

**Decision Session - Cabinet Member for
Leisure, Culture and Social Inclusion**

13 March 2012

Report of the Assistant Director (Communities and Culture)

St Nicholas Fields Funding Agreement

Summary

1. This report is brought to the Cabinet Member to seek approval for a three year funding agreement to 31.3.2015 with the Friends of St Nicholas Fields for the management, upkeep and animation of the St Nicholas Fields Local Nature Reserve.

Background

2. St Nicholas Fields is owned by the City of York Council and has been leased to the Friends of St Nicholas Fields' since the mid 1990's. During that time the organisation has built an environment centre, developed the site to meet Local Nature Reserve standards, and in 2010 they were the first community organisation in York to gain the Community Green Flag Award. A success they repeated again in 2011.
3. In managing the site the Friends have two roles – day to day up keep – enabling York residents to have year round access to the 24 acres of green space; and, to provide or facilitate an environmental education programme covering environmental and conservation issues. In return the Friends have received funding from the Council; most recently through a three year service level agreement which ends on 31.3.2012. Under the agreement the Friends were paid £26,100 per annum
4. The Friends have a 25 year lease on the site which is due to be increased to 99 years in 2012. This will give the group greater security and to enable them to fund raise from a stronger position.

Funding offer

5. It is proposed to offer the Friends:
 - a three year agreement from 1.4.2012 to 31.3.2015

- a payment of £13,050 for the first six months
 - a payment of £11,983 for each of the following six month periods
6. This represents a cut in the payments of 8% per annum which is in line with changes to other recipients of Council grants. The impact of this is delayed for six months until October 2012.
7. In return for the grant Friends of St Nicholas Fields will
- Operate the York Environment Centre for the benefit of York residents
 - Undertake landscape maintenance and development projects to ensure the site meets the Community Green Flag award (or any replacement) standards
 - Provide a programme of community activities designed to encourage an understanding and use of the site including conversation work, educational activities, maintenance tasks and guided walks
 - Provide a range of learning opportunities for the community from York Environment Centre
 - Contribute to wider Council green space priorities for example in Bloom, Tremendous and local food production
8. The tasks and action required of the Friends are very similar to those contained in the preceding agreements. Where new priorities have been added the Friends have already been supporting or contributing to them outside of the formal agreement. In support of these requirements there are a series of grant conditions which are provided in Annex 1.

Consultation

9. The Chief Executive of the Friends of St Nicolas Fields has been briefed on the process and prospects of securing a new three year funding agreement. This included discussion about the likely funding available to support the management of this site.

Options

10. The options available to the Cabinet Member are:
- Option 1: Agree to the proposals set out in Paragraphs 5, 7 and 8.

Option 2: To offer a different level of funding to that proposed in Paragraph 5.

Option 3: Suggest further and/or alternative requirements to those set out Paragraphs 7 and 8.

Analysis

11. Option 1 is recommended because this continues to provide support for the maintenance of the site, which in turn provides a base for the wider activities and opportunities provided by the Friends. Option 2 is not recommended as this may create greater financial uncertainty for the organisation and would also be out of line with others offers being made to the third sector. Option 3 is possible but would need further discussion with the organisation to check their capacity and ability to provide more or different services.

Council Plan

12. The actions set out in the report contribute to the following corporate priorities as set out in the Council Plan 2011-15.
 - Building stronger communities - by encouraging and involving residents and users in green space design and management. And, by supporting the voluntary sector and creating volunteering opportunities.
 - Protecting the environment by enhancing green space for public, wildlife and habitat benefit and making spaces more accessible.

Implications

13. **Financial** – The proposed 8% reduction in funding will contribute to the directorate savings requirement and provide financial stability for the Friends of St Nicholas Fields over the next three year period.
14. **Legal and Property** - Where specific projects have property implications e.g. lease or lettings Legal and Property Services will be involved in any arrangements.
15. **Equalities** – An equality impact assessment will be undertaken prior to the formal offer of funding.
16. There are no Human Resources, Crime and Disorder, or Information Technology implications arising from this report

Risk Management

17. Failure to continue support the Friends of St Nicholas Fields could result in the Council having to take on the day to day management and upkeep of the site. This would be an additional burden on the Communities and Neighbourhoods staff resources. It is very doubtful if the same level care could be achieved due to the amount of voluntary labour and support that the Friends draw in.

Recommendation

18. The Cabinet Member is asked to approve Option 1 – to offer the Friends of St Nicolas Fields a three year funding agreement as set out in Paragraphs 5, 7 and 8 for the management of St Nicholas Fields Local Nature Reserve.

Reason: To meet the ambitions of the Council Plan to support communities managing their own green spaces.

Contact Details

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	Report Approved	✓	Date	1.3.12	
Specialist Implications Officer(s): N/A					
Wards Affected:				All	✓
For further information please contact the author of the report					

Background Papers: None.

See www.stnicksfields.org.uk for information about the site and the Friends activities

Annex 1 – Grant Conditions

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- The grant will be used only for the purpose stated in the application. If at any time you wish to use the grant for a purpose other than stated you must gain approval from City of York Council.
- If the organisation is found to falsify any information it will result in all or part of the funds being withdrawn by City of York Council.
- Should the organisation disband during the grant period, then City of York Council may ask for all or a proportion of the monies to be paid back.
- The organisation shall be responsible for ensuring it complies with all statutory and legal obligations (e.g. health and safety, licensing, insurance, building regulations, planning consents, equalities) applicable to the activities funded by the grant.
- The organisation shall indemnify the City of York Council in respect of claims arising out of the provision of the activity funded by the grant, with the level of the indemnity being no less than five million pounds. Copies of policy documents must be made available on request.
- The organisation will acknowledge the financial support of the City of York Council in all communications with the media. The City of York Council logo, and any other Council logo as appropriate, must be used on all printed material (e.g. posters, flyers and programmes) and online.
- The organisation will ensure that staff, visitors or volunteers who work directly with children and vulnerable adults must have an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check. CRB checks should be received and confirmed as satisfactory prior to any work being undertaken.
- Those whose role does not generally involve direct contact with children or vulnerable adults, but who may be alone unsupervised with children or vulnerable adults, must have a Standard CRB check. For more information www.crb.gov.uk

- Provision must be made for up to date accounts to be kept by the organisation, and for those accounts to be audited annually by a competent person independent of the organisation.
- Where there is a breach of any of the conditions the City of York Council reserves the right to claim back any grant aid.
- Organisations must make arrangements for performance monitoring and evaluation of the activities funded by the grant and submit monitoring reports as prescribed by the Council's client officer.