

Subject: **Venetian Waterways and Boating Lake Restoration Scheme**

Report to: Policy & Resources Committee - 10<sup>th</sup> January 2017  
Council – 12<sup>th</sup> January 2017

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#### **SUBJECT MATTER/RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Heritage Lottery Fund is shortly due to make an announcement on the Council's application for funding for the restoration of the Venetian Waterways and Boating Lake. This report outlines the scheme which will bring about the restoration, the plan for making the attraction sustainable and the implications for the Council if the HLF were to make an award. The report recommends that the Council makes an allowance in the Capital Programme to fund the difference between the HLF's potential award and the full cost of the scheme.

#### **1. INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND**

The Venetian Waterways and Boating Lake is a seven acre park, included on the register of historic parks and gardens.

The area is in need of substantial investment to realise its potential and to restore an important heritage asset. The boating lake is drained of water and closed to the public. Reports commissioned by Property Services suggest a figure in the region of £400k to undertake repair to the lake itself given its severe state of dilapidation.

The declining nature of the area, in a prime seafront location, represents a major obstacle in The Council's ambition to attract new visitors to the Borough and to help boost the tourism economy. The Council has therefore taken a pro-active approach by working to secure a substantial contribution from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) to restore the area as a significant heritage asset and attraction.

The funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) would deliver restoration, training and employment opportunities as well as long term management and maintenance. The total cost of the restoration has been assessed at £2,755,564. Following discussion with the HLF about the maximum size of a grant, a bid has been put to them for £1,773,600. This is significantly above the amount that the HLF originally suggested that they would look to award. The Council has previously agreed to make a contribution of £330k, which along with a £100k contribution in-kind and from volunteers, leaves a shortfall of £550k.

In order to help meet this gap and to provide the required match funding, in June 2016, the council submitted a bid to round 4 of the Coastal Communities Fund (CCF) themed around coast and culture. It highlighted the significance of bringing unique cultural assets back into sustainable end use to better support the coastal economy. Unfortunately this application was not successful.

## **2. HERITAGE LOTTERY FUND SCHEME**

The Waterways, which also includes the Boating Lake, is a historic park at the northern end of the seafront. It is registered as grade II on the historic parks and gardens register. The park was created in the 1920's as an unemployment relief program to support veterans of the First World War. Throughout the middle part of the twentieth century the park, its planting and activities were a significant attraction.

Great Yarmouth Borough Council in partnership with Great Yarmouth Preservation Trust successfully achieved a stage one award from the HLF Parks for People Programme, a national scheme aimed at the restoration of historic parks.

### **Parks for People**

Parks for People is a two stage bidding process. The first stage provides the HLF information about the park and why it is significant, why it needs funding and general proposals for restoration and reuse. The application provides information about management of the project, community engagement and how the project complements other work and aspirations at a local, regional and national level.

If a stage 1 application is successful, the applicant is asked to develop the project for a stage 2 application. During stage 2, the applicant is expected to: develop the project in great detail; provide a full specification for restoration; provide a comprehensive program of works and activities; produce a master plan and a conservation plan; undertake full public consultation; and provide enough information for the HLF to understand exactly what will be delivered and how it will be delivered. Importantly it details precise costs.

### Development Study

As part of the stage 1 process the project was awarded £45,000 of HLF funding, matched with £10,000 of GYBC funding, providing £55,000 to develop the project. This funding has been used to appoint a landscape architect and full professional team to undertake the development works. Other work needed to successfully develop the project is being undertaken by officers from Great Yarmouth Borough Council and Great Yarmouth Preservation Trust.

### The Scheme

Council approved a stage two application to be submitted in August 2016, to comply with the HLF deadline. The bid, based on the recommendations from the feasibility phase, were based on the following three areas

#### 1. Restoration

To restore planting based on the original planting scheme, held in the council archive. Original beds now grassed or gravelled over will be reinstated. The original planting scheme was a radical moved away from familiar seaside bedding plant displays and instead concentrated on perennials and annuals used in drifts. The combination of plants and design was considered innovative. The design was exhibited at the 1928 Royal Horticultural Societies, International Exhibition of Garden Design, where it was consider "bold". The intention is to recreate the spirit of this planting and flower beds. This element of the project will also allow for research to fully understand the original scheme and its importance in terms of seaside planting history.

Rusticated thatched shelters, the boating lake, bridges and other structures which contribute so much to the special character of the place will undergo comprehensive repair. The boating lake will be repaired and brought back into operation.

The scope of the work includes a considerable amount of hard landscaping, including bridges, balustrades and paths, together with the significant costs for the boating lake.

A more detailed understanding of the park gained through research during the development stage led to discoveries such as a series of elaborate gardens around the boating lake. Elements such as lighting and increased security will make the park more viable and safer.

Although initially proposed as a two year project, it is now envisaged as a three year project in order to ensure deliverability with some activities and costs going into a fourth year.

## 2. Training

The project presents an enormous opportunity for training and engagement.

Great Yarmouth Preservation Trust has developed a model where projects are delivered by trainees and volunteers under the guidance of experts and professionals (Cemeteries, Hopton Ruined Church). This successful model will be adopted for this project. The benefits are true community engagement and the development of a highly skilled local work force. It allows and enables ownership of the project and the heritage asset by the community.

As with other recent conservation led training initiatives, training is it fundamental to the success of the project and will provide real opportunities

both during and after the project. Opportunities for training are broad and include initial research and survey, landscaping, propagation of plants, gardening and traditional building skills.

It is proposed to provide training and engagement at all levels including schools and colleges, those unemployed, older people and other groups.

Previous training projects have been over-subscribed and it is anticipated that because of the level of interest in heritage as well as the level of interest in gardening, training and volunteering places will be in demand. The main focus of training will be gardening and traditional building skills. This will not only inspire people and generate skills; it will help to develop a skilled workforce.

Work to train people in traditional building skills is already well underway on other HLF supported projects in the town and is beginning to pay dividends in terms of a skilled workforce able to maintain the historic built environment. This project will complement and accentuate that work.

Two full time posts will be created to manage and coordinate the project, as well as manage the experts and professionals needed to provide the training and engagement activities.

### 3. Legacy

A restored park will contribute to the borough council's ambitions to encourage year round cultural tourism and support the local economy. It will also contribute to the seafront heritage offer and will safeguard an important heritage asset.

The skills developed during the project will be put to use maintaining the park into the future. This will be achieved by direct employment using the social

enterprise company owned and set up by Great Yarmouth Preservation Trust to employ those trained on the trust project. Volunteering will continue post project. The business plan submitted to the HLF is based on the intention that the social enterprise company will manage and operate the Waterways and Boating Lake once the scheme is complete.

The benefits of providing opportunities to garden in a town with limited garden space can create a legacy of well-being. The therapeutic benefits of gardening are well documented.

Comprehensive and robust management and maintenance planning and a firm continuing commitment from the Borough Council will ensure the project's success into the future.

### **3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The council has, over recent years, considered a number of options to improve the Boating Lake and Waterways. The Boating Lake is currently derelict due to repair costs. In 2015 the construction services team sought quotes to address remedial repairs to the Boating Lake basin. These quotes ranged from £375,000 - £475,000 and did not address other potential issues with wall damage, existing structures or the wider aesthetics of the Boating Lake. This also did not take into account any works on the Waterways.

Policy & Resources committee previously considered a paper on 26<sup>th</sup> July ahead of the stage 2 application and allocated a capital sum of £330k against a total cost of £2,234,593. However during the development stage of the project, accurate costings have been produced and in order to deliver the full combined scheme of the Waterways and Boating Lake the current cost projection is £2,755,564.

Following ongoing dialogue, the HLF increased the maximum award that the Council could bid for up to from £1,434,593 to £1,773,600. If the HLF were to approve the

award, the existing agreed funding would therefore be as follows;

£1.77m	HLF
£330k	GYBC Capital Contribution
£100k	Volunteer and in kind contribution

This leaves a gap in funding of £552k.

#### Options to Close the Funding Gap

The Council can continue to look for funding, either capital or revenue, from partners and from external funding opportunities to meet the shortfall. The project will be attractive to revenue grant funders as it provides a broad range of training opportunities leading to employability as well as job creation.

The New Anglia LEP's recent Cultural Strategy recognised that, *'The East's cultural assets and offer are therefore at the heart of our shared growth agenda. Those key cultural and heritage assets, if placed in a geographical area the size of Birmingham, would match and in many cases outstrip the cultural offer of any metropolitan area outside of London. We are proud of these assets. They are a vital source of economic growth, both directly in terms of jobs and employment, and as a source of innovation and collaboration with other growth sectors.'*

The restoration of the waterways therefore has significant strategic backing with which to lobby for additional funding for the project to contribute to cultural and tourism driven economic growth, job creation and training.

However, if the HLF were to make an award, then it would be expected that the Council would underwrite the difference between the HLF award and full cost of the scheme whilst it is looking to secure funding from elsewhere.

### Future cost implications

The development phase of the scheme has made it clear that a private developer is not likely to invest in the project, given current footfall and limitations of the site. The business plan is therefore based on the intention that a social enterprise company will manage and operate the Waterways and Boating Lake once the scheme is complete. This is outlined in the bid to submitted to the HLF.

The business plan emerging from the feasibility study proposes that income generated from boat hire and catering will be used to support ongoing running costs for the sites, therefore reducing the longer-term annual maintenance costs to the council, currently estimated at £40k.

The current business plan for the Boating Lake includes a very conservative estimate for profit and these figures are under ongoing review in order to improve the profit margin for the social enterprise which would allow a reduction in the Council's future financial contribution to the Waterways.

## **4. RISK IMPLICATIONS**

If the council decides not to underwrite the funding gap it is unlikely that the project will proceed. This will impact negatively on the heritage asset and the seafront. The consequence of a declining, and part-derelict site, on the Golden Mile will reinforce the perception of a sub-standard offer, and potentially deter visitors and future investment.

There will be a significant risk to the excellent reputation the Borough has built up with funding partners and will affect the likelihood of support for other projects.

The reputation of the council with the community will suffer as there is an expectation of action to resolve the site. Two community campaigns were initiated in relation to the state of the park through the People of North Yarmouth (PoNY) and



Waterways Action Group (WAG). Additionally, there has been overwhelming community support for the project evidenced through public consultations and social media sites.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The council agreed in May 2016 to establish a Waterways Project Board and submit a stage 2 application to the Heritage Lottery Fund in August 2016. If the HLF were to agree an award, the project would represent a unique opportunity to invest in an important, strategically placed cultural heritage asset. It will support and complement existing and planned projects within the corporate plan and make a significant contribution to cultural and tourism driven economic growth, job creation and training, helping to encourage further private sector investment in the area.

By underwriting the shortfall, while additional funding is proactively sought from elsewhere the council will be able to proceed with the project, enabling a £1.77m investment from the HLF into the area. The alternative would be for the Council to continue to have a significant, highly visible and strategically placed asset in its ownership which continues to provide an eyesore on the seafront.

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

- I. To approve the creation of budget provision within the capital programme for expenditure on the Waterways Project
- II. To create a Member working party to consult and advise on the Waterways Project
- III. To delegate to the CEO in consultation with the section 151 Officer and the Member working party the power to take all steps required to progress the Waterways Project including the commitment of expenditure

Area for consideration	Comment
Monitoring Officer Consultation:	Through EMT

Section 151 Officer Consultation:	Through EMT
Existing Council Policies:	N/A
Financial Implications:	A commitment to council match-funding
Legal Implications (including human rights):	NP Law have been consulted.
Risk Implications:	Identified within the paper.
Equality Issues/EQIA assessment:	Addressed through the delivery of the scheme.
Crime & Disorder:	N/A
Every Child Matters:	N/A