

Area North Committee – 26 February 2014

9. Grant to Barrington Football Club – Purchase of Land (Executive Decision)

Strategic Director: Rina Singh, Place and Performance
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Service Manager: Charlotte Jones, Area Development Manager (North)
Lead Officer: Teresa Oulds, Neighbourhood Development Officer (North)
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Purpose of the Report

This report is for Councillors to consider the award of a grant for £9,500 towards the cost of the freehold purchase of the Barrington Football Club playing field.

Public Interest

Barrington Football Club was founded in 1923 and is a community based football club which has played on the same land since its establishment. The landowner now wishes to sell the freehold and has offered the club a first option to acquire the freehold. Owning the land will ensure there continues to be long term access to a local sporting facility for the people of Barrington and surrounding villages. It has been difficult to find alternative sources of funding for this project and Area North Committee is asked to consider agreeing the award of £9,500 which would afford the club the confidence to continue negotiations, secure in the knowledge that the amount needed is achievable.

Recommendation

It is recommended that councillors award £9,500 to Barrington Football Club towards the freehold purchase of their playing field, to be allocated from the Area North Capital Programme (Local Priorities), subject to SSDC standard conditions for community grants (appendix A) and the following special conditions:

- 1) Legal agreements (which have been checked in advance by SSDC Legal services) are signed between the relevant parties which will ensure the long term maintenance and protection of the land as a community asset for the people of Barrington, the agreement to include a provision for the investment of sale proceeds should the land no longer be required for recreational use in Barrington. A signed copy to be submitted to SSDC.
- 2) Agreements are made between the club and local residents to use the land free of charge for community events or casual use, providing that any activities are complementary to its primary function as a football pitch
- 3) The club promotes the development of players of all ages, with the assistance of SSDC's Community Health and Leisure Service or another appropriate advisory body.

Application Details

| | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Name of applicant: | Barrington Football Club |
| Project: | Purchase of freehold land for football club / community use - AN13/09 |
| Project description: | Purchase of 2 acres of land at Barrington in order to secure the long term future of the club and the land for the community. |
| Total project cost: | £19,000 |
| Amount requested from SSDC: | £9,500 (50%) |
| Recommended special conditions: | SSDC standard grant conditions, plus special conditions (Appendix A) |
| Application assessed by | Teresa Oulds, Neighbourhood Development Officer (North) in consultation with Lynda Pincombe, Community Health and Leisure Manager and Jake Hannis, Senior Sport and Healthy Lifestyles Officer. |

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 | 3 | 7 |
| C Project | 3 | 5 |
| D Capacity of organisation | 11 | 15 |
| E Financial need | 4 | 7 |
| F Innovation | 3 | 3 |
| Grand Total | 24 | 37 |

Background

Barrington Football Club, also known as “The Yellow Hammers”, was established in 1923 and remains a community based football club providing sporting and social activities for local people.

The club has a long history in the Perry Street Football League, having been up and down most of the divisions within it. It currently runs two adult teams: the first team is in the Division 1 and the reserves in Division 3. The club has 50 players and 250 social members.

The club is run completely by volunteers who maintain the facilities and grounds. It is affiliated to the Football Association and has been awarded the Charter Standard in recognition of its development work, safety and standard of provision.

Anyone is welcome to attend training sessions and participate in club activities and the venue can be hired to other local teams and organisations when not in use.

Evidence of Need

Barrington is a small rural village in South Somerset with a population of approximately 450. It is based within the Burrow Hill ward, which is ranked 5th out of 103 areas in South Somerset in the index of multiple deprivation relating to “Barriers to Housing and Services”.

Whilst it has a pub (currently on the market), small school and village hall the community is isolated from mainstream services and facilities, particularly in relation to sport and physical activity. There is a small play area and the only current playing field is the one used by the football club. This field is viewed by the SSDC Community Health and Leisure service to be one of the best quality pitches within the league and should be maintained.

The pitch is of good quality and well maintained by the club. Members and players would like to upgrade the facilities to be able to offer a good playing experience and develop provision for juniors if the opportunity arises. It is difficult for them to plan for the future in the knowledge their playing field is up for sale. Unless they are able to purchase the land and thus secure a permanent playing field for the village it is quite possible there will cease to be a football club in Barrington.

The Project

The owner of the land on which Barrington Football Club plays intends to sell the freehold. The club has been given the option to purchase the freehold and, following negotiation with the owner, agreed a price of £19,000 (to include legal costs). This has been assessed by an independent valuer and found to be a reasonable price. A successful purchase would secure the long term future of the club and enable it to further develop and upgrade the facilities for the benefit of the local community. Provision has been made for the land to remain within the community should the club cease to exist.

Negotiations with the owner’s agent have been going on for over a year and it is now imperative that a decision is made on its purchase, one way or the other.

Project Costs

The purchase of the freehold of two acres of land for recreational use, including legal fees has been agreed with the vendor as £19,000. The club has received advice from an independent valuer that this is a fair price.

Funding Plan

The club has found it difficult to find external funders for the purchase, despite it being generally agreed to be a worthwhile project which would result in the long term security of recreational land for the community. Various local grant funders have been approached, but to date only one local charitable trust and the parish council have offered a grant.

An example is that Barrington is not a big enough club to meet the criteria for investment by the Football Foundation.

The club runs fundraising activities throughout the year to cover its normal expenses and is able to contribute £5000 of its own funds to the purchase (26%).

| Funding Source | Funds | |
|----------------------------|---------------|---------|
| Own funds | £5,000 | Secured |
| Barrington Parish Council* | £500 | Secured |
| Local Charitable Trust | £3,000 | Secured |
| Total secured | £8,500 | |
| Amount requested from SSDC | £9,500 | |
| Current shortfall** | £1000 | |

*The parish council's contribution is below 10% of the value of the project, which is generally expected for community grant applications to SSDC. However, the parish council has given the club £1500 within the last three years to assist with the refurbishment of the facilities following fire damage. The parish council has also agreed to take on the future ownership and maintenance of the playing field through a legal agreement for the benefit of the community were the club to fold in the future.

**There remains a gap of £1000, but the club is confident that, if Area North Committee agrees to award £9,500 then it would be able to raise the shortfall through further fundraising efforts as it would be able to demonstrate the purchase is achievable.

Ownership and maintenance.

Barrington Football Club will own and manage the land for its club activities and is willing to support casual use for recreation and village events. The club accounts and past history show the club covers its costs and raises surplus funds towards longer term improvements.

In the event that the club were to be wound up, Barrington Parish Council has agreed to take on the ownership and maintenance of the land, through a legal agreement. Any sale would have to be agreed by the parish council and Fields in Trust.

The Football Club has joined Fields in Trust which means the land may only be sold with its prior approval. This provides an additional protection that the value of the land will continue to benefit the community.

Consultation response – SSDC Community Health and Leisure

The Community Health and Leisure service is supportive of this application to SSDC. If the facility were lost, there would be no football pitch provision in the near vicinity and the playing pitch itself is a good quality playing pitch and should be retained for community use.

Focus Four of the Council's Local Plan aims to "maintain and enhance the South Somerset network of leisure and cultural facilities" and the Council's saved Local Plan Policies also highlight that "outdoor playing space, recreation fields and recreation areas are an important community resource". The Community Health and Leisure service therefore feels that this application closely accords with Council policy.

The service recommends that if the application is supported consideration be given to ensuring that the land can also be used by local people for complementary community events should the need arise. This point has been included in the special conditions to be applied if the application is approved.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Barrington Football Club is run completely by volunteers who support the teams and maintain the facilities and grounds. It is affiliated to the Football Association and has been awarded the Charter Standard in recognition of its development work, safety and standard of provision.

This application is for £9,500 towards the project cost of £19,000. This is an unusual situation with a once in a lifetime opportunity to purchase the freehold of a good quality playing field in a rural location. It has been difficult to find funding but that does not mean it is not a worthwhile project, rather that it does not meet the criteria of most grant-giving bodies. All those involved with the application are in agreement that it would be a permanent loss to the local community if the land were not secured.

The parish council has agreed that, subject to a legal agreement, it will take on the maintenance of the field should the club fold and not be replaced. This demonstrates the seriousness with which local representatives view the opportunity to retain a valuable piece of recreational space within their village. The cost of legal fees to complete the purchase and associated legal agreements will not be incurred until the majority of funds are secured by the community.

It is recommended the application to SSDC for £9,500 is supported.

Financial Implications

There is £249,036 available in the Area North Capital programme for Local Priority Schemes. If the recommended grant of £9,500 to Barrington is awarded, £239,536 will remain in this allocation for 2013-14 and for future years.

Council Plan Implications

Focus Four: Health & Communities: “maintain and enhance the South Somerset network of leisure and cultural facilities”

SSDC Saved Local Plan Policies highlight that “outdoor playing space, recreation fields and recreation areas are an important community resource”.

Carbon Emissions & Climate Change Implications

None from this decision

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.