

**SOUTHERN RURAL AREA COMMITTEE
THURSDAY 4 DECEMBER 2014**

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

AGENDA ITEM No.

8

TITLE OF REPORT: COMMUNITY UPDATE AND GRANT APPLICATIONS

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF POLICY AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 To advise the Committee of the activities and schemes with which the Community Development Officer has been involved.
- 1.2 To bring to the Committee's attention some important community based activities that will be taking place during the next few months.
- 1.3 To bring to the Committee's attention details of recent requests received for Area Committee Grant Funding made by community groups and local organisations.
- 1.4 To advise the Committee on the current expenditure and balances of the Area Committee delegated budgets.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to note the activities and schemes with which the Community Development Officer has been involved.
- 2.2 The Committee is asked to note the budgetary expenditure, balances and carry forwards within the Area Committee Development Budget Spreadsheet attached as Appendix 1.
- 2.3 That the Committee considers a grant award of £500 to Ickleford Parish Council to part fund essential safety works required to the children's play area at the recreation ground as detailed in Appendix 3 and 8.1 of this report.
- 2.4 That the Committee considers a grant award of £1,000 to Knebworth Bowls Club to part fund safety works and improvement to the external areas surrounding the Clubhouse as detailed in Appendix 4 and 8.2 of this report.
- 2.5 That the Committee considers grant award of £200 to Pirton Parish Council to part fund 4 new external table / benches at the recreation ground as detailed in Appendix 5 and 8.3 of this report.
- 2.6 That the Committee considers grant award of £1,500 to support operational costs in continuation and further development of the beneficial activities undertaken by Waste Not Want Not as detailed in Appendix 6 and 8.4 of this report.

- 2.7 That the Committee considers a grant award of £300 to the Gt Ashby Over 50's Friendship Club to support activities undertaken by the club as detailed in Appendix 7 and 8.5 of this report. In addition for the Committee to also consider hearing of a future grant application in the new year to assist in the installation of a hearing loop system at the Gt Ashby Community Centre via a separate grant application.
- 2.8 That the Committee considers grant award of £1,200 to assist with further refurbishment works at Peters Green Village Hall as detailed in Appendix 8 and 8.6 of this report.
- 2.9 That the Committee considers approval of the Ward Member Grant award of £150 to Pirton Parish Council to assist in the renewing of a garage store door at the recreation ground as detailed in Appendix 9 and 8.7 of this report.
- 2.10 That the Committee considers awarding support funding in relation to any potential Highways schemes as proposed and discussed under section 8.8 of this report.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To ensure that the Committee are kept informed of the work of the Community Development Officer.
- 3.2 This report is intended to inform Members of the financial resources available to the Committee. It draws attention to the current budgetary situation, assists in the effective financial management of the Area Committee's budget and ensures actions are performed within the Authority's Financial Regulations and the guidance in the Grants policy.
- 3.3 The awarding of financial assistance to voluntary organisations and the use of discretionary spending allows the Committee to further the aims and Priorities of the Council.
- 3.4 Production of this report is a requirement of the 'Priorities for the District' in which the Community Development Officer is required to produce a formal report to the Area Committee in line with the Civic Calendar.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 There are no alternative options being proposed other than those detailed within the text of this report. However in the course of debate at committee, Members may wish to comment and offer additional views on any of the items rose within this report.

5. CONSULTATION WITH EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS AND WARD MEMBERS

- 5.1 Consultation with Members has occurred in connection with the allocation of funds for Community Projects.
- 5.2 Consultation with the respective officers and external agencies / groups has taken place with regard to the funding proposals for Area Committee Discretionary Development Funds.

6. FORWARD PLAN

- 6.1 This report does not contain a recommendation on a key decision and has not been referred to in the Forward Plan.

7. BACKGROUND

- 7.1 Members are asked to note the information detailed in Appendix 1 Area Committee Budget Spreadsheet, which relates to the Area Committee budget balances for the current financial year 2014/15
- 7.2 The spreadsheet also details pre-allocated sums carried forward from the previous financial year 2013/14 including balances and past expenditure relating to the allocated and un-allocated budgets available to the Committee.
- 7.3 The current level of unallocated funds within the Committee's Development Budget is **£8,790**
- 7.4 The current level of unallocated funds within the Committee's former MoU Budget is **£3,990**
- 7.5 The current level of unallocated funds within the Committee's Ward Member Budgets is **£6,050**
- 7.6 The current level of outstanding funds within the Committee's Preallocated Budget for Youth & Sport initiatives is **£2,602**
- 7.7 The current level of outstanding funds within the Committee's Preallocated Budget for Community initiatives is **£2,476**
- 7.8 The current level of outstanding funds within the Committee's Preallocated Budget for Highways Projects is **£3,500**

8. PROJECT/ACTIVITY/SCHEME DETAILS

8.1 Ickleford Parish Council – Essential Safety Works to Children's Play Area

The Parish Council is seeking financial support with expenses in improving the children's play area safety following the recent annual inspection.

Various safety shortcomings were highlighted:

- A new grassmat wear pad and apron required at a picnic table (£135)
- A new safety ramp to improve access to the play area from car park (£175)
- New Fence Posts (£140)
- New safety bars and clamps required on swing unit plus three new flat seats (£497)

The total cost of this work is £947.

The Parish Council is seeking a grant in the region of £500 to assist with addressing the costs associated with the above list of immediate safety works.

In addition new playbark medium around areas containing slides and climbing frames is also required in order to maintain them to a safe level £710.

8.2 **Knebworth Bowls Club – Safety works and improvement to the external areas**

The Bowls Club is looking to address issues with sunken paving on the perimeter path and patio area around the Club House. At the same Club Members also wish to tackle other issues associated with the safety railings running along the patio.

Areas of the patio & paving have sunken and cracked to such an extent that the area has now become a serious trip hazard to elderly players. Club members are of the opinion that the whole area needs to be re-laid with areas of the sub structure built up in places. In addition the top rail of the safety railing also needs to be replaced.

Materials required to undertake the works have been estimated at £1,000 and Club Members are looking to undertake the works themselves in order to keep costs down and plan to start prior to the beginning of next year's season which would form the club's input into the project.

The club manages to operate on a small working balance within the Club's accounts each year and has to reserve funds to cover external contractor costs associated in keeping the green in good order, with further funds put aside to maintain the grass cutting mowers.

8.3 **Pirton Parish Council – External benches at the recreation ground**

The Parish Council is seeking financial support with renewing 4 eight seater table / benches to be located outside the Sports & Social Club at the recreation ground.

4 x 8-seater = £474.96 (inc VAT) + Delivery = £504.96

This initiative is part of a number of planned enhancements being undertaken to improve facilities and increase usage at the recreation ground and the Sports & Social Club.

8.4 **Waste Not Want Not – Development & operational support**

The Roebuck site has now been transformed from a derelict field to a vibrant community space and a splendid nursery offering very economically priced plants which is seen as a real benefit to the local community.

Substantial work has been undertaken in making the site secure with unobtrusive fencing and making an existing wooden store, safe and waterproof.

The Offender Management Team from Hatfield has done sterling work in helping create an open fronted potting area sheltered from sun and rain. They have also been manufacturing wooden planters which can be sold on, as well as assisting in numerous day to day maintenance tasks.

The volunteer force has increased substantially and an ex volunteer has now been appointed as the group's nursery foreman and is employed for 3 days a week. The other two days he is continuing his advanced horticultural training at Oaklands College. Earlier in the year, he received a distinction in his horticultural exams.

The new site was opened by Waste Not Want Not's Patron Kim Wilde on 12th April 2014 and a highly successful and enjoyable day was had by guests and volunteers. There was substantial and favourable publicity in three local newspapers and several local magazines including the Council's own Outlook publication.

The demise of the group's Luton van engendered a second event in September this year when Hal Fowler performed at an incredibly enjoyable and profitable event which saw £1,500 raised in one day go into a contingency fund for a new van.

(Hal has been regularly volunteering several days a week since the concert and last month was appointed as Chairman).

Throughout the year the site has been open to volunteers 7 days a week for at least 6 hours a day. This month opening days were reduced to 4 per week because of deteriorating weather.

The grant awarded by the Southern Rural Area Committee last financial year enabled the group to purchase wood to supplement the recycled material for the construction of rain water harvesting devices and the housing of 6 x 1000 litre water storage tanks. (£400)

A portaloos at was also purchased at a cost of £300 as well as 4 gazebos costing £350. The gazebos offer shelter at various social and other events and allow a greater number of volunteers to work in sun and rain. They are of a strong construction and less vulnerable in bad weather.

Local people and businesses continue to donate many tons of growing stock, horticultural materials and equipment which would otherwise go to landfill. £350 was spent on putting a donated mini bus back on the road as a temporary replacement for our previous vehicle.

The group's diesel costs have been substantial in moving stock and equipment to the new site and they also purchased two pallets of compost to pot on some of the donated growing stock. (£200)

The group's governance has been strengthened considerably last month and 4 new director/trustees have been appointed replacing past directors who have moved away or had to resign for personal reasons.

The increased number of volunteers does mean that the group has to find further resources to cover, travelling expenses, but more particularly, they also need to support and supervise the additional number of people who attend.

The group's current foreman doesn't drive and therefore they need to have access to a regular driver at least 2 days a week to take parties of volunteers to do garden creation and maintenance jobs and to make collections and deliveries of donated stock, attend markets and local events etc. All of which provide the basis of the group's income.

In the coming winter months, the group will struggle to raise income via sales of stock or garden maintenance. The group therefore diversifies each year and makes Christmas wreaths, table arrangements etc to sell at local markets and Xmas fairs, although in itself this doesn't generate enough to cover the paying for staff. In addition they are also hoping to do some one off factory sales with our wares.

The nursery site is virtually closed for January and February given the weather and site conditions, but some work and maintenance continues in preparation for the coming season. However they are able to work at the Project Leaders green houses and also at the Learning Garden at Hatfield Galleria.

Knebworth Village Trust will be donating £1,000 towards staffing costs which will more or less covered expected costs to the end of this year.

A contribution of £1,500 from the Committee would enable the group to pay for some driving, some administration and support and supervision of staff in January through to mid March 2015.

The group pays £8 an hour for all the tasks mentioned which they consider is a fair and just amount.

£1,200 would pay for 150 hours of driving, admin and support & supervision of volunteers.

£200 would purchase the necessary compost to pot on the very substantial donated stock for the coming year and £100 would go towards covering some of the travel expenses.

The Committee should be aware that several of our volunteers have moved on to employment and training in the past year. People regain their self confidence and get back into a regular routine and many who are unlikely to be able to return to work have a far better and more satisfying life than if they were not attending the Project.

The Project gives many volunteers a "raison detre" They make friends and support networks with us and are proud of their contribution to society.

8.5 **Gt Ashby Over 50's Friendship Club – Activities costs support**

The Over 50's Friendship Club meets every Tuesday afternoon from 2.00 to 4.00pm in the Small Meeting Hall at Great Ashby Community Centre. Average attendance ranges from 25 to 30 per week with many of the members being over 65 years of age with a proportion being 80+.

The club endeavours to provide some form of social aspect to meet with friends in order to ward off loneliness, especially in the colder months.

The club is seeking support funding in the region of £300 to assist with costs incurred in providing the group with a Christmas meal & celebration afternoon as well as paying expenses and the costs of guest speakers.

The Club is also keen on seeking assistance / possible funds to install a hearing loop system at the Community Centre to aid those members with hearing difficulties.

The CM at the time of writing this report was liaising with the Community Centre's Manager, Dot Smith to look at the possibility of working up a project and costings re the installation of a hearing loop system for the centre.

Further update on this matter will be made available in due course with the view of a separate application coming before the Committee at its next meeting.

8.6 **Peters Green Village Hall – Refurbishment Works**

The Village Hall has offered a unique rural venue for family, social and community events to residents of the village and the Parish, as well as hirers from outside the Parish, since it was built in 1929.

It is used for children and adults parties (including Guides events), WI meetings, dance and exercise classes, harvest suppers, prayer meetings, charity events etc. It also offers a spacious sheltered alternative if outdoor events on the Village Green or at the Chapel are disrupted by bad weather.

The Management Committee is seeking financial assistance towards additional costs arising from the essential maintenance work undertaken at the Hall during October and November 2014. This work was mainly funded by the NHDC Rural Community Halls Funding Scheme (Project Scope: Building enhancements including refurbishment to hall floor, hall insulation, new lighting).

However, the joists under the floor boards were affected by wet rot and just as the funding was awarded the floor started collapsing under the vinyl surface in the toilets.

Additional to the scope of the project, the management committee commissioned the digging of a channel to be filled with shingle along the length of the north/east facing wall that would absorb water otherwise sitting against the brickwork and seeping into ground level air bricks.

They also decided that it was necessary to fit high level air bricks and vent covers in all three toilets to improve ventilation. Subsequently, two of the wall mounted electric fan heaters were also found to be faulty when being refitted to the new insulation walls.

Additional funding required beyond the original scope of the initial refurbishment:

200m drainage channel along the north/west side of the building filled with pea shingle £264.00 (incl Vat)

Fitting air bricks and vent covers in the three toilets £316.80 (incl Vat)

Replacement of faulty Wall Mounted Electric Heaters £600.00 (approx.)

The Management Committee respect the level of funding the Authority has already committed towards the initial refurbishment works and merely asks the Committee to consider a contribution to help cover the costs of the additional unforeseen rectification works which also need to be addressed.

8.7 **Pirton Parish Council – Garage store door at the recreation ground**

Cllr Faye Frost has received a request from Pirton PC asking for a contribution from the 2014/15 Hitchwood, Offa & Hoo Ward Discretionary Budget to assist with the renewing of the Garage store door at the recreation ground.

The Pirton Sports & Social Club (now a Committee of Pirton Parish Council) is seeking funds to assist in the replacement of the old garage door as through damage it was no longer possible to secure the structure properly.

The cost of the replacement is £491.67 (ex VAT)

8.8 **Highways Matters**

This section is included within the community update report for each committee cycle to facilitate debate and enable appropriate feedback on any of the proposed or listed Highways related schemes.

Any new proposals or revised schemes will be forwarded to the respective Herts County Councillor for consideration who will in turn report back and advise the Committee accordingly.

8.9 UU's / s106 Contributions & Funding Advice

The CDM is liaising with a number of Parishes re the potential unlocking of collected UU (Unilateral Undertakings) contributions held by the Authority and in cases assisting to compile evidence of need within each community re any current and future developments. These are subject to meeting relevant criteria set under regulation and by which the Authority must abide.

8.10 Rural Grants Programme 2014/15

The closing date for all grant applications under this year's Rural Grant Programme was Friday 27th September 2014.

In summary, the Council has received 23 grant applications seeking total funding in the region of £34,000. It is hoped that the Parish Challenge Panel will be convened to sit and consider all the applications early in the New Year, with announcements to be made shortly after.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The Terms of Reference in relation to Area Committees confirm that they may establish and maintain relationships with outside bodies/voluntary organisations which include discretionary grant support. However, this does not include grants for district wide activities.

9.2 Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 provides that the Council has power to do anything which it considers likely to promote or improve the economic, social or environmental well-being of its area. This would apply on the basis that financial assistance to voluntary and community organisations improves the economic, social or environmental well-being of the District or part of it.

9.3 Section 137 Local Government Act 1972 provides specific authority for the Council to incur expenditure on anything which is in the interests of and will bring direct benefit to its area. This includes a charity or other body operating for public service.

9.4 The Committee has delegated powers to administer funds from the budgets described.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 Members are asked to note the information detailed in Appendix 1 of the report, which relates to the Area Committee budget balances for the current financial year 2014/15.

10.2 The spreadsheet also details the pre-allocations carried forward from the previous financial year 2013/14 to the current financial year 2014/15.

10.3 In the past few years there has been no inflationary allowance to the Area Committee Budgets and the 2014/15 baseline budget has stayed the same as the previous year.

10.4 The former MoU Budget is subject to a 7.1% reduction each year through to financial year 2015/16.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 There are no risk entries that have been recorded on Covalent, the Council's Performance & Risk system. Individual events should have their own risk assessments in place to mitigate any health and safety issues.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 The Equality Act 2010 came into force on the 1st October 2010, a major piece of legislation. The Act also created a new Public Sector Equality Duty, which came into force on the 5th April 2011. There is a General duty, described in 12.2, that public bodies must meet, underpinned by more specific duties which are designed to help meet them.
- 12.2 In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of its functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 12.3 The projects which comprise the Community Development Officers' workload, and area committee funding assigned to community projects are assessed to ensure that they are as inclusive as possible to members of the local community. The only deviation to this is where a minority group may specifically receive funding or allocation of resources to address a particular area of need or 'gap' in provision.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1 As the recommendations made in this report do not constitute a public service contract, the measurement of 'social value' as required by the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 need not be applied, although equalities implications and opportunities are identified in the relevant section at paragraphs 12.

14. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1 There are no pertinent Human Resource implications associated with any items within this report.

15. APPENDICES

- 15.1 Appendix 1 – Area Committee Development Budget Spreadsheet 2014/15.
- 15.2 Appendix 2 – Area Committee Summary Update 2014/15.
- 15.3 Appendix 3 – Area Committee Grant Form – Ickleford Parish Council – Play Area
- 15.4 Appendix 4 – Area Committee Grant Form – Knebworth Bowls Club – External works
- 15.5 Appendix 5 – Area Committee Grant Form – Pirton Parish Council – Benches
- 15.6 Appendix 6 – Area Committee Grant Form – Waste Not Want Not – Support Funding
- 15.7 Appendix 7– Area Committee Grant Form – Gt Ashby Over 50's Friendship Club – Support Funding

- 15.8 Appendix 8 – Area Committee Grant Form – Peters Green Village Hall
- 15.9 Appendix 9 – Ward Grant Form – Pirton Parish Council – Garage store door

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17. BACKGROUND PAPERS

17.1 Review of Policies and Procedures for Financial Assistance to Voluntary and Community Organisations, November 2002.