

STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS DISTRICT COUNCIL

15 May 2024

Council Questions

1. Question to the Deputy Leader Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Planning received from Cllr Flunder

“In relation to the UK SPF, what is the number and value of grants that have been distributed across the three towns and rural communities?”

Response:

As expected, there has been a lot of interest from across the District in the UKSPF and REPF grants. I am pleased to report that in total, we have approved grants exceeding £500,000 to local businesses and organisations to support a wide range of activities, including local arts and cultural events, supporting businesses in the development of innovative products and services as well as promoting the visitor economy and investment into town centres and high streets. In total, 65 grants have been approved from the two funding streams; 50 from UKSPF and 15 from Rural England.

The distribution of grants has spread to all corners of the District so all of our communities can and will benefit from the investment. Almost half of the grants (43%) have supported activity in parishes and surrounding villages and the remainder (56%) supported activity in the three main towns of Biddulph, Cheadle and Leek. There is still funding available so please continue to promote the opportunities within your local communities.

2. Question to the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Environment received from Cllr Porter

“How successful has the transfer of the SMDC countryside sites been to Staffordshire Wildlife Trust over the last year?”

Response:

“The transfer of countryside sites to Staffordshire Wildlife Trust has been a successful move. The trust has been excellent in their engagement with Council officers and are helpful, knowledgeable, and quick to respond to requests. The trust has members of staff previously employed by SMDC, which gives them valuable insight into both sides of the agreement, they understand the position and role of the Council, whilst also having knowledge of SWT procedures and access to additional internal resources. Staff also have a wealth of experience on each of the countryside sites, and their many years of working on these has built both practical and theoretical knowledge.

SWT has valuable links with many organisations such as Natural England, The Countryside Alliance, The Open Spaces Society, Ramblers, and The British Horse

Society to name just a few and they have consulted with many of these organisations to receive important feedback on current management practices. The trust also has long standing associations with volunteer and community groups and has used these to great effect on the countryside sites in SMDC. One example of this was highlighted in Wetley Moor, where 220 hours of volunteer time contributed to seven hectares of scrub control work. This was undertaken by SWT staff in conjunction with the Churnet Valley volunteer group, the Wilder Neighbourhoods Project, and SWT volunteer days. Some other notable achievements since the transfer of management was made include:

- 20m of drystone wall rebuilt in July 2023. This was a two day course as part of the Stoke on Trent Wilder Youth project.
- Large scale estate maintenance involved the repair of potholes and ruts in two kilometres of access tracks to properties. Repair works using recycled tarmac were carried out in January 2023 and January 2024.
- Heathland restoration work. Rush control/ hay cutting of specific land parcels and plots to maintain and increase floristic diversity.
- Grazing Consultation. A consultation questionnaire seeking public comments on grazing and clearance work, with the option to comment on any aspect of the management of Wetley Moor.

Staffordshire Wildlife Trust have also been proactive in providing information and seeking the views of Councillors. District Councillors from local wards have been consulted regarding management, with a comprehensive programme of work for each year being available to view. SWT are also preparing new management plans for some of the sites which will incorporate ideas and comments from consultation initiatives.

SWT report their progress at regular intervals across the year and would be happy to expend this engagement by presenting progress to a future scrutiny panel meeting where they could elaborate on their work and achievements to date.”

3. Question to the Portfolio Holder for Communities received from Cllr Porter

“How many times has the environmental crime crew cleared up illegal fly-tipping across the Moorlands in the last year?”

Response:

There were 370 Fly-tipping incidents that were cleared by Alliance Environmental Services in 2023-24 (April to March). These are formally recorded in fly-capture and national waste data flow. For information, in previous years the incidents were as follows:

2021/22 - 391
2022/23 - 353