### **3.0 The Project**

3.1 The key flagship projects within the bid include:

- The creation of a new 15 mile 'Ridge Route' which would provide high quality horse riding, cycling, walking and disabled access opportunities along the top of the scarp slope between Castle Neroche and Culmstock Beacon.
- Major improvements to key public rights of way links between Taunton and Wellington to the ridge route.
- An extensive programme of habitat creation and heritage landscape improvement on land managed by FE and the Wildlife Trusts.
- The employment of an Education Co-ordinator for the project to work with local schools.
- Training opportunities and apprenticeship scheme to work with woodland craftsmen and rangers to develop practical woodland skills and qualifications in line with future employment opportunities at Forest Enterprise and Forestry Commission.
- Access improvement, interpretation and restoration work at Castle Neroche, the Wellington Monument and other smaller sites along the ridge.

3.2 If successful the bid would attract £2,000,000 of grant aid from the Heritage Lottery Fund, £700,000 in-kind contributions and £300,000 of partner contributions.

### **4.0 Project Timetable**

4.1 **October 2004** - application to be submitted to the Heritage Lottery by 8<sup>th</sup> October 2004.

- **April 2005** - subject to approval from the HLF team and trustees, funding provided for a one year Development Stage of up to £150,000. This involves preparation of a business plan and contracts.

- **April 2006** – final detailed application to HLF by May 2006.
- **October 2006** – Final decision of bid for £2,000,000.
- **November 2006** to October 2010 implementation on capital programme of works.
- **November 2010** to October 2020 implementation of maintenance programme.

## **5.0 Financial Considerations**

- 5.1 Given the above programme a successful bid would require a contribution of £73,500 from Taunton Deane Borough Council towards the Neroche Project which would be implemented over a five year period from 2006/07 to 2010/11.

## **6.0 Summary**

- 6.1 A contribution of £73,500 would be sought by the Neroche Project from Taunton Deane Borough Council towards a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund. The bid if successful would attract a grant of £2,000,000 which would be spent within the Blackdown Hills area nearest to Taunton and Wellington. The project would help to restore important historic landscapes, improve access to and interpretation of the wildlife, landscape and culture of the area and provide training and apprenticeships in woodland and wildlife management.

## **7.0 Recommendation**

- 7.1 The Executive is asked to support the Neroche Project in principle and to pursue funding opportunities during the forthcoming budget setting exercise.

### **CONTACT OFFICER**

**Tom Noall, Head of Development**

**Telephone: 01823 356454 E-Mail: [t.noall@tauntondeane.gov.uk](mailto:t.noall@tauntondeane.gov.uk)**

**Ian Clark, Heritage and Landscape Officer**

**Telephone: 01823 356491 E-Mail: [i.clark@tauntondeane.gov.uk](mailto:i.clark@tauntondeane.gov.uk)**