

Grant to Montacute Village Hall for Village Hall Accessibility Project (Executive Decision)

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Purpose of the Report

Councillors are asked to award a grant of £4,830 to Montacute Village Hall towards the overall cost of work to improve access to the hall (Montacute Village Hall Accessibility Project).

Public Interest

Montacute Village Hall has applied for financial assistance from SSDC towards the cost of essential improvements to the hall, particularly disabled access (part of a larger programme of work on the hall). A Neighbourhood Development Officer has assessed the application and submitted this report to allow the Area North Committee to make an informed decision on the application.

Recommendation

It is recommended that Councillors award a grant of £4,830 to Montacute Village Hall towards the cost of essential improvements to the village hall, the grant to be allocated from the Area North Programme for Local Priority Schemes, subject to SSDC standard conditions for community grants (appendix A).

Application Details

Name of applicant	Montacute Village Hall
Project	Montacute Village Hall Accessibility Project
Total project cost	£9830
Amount requested from SSDC	£4830 (49%)
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	Maximum Score Possible	Score
A Eligibility	Y/N	Y
B Equalities Impact	7	5
C Evidence of Need	5	5
D Capacity of organisation	15	15
E Financial need	7	6
F Innovation	3	3
Total	37	34

Background

Montacute is a rural village with 389 houses and a population of around 830 spanning all age groups. There is a primary school, church, two pubs, post office and recreation field with a play area. The village hall is in the centre of the village, adjacent to Montacute House and other National Trust land and is set back from the main road, accessed by a narrow roadway. It is an important part of the community but it has been clear for a number of years that it needs substantial work. Village surveys carried out over recent years have supported the view that the hall either needed extensive refurbishment or rebuilding. Despite considerable efforts, it has not been possible to find a viable site for a new hall and further consultation led to the decision, in 2014, to refurbish the existing building.

In addition to the general condition of the hall, residents have identified that it can be difficult for some of the most vulnerable members of the community to attend and participate in events due to poor access with old steps as the only safe route into the hall. The hall is, therefore, not currently an accessible venue. The building is also very cold in winter, which can deter potential hirers.

The current Village Hall Committee has brought about huge improvements in the condition of the hall over the past 12 months. It has developed a network of “community friends” whereby people from all walks of life and ages offer their skills free of charge. Achievements in this time have included:

- The complete repainting of the inside and outside of the hall.
- The installation of a new kitchen.
- The restoration of the working stage area.
- The creation of a Community Garden with a memorial rose garden where local people have sponsored a tribute to their loved ones.

The committee has followed guidance from the Community Council and the Charity Commission to update all the hall policies and renewed all licences. It has also developed a range of community activities to engage a wide audience, in particular those who are socially excluded and those with mental health difficulties.

It has now reached the point where the next stage in the project is to improve access to the building, provide accessible toilets and install effective, efficient heating. The committee has taken advice from Access for All and is keen to complete the work before the onset of winter.

It will look to continue the improvements, including the installation of a hearing loop, once this stage is complete.

Consultation

A number of village surveys have been carried out since 2005, all of which have identified the need to either rebuild or refurbish the existing building. In particular, they have identified that events at the hall can be difficult for some of the most vulnerable members of the community to attend due to poor access, with old steps as the only safe route into the hall. The doors are not easy to open and it has been suggested that the installation of an external bell would be advisable. The toilets are not suitable for wheelchair users: the hall is clearly not an accessible venue.

Access for All has been consulted and has offered its full support to the committee. An officer from SSDC's Engineering and Property Services has offered advice regarding improvements to the toilets to make them accessible to wheelchair users.

The group has also consulted the Community Council and the Charity Commission to ensure they are fully compliant in their constitution, policies and licences.

Montacute Parish Council has been consulted and is fully supportive of the committee's plans, committing £4000 towards the project.

The Project

This phase of the refurbishment of Montacute Village Hall will result in:

- The installation of a heating system (the labour will be provided free of charge)
- A rebuilt slope to the building and the provision of a turning point for wheelchairs. The pathway will continue to the memorial roses and around to the gate, thus giving everyone access to the grounds.
- The installation of a bell system to the external doors so that someone inside the building can help a visitor in to the building where necessary
- Improvements to the accessible toilet location to allow for better access, while removing the asbestos cistern and converting the other toilet with modern facilities
- Improved signage

Benefit to the Community

The stated aim of the group is to *“provide an inclusive venue that provides a real hub for our community, services and local businesses; we aim to provide a venue of choice for training events, clubs, celebrations, adult education, presentations etc. We will strive to maintain an attractive site that is fit for purpose...”*

All groups will benefit from the improvements brought about by this project but particularly those with disabilities, carers, adults and children with special needs and families with small children. The community is ageing and many of those who have used the village hall for much of their life now struggle to attend due to the lack of accessible facilities.

It is the intention that all the community will benefit from the proposed improvements: the hall will be warmer, more inviting and generally easier to access.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This application is for £4,830, representing 49% of the total project cost. The parish council has awarded 41% of the cost, with the remainder coming from the hall's own funds.

The hall was in urgent need of repair or replacement and after a considerable period of consultation and evaluation of options, it was established that the former was the most realistic option for the village. The Village Hall Committee is to be commended for the huge amount of work achieved in the past 12 months which has resulted in noticeable improvements, achieved largely through voluntary contributions (financial or in kind) by members of the community. However, the next stage in the project cannot be done without incurring costs.

Members of the Village Hall Committee bring a wide range of skills and experience to this project and a high level of commitment to strengthening and improving the quality of life for all in their local community. Residents have contributed invaluable insight to assist the development of the committee's plans in order to ensure they best address the well-documented requirements of the residents.

It is therefore recommended that this application for £4,830 is approved.

Financial Implications

There is £175,135 available in the Area North Capital programme for Local Priority Schemes. If the recommended grant of £4,830 is awarded, £170,305 will remain in this allocation for future years.

Council Plan Implications

The project has been included in the Area North Development Plan over a number of years and supports the following Council Plan objectives:

Focus Two: Environment

Focus Four: Health & Communities

Carbon Emissions & Climate Change Implications

Installation of a new heating system should be an improvement on the current system and be more economical and efficient to run. The efficiency and emissions will be dependent on the particular heating system chosen.

Equality and Diversity Implications

The improvements will provide the village with a meeting place that meets the current standards for accessibility. Access for All fully supports this application and will advise on the final plans.

Appendix A

Standard conditions applying to all Community Grants

This grant offer is made based on the information provided in application form no. AN15/05 and represents 49% of the total project costs. The grant will be reduced if the costs of the total project are less than originally anticipated. Phased payments may be made in exceptional circumstances (e.g. to help with cash-flow for a larger building project) and are subject to agreement.

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 this 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 if this was not already in place at the time of the application and before starting the project.
- 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.

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 where buildings regulations are required.
- Incorporate disabled access and provide an access statement where relevant.