

Area North Committee – 25 September 2013

## 10. Grant to Roundabout Preschool, Somerton (Executive Decision)

*Strategic Director:* Rina Singh, Place and Performance  
*Assistant Director:* Kim Close and Helen Rutter, Communities  
*Service Manager:* Charlotte Jones, Area Development Manager (North)  
*Lead Officer:* Teresa Oulds, Neighbourhood Development Officer (North)  
*Contact Details:* [teresa.oulds@southsomerset.gov.uk](mailto:teresa.oulds@southsomerset.gov.uk) or (01935) 462254

### Purpose of the Report

Councillors are asked to consider the awarding of a grant for £10,000 towards the cost of a new building for the Roundabout Preschool in Somerton.

### Public Interest

Roundabout Preschool is based in a wooden building that is over 50 years old and no longer meets current regulations. A suitable replacement building has been identified, with an estimated project cost of £193,141. The Trustees have raised £160,000 towards this, which includes a time-limited grant of £73,000 from Somerset County Council (SCC). There remains a shortfall of around £33,000 and Area North Committee has been approached for £10,000 towards reducing this gap. Fundraising by the group is continuing with a view to be able to start building in October 2013 for completion by spring 2014.

### Recommendation

It is recommended that councillors award a grant of £10,000 to Somerton Roundabout Preschool for their new building, to be allocated from the Area North capital programme (Local Priority Schemes), subject to SSDC standard conditions for community grants (Appendix A).

### Application Details

Name of applicant	Roundabout Preschool
Project	Provision of new premises – AN13/06
Project description	Removal of existing building, purchase and installation of purpose built timber framed building
Total project cost	£193,141
Amount requested from SSDC	£10,000 (5%)
Recommended special conditions	SSDC standard grant conditions
Application assessed by	Teresa Oulds, Neighbourhood Development Officer (North)

### Community Grants Assessment Score

The table below shows the grant scoring for this application. In order to be considered for SSDC funding under the Community Grants policies, applications need to meet the minimum score of 22.

Category	Actual Score	Maximum score possible
A Eligibility	Y	
B Target groups	4	7
C Project	5	5
D Capacity of organisation	15	15
E Financial need	6	7
F Innovation	2	3
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>37</b>

## Background

Originally founded as a playgroup in 1963, Roundabout became a preschool in 1988 and now caters for between 50 and 60 local children. It is the only community-led preschool in Somerton. It aims to offer high quality care and expert led early years' education for the children of Somerton through the following objectives:

- to provide high value Ofsted inspected education at the start of a child's learning;
- to provide excellent care for all local children primarily below statutory school age;
- to work in partnership with parents to help their children learn and develop.

For the last 25 years, the group has been managed by a voluntary committee of parents and other interested people. Six qualified preschool staff and a part-time administrator are employed and the provision is registered with Ofsted. The building is on land next to the infant school in Somerton which is leased to the group by SCC. This proximity to the school gives the children continuity and aids their transition into full time school life.

The current building, an old Pratton hut, is over 50 years old and has been given a one to three year life expectancy. It does not have a suitable kitchen, office or toilet facilities and no longer meets current regulations for a preschool, which limits both the number of sessions that can be offered and the number of children able to attend.

## The Project

The current building no longer meets statutory requirements and needs replacing. The group is seeking funding to purchase a purpose built timber framed building which will meet current health and safety legislation, be fully accessible to children and adults with physical disabilities and provide a safe, stimulating and welcoming environment for young children and their parents.

A new building will enable the group to:

- provide preschool sessions all day throughout the week;
- increase the number of children they are able to support from 24 to over 30 per session;
- provide care for children from 2 years of age to 4 years 11 months;
- provide care and support to children and families with disabilities.

The group has already spent £7014 (including a £750 small grant from Area North), which provided the feasibility work and planning consents to date. Extensive work has taken place in order to identify suitable options and contractors for the project. Several quotes have been obtained, discussions have been held with other preschools that have had similar buildings and advice from SCC has been sought. After careful deliberation

the committee agreed that the preferred supplier was Pure Buildings, a firm that was recommended by other similar organisations and could provide the project at a reasonable cost.

Officers from the SCC Early Years' Commissioning Service have acknowledged the quality of the care provided and the group's business acumen and have given their full support to the committee.

The cost of the project includes clearing the current site (including the removal and disposal of asbestos) and the purchasing and installation of a purpose built timber framed building.

The preschool's website is regularly updated with information about the progress of the project and can be accessed at <http://roundaboutpreschool.co.uk>.

Planning consent has been granted for the project (13/02113/FUL).

### Project Costs

Site clearance including removal of asbestos	£10,860
Purchase and installation of timber building	£179,281.25
Fees (including building regulations)	£3000
<b>Total project cost</b>	<b>£193,141.25</b>

### Funding Plan

Funding Source	Funds Secured
Own funds	£38,054.84
Somerton Town Council	£5000
Somerset County Council	£73,000 (to be spent by March 2014)
Garfield Weston	£7500
Norman Family Trust	£500
Somerset Community Association	£550
Anonymous local trust	£32,000
Sustainable Somerton	£487.24
Yarlington Housing	£3000
Higos Insurance	£500
Somerset Community Foundation	Awaiting decision
Various charitable trusts	Awaiting decision
<b>Total secured</b>	<b>£160,592.08</b>
Amount requested from SSDC	£10,000*

\*This is approx. 5% of the total project cost.

- Over the last five years, the committee has succeeded in raising over £38,000 through local events and activities and gained an additional £49,000 through donations from Charitable Trusts and small grants;
- SCC's Early Years' Service submitted a capital bid to SCC on the committee's behalf, resulting in the award of £73,000. This money has to be spent by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014 and will be released in phases;
- The committee is continuing in its efforts to secure the balance and is well supported in the community;
- A VAT Exemption Certificate has been obtained from HMRC.

If SSDC Area North awards £10,000, there will remain a funding gap of around £22,500. In order to ensure access to the SCC funding, the committee is arranging a loan to bridge the gap so that work can start on site as soon as possible. Projections show that the enhanced facility will allow this loan to be repaid.

### **Evidence of Need**

The Roundabout Preschool is the only community run facility of its kind in Somerton, with other providers being run on a commercial basis. It is very popular with the local community and is now unable to accommodate all those children wishing to attend.

Regular parental surveys have consistently identified the need for more sessions, childcare throughout the day and week, additional places for local children at an affordable cost and fully accessible facilities (both inside and out). For the past few years, although the preschool has been running at full capacity, it has been unable to meet demand from parents due to the constraints of the building.

According to the 2011 census profile, 219 of Somerton's 4,697 residents were aged 0-4. Planning permission has been given for over 133 houses which have yet to be built, and the town is projected to grow further by 2026. Roundabout Preschool would be unable to meet the additional demand for spaces that is likely to arise from new dwellings with the existing building.

### **Local Support**

There has been widespread local support for the project with community groups raising funds in a variety of ways. Examples of this include:

- Sponsored Kickathon in association with a local martial arts club and junior school;
- Play Day in the summer holidays;
- Disco;
- Talent Show;
- Car washes.

The Headteacher and Governors of Somerton Infant School are fully supportive of the project and have agreed the use of one of their classrooms whilst the new facility is being built.

### **The Future**

The group's accounts demonstrate a prudent use of money by the committee to date and regular financial projections have shown the future viability of the preschool.

As a result of the enhanced facility, the preschool will be open for longer than currently and more children will be able to enrol. This will mean an increase in income from government funding per child. Although staff wages will rise, there is currently a better than required ratio of child to adult and the increased employment costs have been included in the financial projections.

The building will be available for the community to hire out of hours, which is not possible at the moment.

## **Conclusion and Recommendation**

The application is for £10,000, which represents approx. 5% of the total project cost. The existing building needs replacing and, following several years of fundraising, the committee is keen to take advantage of the funds pledged. The grant of £73,000 from Somerset County Council has to be committed by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014 and if this were not achieved the project would stall, resulting in the loss of an invaluable asset to the community of Somerton and its neighbouring villages.

It is acknowledged that the contribution requested from Somerton Town Council is less than normally preferred. However, if the application to Area North were deferred to allow for a further request to the town council, the group would either lose the funding from SCC or would have to take out a larger loan than currently anticipated, which would place a considerable additional burden on the group. Instead, it is suggested the group should be encouraged to request further financial support from the town council in the next financial year.

It is recommended that this application for £10,000 is supported.

## **Financial Implications**

There is £89,658 available in the Area North Capital programme for Local Priority Schemes. If the recommended grant of £10,000 to the preschool is awarded, £79,658 will remain in this allocation for 2013-14 and for future years. In addition there is a further £181,528 unallocated capital for local investment.

## **Council Plan Implications**

Focus Four: Health & Communities: encouraging communities to be healthy, self-reliant and with individuals who are willing to help each other.

## **Carbon Emissions & Adapting to Climate Change Implications (NI188)**

The use of timber as the main construction material for the proposed replacement building will result in a structure which has very low embodied energy. This is because wood absorbs carbon dioxide as the tree grows, whereas brick, block and cement mortar create very significant quantities of carbon dioxide during their manufacture.

## **Equality and Diversity Implications**

The Council is committed to promoting equality, recognising and valuing diversity and ensuring equal opportunities chances for all and this project will be fully compliant with these aims and the legislation laid down in the Equality Act 2010.

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