
Community Grant to Muchelney Parochial Church Council (Executive Decision)

Director: Kirsty Larkins, Director of Service Delivery
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Purpose of the Report

Councillors are asked to consider the awarding of a grant of £12,500 towards the 'Phase 1 Project': New All Ability Accessible Toilet at Muchelney Church.

Public Interest

Awarding grants is a key way that SSDC supports and helps to deliver community projects sponsored by Parishes and voluntary community organisations in the towns and villages across the district.

Muchelney Parochial Church Council has applied to the Area North community grants programme for financial assistance with the costs of installation of 'Phase 1 Project': New All Ability Accessible Toilet. This is in readiness for the separately funded 'Phase 2 Project': New Kitchenette, Storage and Community Space within Muchelney Church.

The Locality Officer who is submitting this report to enable the Area North Committee to make an informed decision about the application has assessed the application.

Recommendation

That Area North Committee recommend to the Chief Executive that a grant of £12,500 be awarded to Muchelney Parochial Church Council, the grant to be allocated from the Area North capital programme and subject to SSDC standard conditions for community grants (appendix A).

Application Details

Name of applicant:	Muchelney Parochial Church Council
Project:	'Phase 1 Project': New All Ability Accessible Toilet at Muchelney Church.
Total project cost:	72,500
Amount requested from SSDC:	12,500
% amount requested	17.2%
Application assessed by:	Adrian Moore

Community Grants Assessment Score

The table below shows the grant scoring for this application. Applications must meet the minimum score of 22 to be considered for SSDC funding under Community Grants policies.

Category	Max Score available	Officer assessment score
A Supports Council Plan/Area Chapter	1	1
B Supports Equalities & Diversity	1	1
C Supports Environment Strategy	3	2
D Need for Project	10	8
E Capacity of Organisation	15	11
F Financial need	7	6
Total	37	29

Background

Muchelney Church is the Parish Church of St Peter & St Paul in the beautiful little village of Muchelney. A 17th century writer described it as “a perfectly reasonable church.” This somewhat underwhelming description hides the fact that it is a Grade 1 listed gem, which, like many village churches, has been amended and adapted to contemporary needs down the centuries. It has two particularly notable features – a wonderful ceiling, full of brightly painted angels, and a church barrel organ which is still in working order. The Church St Peter & St Paul is situated between Muchelney Abbey (English Heritage) and The Priest's House (National Trust), and although the church was never part of the abbey, the Abbot was the patron.

Muchelney is a small and friendly village and is rightly proud of its church and looks after it with diligence. There are not many homes around the church but the village runs south from the church and also encompasses the hamlet of Muchelney Ham. There are a number of working farms in the parish and a celebrated Pottery.

More recently Muchelney became famous in the floods of 2014, when the parish was overwhelmed by extensive flooding and the village became an island for over 10 weeks! The centre of the village, though itself not flooded, was cut off from the 'outside world'. Children had to be boated in and out of the village to get to and from school, groceries and other provisions also had to be boated in. With the vicar arriving by boat, the Sunday services welcomed everyone and were often followed by popular 'Flood Lunches'. The church became a natural focal point for all the parish.

In that time, the church acted as post office, doctor's surgery, shop, information hub and an essential cafe for the crew operating the 'ferry boat' link to the mainland. It was used as the centre from which provisions were distributed. The emergency services staff came for relief at the end of long and cold shifts, and hot meals were served to them and villagers too. However, all the food had to be imported in insulated flasks,

as there was no kitchen, and the biggest drawback was the fact that there were no toilet facilities. Despite being surrounded by murky flood water, parishioners brought all that was needed into the ancient church building including clean drinking water. Hosting lunches in the church has continued since the floods, sometimes with a sizzling BBQs in the church porch and there have been several 'Pop-up Pubs-with-a-Question' on summer Friday evenings.

The terrible experience of the flooding actually inspired Muchelney to press on with plans to make the church a community centre for all the village. Many parochial church councils the length and breadth of England are looking to increase the value to the local community of the churches they care for. They still wish them to be places of worship, but recognise that, by careful adaptation of the space within and around them, they can become wider community centres for all the residents of their parish.

It has long been the intention of Muchelney Parochial Church Council to improve the basic facilities of the church and in January 2020 full permission for an external, fully accessible All Ability Toilet was granted by the Church of England. Planning permission has also been granted by South Somerset District Council. This is the first phase in bringing a new life to this old and beautiful building. Further development of the church, which will be separately funded, will include a kitchenette, related storage and the removal of a number of pews to make room for social events and activities providing an essential new community space for the village which has no village hall, school or pub.

In the foreword to the English Heritage 2013 publication, *Constructive Conservation: sustainable growth for historic places*, the then chair, Baroness Andrews, noted that "Historic buildings and places help to define our nation. Even so, change, adaptation or development will often be the key to securing their future."

Parish information

Parish*	Muchelney
Parish Population	200
No. of dwellings	78

*Taken from the 2011 census profile

The project

'Phase 1 Project' - Installation of an external, fully accessible All Ability Toilet constructed just outside the church, adjacent to the north porch.

As the church currently has no plumbing or drainage at all, this 'Phase 1 Project' will also include extensive plumbing and drainage requirements in preparation for the anticipated and separately funded 'Phase 2 Project': New Kitchenette, Storage and Community Space within the church.

Local support / evidence of need

There has always been a need for a toilet in Muchelney church. However, it was identified that in order for the community to begin to be able to use the church effectively for new activities, it was essential to build the new All Ability Accessible Toilet first. Once it is installed and the community use of the church increases it will enable further fundraising activities to take place to support the 'Phase 2 Project' of the increased community space which will include the new kitchenette and associated storage space.

The All Ability Toilet will be a brand new facility and therefore, maintenance costs should be minimal. The key point is that the Church Council will be able to operate their community activities much more easily, such as Big Breakfasts, BBQs, Pop-up Pubs and afternoon tea sessions and income generated will help go towards future maintenance costs.

The new toilet will be a free standing building outside the church and can therefore be open for use at all times. The whole population of the parish of Muchelney will benefit, as well as other South Somerset residents and visitors. The church lies on popular tourist routes including cycling and walking routes and consequently the new facilities will be used and welcomed by all.

The development of this project has been far from straightforward for the Church Council. However, through the lengthy process of securing the two approvals needed for the fully accessible All Ability Toilet which included permission within the Church of England and also planning permission from South Somerset District Council, many expressions of support were offered. Other supportive comments have been received when the Church Council briefed all residents of the parish about their intentions to adapt and use their church for this wider community good.

The operation of the church is well known throughout the parish. The website "A church near you" is always kept up to date. Events that are happening are advertised through a village email list and on local notice boards.

Project costs

Project costs	Cost £
Excavations, building materials & construction, sewage and plumbing installation (to include provision for second phase kitchenette), toilet, furnishings and decorating (incl. VAT)	60,804
Archaeologist's fees (incl. VAT)	2,096
Architect's fees (incl. VAT)	9,600
Total	72,500

Funding plan

Funding source	Secured or Pending	Amount £
Parish Council	Muchelney has no parish council; there is only a parish meeting	-
Awards for All (Lottery)	Secured	5,000
Somerset Community Foundation	Secured	10,600
Church Walking Pilgrimages	Secured	5,000
Clark Foundation	Secured	7,500
Somerset Churches Trust	Secured	3,000
South Somerset District Council	Pending	12,500
Prince's Countryside Fund	Pending	10,000
Laing Family Trust	Pending	5,000
Garfield Western Foundation	Pending	7,500
Medlock Charitable Trust	Pending	6,400
Total		72,500

Conclusion and Recommendation

It is recommended that a grant of £12,500 is awarded

Financial implications

The balance in the Area North Capital programme is £ £50,888. If the recommended grant of £12,500 is awarded, £38,388 will remain.

Grants are awarded subject to all other funding being secured before the commencement of the project and are on a % basis of the full project costs. Payment of the grant cannot exceed the grant award and is proportionally reduced if full project costs are under budget.

Council Plan Implications

Council Plan themes and Areas of focus for 2021/22

Focus 3 – Environment

To keep South Somerset clean, green and attractive and respond to the climate and ecological emergency, we will work in partnership to:

- Continue the delivery of the Environment Strategy action plan, reducing our carbon emissions by 10% every year, to reach carbon neutrality by 2030
- Adopt and commence delivery of an Open Spaces Strategy promoting green infrastructure across the district
- Enhance the quality of the environment and its resilience and ability to adapt to climate change in partnership with our communities and businesses
- To protect South Somerset's landscape to seek to increase tree cover within our communities and the wider environment
- Support the delivery of the County wide Climate Change Emergency Strategy



- Initiate and support actions and infrastructure to encourage a shift to low carbon transport options including walking, cycling and electric mobility
- Promote and improve recycling and minimise waste through the roll out of 'Recycle More' across South Somerset from June 2021 through the Somerset Waste Partnership
- Support the development of environmental and ecological aspects within local, parish and neighbourhood plans
- Promote Nature Recovery Networks across the district, with a focus on delivery via the Ham Hill project
- Work with external partners to benefit the wider national cause in developing and generating clean energy storage to reduce renewable energy wastage in turn reducing use of fossil fuels in UK energy production.

Focus 5 – Healthy, Self-reliant Communities

To enable healthy communities which are cohesive, sustainable and enjoy a high quality of life, we will:

- Embed social value into all processes and activities to ensure we maximise the support we give to our communities
- Work with partners to keep and help our residents feel safe in their homes and communities
- Work with partners to reduce the impact of social isolation and create a feeling of community
- Work with partners to support people improving their physical and mental health and wellbeing
- Enable quality cultural, leisure and sport activities
- Proactively support residents facing hardship
- Help tackle the causes of economic and social exclusion, poverty and low social mobility
- Support older people to live and age well by increasing their independence, reducing loneliness, and improving financial security.

Area Chapter Implications for 2021/22

Healthy, Self-reliant Communities

- Support a range of improvements to community facilities through S106 and Community grants

Carbon Emissions and Climate Change Implications

Reduced travel/car use.

Equality and Diversity Implications

The project aims to provide for people across all age and interest groups in the local community.

Background Papers

None.



Appendix A

Standard conditions applying to all SSDC Community Grants

The applicant agrees to: -

- Notify SSDC if there is a material change to the information provided in the application.
- Start the project within six months of the grant offer and notify SSDC of any changes to the project or start date as soon as possible.
- Confirm that all other funding sources have been secured before starting the project, if these were not already in place at the time of the application.
- Acknowledge SSDC assistance towards the project in any relevant publicity about the project (e.g. leaflets, posters, websites, and promotional materials) and on any permanent acknowledgement (e.g. plaques, signs etc.).
- Work in conjunction with SSDC officers to monitor and share the success of the project and the benefits to the community resulting from SSDC's contribution to the project.
- Provide a project update and/or supply before and after photos if requested
- Supply receipted invoices or receipts which provide evidence of the **full** cost of the project so that the grant can be released.
- Complete an evaluation survey when requested after the completion of the project.
- Note that they cannot apply for another community grant for the same project within a 3-year period of this award.

Standard conditions applying to buildings, facilities and equipment

- Establish and maintain a “sinking fund” to support future replacement of the building / facility / equipment as grant funding is only awarded on a one-off basis.
- Use the SSDC Building Control Service when buildings regulations are required.
- Incorporate disabled access and provide an access statement where relevant.

Special conditions

None