

Minutes

of a meeting of the

Community Grants

Panel



held on Thursday, 29 February 2024
at 9.30 am in Meeting Room 1, Abbey
House, Abbey Close, Abingdon,
OX14 3JE

Open to the public, including the press

Present in the meeting room:

Councillors: Tony Worgan (Chair), Ken Arlett, Mike Giles, Ali Gordon-Creed, Kate Gregory, Georgina Heritage, Denise Macdonald, and Jo Robb

Officers: Jayne Bolton (Community Wellbeing Manager), Lynsey Green (Community Enablement Officer), Alison Hamilton (Community Enablement Officer), Tim Oruye (Head of Policy & Programmes), Cheryl Reeves (Community Enablement Team Leader), Ben Silverthorne (Trainee Democratic and Electoral Services Officer), Madeline Swaine (Community Enablement Officer), and Darius Zarazel (Democratic Services Officer)

20 Chair's announcements

The chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, outlined the procedure to be followed and advised on emergency evacuation arrangements.

21 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence from Councillor David Bretherton.

22 Minutes

RESOLVED: to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 9 February 2023 as a correct record and agree that the Chair sign these as such.

23 Declarations of interest

Councillor Ken Arlett declared that he used to be a Henley-on-Thames Town Councillor, was a trustee of the River and Rowing Museum Foundation until May 2023, and had been the Henley Town Football Club president in the past. However, as he was no longer in those positions and had no involvement in any of the applications from those organisations, he had no interest to declare and so would remain on the panel to discuss and vote on the applications.

Councillor Jo Robb declared that she had previously approved a grant for SHEDQUARTERS in her capacity as a member of the panel. However, as this was not a conflict of interest, she would remain on the panel to discuss and vote on the applications.

24 Urgent business

There was no urgent business.

25 Public participation

A list showing members of the public who had registered to speak had been sent to the panel prior to the meeting.

26 South Oxfordshire Capital Grant Scheme 2023/24

The panel reviewed and noted the submitted grant applications and received representations from supporters of the following applications:

Henley-on-Thames Town Council for Mill Meadows Adventure Playground

Sheridan Jacklin-Edward, representative from Henley-on-Thames Town Council, spoke in support of the application.

The panel asked the representative about biodiversity net-gain, and if the applicants were looking to get any net gain either on the site or externally. In response, the representative indicated that there was very little existing planting and that, as they were developing a planting scheme, there would be some biodiversity net gain on site.

On a question about if the application included inclusive playground equipment, the representative noted that several pieces of inclusive equipment was proposed, including a cradle swing and netting for the slide.

The representative also noted that cost was a factor as to why neither a sand pit nor any water elements were being proposed, although they noted that an existing water fountain was being targeted to be placed about 100 metres from the site.

The panel agreed to note the application of Henley-on-Thames Town Council.

Aston Rowant Parish Council for play area upgrade and new equipment

Councillor Matthew Day and Laura Purse, representatives from Aston Rowant Parish Council, spoke in support of the application.

The panel discussed the potential for more natural element, such as tree planting, to be included in the scheme, but overall agreed that the application was needed for the local community.

Members noted the loss of the swings and that were being replaced by both a baby and large basket swing, and that this could potentially impact certain groups in the community, such as teenage girls.

Also, about a question on if there were any drinking fountains nearby, the representative confirmed there were taps nearby and they accepted the comments that a dedicated drinking tap could be beneficial.

The panel agreed to note the application of Aston Rowant Parish Council.

River and Rowing Museum Foundation for Ratty's Refuge Reimagined

Steve O'Connor, representative from the River and Rowing Museum Foundation, spoke in support of the application.

The panel asked about the financial position of the museum, noting specifically that it ran an annual deficit of £0.5m per year. In response, the representative for the application informed the committee that the recent losses were due to the museum being closed, but that they had a strategy to breakeven within three years. Elements of the strategy included reducing their energy consumption and promoting themselves more to the wider community and volunteer groups.

On a question about planting and biodiversity, the representative discussed their site plan which included increasing wildflower use. However, the representative did note that turf was important for functional use by the museum but confirmed that it would not be astroturf.

The panel agreed to note the application of the River and Rowing Museum Foundation.

South Moreton Parish Council for South Moreton Playground Enhancement

Lucy Dalby, representative from South Moreton Parish Council, spoke in support of the application.

The panel asked if the application was for replacing specific playground equipment that was in disrepair, and the representative confirmed that this was the case as the equipment was mainly wood and had rotted away in certain places over time.

Members asked about if the application included space for girls and the representative clarified that they were aware of the Make Space for Girls scheme but that they observed that most of the playground was aimed at younger children. They also confirmed to the panel that they would make gradual improvements to the site, such as with wildflower planting, as it could be afforded.

In response to a question about tree planting, the representative indicated that a schedule would be put in place to monitor the trees and ensure they would be successful.

On the usage of the playground, the representative indicated that it was a community asset that people wanted to see become more usable, as mentioned in a community led plan.

The panel agreed to note the application of South Moreton Parish Council.

Kidmore End and Sonning Common Parochial Church Council for roof replacement and energy efficiency measures.

Nick Room, representative from Kidmore End and Sonning Common Parochial Church Council, spoke in support of the application.

The panel asked about if other faith groups would be allowed to rent the space. In response, the representative confirmed that the hall was open to everyone subject to them giving due respect to the building, and that the organisations initial response to the council was not correct to indicate the hall was only open to certain faith groups.

On a question about why there were no quotations for the project the representative indicated that they would go to quote after gaining planning permission and that the true cost of the scheme would not be known until after the roof had been taken off, but he confirmed that they had contingencies to cope with any unexpected costs.

Members asked about the energy efficiency of the building and noted that an energy audit was completed in November 2023.

The panel agreed to note the application of Kidmore End and Sonning Common Parochial Church Council.

Chinnor Village Centre for keeping the Lights On-Upgrade to LED Lights

Nick Moore, representative from Chinnor Village Centre, spoke in support of the application.

The panel asked the representative about if the application was retrospective and he confirmed that it was not retrospective, just that the application was phased, and the grant would help them complete the project.

On a question about why the organisation needed a grant with such a large amount of funds in their bank and the representative clarified that they had to liquidate their investments. He did confirm to the panel however, that outside of the years affected by the COVID pandemic, the organisation usually ran a small surplus and the primary source of income was from their coffee shop and meeting room hire fees.

The representative also clarified that kitchen appliances were mentioned in the report but were not part of the bid for grants.

The panel agreed to note the application of Chinnor Village Centre.

Parochial Church Council North Moreton for Safe and More Efficient Use of Village Hall

Jeremy Howland and Jo Nickless, representatives from Parochial Church Council of North Moreton, spoke in support of the application.

In response to a question about if the site was listed, the representative for the application confirmed that it was not, but that they were going to put in an application for permitted development although they believed it might not be required. As the site was in a conservation area, they also confirmed to the panel that the window replacement would be like for like and that the only visual difference in the building would be with the front door.

On the timeframe of the project, the representative was hopeful of completion by Summer 2024.

The panel agreed to note the application of the Parochial Church Council of North Moreton.

South Stoke Community Shop for Community Shop Rebuild Project

Andrew Harden-Sweetnam, Andrew Scrivenor, and Geoff Ward, representatives from South Stoke Community Shop, spoke in support of the application.

The panel asked the representatives about the finances for the project, specifically that the total project cost was £392,000 and that there was a £35,000 funding gap for the completion of the first part of the project, the making of the watertight shell. In response, the representative for the application highlighted to the panel that they had pledges of £10,000 from the local community, meaning only £25,000 was needed, and that they have applied for additional funding and would use the skills of local residents to cut down on costs. The representative also indicated that they had four quotes from separate contractors willing to take the project in the current financial.

When asked about what would happen if the applicants failed to secure enough funding for phase two of the project, the fitting out of the watertight shell, the representative indicated that they could utilise the existing shops assets into the new facility, but that their goal was for a longer-term solution.

In response to a question about if the development would be using natural building materials, the representative confirmed there they were committee to a A+ Building Research Establishment's Environmental Assessment Method (BREEAM) assessment and that the materials would be sustainable.

On the land, the representatives indicated that they had a rolling monthly lease. The panel suggested that they secure a 50-year lease and the representative highlighted that they were taking legal advice on this but that there should be no constraints on them securing this.

Members inquired into the funding for the continued maintenance of the building and were satisfied that the business would run a marginal surplus which would cover maintenance and that the addition of a café would also help with this.

The panel agreed to note the application of South Stoke Community Shop.

Tetsworth Parish Council for play area surface replacement

Paul Carr, representative from Tetsworth Parish Council, spoke in support of the application.

The panel asked the representative about the lifespan of the surface and noted that it was guaranteed for five years but that maintenance afterwards that point would be needed to ensure it remained in good condition.

The panel asked for clarification about the amount of funding that the applicants had requested as the representative for the application asked for £25,000 but that they had put £35,000 in their application. The representative explained they had £26,391 from Community Infrastructure Levy funds, and £9,500 earmarked for maintenance and repairs, that could be used to contribute towards covering the gap in project costs. However, the council had other projects allocated so would need a grant to complete this project.

The panel agreed to note the application of Tetsworth Parish Council.

SHEDQUARTERS for SHEDquarters workshop

Clive Mills, representative from SHEDQUARTERS, spoke in support of the application.

The panel asked about the recommendations made in the officer's report, for an energy audit and a change of width of the access ramp to make it more accessible. In response, the representative confirmed that they would be able to complete an energy audit once the units were finished and that they took onboard the point about the access ramp width.

On a question about how the applicants calculated the number of people that would benefit from the project, the application highlighted that they had 50 members and that they could accommodate about 10 to 12 people per sessions, and that these numbers were the ones used in their application.

In response to a question about land ownership, the representative indicated that they were the trustee of the Peppard war memorial hall, a lease had been secured for 25 years, and that they had secured planning permission for their project in 2022.

The panel agreed to note the application of SHEDQUARTERS.

1st Goring Heath Scout Group for scout hut window replacement and access ramp project

Keith Baty, representative from 1st Goring Heath Scout Group, spoke in support of the application, with support from Hanna Ferguson and Helen Baker.

The panel asked about the location of the Oratory prep school and if they had inquired into securing funding from them. In response, the representative confirmed that they had not but were looking into other sources. She also indicated that the group did have enough reserves to complete the facility if they failed to receive grant funding.

On a question about if the applicants had plans to further insulate the building, the representative confirmed to the panel that the costs of doing so was prohibitively high.

The panel agreed to note the application of 1st Goring Heath Scout Group.

Didcot District Guide Association for refurbishment of our hall

During this item, the meeting length had reached almost two and a half hours. In accordance with the council's Constitution, the panel agreed to extend the meeting in order to finish the remaining items.

Sally Hillingham, representative from the Didcot District Guide Association, spoke in support of the application and Councillor Ian Snowdon also supported the application.

The panel asked about what was included in the application and the representative indicated that they had plans to repair the hall and include all the equipment that would be needed for their users. The representative also indicated that they plan to complete the works within eight weeks, if given funding.

The representative informed the panel that they had applied for other funding but that this was not likely to be secured in the immediate term, but that she had access to £10,000 from a family member to cover any shortfall.

Members queried the community wellbeing score as the officer indicated that there was no evidence of collaboration with other organisations. In response the representative informed the panel that the hall had been used by a number of other organisations and that, before the hall became unusable, they were in conversations about using it as a warm space for the homeless during the day along with a few other groups, such as the WI and Sustainable Didcot.

The panel agreed to note the application of Didcot District Guide Association.

Berinsfield Parish council for new high pedestal slide

Members inquired into the amount of funds that Berinsfield Parish Council had in the bank and if that could affect eligibility and in response the officers confirmed that they assessed applications based on the criteria, and that they were eligible.

The panel noted that the council had not proactively engaged with the community on their proposal, nor issued a consultation to see if the project met any community need.

The panel received and noted the application of Berinsfield Parish Council.

Thame Town Cricket Club Limited for Solar Panels controls housing

At this point, Councillor Kate Gregory declared that she had given a grant to Thame Town Cricket Club in her capacity as county councillor. However, as she did not have a conflict of interest, she remained on the panel to discuss and vote on the application.

When asked about what the application was requesting, officers confirmed that it was for the housing for the batteries for the solar panels on the club house.

The panel received and noted the application of Thame Town Cricket Club Limited.

St Leonard's Parochial Church Council for St Leonard's church bells restoration

Members asked the officer about if the application would benefit the wider community and they confirmed that this impact of the application had been assessed and was accounted for in their scoring.

The panel received and noted the application of St Leonard's Parochial Church Council.

Henley Town Football Club for facility for improvements, upgrade and maintenance. Mower and machinery and equipment storage

Members asked about the funding shortfall for the project and the officers advised that no further information had been provided to them about that.

The panel received and noted the application of Henley Town Football Club.

The first period of the meeting closed at 12.15pm.

The second period of the meeting began at 1pm. The panel discussed the applications and devised recommendations to be sent to the Cabinet Member for Community Wellbeing about which grant applications should be funded.

Henley-on-Thames Town Council for Mill Meadows Adventure Playground

The panel discussed the projects criteria scores and agreed that the score should be 26 out of 30 and recommended that the requested amount be fully funded.

Aston Rowant Parish Council for play area upgrade and new equipment

Officers noted that, as the applicant confirmed to them that they had secured a contingency of £3,900 after the application, they recommended increasing the finance sustainability score to a six, therefore raising the total score by a point to 25.

The panel discussed the projects criteria scores and agreed that the score should be 25 out of 30, and recommended that the requested amount be fully funded.

River and Rowing Museum Foundation for Ratty's Refuge Reimagined

The panel discussed the projects criteria scores and agreed that the score should be 26 out of 30 and recommended that the requested amount be fully funded.

South Moreton Parish Council for South Moreton Playground Enhancement

On a question about why their community inclusion score was not higher, officers confirmed that for them to reach a higher score, they would need to provide a new facility or increase its capacity as opposed to doing a refurbishment. For a refurbishment, four was the highest score it could be given under the scoring criteria.

The panel discussed the projects criteria scores and agreed that the score should be 21 out of 30 and recommended that the requested amount be fully funded.

Kidmore End and Sonning Common Parochial Church Council for roof replacement and energy efficiency measures.

The panel had concerns about the applicant's access audit and were not totally assured by comments from the representative. However, the panel were satisfied that with a condition on the grant that specified that hiring access would be available for all, they could give the application funding.

The panel discussed the projects criteria scores and agreed that the score should be 19 out of 30, and recommended that 75 per cent of the requested amount be funded with the inclusion of a condition that, before the money is awarded, the applicant provide publicises on their website that the village hall was inclusive and available to hire for people of all diversities, including all faith and non-faith groups.

Chinnor Village Centre for keeping the Lights On-Upgrade to LED Lights

In response to additional evidence provided to officers after the application deadline, they recommended that the financial sustainability score be increased from two to six.

The panel discussed the projects criteria scores and agreed that the score should be 22 out of 30 and recommended that that requested amount be fully funded.

Parochial Church Council North Moreton for Safe and More Efficient Use of Village Hall

The panel discussed the applications action on climate emergency score and noted that this was scored by the council's climate emergency team with all of the latest information available.

The panel discussed the projects criteria scores and agreed that the score should be 19 out of 30 and recommended that 75 per cent of the requested amount be funded.

Berinsfield Parish council for new high pedestal slide

On the community benefit scoring, the panel were concerned to see the lack of evidence provided about a community consultation on the application and the officers confirmed that, in order for the project to achieve a higher score in that area, they would need to provide evidence of a consultation.

The panel agreed with the scoring but emphasised the need for Berinsfield Parish Council to conduct a consultation with the local community on their projects.

The panel discussed the projects criteria scores and agreed that the score should be 17 out of 30 and recommended that 75 per cent of the requested amount be funded.

In addition, the panel recommended to advise the Council for more community engagement and consultation for future grants.

Thame Town Cricket Club Limited for Solar Panels controls housing

Members inquired into the projects community benefit score and were satisfied with the response from officer that the score was based on the benefits gained from the housing of the panels and not the panels themselves which were already present.

The panel discussed the projects criteria scores and agreed that the score should be 16 out of 30 and recommended that, as the entire project was under £10,000, to full fund the project.

South Stoke Community Shop for Community Shop Rebuild Project

The panel inquired into the community need scoring as no numbers were given about its use. In response, Officers noted that the applicant claimed about 500 people would use the shop and that they may get trade by residents passing through the village, and that the existing shop was profitable and operating successfully for 10 years. Due to further information provided about the number of consultations that had occurred, the applicant having completed five village surveys, and as a new café would be created, the panel agreed that the community need score should be raised to a six.

On financial sustainability, the panel agreed to increase their score by a point to two due to the detail they provided around the facilities maintenance.

On the themed criteria, the officers also believed that the score could be increased by one point to five due to the new facility increasing footfall and the café bringing more community and economic wellbeing to the area.

The panel discussed the projects criteria scores and agreed that the score should be 22 out of 30.

Officers noted that the panel would have to consider the level of risk with the project and its funding. A consideration of the grant fund was that the council was happy to be a first funder for an application which could then enable them to secure more funding. It was also noted that time needed to use the grant award could be extended if the applicants needed more time to secure the necessary funds.

The panel discussed the different funding choices available to the panel, including funding just phase one of the project or both phases, and which option entailed more risk. However, the panel noted that the scoring would need to be redone if the project was only funded for phase one as it had currently been done to cover the project as a whole.

The panel agreed to fully fund the requested amount but include a condition where no funds would be released without evidence that the project was fully funded, and that they secure a lease for the land – ideally a lengthy lease of around 50 years.

Tetsworth Parish Council for play area surface replacement

The panel inquired into the point that the applicants were asking for more funding than was needed and the officers clarified the point, informing members that they had included funds earmarked for maintenance.

On a question about why different playground applications had received different community benefit scores, the officers noted that this application had not met the requirement to prioritise a particular priority group, unlike some others. However, the panel believed that the new surface would allow for access from disabled children and so agreed to increase the community benefit score to a six.

The panel discussed the projects criteria scores and agreed that the score should be 19 out of 30 and recommended that 75 per cent of the requested amount be funded.

1st Goring Heath Scout Group for scout hut window replacement and access ramp project

The panel discussed the projects criteria scores and agreed that the score should be 18 out of 30. As the panel believed that the project was valuable for the community and as the total project cost was under £10,000, the panel recommend to fully fund the requested amount.

Didcot District Guide Association for refurbishment of our hall

The panel discussed the point raised by the representative for the application, and how there were plans to establish a warm space in the building during the day, and of their other collaborations with local groups like Sustainability Didcot. Therefore, they agreed to improve the community need score from three to four. In addition, due to the information presented by the representative, the officers suggested increasing the projects community benefit score to five, and the panel agreed with the recommendation.

On financial sustainability, the panel noted that they had secured £10,000 from a family donation and so agreed to increase the score to a four.

Members enquired into if the application had chosen the climate action corporate plan theme to be assessed on, if that would have increased their score. In response the officers confirmed that they spoke to the climate team and believe that the project would have scored three points.

The panel discussed the projects criteria scores and agreed that the score should be 18 out of 30 and recommended that 75 per cent of the requested amount be funded.

St Leonard's Parochial Church Council for St Leonard's church bells restoration

On a question about if officers asked the applicants to consult the community, officers confirmed that they were all provided with the scoring criteria and guided through the application process, and that they had an opportunity to come back with additional evidence to get a revised score.

The panel discussed the projects criteria scores and agreed that the score should be 9 out of 30. Due to the applications score, the panel recommended to not fund the project.

SHEDQUARTERS for SHEDquarters workshop

The panel discussed the projects criteria scores and agreed that the score should be 16 out of 30.

As the panel were satisfied with the merits of the application, and as the total project's costs were under £10,000, the panel recommended to fully fund the requested amount.

Henley Town Football Club for facility for improvements, upgrade and maintenance. Mower and machinery and equipment storage

The panel discussed the projects criteria scores and agreed that the score should be 7 out of 30. Due to the applications score, the panel recommended to not fund the project.

The members discussed the projects scores and noted that the recommended awards for high priority projects (scoring 21 to 30 points) was for them to be fully funded to the requested amount, for medium projects (scoring 15 to 20 points) to receive 75 per cent of the requested amount, and for low priority projects (scoring between 0 and 14 points) to receive no funding. The panel discussed giving funding to the low priority projects but could not justify this within the Council's grants policy.

As the Council's grant scheme was undersubscribed in the financial year 2023/24, the panel considered the applications where the total funding required for the project was under £10,000. As the grant policy allowed for these projects to be fully funded, the panel decided to recommend fully funding the requested amount for the Thame Town Cricket Club, 1st Goring Heath Scout Group, and SHEDQUARTERS applications due to these projects particular merits, benefits to the community, and low project cost.

In addition, the panel discussed the grant scheme itself and made a series of recommendations for its improvement. Specifically, members noted that the criteria for applications from specific group, such as football club, by their nature, may not score high in specific areas. An example given was that a scout hut which may not have wider community benefit, would still have significant benefit to those who use it and was otherwise a good application. In addition, members asked about the weighting applied to each category and why they were all given equal weight. In response, the officers confirmed that this was a result of a series of amendments over the years, but they believed that the scoring was fit for purpose, and that the criteria had been scrutinised by Council. Finally, members also noted that, for the 'action on climate emergency' section, new organisations without a history to base the score on, will receive a low score on this even if the organisation itself was dedicated to taking action on the climate. Officers assured the panel that a review would be conducted into the grant scheme and its scoring and that the panel would be invited to have input into that.

Overall, the panel agreed with the approach and therefore recommended to the Cabinet Member for Community Wellbeing that:

- 1) That the following applications receive full funding of their requested amount:

- Henley-on-Thames Town Council for Mill Meadows Adventure Playground
- Aston Rowant Parish Council for play area upgrade and new equipment.
- River and Rowing Museum Foundation for Ratty's Refuge Reimagined.
- South Moreton Parish Council for South Moreton Playground Enhancement.
- Chinnor Village Centre for keeping the Lights On-Upgrade to LED Lights.
- South Stoke Community Shop for Community Shop Rebuild Project.

2) That the following applications receive 75 per cent funding of their requested amount:

- Kidmore End and Sonning Common Parochial Church Council for roof replacement and energy efficiency measures.
- Parochial Church Council North Moreton for Safe and More Efficient Use of Village Hall.
- Berinsfield Parish council for new high pedestal slide.
- Tetsworth Parish Council for play area surface replacement.
- Didcot District Guide Association for refurbishment of our hall.

3) That the following applications receive full funding of their requested amount as they were justified as important projects for the community that were under £10,000:

- Thame Town Cricket Club Limited for Solar Panels controls housing.
- 1st Goring Heath Scout Group for scout hut window replacement and access ramp project.
- SHEDQUARTERS for SHEDquarters workshop.

4) That the following applications receive no grant funding:

- St Leonard's Parochial Church Council for St Leonard's church bells restoration
- Henley Town Football Club for facility for improvements, upgrade and maintenance. Mower and machinery and equipment storage.

5) That the following improvements to the grants scheme be examined:

- a. If it was appropriate for specific groups (such as sports clubs) to be given low scores in community benefit even though they do benefit those in the community who use the facility.
- b. If each scoring category should be given equal weight to the overall project score.
- c. If new organisations without a history to base climate scores on should be given low scores despite the organisation itself being established to take action on the climate emergency.

The meeting closed at 3.11 pm
