

**SOUTHERN RURAL COMMITTEE
10 SEPTEMBER 2015**

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

AGENDA ITEM No.

6

TITLE OF REPORT: COMMUNITY UPDATE AND GRANT APPLICATIONS

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF POLICY AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

PORTFOLIO HOLDER – COUNCILLOR TONY HUNTER, COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND RURAL AFFAIRS

1. SUMMARY

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

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to note the budgetary expenditure, balances and carry forwards within the Area Committee Development Budget Spreadsheet attached as Appendix 1.
- 2.2 That the Committee notes the update report regarding the initial period of operation at the new John Clements Sports & Community Centre.
- 2.3 That the Committee considers a grant award of £1,500 to the Codicote Tennis Club to assist with the reparation works to the courts, as detailed in Appendix 3 and 8.2 of this report.
- 2.4 That the Committee considers a grant award of £200 to the Codicote Local History Society assist with essential electrical works required at the local Museum facility, as detailed in Appendix 4 and 8.3 of this report.
- 2.5 That the Committee considers a grant award of £1,190 to Ickleford Parish Council to assist with essential repairs to the Children's Play Area and access road to the burial ground, as detailed in Appendix 5 and 8.4 of this report.
- 2.6 That the Committee considers a grant award of £800 to St Ippolyts Parish Council to assist with the renewal of the commemorative bench for Cllr Alan Caulder at Gosmore Village Green, as detailed in Appendix 6 and 8.5 of this report.

- 2.7 That the Committee considers a grant award of £300 to Wymondley Parish Council to assist with the construction of the new Pavilion at Tower Close Recreation Ground, Little Wymondley and to help with costs associated with holding this year's Village Day, as detailed in Appendix 7 and 8.6 of this report.
- 2.8 That the Committee considers a grant award of £690 to Offley Parish Council to assist with the installation of a defibrillator unit at the Recreation Centre, as detailed in Appendix 8 and 8.7 of this report.
- 2.9 The Committee is asked to note the activities and schemes with which the Community Officer has been involved.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 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.
- 3.2 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.
- 3.3 To ensure that the Committee are kept informed of the work of the Community Officer.

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 within this report.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

- 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 2015/16

- 7.2 The spreadsheet also details pre-allocated sums carried forward from the previous financial year 2014/15 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 **£26,310**
- 7.4 The current level of unallocated funds within the Committee's Ward Member Budgets is **£6,800**
- 7.5 The current level of outstanding funds within the Committee's Preallocated Development Budget carried forward from 2014/15 for Community Projects is **£3,256**

8. PROJECT/ACTIVITY/SCHEME DETAILS

8.1 John Clements Sports & Community Centre Update

The new Centre opened on 8th April receiving donations from a wide range of funding avenues which ultimately allowed the centre to be constructed at a total cost of £545k and meeting the immediate needs to get the centre open.

Apart from the final building retention fee of £8.3k payable in April 2016, all outstanding costs have been covered with an estimated £8k to 9k in reserves in place by the end of September.

This balance will have resulted from the good reception for the project within the village, excellent press / radio coverage, an average of one major event each week for the first 16 weeks and club membership trebling to 500.

Bookings for the rest of the year mirror the first 4 months, thus confirming the immediate financial viability of the Centre, with the Management Committee now wanting to guarantee the Centre's long term sustainability.

To do this, the Management Committee intend to invest in capital items to enable an increase in revenues, bring more enjoyment to users of the building, and guarantee its long term sustainability.

8.2 Codicote Tennis Club Court Repairs

On Friday 17th July members of Codicote Tennis Club were devastated to discover two large holes had appeared on two of the three tennis courts at Bury Lane recreation ground, following a thunderstorm the night before.

The news was particularly heart-breaking given that the club has been tirelessly improving the facilities at the site over the past few years. Such works include the resurfacing all 3 courts, replacing and updating nets, score posts and other court equipment, at a cost of £55,000. When the new John Clements Sports and Community Centre opened earlier this year the club proudly felt that it was offering first class tennis facilities to all its members and visiting teams.

The damage consists of a large hole in court 3 measuring approx. 2m x 1m, and a large depression on court 2 of approx. 4m x 4m. There is also a depression on the grass between court 1 and 2.

The Parish Council owns the two damaged courts which the Club pays an annual rent. The club now finds itself in a very difficult position, as it has 160 members and unfortunately only one useable court in operation. The club held a successful Open Day on 11th July just 6 days prior to the storm damage, where 21 new members were recruited.

The damage could not have come at a worse time from a usage point of view, as its right in the middle of the summer tennis season. However, the club has been extremely heartened by the kindness of other local clubs, particularly Welwyn Tennis Club and Digswell Tennis Club who have offered their own courts to enable Codicote to play pre-arranged competition matches.

The Club needs to act quickly to ensure the courts are fully operational as soon as possible, and is obviously keen to avoid any membership attrition.

The Club has informed the Parish Council, as owners of the courts and they are looking at pursuing an insurance claim for the damage. Although it is not known how successful this will be as the Parish Council were originally told that subsidence is not normally covered.

The Club has also has informed the Lawn Tennis Association and arranged for the original contractor to visit the site to inspect the damage and both have recommended a full ground survey is undertaken in order to understand what has happened and whether there are any further issues underground. The Parish Council have agreed to pay for the ground survey which will cost in the region of £1,000.

The ground survey is to be undertaken shortly and will use Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) which uses electromagnetic radar to take readings and measure the subsurface features, such as variations in ground conditions, the presence of buried obstructions, and voids. The LTA have offered to pay for a consultant to manage and advise the Club on the findings of the GPR survey.

Meanwhile, the Club has also obtained two quotes for the repair work, one for £25,000 and the other for £38,000. Both quotes include excavating the court 1m beyond the damage and to a depth of 50cm, and fully resurfacing the entire area to return the courts to their original condition. These quotes **do not** include the cost of further excavation work which may be required once the result of GPR survey is known.

The sole aim of the Tennis Committee is to complete the repair work as quickly as possible; however the current ownership structure does add an additional layer of complexity for the Club. As a result the Tennis Club and the Parish Council have formed a working party to work closely together to pursue an insurance claim and to consider wider / alternative funding sources in case of need to achieve the court repairs in a timely manner.

8.3 **Codicote Local History Society – Museum electrical works**

Following a recent electrical testing survey carried out on the Museum facility situated behind the Peace Memorial Hall, Codicote High Street, the Local History Society is faced with repair / renewal costs amounting to £666.

County Councillor Thake has already committed £100 towards the works from his county locality budget, and the Society is asking the Area Committee to consider a grant in the region of £200 to help address the necessary electrical improvements.

The Society is a registered charity which returns a modest surplus each year within its annual accounts and is prepared to meet the balance of funding required in order to get the enhancements carried out as soon as possible.

8.4 **Ickleford Children's Play Area repair works**

The Parish Council is seeking financial support in addressing essential repair works to various items of existing equipment within the Children's Play Area and critical repairs to the surface of the Sports Club overflow car park, which also serves as access to the burial ground.

The latter has several areas requiring new surfacing, which currently cause problems during periods of heavy rain and are extremely dangerous to any young children passing, particularly as that section also leads on to the play area.

A recent safety / condition survey has indicated rectification works to the Play Area Equipment is £1,219 plus vat and the repairs to the access road being £1,160 plus vat.

The Parish Council is asking the Area Committee to consider a grant award to help address the necessary rectification works..

Members of the Committee are therefore minded to consider making an award from available grant budgets perhaps in the region of 50% of the overall rectification works.

The Area Committee may wish to note that the Parish Council is a precepting body which has the power to raise funds for such projects in its own right.

8.5 **Renewal of the bench at Gosmore Village Green**

Following the Parish Council's recent annual assets inspection, the memorial bench installed by NHDC Members in memory of Cllr Alan Caulder and situated at Gosmore Village Green was identified as an item to be monitored.

Unfortunately, the legs of the bench are extensively rotten and deemed to be beyond economical repair, so at some stage the whole bench will need replacing.

Members of the Committee might be minded to consider making an allocation within available grant budgets to cover the cost of replacing the bench which is currently estimated in the region of £800.

The Area Committee may wish to note that the Parish Council is a precepting body which has the power to raise funds for such projects in its own right.

8.6 **Wymondley Pavilion**

The Parish Council is seeking financial support of £250 from the Chesfield Ward Budget 2015/16 to assist with the final costs associated to the construction of the new Pavilion on the Recreation Ground at Little Wymondley and a further £50 contribution to assist with costs relating to this year's Village Day.

The Area Committee may wish to note that the Parish Council is a precepting body which has the power to raise funds for such projects in its own right.

8.7 **Gt Offley - Defibrillator**

Offley Parish Council would like to install a defibrillator at a central point within the village. As with other rural parishes / villages within the Southern Rural area of North Herts, the Parish Council is aware that the village is a fair distance from an ambulance station and such provision has the potential to be a life-saving initiative for local residents and the many visitors to the area for leisure purposes.

Plans are to locate the unit at the Offley Recreation Centre for easy access and home to numerous sporting & leisure activities. The Parish is seeking a grant in the region of £875 to assist with the total cost for provision of £1,375.

The Area Committee may wish to note that the Parish Council is a precepting body which has the power to raise funds for such projects in its own right.

8.8 **Titmore Green Village Pond enhancements**

The pond at Titmore Green, Wymondley, is in need of some reinvigoration, as it is currently dry and has been so during previous summers. For the rest of the year it does tend to retain some water even though being heavily silted and this is possibly because it takes all the surface water off of the adjacent section of road.

It's situated directly opposite the ' Hermit of Redcoats pub ' in Titmore Green and could well have been used as a wagon / cart wash serving the Inn in years gone by.

One end seems to be fed by a channel (currently blocked) coming off of the highway and although being dry there are a fair number of aquatic plants in clumps around the edges and within the actual basin of the pond.

Clearly the owners of the two properties directly behind the pond have been maintaining areas of vegetation surrounding the pond, but from looking at the line of the highway verge either side it seems that the majority of the pond is on Highway land.

The Parish Council did have a tentative look at this matter last September but it was unclear at the time where boundaries / ownership laid. From speaking with the Parish Clerk, it's always be deemed to be a feature within the hamlet and they are willing to support a joint project, so too are the owners of the two properties behind.

The CM has been in contact with CMS to provide some initial advice on what perhaps needs to be done to revive the pond to its former state and possibly indicate whether they could take on such works and give an indication of the likely costs.

As a result a second site visit has been proposed for the end of the Bank Holiday week, so the CM will update the Committee and Ward Members on any progress made.

8.9 **St Ippolyts 5 a side Tournament & Family Fun Day**

Community Officers at the request of local members gave assistance and advice re the Five a Side Tournament and Family Fun Day held at the Recreation Ground at St Ippolyts on Saturday July 25th 2015

The organisers needed assistance finalising waste disposal arrangements for the day which ran from 10.00am to 4.00pm and drew an estimated attendance of be around 400. Through liaison with the Council's waste team a collection was scheduled in to help tidy up after the event.

8.10 **Ickleford Village Hall**

The management committee at the Village Hall is looking to renew the Hall's existing heating system, parts of which date back to when the hall was originally constructed in 1925 with pipework & radiators that are estimated to be over 65 years old.

The Hall's committee is minded that eventually the system will inevitably fail and has therefore embarked on a scheme to replace everything next Easter or may be Whitsun when demand to use the Hall is a lot less.

The total estimated cost for the project is £20k plus VAT and the CM is closely working with Hall's Committee Chair & Deputy Chair in identifying and applying to potential external funding agencies to try and achieve a funding target in the region of £18k as the Hall's committee is prepared to utilise around £6.5k of its reserves.

Depending on how the project develops over the next few months and whether the committee is successful in sourcing all the funds required to commence the works next year, there might be a need to bring a funding application before this Committee later in the year.

8.11 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.

8.12 UU's / s106 Contributions & Funding Advice

The CM 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.

8.13 Rural Grants Programme 2015/16 – Parish Challenge

The Parish Challenge Funding Programme is currently live for the next two months. All Parish Councils, Meetings and other eligible village based organisations / groups have been notified of the three funding Programmes and the timescales to apply.

Members in the course of their civic role may wish to remind rural and Parished based groups / initiatives that the funding window is currently open and that all applications need to be returned to the Authority by Friday 2nd October 2015 and to refer any potential schemes / projects to the Communities Team for advice and assistance.

See Appendix 9 - Rural Grants Fund 2015/16 – *A Quick Guide*

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 a General Power of Competence which gives local authorities the power to do anything that individuals generally may do for the benefit of the authority, its area or persons resident in its area.

- 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 **as a body** has delegated powers to administer funds from the budgets described. Whilst individual ward members may comment on and support (or not) any grant application put before the committee, the decision to award is afforded only to the Southern Rural Area Committee itself under the Council's Constitution and provided such committee is quorate at the time of such decision.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 In the past few years there has been no inflationary allowance to the main Area Committee Budget and the 2015/16 baseline budget has stayed the same as the previous year.
- 10.2 Appendix 1 provides details of the 2015/16 budget position for the Area Committee.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 There are no relevant 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. There are no pertinent risk implications for the Authority associated with any items within this report.

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 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 2015/16.
- 15.2 Appendix 2 – Area Committee Summary Update 2015/16.
- 15.3 Appendix 3 – Grant Form – Codicote Tennis Club - Court Repairs
- 15.4 Appendix 4 – Grant Form – Codicote Local History Society - Electrical Works
- 15.5 Appendix 5 – Grant Form – Ickleford Parish Council - Children’s Play Area Works
- 15.6 Appendix 6 – Grant Form – St Ippolyts Parish Council - Gosmore Village Green – Bench
- 15.7 Appendix 7 – Grant Form – Wymondley Parish Council - Wymondley Pavilion / Village Day
- 15.8 Appendix 8 – Grant Form – Gt Offley - Defibrillator
- 15.9 Appendix 9 – See Appendix - Rural Grants Fund 2015/16 – *A Quick Guide*

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17. BACKGROUND PAPERS

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