

SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

DATE: 25 JULY 2023



REPORT OF CABINET MEMBER: DENISE TURNER-STEWART, DEPUTY LEADER AND CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITIES AND COMMUNITY SAFETY

LEAD OFFICER: MARIE SNELLING, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CUSTOMER AND COMMUNITIES

SUBJECT: YOUR FUND SURREY- CF277 WILDLIFE AID FOUNDATION

ORGANISATION STRATEGY PRIORITY AREA: EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES

Purpose of the Report:

This report sets out the key information on the **Wildlife Aid Foundation** Your Fund Surrey (YFS) application, for the consideration of Cabinet.

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

Recommendations:

It is recommended that Cabinet:

1. Approve the full amount requested of £2,808,000 (21% of total project cost), comprised of:
 - Up to £2,808,000 of capital funding towards the development of a community hub to be paid in staged payments, on evidence of spend. The final value of funding will be contingent on Surrey County Council's (SCC) review of a tender before entering into a funding agreement.
 - 5% of which will be retained as final payment until final evidence of income, expenditure and building control sign-off is provided.

Reason for Recommendations:

- This application has been the subject of a rigorous assessment process and officers consider the project meets the aims and published criteria of the Fund and to satisfy the requirements to award funding.
- This project has the potential to have a long-lasting positive impact on the environment and wildlife in Surrey. The proposed Wildlife Centre would help redress the balance between humans and nature and play a part in preserving Surrey's natural heritage for future generations to enjoy. The community spaces will support charities, schools and

diverse community groups across Surrey and provide education for all about how to protect the natural environment for the future.

Executive Summary

1. For 40 years, the Wildlife Aid Foundation (WAF) has been rescuing and rehabilitating sick, injured and orphaned wildlife, including some of Britain's most vulnerable and endangered animals. Alongside this, they also run off-site education and public engagement programmes.
2. The charity is now in a period of transformational change. They have purchased a 20-acre piece of land in Leatherhead, where they plan to create "The Wildlife Aid Centre" which will include new habitats, a visitor centre & community hub, a new wildlife hospital and a domestic vet practice. Most of the site, which is bordered by the M25 and the River Mole, is currently classed as impoverished floodplain and offers little biodiversity. They plan to restore the land and create a network of diverse, productive ecosystem including 12 acres of wetland habitats that will attract a range of wildlife.
3. The YFS application is for phase 3 of the total project which is the Visitor Centre and Community Hub (Community Hub) and the habitat walkways. The Community Hub will consist of two classrooms, an exhibition space and shop, a community café, surrounding outdoor areas and paths and walkways around the wetlands.

Project Summary

4. The new Wildlife Aid Centre location is based in the electoral division of Leatherhead and Fetcham East. The new centre will be open to all residents of Surrey and further afield.

Lower Super Output Area (LSOA)	Mole Valley 003A
National Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)	7 (one is most deprived)
Surrey Index of Multiple Deprivation	3 (one is most deprived)
Neighbouring LSOAs	The Community Hub will serve people from across Surrey and surrounding counties. Neighbouring LSOAs to the Centre: Leatherhead North - 12740 (Surrey decile 1) & 17115 (Surrey decile 2).

5. WAF currently operates from the home of the CEO, on Randall's Road in Leatherhead, and is used to rescue and rehabilitate injured animals. All their current educational outreach work takes place offsite with various educational volunteers visiting schools, groups and clubs to inform the public about the importance of our natural heritage.
6. The Wildlife Aid Centre's overall project includes the following five phases:

- **Phase 1 & 2 – Habitats:** Creating a network of diverse, productive ecosystems – including 12 acres of wetland habitats attracting a wide range of wildlife.
 - **Phase 3 - Community Hub, wetlands walkway and temporary caretaker and security building- The subject of this funding application.** – Accessible to all, the Community Hub will include a community café, community spaces, exhibition areas and a shop. The Community Hub will host school, college and community groups, adult leisure learning, family sessions and talks. There will be a bookable community room and a changing exhibition programme. Volunteering and placement opportunities here will include working in the café or shop, giving talks to visitors and supporting delivery of school and community activities.
 - **Phase 4 - Caretaker and security accommodation and ancillary buildings:** This will provide 24-hour security 365 days a year.
 - **Phase 5 - Wildlife Aid hospital:** An upgrade from its current overcrowded facilities with more animals being treated, housed and rehabilitated.
 - **Phase 5 - Domestic vet practice:** The domestic vet practice will offer care for domestic animals. A key element is that all profits will go straight back to support the work of the whole Wildlife Aid Centre, strengthening their business model.
7. Development will be phased to reduce risk and ensure full focus is given to each stage. The final phase will be to create a commercial veterinary practice, that will supplement the income of the activities at the Community Hub. The whole project has taken 8 years to plan, involving extensive research into the issues wildlife face, to ensure they are providing the most effective solutions to increase biodiversity across Surrey.
 8. The Community Hub will comprise of two classroom/meeting spaces, an exhibition space/retail area and café. Including the habitats, this size allows for a maximum of 120 students visiting per day. The Community Hub is a flexible space that can be used to welcome small or large groups.
 9. The Community Hub and walkways will be free to access and be fully accessible to all the community. The spaces will be designed and run to be inclusive to all.
 10. The Community Hub will have a bookable community space open to schools, charities and community groups. Costs will be lower for visits from schools in disadvantaged areas (25% reduction) and there will be a 50% reduction in room hire costs for community groups. WAF have assumed 25% of all community bookings will be free and are committed to ensuring the space meets the needs of the local community.
 11. WAF are keen to use the Wildlife Centre to support green social prescribing and have consulted with a variety of charities who have a mental wellbeing provision and work in partnership with GP surgeries and community partners to support people with mild to moderate mental health difficulties. They have a paid Learning Manager who will coordinate the WAF activities on site as well as externally run activities by the community.
 12. WAF is already deeply embedded in the local community with over 400 current volunteers, equating to 78,000 volunteer hours per year. With the increase in opportunities the new Wildlife Centre will bring, they hope to expand this to over 600. WAF have a waiting list for volunteers and 96% of current volunteers have expressed an interest in additional shifts.

- 17
13. The Community Hub will include a community café, outsourced to a community organisation at a nominal rent. WAF are currently exploring possible options including a model that offers people with Learning Disabilities and Autism an opportunity to work.
 14. WAFs vision and mission is focused on protecting the wildlife of Surrey. This is achieved directly, through their rescue and rehabilitation work, and in-directly through their environmental education programme. WAF has completed a number of community consultations in Surrey to understand the views of the community on wildlife and the new Wildlife Centre. Of the 908 people who initially responded, 41% lived local to Leatherhead. Of those who live locally, 98% said they would visit and use the Wildlife Centre. Furthermore, WAF's community consultation highlighted some potential activities that would be of interest to visitors including tree planting, litter picking days and land management workshops. WAF activities at the Centre will be focused on their engagement programme iDot (I Do One Thing), in which people commit to carrying out one positive action per day for wildlife and the wider environment. Since the launch of iDot in 2019, it has already produced over 1.3m individual actions.
 15. The Wildlife Centre will have accessible boardwalks, viewing platforms and hides which will offer visitors access across the habitats, enabling them to learn what wildlife lives where and how to replicate those habitats in their own green spaces.
 16. The Community Hub has been designed with sustainability in mind and has received the BREEAM sustainability standard of 'Very Good'. Included within the building, but not limited to, will be high levels of insulation, a Ground Source Heat Pump, solar panels, EV charging points and bike racks. Alongside these environmental features, WAF plan to promote greener travel to the site from their staff, volunteers and the community.
 17. Due to the considerable level of investment, an element of the funding agreement would include the requirement of WAF to work with the Council's marketing team to install significant Surrey County Council signage at the front of the building to reflect the project is in partnership with SCC.

Description of project benefits

18. The key benefits of the project include:
 - i. Supporting physical and mental health by providing unique opportunities for residents to engage with animals and nature
 - ii. Creating new habitats for wildlife and biodiversity
 - iii. Creating new community spaces and opportunities for local people
 - iv. Supporting greater and accessible access to wildlife and the environment in Surrey
 - v. Increasing opportunities for volunteering and skills development

Project Timeframes and Management

19. Phases 1, 2 & 4 are fully funded. Phases 1 and 2 have been completed.
20. After securing funding for Phase 3, the Community Hub, WAF will begin the remaining elements of the project plan, including:
 - RIBA Stage 3 – Spatial Coordination – 10 weeks
 - RIBA Stage 4 – Technical Design – 10 weeks
 - Procurement – 23 weeks

- RIBA Stage 5 – project delivery – approximately 58 weeks, comprising of the following stages:
 - Site set-up & temporary works
 - Piling foundations and underground services
 - Superstructure
 - Roofing, windows, external doors, cladding
 - Mechanical and electrical works
 - Community Hub Fit out
 - Ancillary, landscape works and wetlands walkway
21. Planning permission was granted by Mole Valley District Council (MVDC) in September 2020. In early 2021, MVDC confirmed that the permission has been lawfully implemented and therefore remains in place. The new building will have an expected minimum life expectancy of 50 years. On-going maintenance has the potential to extend the lifespan beyond this.
 22. The overarching project manager will be the WAF CEO, who in turn reports to the WAF board of trustees. An external project manager will manage the build. Throughout the build the WAF hospital will continue to operate from Randalls Road and the learning manager will continue to work with communities, schools, and businesses. On opening, the centre will be the responsibility of the centre manager, who will report to the CEO.
 23. Progress and spend on the Wildlife Aid Centre is reviewed quarterly at each board meeting. For Phase 3, milestones will be set between the contractors and WAF project manager for the build, which will be regularly reviewed at WAF board meetings.
 24. WAF have recognised the significant expansion to their current operation and have changed their management structure accordingly, creating a flat management team. An external consultant is mentoring the management team as they work towards the creation of the Wildlife Aid Centre.
 25. WAF have five trustees who bring a broad range of skills to the project, including finance, project management, public relations and design. They are currently actively looking for an additional 3 board members and have identified key additional skills and knowledge requirements, including legal, retail, community engagement and evaluation.

Consultation:

Summary of Support

26. Have Your Say, which featured The Wildlife Aid Centre, received 4,304 comments, the highest of any project to date. 99% of comments were positive.
27. Letters of support have been received from a wide range organisations, groups, individuals and county / district Councillors.

Risk Management and Implications:

28. Table 1 below outlines the key risks to the project. Officers consider there to be adequate control measures in place.

Table 1: Summary Table of Risks and Key Mitigations

Risk description	RAG	Mitigation action/strategy
Uncertainty over the future management of the organisation.	Yellow	The original WAF management structure has been changed to reflect the expansion of the operation, creating a flat management team that oversees all areas of the business. The CEO is still in charge but is also mentoring the team, sharing knowledge, contacts and skills, enabling WAF to run effectively. In addition, an external consultant is mentoring the management team as they work towards the creation of the Wildlife Aid Centre and will continue to do so. They have identified additional skills required on the Board and are currently trying to recruit an additional 3 Board members in next 6 months.
Unable to raise the funding gap.	Green	They have significant fundraising potential. YFS funding could also help leverage other grant funding.
Project costs rise well above QS estimates post tender due to inflationary environment.	Yellow	Full tender process and subsequent value engineering to mitigate against cost increases. SCC will review tender exercise and agree final funding and scope before completing funding agreement.
Post award project costs rise significantly, and the build is no longer viable.	Yellow	Full tender process and subsequent value engineering to mitigate against cost increases. SCC review of tender before completing funding agreement. Multiple funding streams and phases of work allow flexibility in meeting available budget.
Failure of the organisation.	Green	WAF have been running for 40 years and have significant support from the community.
Wildlife Aid sell the building.	Green	Consider: • Restriction on title • Claw back if not used as intended or sold.
Project fails to deliver desired community benefit.	Green	WAF well connected in the community. WAF have already conducted community engagement to ascertain need and support. Funding agreement requirement to monitor use over 20 years.

Financial and Value for Money Implications:
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29. YFS funding is requested towards the construction of the community hub and walkways. The project has applied for £2.8m which equates to 21% of the overall Wildlife Aid Centre project costs and 67% of Phase 3 (Community Hub) project costs.
30. Due to the high value of the project and YFS funding request, all costs are based on a detailed Quantity Surveyor (QS) report conducted in March 2023 which has also been reviewed by SCC Land & Property (L&P). L&P had queries regarding some of the costs such as the inflation allowance and WAF provided appropriate responses. The cost estimate is based on benchmark rates from similar projects. Any funding provided by YFS would be subject to a satisfactory tender process.
31. Table 2 - Financial Summary, details the £10,764,029 of other funding which has already been secured or is being sourced towards the wider project. The total project cost is £13,572,029. Table 3 details the Wildlife Aid Centre project cost breakdown. Table 4 shows the Community Hub project cost breakdown.

Table 2 - Financial summary

Amount applied for:	£2,808,000
Total project cost:	£13,572,029
Percentage of cost against total:	21% of whole project & 65% of Community Hub
Have other funding sources been secured?	Yes, towards the wider project
Other funding:	<p>Actual</p> <p>Phases 1,2, & 4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wildlife Aid funding £1,200,000 • Surrey Freemasons - £50,000 • Haskins Garden Centre - £14,000 • International Tree Foundation - £3,780 • Surrey Climate Commission, community grants for sustainability - £1,200 <p>Phase 3 – Community Hub</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £1,536,661 WAF contribution <p>Phase 4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wildlife Aid funding £1,977,360 <p>Phase 5</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simon's Last Wish campaign - £524,148 (live campaign specific to the wildlife hospital equipment) • Wildlife Aid funding (includes restricted funds, legacies & donations due to launch June 2023) - £5,456,880 <p>Total – £10,764,029</p> <p><i>Fundraising activity for the Wildlife Aid Centre is ongoing throughout all phases.</i></p>

Table 3 - Wildlife Aid Centre Cost Breakdown

Phase	Activity	Total Cost (inc VAT)	YFS Funding	Other Funding
Phase 1 & 2	Land purchase, architects, surveyors, ponds & habitats	£1,268,980	£0	£1,200,000
				£50,000
				£14,000
				£3,780
				£1,200
sub-total				£1,268,980
Phase 3	Community Hub, infrastructure & temporary security building	£4,344,661	£2,808,000*	£1,536,661
sub-total				£1,536,800
Phase 4	Workshops, garages and security house	£1,977,360	£0	£1,977,360
sub-total				£1,977,360
Phase 5	Wildlife hospital and community vet	£5,981,028	£0	£524,148
				£5,456,880
sub-total				£5,981,028
Total		£13,572,029	£2,808,000	£13,572,029

*towards community building & walkways only

Table 4 - Community Hub Project Cost breakdown

Phase 3 element		Total		YFS Contribution
Community Hub*	Substructure	£231,195	£2,408,000	£2,408,000
	Superstructure	£958,847		
	Internal Finishes	£66,922		
	Fittings and Furnishings	£52,700		
	Services	£427,200		
	External works	£60,500		
	Preliminaries	£391,736		
	Contractor overheads	£218,900		
Civil & Infrastructure Works	Wetlands walkways to make the site fully accessible *	£400,000	£745,861	£0
	Tarmac road & car park	£204,000		
	Landscaping in between buildings	£25,000		
	Permanent block paving	£20,000		
	Cabling & fencing	£35,000		
	External drainage	£61,861		

Caretaker and Security	£130,000	£0
Inflation allowance (2%)	£69,000	£0
Design & Construction Contingency (10%)	£335,000	£0
VAT	£656,800	£0
Total	£4,344,661	£2,808,000

*Denotes YFS funded element

Advisory Panel Comments

32. The applicant presented the project to the Advisory Panel on 14th June 2023. Panel members were particularly interested in understanding the future management of the Wildlife Centre, considering the significant upscale from their current operation and future change in management.
33. Members also queried if there are any negative implications of the Wildlife Centre being located on the floodplains close to the M25. The applicant's architect clarified the measures that will be taken including elevating the buildings. Wildlife Aid representatives explained how wildlife can thrive near human activity such as roads & motorways.
34. Further queries were raised on the funding gap. The applicant gave further details on their fundraising plan, including potential future legacies.
35. Members of the Advisory Panel were generally satisfied by the answers provided and further information was sent out after the meeting on the future management of the centre and trustees. Three out of four Members in attendance agreed that the project should be recommended for funding. One member abstained as they felt they did not have enough financial and cashflow information to take an informed view.

Greener Futures Comment

36. This is a very strong project as it has demonstrable benefits for wildlife and biodiversity, both of which are at risk in the county. The building will be low carbon and therefore aligns with the county net zero 2050 target.

Section 151 Officer Commentary:

37. Significant progress has been made in recent years to improve the Council's financial resilience and the financial management capabilities across the organisation. Whilst this has built a stronger financial base from which to deliver our services, the increased cost of living, global financial uncertainty, high inflation and government policy changes mean we continue to face challenges to our financial position. This requires an increased focus on financial management to protect service delivery, a continuation of the need to be forward looking in the medium term, as well as the delivery of the efficiencies to achieve a balanced budget position each year.
38. In addition to these immediate challenges, the medium-term financial outlook beyond 2023/24 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 the stable provision of services in the medium term.

39. The Section 151 Officer supports this application. WAF have submitted detailed financial costing and queries on this have been resolved. The documentation shows the full scope of the project envisaged. The value of award is material but as a % of total project costs is reasonable as there is significant wider funding secured. Due to the scale of the project, costs need to be tightly controlled and project management needs to be strong to ensure financial risk is minimised. Conditions should be added to the funding agreement to mitigate exposure to these risks.
40. 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 £2,808,000 would be £163,645.

Legal Implications – Monitoring Officer:

41. 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.
42. 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.
43. It is recommended that SCC Require a restriction on the title to prevent sale of the property or change of use without SCC permission and require pay back should the building be sold or not used for the intended purpose, on a sliding scale. The final terms to be agreed by the Executive Director.

Equalities and Diversity:

44. 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 this project 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.

Other Implications:

45. 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 5 - Implications for council priorities and policy areas

Area assessed:	Direct Implications:
Corporate Parenting/Looked After Children	Improved access to environment and nature activities for looked after children across Surrey.
Safeguarding responsibilities for vulnerable children & adults	Provides a safe space for vulnerable children and adults attending sessions with charities
Environmental sustainability	As well as protecting local wildlife populations, the Centre will contribute to national efforts to reverse species and habitats decline. Visitors will also learn about Surrey wildlife, how human activity impacts it, and how they can each protect and live in harmony with nature.

Public Health	Increasing access to green spaces for residents across Surrey. Involvement in such activities can have positive impacts on health and wellbeing.
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What Happens Next:

- Following Cabinet 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.
- 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 issue a provisional offer of funding to the applicant requiring review of the tender before the final value of YFS funding is confirmed and a funding agreement drafted.

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Land & Property, Greener Futures, Corporate Finance & Commercial – SCC

Sources/background papers:

Your Fund Surrey Criteria

Your Fund Surrey Governance Document

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