

Record of decision taken under delegated powers by a council officer



Title:	Your Fund Surrey Application – CF226 Walton Charity Tree Canopy Project
Divisions Affected:	All / List divisions in Surrey impacted 1. Walton South and Oatlands – Tony Samuels
Key Decision:	No Note: This record relates to a decision which impacts solely on one division as set out above.
Reason Key:	N/A
Decision taken under delegation by virtue of:	Cabinet/ Committee decision Cabinet 21st July 2020 Min Ref: 112/20 COMMUNITY PROJECTS FUND [Item 10] Link

Summary

This decision record sets out the key information for publication on the decision by the Executive Director for Customer and Communities to approve expenditure for a Your Fund Surrey project located in Walton-on-Thames. The agreed recommendations are set out below on the face of this decision record. Details on the project are set out in the Decision Report as an annex to this record.

Decisions made

It was AGREED

Officer Recommendations in consultation with the Advisory Panel. It is recommended that:

1. **To fund project CF226 for the full £53,675 requested, composed of:**
 - **£53,675 of capital funding towards the equipment and materials to be paid in staged payments, on evidence of spend. This includes £4,000 contingency payment**
 - **Including £2,684 (5%) to be held by Surrey County Council (SCC) until final evidence of income, expenditure and evaluation is received.**
2. **To approve the following conditions for the applicant should be included within the funding agreement:**
 - **the applicant contacts SCC Public Rights of Way for advice on any works**

- which impact a Public Right of Way, with correspondence copied to YFS
- the applicant uses all possible measures identified to increase sustainability and reduce environmental impact during construction and operation of the facility

3. To encourage applicant to consider all reasonable measures which could be undertaken to expand the reach and use of the facility.

Reasons for Decisions:

These decisions are to enable expenditure from the Your Fund Surrey to be awarded to a project which have been the subject of a rigorous assessment process by officers, as set out in Annex 1.

Officers consider the project to meet the aims and published criteria of the fund and to satisfy the requirements to award funding, the project has been further considered by the Your Fund Advisory Panel.

Decisions taken by:	Marie Snelling - Executive Director of Customer and Communities
Decisions taken on:	2nd December 2022
To be implemented on:	2nd December 2022 (not subject to Call In)

Alternative options considered

N/A

Summary of any financial implications

This project that has been approved for funding and has been through the due diligence and agreed governance process.

Cabinet agreed in July 2020 the funding for these projects will be drawn from the £100m of capital funding allocated to Your Fund Surrey within the Capital Programme.

Cabinet agreed in July 2020 to establish a core team to manage the delivery of the fund and risks associated with it, funded from the Corporate Feasibility budget.

Declarations of conflicts of interest

None

Consultation/Process Followed

Decision taken in consultation with Cllr Denise Turner-Stewart, Cabinet Member for Communities and Safety following Your Fund Surrey Advisory panel review.

Background Documents

Exempt:

Annex 1 – Your Fund Surrey Decision Report CF226 Walton Charity Tree Canopy Project	No
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Your Fund Surrey - Delegated Officer Decision Report

DATE: 30th November 2022

SUBJECT: YOUR FUND SURREY APPLICATION – WALTON CHARITY

PROJECT NAME: TREE CANOPY PROJECT

CF REFERENCE: CF226

Purpose of the Report:

This decision record sets out the key information for publication on the decision by the Executive Director for Customer and Communities to approve expenditure for a Your Fund Surrey project located in Walton-on-Thames.

This is to enable expenditure from Your Fund Surrey to be awarded to projects which have been assessed by Officers to meet the fund criteria and further considered by the Your Fund Advisory Panel. The vision of Your Fund Surrey (YFS) is to bring community-led and place-making projects to life, with a focus on wider community benefit that leaves a real legacy.

Recommendations:

Officer Recommendations in consultation with the Advisory Panel. It is recommended:

4. **To fund project CF333 for the full £53,675 requested, composed of:**
 - **£53,675 of capital funding towards the equipment and materials to be paid in staged payments, on evidence of spend. This includes £4,000 contingency payment**
 - **Including £2,684 (5%) to be held by Surrey County Council (SCC) until final evidence of income, expenditure and evaluation is received.**
5. **To approve the following conditions for the applicant should be included within the funding agreement:**
 - **the applicant contacts SCC Public Rights of Way for advice on any works which impact a Public Right of Way, with correspondence copied to YFS**
 - **the applicant uses all possible measures identified to increase sustainability and reduce environmental impact during construction and operation of the facility**
6. **To encourage applicant to consider all reasonable measures which could be undertaken to expand the reach and use of the facility.**

Reason for Recommendations

1. This application has been the subject of a rigorous assessment process by officers, as set out in the body of this report. Officers consider the project to meet the aims and published criteria of the fund and to satisfy the requirements to award funding.

Executive Summary

2. This proposal is to support the development of The Tree Canopy Project by Walton Charity. The site is located in the Electoral Division of Walton South and Oatlands which is ranked 31,460, Decile 10 on the Index of Multiple Deprivation (decile 1 being in the most deprived 10% nationally and decile 10 being in the least deprived 10% nationally). Under 1 mile away is Walton North which is ranked 10,366, Decile 4.
3. Walton Charity is a local charitable foundation supporting people in Elmbridge who are experiencing financial hardship and are disadvantaged and vulnerable. The charity has been established for over 800 years and have a strong track record of providing housing, allotment and grant giving to those in need.

4. The space that will become the Tree Canopy project is 7,135 sq metres and is currently a wilderness area of neglected trees, brambles and scrub alongside the Home Farm Allotments, Rydens Road. Public transport links are close by at Hersham Railway Station and bus route 461. An old access gate onto the site from the public footpath off Lindley Road will be opened and space created for pedestrian and cycle access. There are no opening or closing times on the site, however only the project leaders have keys to the site and will manage access for users at the times their projects are running.

5. Walton Charity created a community allotment at the largest of their four allotment sites on Terrace Road, Walton on Thames. The community allotment is used by many residents, some of whom are unemployed and those who are suffering from poor mental health. Following the success of this project, they would like the local community to utilise more of their woodland and to launch a Tree Canopy project alongside the Home Farm Allotments, Rydens Road. The project will form three clear elements:
 - The creation of a local community woodland space, giving residents the opportunity to get involved in the appreciation of the woodland through volunteering and educational opportunities. This includes both children and adult forest schools led by Rewilding Forest School and social prescribing practitioners. To maximise the use of the space it will also be available for hourly rent to practitioners to run other eco therapy initiatives and green prescribing activities.
 - A base for a Tree Warden Volunteer scheme to have a tree nursery, arrange tree planting days and a programme of aftercare for the newly planted trees. The group will initially be led by the Walton Charity's Green Spaces manager, with the longer-term goal of setting up a Community Interest Organisation (CIO) for the Volunteer group to be self-sufficient and enable them to do their own fundraising.
 - An area for a Community Allotment that will be used by a rota of different charities to specifically run therapeutic gardening schemes for their beneficiaries. These include Mary Francis Trust, a domestic abuse charity (NSDAS) and the children's charity Eikon.

6. Since their Idea Submission was submitted to Your Fund Surrey in May 2022, they have received Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding from Elmbridge Borough Council for the Tree Warden scheme and have begun preliminary work for that area of the site. They have also secured funding from PA Housing for storage for the forest school and are now seeking Your Fund Surrey funding to support with the remaining elements of the project. The charity has large reserves that currently equates to roughly twelve months operating costs, ref para 19.

Details

Description of project benefits

7. The project aligns closely with several of Surrey County Council's ambitions, particularly to be carbon neutral by 2050. It does this by giving residents access to the nature on site but also through the legacy of learning about wildlife, the environment and gardening. The tree warden element of the project also supports Surrey County Council's tree planting strategy.

8. Walton Charity, through its long-established role in the community, has networks with the local voluntary sector serving the most isolated of the people of Elmbridge. Elmbridge is the third most densely populated area in the County of Surrey with 130,875 people living in the area (2011 figures). The Tree Canopy Project has been specifically designed to encourage people of all ages to participate in green social prescribing projects in a physically accessible and welcoming natural setting.

9. Officers consider the project contributes towards the following areas of the SCC priorities 2021-2026:

Tackling health inequality

- Increased physical and mental health for people involved

Empowering communities

- Improved social cohesion and understanding between various groups of people using the site
- The Tree Warden Scheme long term aim is to encourage volunteers to be self sufficient

Enabling a greener future

- Residents encouraged to engage with open air/greenspace initiatives
- The site will be developed and maintained as a clean, safe and green area for the community

Growing a sustainable economy so everyone can benefit

- Organisations are involved, supported and can offer their beneficiaries green social prescribing initiatives
- Skills development in users and volunteering opportunities

Project Timeframes

10. The project timeframes are approximately 10 weeks, comprised of:
- Clearance
 - Building structures and pathways
 - Planting & installation of sheds

Management of the project

11. The Walton Charity have employed a Green Spaces Manager who will manage the project, overseeing the operation of organisations/charities utilising the site. Once the site is established it will come under Walton Charity's regular maintenance program. The maintenance of the pathways, gates and forest school activities for adults and children will be the responsibility of Walton Charity. All the partners engaged in providing activities in The Tree Canopy will have responsibility for maintaining the tools, equipment and buildings assigned to them.
12. Running costs will be funded by Walton Charity, plus small contributions received from peppercorn rents from charities & organisations using the space

Project Lifespan

13. The Tree Canopy project should last at least ten years, with good care and maintenance.

Financial and Value for Money Implications

14. Y YFS funding is requested to contribute towards the infrastructure, shelters, sheds and equipment.
15. Table 1. Financial Summary details the total project cost of £53,675.
16. As with all applications, there is a risk that construction and purchase costs will increase between application and approval due to the current economic environment. This is mitigated by the contingency (which will only be released if there is demonstrated need). The applicant has secured quotes that support their costing, and will ultimately be funded based on evidenced, actual spend, up to the amount awarded.

Table 1. Financial summary

Amount applied for:	£53,675
Total project cost:	£88,795
Percentage of cost against total:	60%
Have other funding sources been secured?	Yes
Other funding:	CIL Funding for Tree Warden Project - £12,000 PA Housing - £2,500 Walton Charity - £10,000

	Total other funding = £35,120 including volunteer contributions
Volunteer contributions	Yes - £10,620
Is there a commercial element to the project?	No
Amount suggested for funding:	£53,675

Expert Hub Review

17. Finance – This project has been reviewed financially and is felt to be adequately planned. It is low value and low risk. There are a number of funders although the majority of funding for this project is being requested from YFS (£54k / 60%).
18. It is noted that they have undesignated unrestricted reserves of over £6m. Their reserves were queried, and they have directed us to their reserves policy in their annual accounts. This states that the required level is 12 months running costs, or £2.3m. YFS does not have a position statement on the level of applicants reserves and as such they are not prohibited from applying.

Advisory Panel Comments

22. The Advisory Panel functions in an advisory capacity and its role is intended to assist the formal decision-making processes which sit outside the Panel. The role of the YFS Advisory Panel is to review shortlisted applications and to advise and inform the final officer recommendations to the appropriate decision-maker.
23. The Advisory Panel met on 1st November 2022 and CF333 was discussed. Panel Members were positive about the project and its links to SCC aims. However there was considerable discussion regarding the levels of reserves held by Walton Charity. After considering the arguments made for and against, the Advisory Panel Chair decided the project should be recommended for funding.

Consultation

Summary of Support

20. Have your say, which had the Tree Canopy Project featured on the Commonplace website, received positive 26 comments. No negative comments were received.
21. Various community consultation took place prior to the application, these included a Facebook poll, newsletters and a survey to 75 community partners of Walton Charity.
22. The Divisional Councillor Tony Samuels has confirmed his support for this proposal.

Risk Management and Implications:

23. This application for funding has been through the due diligence and agreed governance process. As part of this process the applicant has provided an overview of risks against the project. This is summarised in Table 3 below. Officers consider there to be adequate control measures in place. The overall project delivery is deemed low risk.

Table 3. Summary Table of Risks and Key Mitigations

Risk description	RAG	Mitigation action/strategy
Risk of injury during nature-based activities		Policies on the following areas are in place:
Safeguarding risks with vulnerable		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Health & safety incl. Fire & First aid

people		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lone working • Safeguarding • Smoke Free • GDPR • Data Protection • Privacy • Information technology • Social media
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Equalities and Diversity:

24. Your Fund is designed to provide investment in schemes that encourage community participation, reduce isolation, and develop the potential for social wellbeing and economic prosperity. As such it is anticipated that it will have a positive impact on a number of those who may rely on or gain support from within the local community and those within protected characteristics that may be more likely to experience social and economic exclusion.
25. An Equalities Impact Assessment has been produced for YFS and was circulated as an Annex to the YFS Cabinet Report 26th January 2021.

Legal implications – Monitoring Officer:

26. The report sets out the information and steps for the consideration of the application further to the Council’s governance arrangements for Your Fund Surrey.
27. Further to those arrangements, if approved, the Council and the organisation will enter into a comprehensive funding agreement which will include the performance measures that will be put in place to ensure the funding is used as intended as well as clearly describing any support or additional conditions agreed as part of the funding award.

Other Implications:

28. The potential implications for the following council priorities and policy areas have been considered. Where the impact is potentially significant a summary of the issues is set out in detail in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Implications for council priorities and policy areas

Area assessed:	Direct Implications:
Corporate Parenting/Looked After Children	No direct implications
Safeguarding responsibilities for vulnerable children & adults	The Walton Charity has their own safeguarding policy and procedures.
Environmental sustainability	The materials used for the roadway is crushed, recycled concrete which is already used on the other roadways on the allotment to prevent slippage when the roadways get muddy in wet weather. The footpaths are lined with weed suppressant material and covered in woodchip which is provided for free by a local tree surgeon. Pedestrian & cycling to the activities on site is encouraged.
Public Health	The project has a positive impact on wider health determinants with specific reference to users being encouraged to use outdoor space and increase their physical activity and mental wellbeing. The project also seeks to enhance social cohesion.

What Happens Next:

- Following Delegated Officer approval of the funding a notice of the records of decisions taken under delegated power, will be published within 3 days of the decision being made. A note of this decision will be included in the YFS Decision Tracker and the next Cabinet report containing an update on Your Fund Surrey.
 - Officers will prepare the relevant schedules and funding agreements to enable payment of funds and monitoring and evaluation of the project against its outcomes.
 - The YFS Team officers will then issue a provisional offer of funding to the applicant, including a copy of the draft Funding Agreement incorporating any additional conditions.
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Consulted:

Division County Councillor

Corporate finance

Sources/background papers:

Your Fund Surrey Governance

