

Report of the Corporate Director of Economy and Place

Improving York's Green Spaces

Summary

1. This report seeks approval for phase 1 of the *Improving York Green Spaces Community Project*.

Recommendations

2. The Executive Member is asked to approve funding for those schemes identified in paragraph 9.

Reason: To harness the talents and energies of the community and to support more sustainable care of the city's green spaces.

Background

3. At the Decision Session of the Executive Member for Economic Development & Community Engagement, in consultation with the Executive Members for Environment, and Culture, Leisure & Tourism, on 10 May 2016, approval was given to use £50k per annum for two years, 2016-18 to develop new volunteering opportunities via voluntary sector organisations.
4. Two areas were identified where this funding might most effectively be used:
 - a) By using the expertise of the sector to encourage and to support volunteering – to reach new groups and organisations who have not traditionally been involved
 - b) By targeting those wards where the affects of previous budget reductions have been greatest – those in which the city's main parks and gardens are located
5. York CVS were approached to champion this initiative, given their wide reach within the voluntary sector. They were asked to:
 - Promote the availability of the funding

- Undertake consultation to better understand community needs and opportunities
- Approach individual organisations to promote take up of the scheme
- Convene voluntary sector organisations through workshops to generate ideas and encourage innovation and collaboration
- Invite bids from individual organisations or consortia
- Assessing expressions of interest received and making recommendations to the Council
- Manage the funding on behalf of the Council

The possibility was also left open that CVS would also play a day to day delivery and coordination role if other appropriate voluntary organisations, qualified to do this, did not come forward; however, this has not proved necessary on the basis of the bids received.

6. CVS launched the scheme under the banner of Growing Green Spaces <http://www.yorkcvs.org.uk/growing-green-spaces/>.
7. Available funding available was specifically aimed towards five sites:
 - Rowntree Park
 - West Bank Park
 - Glen Gardens
 - Hull Road Park
 - Clarence Gardens
8. CVS have done a significant piece of work in bringing this project to life; given the complexity of the project and the nature of the consultation required it has taken longer to bring to fruition than originally envisaged. Under the circumstances it is proposed to extend the scheme to the end of March 2019.

Proposals

9. The following proposals have been received and are recommended by CVS for acceptance:
 - a) Rowntree Park: this bid is lead by the Friends of Rowntree Park (FRP) who want both to increase their care of the existing shrub / herbaceous borders and to develop new garden features which will widen the appeal of the Park and show what the community can do. Partners in this bid include:

- YUMI Intercultural York who will collaborate with FRP to engage people from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities, run events, advise on gardening and volunteering.
- Brunswick Organic Nursery who will design and install raised beds.
- York Cares who will provide work-place volunteers

Future sustainability will be demonstrated by FRP having increased levels of experience, knowledge and skills across both horticulture and managing volunteers. The number and variety of volunteers working in the park will have increased thus ensuring that work undertaken can be sustained and have scope to take on more aspects of the park. Funding proposed: £17,150.

- b) West Bank Park: A bid by Blueberry Academy with the support of the Friends of West Bank Park. The project will be undertaken by the Blueberry Academy Gardening Team, which provides valuable work experience for trainees largely aged 18 to 24 with learning difficulties. The proposal is to create a sensory garden in the Park which will become an ongoing long term base from which the Academy can operate. Once the core project is up and running volunteers will be able to carry out further work in the park. Funding proposed: £6,000.
- c) Glen Gardens: A bid by Therapeutic Art and Play Therapy Yorkshire (TAPTY) with the support of the Friends of Glen Gardens and Refuge Action York (RAY). The project will see the group take over an existing shrub / herbaceous border removing it from council day to day care. RAY will be the main link to the volunteers, who will be supported through weekly gardening sessions. Future sustainability is proposed through aligning the project with the work on the Friends of Glen Gardens. Funding proposed: £6,000.
- d) Hull Road Park: A bid by The Conservation Volunteers (TCV) with potential support from York Flourish and Men's Shed. The project will see TCV provide weekly supported sessions with volunteers undertaking a range of horticultural and non horticultural tasks. TCV have already secured a small amount of Ward funding to pilot this idea during the spring and to run a *Ways to Wellbeing* programme in the area.

The new funding will enable TCV to run sessions at times which suit volunteers (outside of TCV's normal 9am to 4pm programme), so expanding the volunteer base. Carecent, who work with the homeless community in York along with other vulnerable people have already expressed an interest in signposting volunteers to this project. The project will focus on (but will not be restricted to) the care of a 100m long rockery, which will make a significant difference to the parks appearance.

Future sustainability is proposed through aligning the project with the work to other groups in the park, through the creation of a "Friends of" group and by giving volunteers the confidence and skills such that they can be signed up as an independent council volunteer if necessary. Funding proposed: £25,200.

- e) Clarence Gardens: This site is in most need of increased local community input and / or adoption by a city wide group. CVS and TCV will work together to achieve this. TCV will bring to the project the same approach and source of volunteers as the Hull Road Park scheme; CVS will continue to use their connects in the heath, social care and communities sectors to find possible long term partners.

The work programme will focus on schemes which reduce future maintenance obligations, improve the visual appearance of the Gardens and be better for wildlife. Funding proposed: £12,660.

10. All schemes are for two years ending March 2019. Release of 2018-19 funding will depend on satisfactory progress being made during 2017-18.

Consultation

11. As part of developing their promotion programme for the initiative CVS undertook site visits and met key stakeholder e.g. Friends of groups. Once the initiative was launched those organisations who submitted an expression of interested were invited to face to face meetings at Priory Street. All applicants consulted with council staff as they developed their expressions of interest.

12. After the closing date expression of interested were examined by CVS and Operations Manager Public Realm (Strategy and Contracts). This resulted in revised submission being submitted by TCV for a package of work limited to Hull Road Park and Clarence Gardens.

Options

13. Two options are available:
- a. To accept the proposals listed in a) to e) in paragraph 9.
 - b. Not to pursue this idea further.
14. Option a) will help to ensure that the green spaces continue to meet the aspiration set out at the Executive Member meeting 10th May 2016, namely that green spaces:
- Are of a high quality and, visually appealing,
 - Are clean and tidy,
 - Provide a range of volunteering events and activities involving local communities; and
 - Rowntree Park, West Bank Park, Glen Gardens and Clarence Gardens are maintained to Green Flag standard and Hull Road Park is assisted towards meeting the standard.

This is the option recommended by officers.

Future development

15. The funding allocated to the schemes set out in paragraph 9 above amounts to £67,010. It is suggested that the remaining funding is targeted at projects on sites where there remains on-going costs for the council but where there is currently this little or no community activity e.g. Rawcliffe Lake, North Street Gardens, Monk Bridge Gardens.
16. It is proposed that £12,500 is allocated to CVS. This will cover:
- The work that CVS has undertaken to date
 - Ongoing contact with the funded schemes, offering support for organisational development where needed, monitoring outcomes and reporting back to the Council
 - Seeking new partners and projects to deliver on the priorities set out in paragraph 15
17. It is proposed that the remaining £20,490 is retained to be allocated to further schemes to be developed during this second phase.

Council Plan

18. The option proposed in this report is in line with the Council Plan priorities that ensure valued community facilities are protected and the Council works with other organisations to deliver the best services for residents.

Implications

19. **Financial:** Funding for the above projects will met from the £100k allocated to this initiative at the Decision Session of the Executive Member for Economic Development & Community Engagement on 10 May 2016.

Equalities

20. The projects proposed offer a wide range of volunteering opportunities will enable many sectors of society to take part in the care of the city's green spaces.

Legal

21. There are no human resources, legal, crime and disorder, IT, property or other implications arising from this report.

Risk Management

22. In compliance with the council's risk management strategy the main risks that have been identified with the proposals contained in this report are that the task group fails to establish a new management model for the service. This may damage the council's reputation. Level of risk is assessed as "Very Low". This means that periodic monitoring is required of the operation of the new arrangements.

Background Papers:

CVS – <http://www.yorkcvs.org.uk/growing-green-spaces/>

Expressions of Interest held by report Author.

Annex 1 – Project organisations

Contact Details

Author:	Chief Officer responsible for the report:		
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	Report Approved	✓	Date 04.04.17
Specialist Implications: None			
Wards Affected:		All	✓