

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

TITLE OF REPORT: GRANTS & COMMUNITY UPDATE

REPORT OF: THE POLICY & COMMUNITIES MANAGER

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

CURRENT COUNCIL PRIORITIES: PEOPLE FIRST

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 To advise the Members on the current expenditure and balances of the Committee Grant budgets.
- 1.2 To bring to the Members' attention to recent requests received for Committee grant funding, made by community groups and local organisations.
- 1.3 To advise of the activities and schemes with which the Community Engagement officers have been involved in.
- 1.4 To bring to the Members' attention some important community-based activities that will take place during the next few months.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the Committee considers allocating funding from their discretionary community budget towards the projects below:
- 2.2 **£1,000** to Culture Wood CIC towards Forest School activities aimed at adults to support mental health as outlined in paragraph 8.1.1 of the officer's report.
- 2.3 **£1,050** to Green Care at Norton CIC towards equipment for their new Social Enterprise based at Standalone Farm aimed at adults to support mental health as outlined in 8.1.2
- 2.4 That the Committee be recommended to endorse the actions taken by the Community Engagement team to promote greater community capacity and well-being for Letchworth.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To ensure the Members are kept informed of the work of the Community Engagement Team.
- 3.2 This report is intended to inform Members of the financial resources available. It draws attention to the current budgetary situation by assisting in the effective financial management of budgets. This ensures that all actions are performed in line with the Authority's Financial Regulations, the Council's Constitution, and the guidance of the existing Grants policy as agreed by Cabinet in January 2020.
- 3.3 The awarding of financial assistance to voluntary organisations and the use of discretionary spending allows the Committee to further the aims of the Council Plan.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1. Delay decisions until the Committee meets in person, which is not considered the best option as many community organisations rely on such Grants.

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 bodies/groups has taken place regarding funding proposals for Committee Funds.

6. FORWARD PLAN

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

7. BACKGROUND

- 7.1 With reference to the Council's Constitution, Section 9.3 Area Committees will include budgets for the purpose of providing grants and discretionary budgets that may be used within the area of the Committee for economic, social and environmental well-being.
- 7.2 Members are asked to note the information detailed in Appendix 1. Letchworth Area Committee Budget spreadsheet, which relates to the Area Committee budget balances for 2022/23 The spreadsheet also details pre-allocated sums carried forward from the previous financial years, including balances and past expenditure.

- 8. **RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS** - Councillors are at liberty to consider any amount requested in a grant application as long as the Letchworth area committee has sufficient funds in the 2022/2023 budget.

8.1 Grant Applications

8.1.1

Applicant Project	Culturewood CIC Ltd Provide new sessions focussed on adult's mental health and well-being
Sum requested	£1,000
Total project cost	£1,300
Match funding	£300 Christmas Raffle
Previous support	Yes
NHDC Policy met	Yes
Council objectives	People First

This funding will be used to provide new sessions focussed on adult's mental health and well-being. Culturewood would like to be able to support adults at this difficult time. They have spoken to their current clients and there is a need for adult only sessions, focussing on improving mental health using nature - improving and supporting well-being and mindfulness outdoors.

They would like to run a series of two-hour sessions (between eight and ten sessions) with adults, at Norton Common, from June to October. The sessions would promote access to nature as the natural way to re-set after the stresses that COVID and multiple lockdowns put the community under. Included in these sessions would be learning new skills, bush-crafting and green crafts, as well as guided mindfulness exercises.

All sessions would be run by a qualified Forest School Leader and Therapeutic Wilderness Practitioner

This project will help local people over the age of 18, with a focus on adults with mental health issues, addiction issues and any other community groups that would not usually access these types of projects. This project could benefit up to 80 individuals in Letchworth and the surrounding areas in North Hertfordshire.

8.1.2

Applicant Project	Green Care at Norton CIC Purchasing a Grillo G55 Walking Tractor
Sum requested	£1,050
Total project cost	£2,100
Match funding	£1,050
Previous support	Yes
NHDC Policy met	Yes
Council objectives	People First

Green Care are aiming to purchase a Grillo G55 Walking Tractor. They are establishing a social enterprise at Standalone Farm on a much larger parcel of land than they currently use, leading to them needing to purchase specialist machinery to be able to carry out the groundwork. They have rented approx. 0.75 of an acre for growing vegetables, with a further large area for growing cut flowers.

As the land is currently pasture, they cannot start growing anything on it without preparing the ground. A walking tractor would allow them to cultivate the land mechanically without the need for excessive hand digging, which would be physically very difficult and demoralising for their participants (approx. 15-20 at any one time who live in Letchworth and surrounding areas). To this end they are asking for NHC to make a contribution towards their purchase of a professional standard walking tractor with rotavator attachment.

In the longer term buying these items will provide good value for money in so far as without it they would have to hire these items at approximately £90.00 per day or hire sub-contractors to do the groundwork at substantial expense.

All their participants will directly benefit from this purchase as it will considerably reduce the need for challenging physical work on a large plot. By preparing the ground with a walking tractor, their participants have suitable, prepared land on which to start growing. It will also help their project to become more self-sufficient by generating most of their own income which will help guarantee their long-term future.

Indirectly, the local community will benefit as, when the group are producing fresh, local, and organic produce and ethically grown cut flowers, they will be able to offer the goods at a reasonable price to locals. Similarly, visitors to Standalone Farm from all areas of Hertfordshire and beyond will be able to purchase high quality, produce grown at the farm.

Green Care at Norton gives ongoing long-term support to vulnerable and socially excluded local residents in order to overcome social exclusion through loneliness, isolation and mental health issues. There are no time limits for how long participants can stay with them, and they value everyone's contribution and judge no-one. They adapt the sessions depending on the participant's particular needs, and have worked hard to install wide, smooth pathways on the allotment site, as well as to provide specially adapted gardening equipment, which means that participants with mobility difficulties can still attend and receive support from them.

They also support participants in the project to take the first steps into paid employment through collaboration with their partner organisations; Settle Housing Association Tenancy Support, Job Centre Plus, and Create Community Networks Foundations 4 Work programme.

They support local residents within the community who are disadvantaged or experiencing social exclusion, and give them the opportunity to make new friends, learn new skills, and improve their mental and physical wellbeing through attending Green Care at Norton. They are also excited to build a presence at Standalone Farm, which is a well-loved local attraction visited by many people in the local and wider communities. They hope this will give them the opportunity to engage with more people in the community and give them information about the advantages of consuming locally grown produce. By producing fruit, vegetables and cut flowers locally they are drastically reducing food miles, refrigeration costs and eradicating the need for plastic packaging on produce. Furthermore, unlike some imported cut flowers and other produce all their produce will be ethically produced without the need for harmful pesticides and herbicides for local people.

This phase of the development of Green Care at Norton will see them establishing a not-for-profit social enterprise which will be the trading arm for their more charitable work at Norton and yet still placing vulnerable and isolated adults at the heart of everything they do.

8.2 Community Engagement Update and previous grants awarded

8.2.1 Community Engagement Team

The team have been continuing to engage and network with local community groups and initiatives. This involved:

- Processing grants to utilise the Health Protection Board funding to assist the community's recovery following the Covid 19 Pandemic.
- Supporting various local and district wide Network Groups such as Youth Action, Food Provision, the Arts and Culture Network and the newly resurrected Jackmans Network Group.
- Facilitating the NHC Letchworth Councillors' Community Surgeries.
- Continuing to work with, and add to, the Arts Cooperative which was set up after the Arts and Culture Cabinet Panel meeting.
- Continuing to share and disseminate information on social media and to mailing lists, keeping in touch with the community, voluntary, statutory, and non-statutory agencies.
- Attending JAG (Joint Action Group) and SAG (Safety Advisory Group) meetings to pass on and share information.
- Sharing information and assisting groups with events planned for the Queen's Platinum Jubilee weekend.

- Gathering speakers and information for the Cabinet Panel for Community Engagement and Co-operative Development.
- Assisting in the organisation of the Chair's Community Recognition Awards.
- We also have a new team member, Aimee Flack, who will be covering Southern Rural.

8.2.2 Update on Previous Grants Awarded

- Letchworth Garden City Bowls Club – update from Peter Bailey
North Herts Council (NHC) awarded £1,000 to support the LGC Bowls Club with repair works – 'I can confirm that the repair works to the ditch have been completed. The Club is very grateful to the Letchworth Committee for supporting this project, and to you for your assistance. Best wishes – Peter Bailey, Club Treasurer, LGC Bowls Club.



- Letchworth Corner Sports Club – update from Ian Hammond
North Herts Council (NHC) awarded £10,000 from the Community Facility Capital Grant Fund to support the Letchworth Corner Sports Club with refurbishment works – 'NHDC generously supported us with a £10,000 grant. We are extremely pleased with the finish of the work and we now have an excellent refurbished facility for our members and guests to enjoy'. - Ian Hammond, Treasurer.

Before and after shots of the men's showers,



8.3 Highways Matters

- 8.3.1 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.

- 8.3.2 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.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Sections 9.8.1 (a) and 9.8.1 (b) of the Council's Constitution in respect of the Area Committees' Terms of Reference, notes the following: To allocate discretionary budgets within the terms determined by the Council and to allocate devolved budgets and activities within the terms determined by the Council. This is outlined in the current Grant Policy agreed by Cabinet in January 2020. Section 9.8.2 (h) of the Constitution in respect of Area Committees' Terms of Reference notes that they may: Establish and maintain relationships with outside bodies/voluntary organisations operating specifically with the area including, where appropriate, the provision of discretionary grant aid/financial support etc. but excluding grants for district-wide activities.
- 9.2 Chapter 1, s1-8 of the Localism Act 2011 provides a General Power of Competence which gives local authorities the powers to do anything provided that it is not specifically prohibited in legislation.
- 9.3 Section 137 of the 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.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 As outlined in Appendix 1. Letchworth Area Committee Budget spreadsheet.
- 10.2 The current 2022/23 base budget is **£11,000**, with **£956** carried forward from the 2021/22 budget. This leaves a budget available of **£11,956**.
- 10.3 The grant applications for this meeting total **£2,050** and if the Members agree the grants outlined in this report this will leave a balance of **£9,906**.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 There are no relevant risk entries that have been recorded on Pentana Risk, the Council's performance and risk system. Individual events should have their own risk assessments in place to mitigate any health and safety issues. Whenever a request for grant funding for equipment is received, the recipient of the funding will be advised to obtain insurance for the item to avoid a repeat request for funding in the event of the equipment being stolen or damaged. There are no pertinent risk implications for the Authority associated with any items within this report.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1. In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their 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.
- 12.2. Area committee funding is awarded to community groups that clearly demonstrate positive impact on the community and wider environment. The projects outlined in this report seek to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations. As noted at section 8.1.2, Green Care at Norton will provide long-term support to vulnerable and socially excluded local residents to overcome social exclusion through loneliness, isolation and mental health issues, which will advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations for the participants.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1. The Social Value Act and “go local” requirements do not apply to this report.

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1 The provision of a Walking Tractor will have an impact on the use of the land. As Section 8.1.2 notes, the land will be transformed into a productive area for locally grown fruit, vegetables and cut flowers which will reduce food miles, refrigeration costs plastic packaging.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

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

16. APPENDICES

- 16.1 Appendix 1. Letchworth Area Committee Budget spreadsheet

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18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 18.1 Review of Policies and Procedures for Financial Assistance to Voluntary and Community Organisations, November 2002.
- 18.2 Review of Grant Policy Cabinet January 2020