

BIG LOTTERY FUND APPLICATION

Report of Strategic Director (Joy Wishlade)

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Big Lottery Fund recently announced a new funding stream—Living Landmarks.
The fund is available nationally on a one-off basis for major capital projects. The most relevant to us is for sums of between £10 and £25 million. Initial ‘expressions of interest’ must be made by 6th January 2006 – a very short timescale. However, the amount of information that needs to be presented in January is small (up to 10 sides of A4). The Big Lottery has made it clear that they are interested in innovative and exciting concepts at this stage. Those projects that get through the first assessment will then be granted funding for detailed development of their project. This will then go through a final assessment before the final projects are chosen for implementation. Even if the project were to get no further than the first round, it could still secure substantial revenue/development funding for feasibility work already identified but currently either un-funded or only part funded.
- 1.2 Match funding of at least 25% of the total project costs is required—although this can be achieved in kind or through other external funding streams or by the inclusion of land or property essential to scheme delivery.
- 1.3 This is a real opportunity to access funding for ‘iconic’ projects which have wide ranging support and which will make a real difference to the communities in which they will exist.
- 1.4 Our suggestion is that an application be made for a project that focuses on the canal and river corridor between Bridgwater and Wellington with Taunton as the central hub.

2. The Proposed Project

- 2.1 The proposed project aims to develop the canal as an enhanced tourist attraction; links into the Tone and provides an improved river corridor through Taunton including additional locks at French Weir and Silk Mills. It would also develop opportunities to extend the canal through Nynehead and into Wellington—incorporating the proposals for Tone Mills. It could also incorporate a further link from Bridgwater to Langport along the Parrett incorporating the Parrett Sluice.
- 2.2 Parallel themes of industrial heritage and archaeology, and railway architecture and heritage could be developed, including links to Brunel in Bridgwater, Taunton, Nynehead and Langport (for instance).

- 2.3 Possible further stages of any project could improve the links between Taunton to Minehead by improvements to the infrastructure on the West Somerset Railway; Langport to Yeovil via the river network; Wellington to Tavistock via the Grand Western Canal and Bridgwater to Glastonbury via the Brue. There is also the potential to link to a similar project proposed in South Wales, which terminates on the Welsh side of the Bristol Channel. Informal discussions with the sponsors of that project have already taken place and it is clear that the projects could be highly complementary.
- 2.4 This could be a sustainable tourism project of genuinely national significance

3. Links to the Vision for Taunton

The discussion around an application for this project commenced with the Vision Delivery Team as it directly supports many of the aims of the Vision in putting the river Tone back at the centre of the town. However, it is recognised that the project has developed in such a way that should it successfully be admitted to the second stage a separate working group would need to be set up to oversee it. While the project would still further the implementation of the Vision for Taunton, its extent has developed beyond the remit of the Vision Delivery Team.

4. Partners

This is not a project that can be achieved without a number of partners working together. The project would be in line with the priorities of a wide range of existing partners/local partnerships and already has widespread but, as yet, informal support. (More detail to be provided at the Steering Group).

Organisations that have formally agreed to support the project include:

- Somerset Waterways Development Trust

5. Cost and timescale

- 5.1 Although the project would undoubtedly be costly and would require a bid towards the upper end of the £10-£25 million range, it is felt that the necessary match funding could be largely obtained through the value of necessary land and property already in public/partner ownership and essential to the successful delivery of the project.
- 5.2 Although there are significant technical and logistical problems with some aspects of the proposed project, the Big Lottery accepts that schemes can be delivered over as long as 10 years

6. Recommendation

The Executive is requested to approve Taunton Deane becoming a key partner in this project and its application for Big Lottery Funding.

