

WARWICK DISTRICT COUNCIL

TO: DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE - 19TH JULY 1999

SUBJECT: HILL CLOSE GARDENS, WARWICK

FROM: HEAD OF PLANNING

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1_ Members will recall that a report was presented to the last Development Committee identifying some additional resources needed to support both the voluntary work at the gardens and the longer term management of the gardens. Following a meeting of the Hill Close Gardens Steering Group on 10th June, these needs were identified more specifically and presented to Strategy Committee on 30 June 1999.

1.2_ It was also agreed at the last Development Committee to invite Mr. Colin Burden of Plincke Landscape - the Council's Consultants to make a representation to this Committee setting out the four options which he has identified as possible long term solutions for Hill Close Gardens. Mr. Burden will make a short presentation at the meeting.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Members will recall that Plincke Landscape were engaged by the District Council to prepare a management document for the Gardens which would include a master plan and recommended options for the long term future of the gardens. This has now been prepared and will be described by Mr. Burden.

2.2 He has identified four main options, which briefly are as follows:-

1. Disposal of freehold of the gardens by Warwick District Council (as a nominal sum) to a Charitable Trust formed for this purpose.
2. Management of the Gardens by WDC in collaboration with the Trust;
3. Management of the Gardens by WDC in collaboration with the Friends Group and individual plot holders. This option would be a non-Trust option but could be developed into Option 2.
4. Restoration of the Gardens by Warwick District Council, with maintenance undertaken through existing park maintenance management systems.

2.3 In terms of the cost to the Council, the first option would result in handing over Council property at a nominal sum. Without any further financial commitment to the project by the Council, a significant sum of money would need to be raised by the Trust, which may not be realistic. In the case of options (2) and (3), the Council's minimum contribution towards a Heritage Lottery Fund grant would equate to the restoration of the Grade II Listed summerhouses at the gardens: this is estimated to be £110,000. Option (4) requires a greater contribution from the Council of £205,000 to support the lottery application. The difference being the value of the volunteer input into the scheme.

3. STRATEGY COMMITTEE

3.1 The report taken to Strategy Committee on 30 June identified a need for a part time clerical staff member, for one

day a week for one year, representing a funding need of £2000. The report also considered the longer term needs with a view to an Heritage Lottery Fund application being made whichever of the options, 2 to 4 are chosen. A figure of £5,000 has been identified for the continued use of Plincke Landscape Ltd. to make a Heritage Lottery Fund application for the chosen option. This bid was taken to Strategy Committee in order to facilitate a speedy way forward - however, it will need the decision of this Committee to proceed.

4. POSSIBLE WAYS FORWARD

4.1 Mr. Colin Burden will explain the merits of each of the four options at the meeting.

4.2 A brief synopsis of this in terms of a possible way forward looked at the following considerations:-

Option 1 - would transfer responsibility to an independent trust, the disadvantages of this would be lack of control over public access, and as a consequence this proposal would be the least likely to be successful for Heritage Lottery Fund application.

Option 2 - retains Council control but shares responsibility with a trust, requires a financial input of £110,000.

Option 3 - This is a more gradual approach to the formation of a trust and would allow for such a status to be worked out within a less formal 'friends' structure which already loosely exists. Financial commitment, £110,000.

Option 4 - This would require total Council commitment fundwise and would not take account of the present volunteer involvement hence £205,000 would be required.

5. FUTURE STRUCTURE OF THE STEERING GROUP

5.1 It was proposed at the last Steering Group that the structure should be reviewed and it was proposed that the Chair of the Group be elected from the elected members on the Steering Group in a similar way to the current structure of the Leamington Spa Conservation Area Advisory Forum, which is also made up of elected Members, members of the public and officers. The meeting is currently Chaired by Alan Mayes, Conservation Architect.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1 The District Council have realised the historic value of gardens when they were released from housing land. The provision of a security fence has enabled valuable voluntary works to be carried out and in order for the long term future of the gardens to be secured a decision is now needed as to the level of commitment the District Council are prepared to make following the advice provided by the Council's Consultants. A minimum capital contribution for options 2 or 3 would be £110,000 which could be spread over 4 years as the Council's contribution to HLF funding - which would result in an annual commitment of £27,500. If members decide to pursue options 2 or 3 to a Heritage Lottery fund bid their contribution would, if a bid were successful, raise up to £680,806 in grant aid towards the total cost estimate of £940,796. The residue of these costs has then been calculated as volunteer input which would equate to £69,990 worth of work over a 10-year period, which is the time period over which costings have been calculated.

6.2 If members do not wish to make that level of commitment then an alternative option would be for works to continue on a voluntary basis, with restoration carried out as and when monies became available. This option

would also need to address the Council's obligation to restore the summer houses as Grade II listed buildings.

6.3 In terms of maintenance, under option (1) the costs of not only restoring the gardens but additionally of the ongoing maintenance is also passed to a Trust. Options (2) and (3) share the cost of maintenance, between WDC and the volunteers; WDC's annual contribution would be approximately £7,500. Under option (4) the maintenance costs to the Council would double but access to the gardens would be greater.

7. KEY ISSUES STRATEGIES

7.1 Implementation of this in accordance with Environment Key Issue EN6.

8. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

8.1 Restoration of the gardens will have an important impact on the enhancement of this part of the Warwick Conservation Area, they will also serve as an important tourist attraction once fully restored.

9. RECOMMENDATION

1. That the Committee express its support for the continued restoration of the gardens and buildings.
2. That the Committee considers if they wish to pursue a Heritage Lottery Fund grant approach to restoration.
3. That should Members agree to the Heritage Lottery Fund approach: a further detailed report be brought to the next meeting of this Committee, reporting on the capital programme bid implications and progress towards a Heritage Lottery fund application.
4. That the Chairmanship of the Hill Close Garden Steering Group be elected from and by the elected Members of the Steering Group.

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Areas in District

Affected: Warwick

Background Papers: Hill Close Gardens file
Plincke Landscape draft report
on Hill Close Gardens to WDC.

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