The Highland Council

Agenda Item	6.
Report No	NBS 36/15

Nairn, Badenoch & Strathspey Area Committee
4 December 2014

Landfill Communities Fund

Report by Director of Community Services

Summary

This report invites Members to approve applications to the Highland Council Landfill Communities funding.

1. Background

1.1 Landfill Operators, including The Highland Council, pay a tax to the Government on every ton of waste that they dispose of in a landfill site. The Landfill Communities Fund (LCF) allows the landfill operator to offset 5.1% of their landfill tax liability and gives a 90% tax credit against their donations to organisations who deliver Environmental Objectives, and are registered with ENTRUST, the Government regulator for the LCF.

1.2 The Highland Council removes the need to register with ENTRUST by employing E B Scotland a 'Distributive Environmental Body'. This means that E B Scotland register the projects in the Council's name and undertake all regulatory and administrative responsibilities.

1.3 The Highland Council, as a Landfill Operator, distributes its Landfill Communities Fund to local biodiversity conservation projects with a maximum contribution of £10,000 to any one project annually, subject to approval by the appropriate Area Committee as agreed by Members when they considered report COM /03/14 to the Community Services Committee on 15 May 2014.

2. Applications for Consideration

2.1 Members are invited to consider the following applications to the Highland Council Landfill Communities Fund. The details of the projects are set out in **Appendix A.**

2.2 **Restoring Aspen Woodlands in Strathspey by COILLE ALBA**
The Project will work closely with Highland Aspen Group to propagate Aspen trees at the Group's nursery in Kincraig. The Project will also encourage land-holders in Strathspey to manage and expand existing Aspen woodlands.

2.3 **Enhancing Forest Habitats at Abernethy Nature Reserve by RSPB Scotland**

Selected locations of Abernethy Forest will be enriched using an experienced contractor to plant 4,000 aspen and other broadleaf trees. These trees will be of local provenance to ensure that they will be 'hardy' enough to withstand the harsh growing conditions experienced at Abernethy.

We will also carry out hand weeding around the young trees at selected locations to allow the new saplings to become established and to reduce competition from tall grass or bracken.

3. Project Costs and Recommendations for Allocation of Funding

The table below details the total project cost, the amount requested, and the proposed allocation

APPLICATIONS	TOTAL PROJECT COST	AMOUNT REQUESTED	RECOMMENDED ALLOCATION
COILLE ALBA	£10,470	9,460	9,460
RSPB	£8,107	4,920	4,920
TOTAL			**£14,380**

4. Implications

4.1 There are no resource implications arising from this report.

4.2 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

4.3 There are no equality implications arising from this report.

4.4 There are no climate/Carbon Clever implications arising from this report.

4.5 There are no risk implications arising from this report.

4.6 There are no Gaelic implications arising from this report

4.7 There are no Rural implications arising from this report

Recommendation

Members are invited to approve the applications.

Designation: Director of Community Services

Date: 13 November 2014

Author: Neil Downie

Background Papers: **Appendix A**

Appendix A

Name of Project: Restoring Aspen woodlands in Strathspey

Applicant: COILLE ALBA

Background: Aspen is generally scarce in Scotland's native woodlands. Its stronghold is the north of Scotland, and especially Strathspey. Largely overlooked until recently, Aspen has been found to support a wide range of animal and plant species not associated with other trees. With greater recognition, Aspen has the potential to deliver considerable benefits for biodiversity, landscape, freshwater systems and timber production.
Project Description: The Project will work closely with Highland Aspen Group to propagate Aspen trees at the Group's nursery in Kincraig. Most of these trees will be planted in Strathspey to create 'stepping-stones' of Aspen habitat. Some clones will also be selected to establish a gene bank at Inshriach; these trees will be grafted at the Kincraig nursery. The Project will also encourage land-holders in Strathspey to manage and expand existing Aspen woodlands.
Project activities will take place in Strathspey within 10 miles of Granish landfill site.

Key Costs

activity	£
harvest seed	650
propagate trees	1200
collect scion material from selected clones	1240
graft aspen scions onto rootstock	1300
grow on grafted trees for planting out in genebank	960
manage containerised aspen in polytunnel	1020
plant groups of aspen as habitat 'stepping-stones'	1260
tools, tree stakes and shelters	1240
admin, mileage	1600
TOTALS	10470

Amount Requested: £ 9460

Timescales: Project activities will take place between January 2015 and December 2015.

Benefits provided: Aspen woodlands benefit biodiversity, landscape, freshwater systems and timber production. The Project participants will benefit from engaging in outdoor activities, both socially and health-wise.

Other funding sources: We have raised £1010 towards this project from Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and the A & N Daniell Trust.

Name of Project:
Enhancing Forest Habitats at Abernethy Nature Reserve

Applicant:
RSPB Scotland

Background:
Sitting in the heart of the Cairngorms National Park, Abernethy Forest nature reserve holds the largest single unit of Caledonian Pine Forest left in the UK. In former times this iconic woodland covered nearly 20% of the Scottish landscape but historical climate change and man's impact over the centuries have diminished the habitat and now only c1% of its former extent remain in pockets across northern and western Scotland. This native pine woodland is a priority UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UKBAP) habitat and, is home to an incredible 4,800 species - 20% of which are nationally rare. Iconic rare species which rely heavily on this habitat include red squirrel, capercaillie, black grouse and the Scottish crossbill (the UK's only endemic bird species) – all of which are priority UKBAP species.

Since 2011, RSPB Scotland has been undertaking an ambitious programme of forest restructuring and expansion in order to enhance the quality and increase the range of this important native habitat. This work is taking place both on the edge of the natural forest and within the plantation woodland sections of the reserve which were purchased by the RSPB for the specific purpose of placing them under conservation management.

Part of this long-term work programme has previously benefited from Highland Council LCF funding. A grant of nearly £10,000 in 2011 enabled 7,000 pine trees to be planted across targeted areas of the reserve, and sections of the dense forest canopy to be thinned to enable more light to reach the forest floor. Our forest enhancement and expansion management is however a long-term plan that – for ecological, resource and capacity reasons – will be implemented in incremental stages over many years. This includes planting a range of native tree species, including aspen, alder, juniper, birch and willow which would normally be present in a natural forest system. It is this planting of native deciduous tree species that forms the focus of this project.

Project Description:
Selected locations of Abernethy Forest will be enriched using an experienced contractor to plant 4,000 aspen and other broadleaf trees. These trees will be of local provenance to ensure that they will be 'hardy' enough to withstand the harsh growing conditions experienced at Abernethy. Once mature, these trees will in turn provide a seed source for these `missing species' which had previously been lost or were under represented due to overgrazing or past land use practices. This will encourage future natural regeneration and in time, will help to improve the forest soils and maintain water quality. The establishment of broadleaf species within the expanding pinewood will help to increase the biodiversity value and landscape quality of the reserve and will add to the visitor experience of the thousands of people who come to enjoy walking, wildlife-watching and other outdoor pursuits in the forest each year.

We will also carry out hand weeding around the young trees at selected locations to allow the new saplings to become established and to reduce competition from tall grass or bracken. By cutting back the advancing bracken we can also provide improved conditions for the variety of rare plants Abernethy is home to by reducing competition for valuable light, while enhancing biodiversity across this vital wildlife landscape. This work will be carried out by local contractors.

Key Costs:

Planting of 4,000 deciduous trees	£3,600
Purchase of 2,000 tree saplings	£720
Grass / bracken cutting around targeted areas of reserve	£600
RSPB staff time (in kind)	£3,187
Total project cost	£8,107

Amount Requested:
We are requesting £4,920 of funding towards our forest regeneration programme.

Timescales:
We would seek to carry out this forest management between March and August 2015.

Benefits provided:
Stretching for 53 square miles, Abernethy provides a crucial stronghold for 4,800 recorded species, 20% of which are nationally rare, including Scottish wildcat and red squirrel. Of these recorded species, 758 have a conservation designation, including 133 UK Biodiversity Action Plan species. The Caledonian pine forest is also one of the last major strongholds in the UK for the threatened capercaillie, whose numbers show such marked decline that it has been classified as a 'Red List' species for conservation, meaning it is at very real risk of extinction.

One of the first milestones of this ambitious Caledonian expansion project is to connect the forest at Abernethy with the neighbouring Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) Glenmore estate. This initial ten year programme between the RSPB and FCS will see c60,000 native tree saplings planted to create a wildlife 'corridor' between the two forests.

By planting 4,000 trees in spring/summer next year, we will enrich the developing pine forest and help replicate the tree species that would be found naturally in woodlands. Planting at selected sites, combined with complementary field-layer management will over time, help enable the forest to expand into the open areas of the reserve and up the hillsides to the natural tree line, where the habitat merges into sub-alpine scrub. The forest landscape will gradually become more robust, better able to withstand natural catastrophic processes such as fire, storms and forest disease - all of which may be exacerbated by climate change.

The trees in the Caledonian woodland absorb carbon dioxide – a harmful greenhouse gas - from the atmosphere, and thereby help to mitigate against global warming and climate change. This project will speed the restoration of this iconic forest, and will help to deliver essential ecosystem services such as clean air, clean water and a healthy natural environment for local communities within the Cairngorms National Park.

Other Funding sources:
RSPB Scotland is contributing staff time towards managing this project, to a total of £3,187.