

Report of the Assistant Director (Culture, Communities & Public Realm)

## **West Bank Park Heritage Centre and Community Café Project**

### **Summary**

1. This report asks the Cabinet Member to approve a bid to the Nesta *Rethinking Parks* programme for the West Bank Park. The project will look at future parks management using the heritage centre and community café project as a starting point.

### **Background**

2. Nesta (National Endowment for Science Technology and the Arts), in partnership with the Big Lottery Fund and the Heritage Lottery Fund, have made available £1m to support between 8 and 15 exemplar projects. Projects must be capable of being used as role models for future parks management across the country and internationally through their *Rethinking Parks* programme. Specifically, Nesta are looking for bold and innovative ways to use, manage and make the most of the UK's public parks.
3. Nesta believe there will be four themes of innovation (these are not mutually exclusive):
  - Support changes to parks management and maintenance systems - including potential changes to maintenance regimes, restructuring contracts and maximising the productivity of particular landscapes.
  - Encourage new organisational structures and partnerships that can adopt more locally focused and collaborative approaches to the long-term care of parks.
  - Identify more diverse sources of funding and resources to supplement those from local councils and to increase the variety of uses and activities that parks may be used for.
  - Explore new uses and activities within parks from carbon capture to concerts and more.
4. The timetable for bidding for this fund is very tight; whilst this opportunity has been known about since November 2013 it was only in late January that the “rules” for bidding were announced.

The award is a 2 stage process. Stage 1 expressions of interested have to be in by 28<sup>th</sup> February. If successful, organisations will be invited to refine the bid and submit a stage 2 application in late March 2014.

5. Bids can be for up to £100k plus in kind professional support and mentoring. Between 8 and 15 bids are likely to be accepted. The funding will become available in July this year and has to be used within 18 months.

### **Why West Bank Park?**

6. In July 2013 a public meeting was held in Holgate with a view to forming a community group with the ambition of creating a heritage centre and community café to celebrate the work of James Backhouse and create a community space in West Bank Park. Following that meeting an informal group of local residents, businesses and interested parties was established and a period of further exploration of ideas and options took place. See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N3Ha1I7PBwE>. Throughout this period the Council has been supporting the group.
7. In January 2014 this group agreed to become a constituted body under the name of West Bank Park Heritage Project with the initial aims being to explore and develop the sustainability and progression of West Bank Park through its Backhouse heritage and amenities, to benefit park users, local residents and the wider community.
8. In order to take advantage of the opportunity that Nesta have created, the original thinking behind the reuse of 14 New Lane as a heritage centre / community café has been expanded. Discussions with the Chair of the group and the wider committee have confirmed support for a joint bid with the Council which includes:
  - looking at the management of the park as a whole entity including new community management structures,
  - exploited the Park's rich heritage through a series of products and programmes,
  - exploring relocating assets and the development of new attractions within the park,
  - exploring what community use and income generating possibilities 14 New Lane offers, either in its current form, or if rebuilt and extended, and,
  - using the above to fund the future care and development of the whole site.

9. West Bank Park was the family home of James Backhouse a 19<sup>th</sup> century botanist, nursery owner and Quaker missionary who travelled extensively throughout Australia, Mauritius and South Africa. Backhouse Nurseries, which stretched from the Park to Acomb, were at the time one of the most significant nursery sites in the north of England. They became renowned as suppliers of alpine plants, rock gardens and for the introduction of species new to English horticulture. James Backhouse is better known in Australia than England which has given rise to the opportunity for international cooperation on this project with the University of Tasmania.
10. The bid will be to seek funding and in kind professional support to develop a business and development plan through community consultation which utilises this heritage to generate the income to self-finance the running of the park. A successful bid would also create a template which could be used at other Council parks and open spaces where increased community management and care is beginning to materialise under the Council's "Smarter" agenda for example at Hull Road Park.

### **Council Plan**

11. The proposal responds to two Council Plan priorities:
  - Build strong communities - where active and self-reliant communities really have a say in local issues and where everyone feels they belong
  - Protect the environment - York has an outstanding built and natural environment and world class heritage. These star qualities need to be used to attract further investment and lasting growth, without compromising what makes the city such a beautiful place

### **Implications**

#### **Finance:**

12. If the project is accepted by Nesta as one of their national schemes it would close down other immediate options for reusing 14 New Lane e.g. redevelopment for social housing or realising a capital asset.
13. Subject to the outcome of the development plan exercise the ambition is to create new income streams which over a number of years would replace council funding for the site.

At present the site costs in the region of £70k per annum to upkeep. In addition there is ongoing capital required for the upkeep of paths, buildings, play grounds and such like.

14. A discussion paper on the bid has been presented to the Corporate Asset Board earlier in February which gave their backing to the bid.

**Equalities:**

15. A key objective of the bid will be to ensure that the site remains accessible to all and is more accessible to all communities of identity. The Friends of the West Bank Park have been updated on this proposal and are supportive of it.

**Property:**

16. If the bid is successful then a long term lease of 14 New Lane and surrounding areas of the park to a suitable community group or organisation will be necessary. Before this is agreed approval of the heads of terms will be sought from the Cabinet Member.
17. There are no Legal, Highways, Human Resources, Crime and Disorder, Information Technology implications arising from this report.

**Risk Management**

18. In compliance with the Council's risk management strategy there are no risks associated with the recommendations of this report.

**Recommendations**

19. The Cabinet Member is asked to approve a bid to the Nesta *Rethinking Parks* programme for the West Bank Park based around the community café and heritage centre project.

Reason: To seek funding for business planning and development work to improve facilities and increase community management of the park.

**Annexes:** None

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**Report Approved**  **Date** 12.2.14.

**Wards Affected – Holgate**

**For further information please contact the author of the report**

**Background Papers:**

<http://www.nesta.org.uk/project/rethinking-parks>