

TO: ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 23 MARCH 2005

SUBJECT: HISTORIC BUILDINGS GRANT SCHEMES IN WARWICK DISTRICT
ANNUAL REVIEW AND REPORT OF MEMBERS WORKING PARTY

FROM: MEMBERS WORKING PARTY AND PLANNING AND ENGINEERING

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To provide an annual review of the Historic Buildings Grant Scheme and to consider the report of the Members Working Party into the Historic Building Grants.

2. BACKGROUND

Historic Buildings Grants Schemes in 2004/05

The District Council have for many years supported Schemes of Grants to preserve and enhance the Historic Environment within the District. The following schemes have been successfully operated within the District in the past year.

- (1) Historic Buildings Scheme of Grants. Offering £20,000 for distribution to listed buildings and significant buildings in Conservation Areas within the District. It has been the practice to offer this funding to properties within the rural areas which do not receive grant aid from any other source. Significant works have been carried out in Lapworth, Bishops Tachbrook, Stoneleigh, Bubbenhall, Hampton on the Hill, Kenilworth and Whitnash in the past year.
- (2) Warwick Town Scheme of Grants. Offering £10,000 to all listed buildings and other significant buildings within the Warwick Conservation Area for restoration and Conservation works. This year works have been carried out in the town centre in Coten End, West Street, Jury Street and Church Street.
- (3) The Heritage Economic Regeneration Scheme of Grants for Royal Leamington Spa. This is operated on the basis of Warwick District Council offering £20,000 and English Heritage matching this with a further £20,000 towards the cost of works to four specific areas within the Conservation Area to the north of the river in Leamington Spa. This has operated now for four years, with the final year being an additional year awarded by English Heritage, and will conclude at the end of March 2005. Funds have been successfully distributed for each financial year and significant progress has been made in the Conservation Area in Warwick Street, Grove Street, Portland Place, Rugby Road, Clarendon Avenue and other parts of the town. This scheme has enabled groups of buildings in parts of the town to be restored thus increasing the enhancement of the Conservation Area.
- (4) The Townscape Heritage Scheme of Grants for Royal Leamington Spa, including the Shopfront Scheme of Grants operates in the Old Town of Leamington. The Heritage Lottery funded part of this scheme which offered the most significant part of the match funding concluded in March 2004. However, under the arrangements for this scheme works do not need to be

completed until March 2006 and there is therefore ongoing works in terms of outcomes from this grant scheme. The shopfront element of the grant scheme which is match funded by the Advantage West Midlands has enabled a number of further shopfronts to be restored in the Old Town Area. This will continue for a further year.

- (5) Leamington Scheme of Grants. This scheme was introduced in 2004 within an allocation of £10,000 available to listed buildings and other significant buildings in the Leamington Conservation Area not covered by other grant aided schemes, (given that the Townscape Heritage Initiative has now ceased to offer grants in Leamington Spa). This scheme was fully expended and offered 10 grants within Leamington Spa last year.
- (6) The Conservation Fund. This fund has a £20,000 allocation distributed against a new set of criteria approved last year. To date funds have been used to fund and publicise the Heritage Day held at the Royal Priors in September 2004 and the Heritage Open Days Weekend on the following weekend which was District Wide. We have also funded the restoration of the Church clock at St. Marks, Leamington Spa and may be offering a contribution towards enhanced lighting columns for the Parade in Leamington Spa.

Report from Members Working Party into the Historic Buildings Grant Scheme.

The following is a report prepared by Councillor Mrs. A. Blacklock, Councillor J. Hatfield and Councillor R. Smith appointed by Environment Scrutiny Committee to investigate the effectiveness of the Historic Buildings Grant Schemes within the District.

We held two meetings with officers and also enjoyed a conducted tour of the Leamington Old Town, viewing a number of both major and minor schemes which have been grant-aided. We received a large amount of background information in document form supplemented by question-and-answer sessions.

* WDC is the only District Council in Warwickshire to make such grants regularly. It is a discretionary, not a statutory policy, so the possibility of comparison with other councils' policy and practice is limited. However, we are convinced WDC is right to continue with it because:-

1. It has attracted a series of match-funding from outside bodies, enabling wide range of projects to go ahead;
2. Grants to individual buildings have made a visible and significant difference in upgrading whole areas which were in a poor state, thus benefiting the whole community;
3. Judicious allocation of the grant of 25% amount of the total cost, seems to be enough to encourage private owners to invest the rest themselves;
4. Strict criteria are used to assess proposals before the grant is made, and to inspect and review on completion of the work.

The reasons for operating the policy are equally valid now as when it began, i.e.

1. To maintain/improve the quality of life and the distinctiveness of a street or an area, both for residents and for visitors;
2. To recognise and subsidise the extra expense of caring for an older property.

The Working Party feels that the schemes as described elsewhere in the report, have been very effective. They have achieved the expected results and have been appreciated by the public.

Publicity

Over the past year the grant schemes have continued to be promoted through the Council's publicity leaflet (which is now due for reissuing). Surgery days have also been held at the offices of Regenesys to promote the Shopfront Scheme of Grants. The availability of grants schemes was also publicised at the Council's Heritage Day in September and is available on the Council's Website.

Historic Buildings Grant Scheme Proposals for 2005/6

The proposals for distribution of the Historic Buildings Grants for 2005/6 is set out in the report to the Executive for 29th March 2005. This incorporates recommendations of the Members Working Party and the funding allocations to each grant scheme.

3. **POLICY AND BUDGET FRAMEWORK**

There will be no changes to the present arrangements offering £100,000 towards Historic Buildings Grants Schemes however, there will be some changes to the way in which this funding is distributed as set out in the report to Executive on 29th March proposing.

4. **CONCLUSION**

Present grant schemes have been successfully operated in the District over the past year with the conclusion of the Heritage Economic Regeneration Scheme of Grants some changes have been made to the way in which funds are to be distributed this year.

The recommendations of the Members Working Party have been taken into account in the proposals for the coming year and their conclusions on the grant scheme are as follows:-

We strongly support continuation of the various schemes with the budget of £100,000. This sum approximates quite closely to the level of demand each year, and also, we have no evidence of public resentment or criticism of the deployment of council tax payers' money in this way.

We endorse the report to the Executive for 29th March, including

- (i) augmenting two of the schemes with the 'spare' money released from the conclusion of one of the match-funded schemes.
- (ii) producing a new user-friendly leaflet, in the WDC house style.

* Many of our recommendations relate to Promotion and Publicity, we need to be louder and clearer in promoting this aspect of WDC work:

- (a) The Website could be used to explain the different schemes and how to apply for assistance, and to illustrate some projects with 'before and after' photos, and to emphasise the Council's role in facilitating them.
- (b) The Heritage Days and the Rural Design Awards, etc., are valuable but could be revamped to engage more with the public.
- (c) The Conservation Team already gives professional advice to the public, this could be extended, and could include advising and supporting bids to outside bodies and to private sponsors.
- (d) Parish Councils should be involved in raising the profile of the service and nominating suitable cases for grant aid.
- (e) The Conservation Fund is the most flexible of the different funds and it is able to support publicity efforts. More publicity is needed to encourage applications from the wider District, i.e. outside Warwick and Leamington. These towns have their own dedicated schemes and we need also to counter perceptions that other areas are not a priority.
- (f) The scope of the grants available does cover historic gardens and green spaces and industrial remains, walls and railings, and so on, in Conservation Areas. This type of historical relic has become greatly valued by the public: again, it has to be made more explicit that funding is there. In future we hope this category will received even more attention and money.

* In 2006, the last of the match-funded schemes will come to an end. This will present a great opportunity to review the whole range of grant schemes and to establish new priorities. We want members to be involved in the review.

5. **OUTCOMES REQUIRED**

That the recommendations and conclusions of the Members Working Party into Historic Building Grants be accepted and that the Annual report into Historic Buildings grant funding be noted. That an Annual Report be brought to the Environment Scrutiny Committee in March 2006.

Alan Mayes
Principal Architect/Planner

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Historic Buildings Grant files.

Areas in District Affected: All

Executive Portfolio Area and Holder: Councillor Mrs. M. Begg

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