

Record of individual Cabinet member decision

Local Government Act 2000 and the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012

Decision made by	Councillor Pieter-Paul Barker
Key decision?	Yes
Date of decision (same as date form signed)	19 April 2024
Name and job title of officer requesting the decision	Tim Sonnex, Strategic Property Surveyor
Officer contact details	Email: tim.sonnex@southandvale.gov.uk
Decision	To award Earth Trust a five-year contract with effect from 1 April 2024 to deliver custodianship and volunteer management services of countryside land on three sites in the District of South Oxfordshire and three sites in the Vale (Countryside Management Services). This will be a joint contract with the Vale of White Horse District Council.
Reasons for decision	<p>In accordance with a procurement management plan approved on 7 June 2023, officers have undertaken a compliant procurement process via the Find a Tender Service and South East Business Portal to invite tenders for the provision of custodianship and volunteer management services to replace the existing services being provided at Castle Meadows, Wallingford; Riverside Meadows, Crowmarsh and Mowbray Fields, Didcot, as well as three countryside sites in the Vale of White Horse district.</p> <p>Appointment of a countryside manager on the sites listed below will enable the council to support its priorities and strategic themes of taking action on the climate emergency and improving economic and community well-being, as well as helping it to meet its health and safety obligations on these sites, which are open to the general public.</p> <p>The tender from Earth Trust was the only one received. Three officers undertook an evaluation of the tender against a pre-published set of evaluation questions and after receiving further clarifications to the response received and awarded a total of 55 per cent out of a possible 60 per cent for quality. 40 per cent of the marking was attributed to price and, as this was the only tender, it received a maximum score for price. Overall, this gave a score of 95 per cent.</p> <p>Please see more detailed comment on the pricing schedule under Financial implications below.</p>

	<p>The proposed Countryside Management Services will help to maintain and enhance the biodiversity of the above sites, in support of the council's priorities and strategic themes and in particular taking action on the climate emergency and improving economic and community well-being under the Corporate Plan.</p> <p>The sites are all of ecological importance and are visited frequently by members of the public:</p> <p>Wallingford Castle Meadows covers 16.6 hectares on the banks of the River Thames in Wallingford and is adjacent to the site of Wallingford Castle, which is a Scheduled Ancient Monument. The site has been awarded the coveted Green Flag Award for nine consecutive years, and Green Heritage Site Accreditation for the last three years.</p> <p>Riverside Meadows, south of Wallingford Bridge and totalling 9.25 hectares, is a Scheduled Ancient Monument within the Chilterns, and contains three known important archaeological sites. The area also hosts the annual Wallingford Regatta and Raft race.</p> <p>Mowbray Fields is a local nature reserve of 1.9 hectares south of Didcot and north-west of East Hagbourne. The reserve includes a small section of stream, a wildflower meadow, part of a railway embankment and a fill pond.</p> <p>Local volunteer groups are active on all three sites and are a vital resource. The appointed service provider will be required to work closely with these groups, to support them and to provide advice and guidance.</p>
<p>Alternative options rejected</p>	<p>There were no alternative bids to consider.</p> <p>The council could choose to not appoint an external consultant to provide countryside management services but the Development and Corporate Landlord would need to recruit to fill this gap or potentially compromise its position on health and safety, ecology and biodiversity.</p>
<p>Climate and ecological implications</p>	<p>15 percent of the quality score was given to a question asking the bidders to provide details of their ecological monitoring skills and experience of managing sensitive ecological sites, including SSSIs. Earth Trust scored 5 out of 5, demonstrating high levels of skill and experience in managing sensitive ecological sites.</p> <p>5 per cent of the quality score was given to a question asking the bidders to outline how their approach would help to contribute towards the council's goals of carbon reduction and energy efficiency. Earth Trust scored 4 out of 5 for their response, which demonstrate a clear ability to address climate change and embed sustainability into their services.</p>

Legal implications	Legal services will be requested to prepare the final contract documents for execution by the successful tenderer and the Council. A draft contract was included as part of the Invitation to Tender.																								
Financial implications	<p>Bidders were asked to provide annual costs for each of the three sites over the 5 years of the proposed contract and to include any cost inflation within their proposals, such that the cost of future years is known and can be budgeted for.</p> <p>Officers sent several clarification questions to Earth Trust on their proposed fee schedule, because the numbers showed a significant increase from current levels and were weighted towards year 1 of the contract. Earth Trust responded to those clarifications comprehensively and submitted a slightly revised fee schedule showing some reductions and the principal reasons for the increases can be summarised as follows:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. They state that they have been managing the contract on the three sites in South at a loss in recent years but have a strong desire to retain their involvement in these sites with a pricing structure which allows them to at least cover their costs. 2. The pricing has not kept up with CPI increases since the start of the current contract in 2015. 3. The year 1 costs include the purchase of a vehicle, the cost of which Earth Trust have spread over all of both councils' sites in the tender as the vehicle will be used across the joint contract. 4. The pricing schedule allows for an annual uplift of 5 per cent. 5. Any reduction on the revised fee proposal will result in a compromise on the services delivered. <p>The agreed fee schedule for South Oxfordshire is as follows:</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="494 1355 1396 2049"> <thead> <tr> <th>Site</th> <th>Time period</th> <th>Total £</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td rowspan="5">Castle Meadows, Wallingford</td> <td>Year 1</td> <td>£19,382.74</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Year 2</td> <td>£17,893.88</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Year 3</td> <td>£17,130.88</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Year 4</td> <td>£17,564.34</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Year 5</td> <td>£18,442.56</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>Total</td> <td>£90,414.40</td> </tr> <tr> <td rowspan="3">Riverside Meadows, Crowmarsh</td> <td>Year 1</td> <td>£18,790.74</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Year 2</td> <td>£17,272.28</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Year 3</td> <td>£16,478.20</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Site	Time period	Total £	Castle Meadows, Wallingford	Year 1	£19,382.74	Year 2	£17,893.88	Year 3	£17,130.88	Year 4	£17,564.34	Year 5	£18,442.56		Total	£90,414.40	Riverside Meadows, Crowmarsh	Year 1	£18,790.74	Year 2	£17,272.28	Year 3	£16,478.20
Site	Time period	Total £																							
Castle Meadows, Wallingford	Year 1	£19,382.74																							
	Year 2	£17,893.88																							
	Year 3	£17,130.88																							
	Year 4	£17,564.34																							
	Year 5	£18,442.56																							
	Total	£90,414.40																							
Riverside Meadows, Crowmarsh	Year 1	£18,790.74																							
	Year 2	£17,272.28																							
	Year 3	£16,478.20																							

	Year 4	£16,879.03
	Year 5	£17,722.98
	Total	£87,143.23
Mowbray Fields, Didcot	Year 1	£13,711.56
	Year 2	£12,369.64
	Year 3	£11,340.93
	Year 4	£11,473.87
	Year 5	£12,047.56
	Total	£60,943.56
Grand total - all sites	5 years	£238,501.20

The annual budget for countryside services in the Medium Term Financial Plan matches the contract price.

Other implications	<p>5 per cent of the quality score was given to a question asking the bidders to demonstrate their approach to delivering social value through this contract. Bidders were asked to demonstrate their experience of organising and running a programme of public events and to outline their approach.</p> <p>Earth Trust scored 4 out of 5 for their response.</p>
---------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Background papers considered	Appendix 2- summary of evaluation scoring
-------------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------

Declarations/conflict of interest? Declaration of other councillor/officer consulted by the Cabinet member?	As far as the evaluation team is concerned there were no conflicts of interest identified.
--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

List consultees		Name	Outcome	Date
	Ward councillors	James Barlow-Wallingford; Sue Cooper, Benson & Crowmarsh; Mocky Khan, Axel Macdonald, Denise Macdonald-Didcot South	James Barlow- queries answered including follow up conversation with SODC member as requested Sue Cooper- approved with query on pricing addressed Mocky Khan- approved with query on performance measurement addressed Axel Macdonald- approved Denise Macdonald- no response	7 May 2024
	Legal	Pat Connell	Agreed subject to clarifying if a joint contract or two separate ones	18 October 2023

	legal@southandvale.gov.uk			
	Finance Finance@southandvale.gov.uk	Kathy Merritt	Agreed	27 February 2024
	Procurement procurement@southandvale.gov.uk	Angela Cox	Approved with comments incorporated	13 September 2023
	Human resources hadminandpayroll@southandvale.gov.uk	Trina Mayling	Agreed with no comments	18 October 2023
	Strategic property Property@southandvale.gov.uk	Karen Lister	Agreed with comments incorporated	19 March 2024
	Climate and biodiversity climateaction@southandvale.gov.uk	Jessie Fieth	Agreed with no comments	19 October 2023
	Diversity and equality equalities@southandvale.gov.uk	Lynne Mitchell	I would approve this request but would just like confirmation that when they are completing requirements in appendix 1, they will also be ensuring that accessibility to everyone is good to and in the sites, wherever possible. Also reporting any potential problems that may arise	13 October 2023
	Health and safety healthandsafety@southandvale.gov.uk	Jane Smith	Approved. Please ensure that Volunteer/staff receive adequate training/instruction and supervision under H&S, and provisions are in place accidents/first aid/PPE and risk assessments and method statements are in place	19 October 2023
	Risk and insurance risk@southandvale.gov.uk	Yvonne Cutler Greaves	Agreed. Ensure they have suitable levels of PL/EL £10M minimum prefer £15m if possible as it is in the public domain	16 October 2023
	Communications communications@southandvale.gov.uk	Lucy Billen	Agreed. We would look to publicise the relationship with the chosen bidder when appropriate	19 October 2023
	SMT		Approved with comments incorporated	20 March 2024
Confidential decision? If so, under which exempt category?	No.			
Call-in waived by Scrutiny Committee chairman?	No			
Has this been discussed by Cabinet members?	No			
Cabinet portfolio holder's signature To confirm the decision as set out in this notice.	Signature: <i>Pieter-Paul Barker</i> Date: <i>19th April 2024</i>			

ONCE SIGNED, THIS FORM MUST BE HANDED TO DEMOCRATIC SERVICES IMMEDIATELY.

For Democratic Services office use only		
Form received	Date: 8 May 2024	Time: 08:17
Date published to all councillors	Date: 8 May 2024	
Call-in deadline	Date: 15 May 2024	Time: 17:00