

Title: Proposed Use of Community Projects Reserve

Lead Officers: Chris Elliott – Chief Executive

Portfolio Holder: Councillors Day and Cooke

Wards of the District directly affected: Leamington Clarendon, Leamington Brunswick, Leamington Willes; Warwick Aylesford, Warwick Emscote and Fosse (?);

Summary

The budget agreed in February included a provision of £300,000 for Community Project Reserves. This report sets out a variety of proposals which take forward the Council's priorities in respect of its communities. There are two other reports on this agenda which also seek to use part of this reserve.

Recommendations

- (1) That Cabinet notes the existing commitment to contribute toward Hill Close Gardens as agreed in February 2022 and the use of the Chief Executive's Emergency powers to acquire land at Villiers Street, Leamington, and the proposals on other agenda items in respect of the Strategic Planning Infrastructure Network Masterplan and Creative Quarter.
 - (2) That Cabinet approves the schedule of allocations to community projects as set out in paragraph 1.3 of this report and as subsequently detailed in paragraph 1.4.
 - (3) That Cabinet agrees that additional provision for one off items totalling £100,000 will need to be made for 2023/24 adding to the additional savings/income total.
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1 Background/Information

- 1.1 The Council agreed as part of its budget for 2022/23 a Community Project Reserve of £300,000. This is to assist the Council and the wider community to deliver a range of the Council's community related projects.
- 1.2 At the same time, in February 2022, the Council agreed a one-off grant to Hill Close Gardens Trust of £25,000 funded from the Community Projects Reserve and that a longer-term grant (5 years) will be considered separately in the context of the receipt of a Business Plan. Group Leaders also agreed as an emergency decision that the Chief Executive should seek to achieve the purchase of a small part of the open space at Villiers Street that a company was selling off (even though it has been managed by the Council for 50 years or so). It has been agreed that a local resident that had bid for the land and was accepted, will complete the purchase, and will then sell it to the Council for the same price and including legal fees so he is not out of pocket. This is estimated at £10k.

- 1.3 There are two other reports on this Cabinet agenda also proposing the use of the Community Projects Reserve - one for £56,000 for the preparation of a Strategic Planning and Infrastructure Network Masterplan, the other for £30,000 for masterplan work around Court Street/Althorpe Street/Canalside. Assuming that these proposals are agreed and noting the above commitment then a total of £121,000 of the £300,000 has been committed before the consideration of this report.

Effectively Committed Items (assuming the latter two are agreed):

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| Hill Close Gardens | £25k |
| Purchase of Land at Villiers Street, Leamington | £10k |
| Strategic Planning and Infrastructure Network Masterplan | £56k |
| Masterplan for Court Street/Althorpe Street and canalside area, Leamington | £30k |

Additional Items:

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|--|--------------|
| Feasibility Work for Leamington Town Centre | £10k |
| Community Masterplan work for Christchurch Gardens, Leamington | £5k |
| Feasibility work for Spencer Yard footbridge | £50k |
| St Marys Lands Next Steps £50k over 2 years/£25k each pa | £25k |
| St Mary's Church Tower Restoration £100k over 2 years/£50k each pa | £50k |
| Sustrans phase 2 £50k over 2 years/£25k each pa | £25k |
| Total for 22/23 | £286k |

- 1.4 Each of the additional items are discussed below.

1.4.1 Feasibility Work for Leamington Town Centre £10k

WCC and WDC are expecting a formal announcement on some transport related funding shortly but have a level of confidence that the bid submitted will be successful. It is likely however that the allocated funding will not be sufficient to ensure that the feasibility study considers the wider aspirations of the emerging Leamington Town Centre Transformation Framework. Therefore, it is proposed that WDC and WCC each contribute £10k towards the feasibility study and that this Council's contribution comes from the Community Projects Reserve.

This work is a key part of a wider Transformation Framework currently being developed under a Board consisting of all three levels of local authority at County, District and Town levels with an Advisory Group. Similar work has already been progressed in part by WCC Highways, funded by WDC Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) in the south of the town centre around Bath Street.

The feasibility work will assist further funding bids to various sources including but not exclusively the Levelling Up Fund Round 2 bids which are to be submitted by 6th July.

1.4.2 Community Masterplan work for Christchurch Gardens, Leamington £5k

A Friends Group has developed around the Christchurch Gardens area of Leamington Town Centre. The group is formally affiliated to the Leamington Society and has been raising funds to undertake various small-scale improvements to the Gardens. They wish to take this further and develop a community masterplan and have asked the Council for some support to do this.

It is proposed that a grant of £5k be made which the Friends group will match with £1k which they will use to procure advice to help them undertake a process that will engage the community to work up an achievable plan for this valuable open space. It is an area that represents a significant opportunity to contribute to the transformation of the town centre.

1.4.3 Pump Rooms/Spencer Yard Bridge Feasibility - £50K

The proposal is to appoint a consultant team using open procurement (up to £50K) to prepare a feasibility report for a new pedestrian footbridge as a critical part of the movement network in the Creative Quarter project. The bridge will improve pedestrian connectivity between the Old Town (including the station) and New Town, traversing the River Leam from the Pump Rooms to Spencer Yard. This will be part of improved activation along the north and south banks of the River Leam in this area and will increase footfall to surrounding businesses and venues whilst delivering a visually striking and beautiful destination in its own right – it will be more than just a functional bridge/connection, maximising the visitor experience around the Spa water drinking fountain and enhancing Leamington's riverside heritage.

The span of the bridge will be approximately 30m and the width of the bridge approximately 3m to accommodate two-way pedestrian movement. A bespoke design is anticipated, not an off the shelf solution, with an approximate budget in the order of £2m inc. all fees and implementation. Upon receipt of the completed Feasibility Report, avenues of funding will be explored e.g., Government Funding Bids such as the Levelling Up Fund and there is the potential to procure via design competition (possibly with public involvement) which will be explored further. This will offer new opportunities for the town as part of the wider Transformation Framework as well as supporting the local regeneration via the Creative Quarter.

1.4.4 St Marys Lands Next Steps - Project Management and Design Work

It is proposed that to complete the next steps of the St Mary's Lands Masterplan that Plincke's commission is extended to undertake the following over the next two years at a cost of £25k per annum. This will include:

1. A developed feasibility study for the golf course and golf centre pavilion. This is likely to include a preliminary design proposal for re-working the current golf course to achieve a reduced size but enhanced quality to create a more commercially appealing entry level, turn-up and play facility. As part of the feasibility, the value of any eco-credits for 're-wilding' of the surplus

area will be calculated alongside an assessment of community value. The proposals would link into the Council's climate change commitments and biodiversity gains. The cost of replacing the driving range would be assessed, linked to a market appraisal to review whether a 'competitor analysis' would support the investment needs. An outline design proposal would be drawn for the golf centre building, including its size, form, function, and materials for discussion with the Working Party members. Undertake pre-application discussion with the Planning Team. (Note that architectural and cost consultancy fees would be procured separately.)

2. Prepare a play area proposal for the site next to the replacement golf centre / hub building, including a low-cost, temporary summer play scheme for 2022 to trial the locations popularity as a play destination. Following the outcome of the trial play project, develop a natural play scheme for further consultation. Liaise with the Council's play strategy team over design and maintenance. Develop the trial scheme to detailed proposal and the final scheme to RIBA Stage 3, outline proposals.
3. Agree a maintenance specification for the cycle track and undertake 2-observational inspections throughout the year, one summer and one winter inspection. Agree with the Jockey Club / County Council the commissioning and installation of the additional signage.
4. Assist with the commissioning and installation of the bird-nesting protected areas, including commissioning of ecological supervision.
5. Undertake a wider public consultation process via the Council's website and a virtual Q&A session. The purpose of the consultation will be to feedback on outcomes to date and set out the next stages of the project development. Assist the Council with other awareness raising opportunities such as newsletter content and press releases.
6. Provide project liaison and coordination services including 2 - working party meetings and general advice in response to stakeholder engagement / FoSML.

1.4.5 St Mary's Church Tower Restoration

The Church Tower of St Marys Church in Warwick is a significant and place defining landmark. Sadly, the fabric of the tower has deteriorated significantly and now needs £1.8m of work to restore it. The Council has been asked to contribute as has the Town and County Council. The Town Council is to contribute of £15k but the County Council will not contribute. The contribution is only toward the heritage of the church and not to the running of it as a religious facility. There is no legal impediment to the Council in this respect.

A business plan has been prepared by volunteers to help raise funds for the works. A copy of that business plan is attached at Appendix 1 to this report. The plan has been assessed as is usual for community projects that this Council considers and is rigorous. Clearly construction costs are a challenge for all projects, but this Council's exposure can be limited to the sum it is prepared to contribute only. It is suggested that a contribution of £100k over 2 years is meaningful and is of a similar scale as the contribution made toward the successful Lottery bid for the Lord Leycester Hospital.

1.4.6 Sustrans phase 2

The Council had previously given support to Sustrans bid to the Department of Transport (DfT) to improve the Lias Line – the old Leamington to Rugby railway line as a footpath and cycleway connecting the existing greenway at Radford Semele to Long Itchington via a new bridge over the Fosse Way and a tunnel under the Offchurch Road that HS2 is to implement next year. The support – advice and £50k helped to lever in almost £3m. Sustrans are bidding for an additional £800,000 or so to improve the old railway line spur to Draycote Water. This proposal will also include acquiring a short but important section of the old line. If successful it will enable residents to cycle off road all the way from Leamington to Draycote Water. When connected to the cycling facilities planned elsewhere in Leamington and Warwick this will represent a significant leisure facility for local people.

2 Alternative Options available to Cabinet

- 2.1 The Cabinet could decide to vary or to not agree the proposals, but the proposals put forward are a reasonable cost if the items are to be undertaken and the items support the Council's ambitions.

3 Consultation and Member's comments

- 3.1 Some of these items have come via the Leamington Transformation Board and or the Creative Quarter Project Board which are populated by Members. Some community groups have made requests to the Council.

4 Implications of the proposal

4.1 Legal/Human Rights Implications

- 4.1.1 There are no legal or human rights implications of the proposals.

4.2 Financial

- 4.2.1 As set out in this report the proposals can be funded from the Community Project Reserve but provision for £100k for 23/24 only will be needed. This will have the result of there needing additional savings required of an equivalent scale.

4.3 Council Plan

- 4.3.1 **People - Health, Homes, Communities** – This proposal will make a direct contribution to supporting health and well-being, community cohesion and activity and in some case housing provision.

- 4.3.2 **Money – Infrastructure, Enterprise, and Economy** – The proposals will make a very significant contribution toward improving the infrastructure of the District, its town centres and support for enterprise.

- 4.3.3 **Services – Green, Clean, Safe** – The proposals will contribute toward open space improvements and toward improvements in the quality of the environment generally.

4.4 Environmental/Climate Change Implications

- 4.4.1 The proposals would all have a positive impact in terms of encouraging a more active lifestyle, improving open spaces and town centres.

4.5 Analysis of the effects on Equality

- 4.5.1 No effects on equality.

4.6 Data Protection

- 4.6.1 There are no data protection implications of the proposal.

4.7 Health and Wellbeing

- 4.7.1 The proposals all aim to improve the quality of life in the District and to that end they will all contribute to the health and well being of the local community. The Sustrans proposal if successful will have a particular benefit as it will encourage safe off-road cycling opportunities for families. The Christchurch Gardens proposal could help improve a valuable open space in the centre of Leamington.

5 Risk Assessment

- 5.1 The risks involved in these proposals are whether the costs involved are realistic for the task and whether where commissions are proposed that there is the capacity to meet the Council's needs. On the cost side for construction projects as the Council is not the direct project owner its financial contribution can be limited to what it agrees to contribute. On the Commissioning aspect the budgets identified have been soft market tested to suggest that they are reasonable.

6 Conclusion/Reasons for the Recommendation

- 6.1

Background papers: None

Supporting documents: None.

Please complete and submit to Democratic Services with draft report

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|---|--|---|
| Committee/Date | 20.04.2022 | |
| Title of report | Creative Quarter / Future High Streets Fund – Old Post Office / Former Stoneleigh Arms | |
| Consultations undertaken | | |
| Consultee *required | Date | Details of consultation /comments received |
| Ward Member(s) | | |
| Portfolio Holder WDC & SDC * | | |
| Financial Services * | | |
| Legal Services * | | |
| Other Services | | |
| Chief Executive(s) | | |
| Head of Service(s) | | |
| Section 151 Officer | | |
| Monitoring Officer | | |
| CMT (WDC) | | |
| Leadership Co-ordination Group (WDC) | | |
| Other organisations | | |
| Final decision by this Committee or rec to another Ctte/Council? | | Recommendation to: Cabinet |
| Contrary to Policy/Budget framework | | No/Yes |
| Does this report contain exempt info/Confidential? If so, which paragraph(s)? | | No |
| Does this report relate to a key decision (referred to in the Cabinet Forward Plan)? | | No |
| Accessibility Checked? | | Yes |