

## SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL

## CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITIES AND COMMUNITY SAFETY



**DATE:** 25 APRIL 2023

**REPORT OF CABINET MEMBER:** DENISE TURNER-STEWART – CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITIES AND COMMUNITY SAFETY

**LEAD OFFICER:** MARIE SNELLING – EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR CUSTOMER AND COMMUNITIES

**SUBJECT:** YOUR FUND SURREY APPLICATION – Blanchman’s Farm All Abilities Trackway

**ORGANISATION STRATEGY PRIORITY AREA:** EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES

<b>Purpose of the Report:</b>
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This report sets out the Your Fund Surrey application from **Blanchman’s Farm Nature Reserve** for the consideration of the Cabinet Member for Communities and Community Safety.

The vision of YFS is to bring community-led and place-making projects to life, with a focus on wider community benefit that leaves a real legacy.

<b>Recommendations:</b>
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It is recommended that the Cabinet Member:

1. Approve funding the full amount requested of £119,000 (representing 53% of overall project), comprised of:
  - £113,050 of capital funding towards the improvement of the Blanchman’s Farm Nature Reserve trackway to be paid in staged payments, on evidence of spend.
  - Including £5,950 (5%) to be held by SCC (Surrey County Council) until final evidence of income, expenditure, evaluation and building control sign-off is provided.

<b>Reason for Recommendations:</b>
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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.

<b>Executive Summary:</b>
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1. Blanchman’s Farm is a 25 acre Local Nature Reserve in Warlingham, Tandridge. It is owned by Tandridge Borough Council and managed by the applying organisation,

Blanchman’s Farm Nature Reserve Committee (BFNR), in partnership with the Downlands Countryside Project (DCP). The reserve is comprised of managed fields, woodland and a 1.5 kilometre concrete trackway constructed in 1995.

Lower Super Output Area (LSOA)	Reigate and Banstead 015A
National Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)	10 (one is most deprived)
Surrey Index of Multiple Deprivation	8 (one is most deprived)
Neighbouring LSOAs	Whilst the nature reserve is not located in an area of deprivation, it is located next door to two LSOAs, ranked one and four in Surrey. Residents in these LSOAs have little outdoor space and visit the nature reserve.

2. During the COVID-19 lockdowns BFNR saw a large increase in people visiting the reserve, which has continued into the present day. In response to witnessing people with accessibility needs turning away from the site, the committee conducted online surveys and consulted with users. Their research confirmed that local people with disabilities or young families with pushchairs, despite wanting to access the reserve, were unable to access it due to the uneven and poor surface.
3. The aim of the project is to improve accessibility to the site by re-laying sections of the trackway which have come to their end of life. The original trackway was laid in 1995 with various grades of scalping, which over the years have washed down to large and sharp stones. BFNR reluctantly laid concrete in response due it being hard wearing and low maintenance. However some sections of the concrete have now worn and rendered the site inaccessible for many local people.
4. The original trackway included a guided walking tour with information points throughout the route. The committee would like to reinvigorate this service once the trackway has been restored. An audio guide will be made available for free on the Blanchman’s Farm website for residents to listen to whilst moving around the site.
5. The original application sought to use concrete to match the existing trackway. However, on advice from the Surrey County Council (SCC) Greener Futures team, Your Fund Surrey asked BFNR to look for a low-carbon alternative. BFNR have sourced a low-carbon concrete which has a 30% saving on carbon compared to normal concrete. In addition BFNR have taken advice from SCC Countryside Partnerships Team and have incorporated more passing places in the plan to further the accessibility of the site.

<b>Details</b>
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**Description of project benefits**

6. The benefits to the project include:
  - Improved access to countryside for people living with disabilities or people with access requirements.

- Improved health and wellbeing for people living with disabilities or people with access requirements.
- Ensures the Nature Reserve will be accessible to residents for at least another 20 years.
- Enhanced social cohesion as more people can access and be proud of the area.

### Project Timeframes and Management

7. The works will be conducted in five stages over approximately 8 weeks to better protect the site from the effects of heavy machinery.

<b>Financial and Value for Money Implications</b>
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8. YFS funding is requested for £119,000 towards the construction of an All Abilities Trackway. This represents 53% of the total project cost. Prior to advice from Greener Futures on using low-carbon concrete, the project was seeking 50% from YFS. The bid subsequently increased by £28,436 to fund low-carbon concrete and additional contractor management costs.
9. Table 1. Financial Summary details the £104,000 of other funding against the total project cost of £223,000. Table 2 details the total project cost breakdown.

**Table 1. Financial summary**

<b>Amount applied for:</b>	£119,000
<b>Total project cost:</b>	£223,000
<b>Percentage of cost against total:</b>	53%
<b>Have other funding sources been secured?</b>	Yes
<b>Other funding:</b>	Tandridge District Council CIL - £104,000
<b>Is there a commercial element to the project?</b>	No
<b>Amount suggested for funding:</b>	£119,000

**Table 2. Project Cost breakdown:**

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Total Cost (inc. VAT)</b>
Professional Fees	£15,000
Repair work to footbridges	£3,600
Construction of new trackway	£163,564
Additional cost for low-carbon concrete and contractor management	£28,436
<b>Sub total</b>	<b>£210,00</b>
Contingency	£12,400
<b>Total</b>	<b>£223,00</b>

10. As with all applications, there is a risk that construction and purchase costs will increase between application and approval. This is partially mitigated by the contingency. The

applicant has secured quotes that support their costing, and will ultimately be funded based on evidenced, actual spend, up to the amount awarded.

## Assessment of the application against the criteria for the fund:

### Advisory Panel Comments

11. The role of the YFS Advisory Panel is to review shortlisted applications following the assessment and scoring of bids by Officers, and to advise and inform the final officer recommendations.
12. The YFS Advisory Panel were supportive of the project and the need to make the nature reserve accessible for all residents. The use of low-carbon concrete and the addition of more 'passing places' on advice from SCC colleagues were welcomed by the Panel.

## Consultation

### Summary of Support

13. Have your say, which featured the Blanchman's Farm Nature Reserve All Abilities Trackway, received 175 comments. 98% of comments were positive and 150/155 comments said that there was nothing else similar in the local area.
14. Letter of support have been received from:
  - 11 resident emails.
  - 314 responses to a Facebook poll (all but one was positive)
  - 23 comments on the Facebook poll (all positive)

15. The Divisional Councillor Becky Rush commented as follows:

*"As the County Councillor for Warlingham I am extremely supportive of this Your Fund Surrey application on behalf of Blanchman's Farm. Blanchman's Farm is a nature reserve located right in the heart of Warlingham village, a community of c7,000 residents. The nature reserve is the largest green space in the community and much loved by local residents; with a thriving volunteer group they are committed to maintaining the reserve to support native flora and fauna using funding raised through the local community and events such as their annual fair.*

*By its nature the going underfoot is uneven (and in the winter very muddy!), and whilst there is a circular walk established it is only partly accessible, in fair weather, by those with mobility issues or buggies. The real vision, through this application, is to make Blanchman's Farm accessible to all users and increase usage by local residents, school and youth groups, care homes and disability groups, by the building of an all-weather path suitable for walking sticks, supports, wheelchairs and buggies.*

*Being on the border with London Borough of Croydon, and on bus routes, it is hoped to attract new users from all around to come and enjoy the natural environment. I particularly enjoy their walking tour where at key points on the circular route you can access information about the plants and trees that you are looking at.*

*The materials for the path have been well researched to ensure their longevity and provide value for money, and the committed volunteer group will take good care of it ensuring it will be enjoyed for years to come.*

*We all understand the benefits of exercise and outdoor pursuits on our mental and physical health, and this path will enable a wider section of residents to enjoy this valuable local asset.*

*This is a fantastic community addition for Warlingham and will be well used all year round”.*

<b>Section 151 Officer commentary:</b>
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26. Although significant progress has been made to improve the Council's financial position, the financial environment remains challenging. The UK is experiencing the highest levels of inflation for decades, putting significant pressure on the cost of delivering our services. Coupled with continued increasing demand and fixed Government funding this requires an increased focus on financial management to ensure we can continue to deliver services within available funding. In addition to these immediate challenges, the medium-term financial outlook beyond 2022/23 remains uncertain. With no clarity on central government funding in the medium term, our working assumption is that financial resources will continue to be constrained, as they have been for the majority of the past decade. This places an onus on the Council to continue to consider issues of financial sustainability as a priority in order to ensure stable provision of services in the medium term.
27. The long-term sustainability of the projects funded by Your Fund Surrey is a key factor in assessing their suitability. This ongoing sustainability of this project relies only on identifying a modest and reasonably secure source of funds to maintain the asset. This is considered low risk for this specific project.
28. The finance assessment has been completed. This review means the expected benefits of the project have been scrutinised and challenged by officers and are deemed acceptable in this instance. An important consideration is that Your Fund Surrey is a key part of the Council's Empowering Community approach focused upon enabling communities through investing in a meaningful and lasting way. Therefore, the success of Your Fund Surrey will set against establishing a different relationship with communities, empowering them to be more self-reliant. In forging that relationship, the success of individual projects will vary within the benefits delivered by the programme as a whole. Learning points from successful and unsuccessful projects will be taken and used to inform the development and evolution of the fund over time.
29. The borrowing costs associated with the fund have been fully built into the Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy. The annual cost of borrowing for this specific project of £119,000 would be c£6k.

30. This project has been reviewed financially and has been adequately planned and is a direct investment into an asset being constructed. It is supported by a material amount of other funding which helps minimise risk to the YFS investment.

**Legal implications – Monitoring Officer:**

16. 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.
17. 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.

**Equalities and Diversity:**

18. 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 the local community and particularly those with protected characteristics that may be more likely to experience social and economic exclusion.
19. An Equalities Impact Assessment has been produced for YFS and was circulated as an Annex to the YFS Cabinet Report 26<sup>th</sup> January 2021.

**Other Implications:**

20. 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 below.

**Table 4: Implications for council priorities and policy areas**

<b>Area assessed:</b>	<b>Direct Implications:</b>
Corporate Parenting/Looked After Children	No direct implications
Safeguarding responsibilities for vulnerable children & adults	No direct implication
Environmental sustainability	Use of low-carbon and recycled will contribute towards targets.
Public Health	The project will have a positive impact on wider health outcomes, particularly families and people with disabilities being encouraged to increase their physical activity and access the countryside.

**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.

- 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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**Report Authors:**

Patrick Culligan, [yourfund@surreycc.gov.uk](mailto:yourfund@surreycc.gov.uk)

Nikki Tagg, [yourfund@surreycc.gov.uk](mailto:yourfund@surreycc.gov.uk)

**Consulted:**

Division County Councillor

Corporate Finance – Surrey County Council

**Sources/background papers:**

YFS Criteria

YFS Governance Document

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