

## SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL

## CABINET MEMBER DECISIONS



DATE: 23 JULY 2024

REPORT OF CABINET MEMBER: DENISE TURNER STEWART, CABINET MEMBER FOR CUSTOMER AND COMMUNITIES

LEAD OFFICER: MICHAEL COUGHLIN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, PARTNERSHIPS, PROSPERITY AND GROWTH

SUBJECT: YOUR FUND SURREY APPLICATION FOR FARNCOMBE COMMUNITY GARDEN HUB, GODALMING

ORGANISATION STRATEGY PRIORITY AREA: Empowered and Thriving Communities

<b>Purpose of the Report:</b>
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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.

This report sets out the key information on the shortlisted **Farncombe Community Garden Hub, Godalming** Your Fund Surrey (YFS) Application for the consideration of the YFS Advisory Panel.

<b>Recommendations:</b>
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It is recommended that the Cabinet Member for Customer and Communities:

1. Approve to fund the full amount requested of £114,000 comprised of:
  - a. £114,000 of capital funding towards the development of the community hub building to be paid in staged payments, on evidence of spend.
  - b. 5% of which, to be held by SCC until final evidence of income, expenditure, and completion provided.

<b>Reason for Recommendations:</b>
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This application has been the subject of a rigorous assessment process by officers, who consider the project to meet the aims and published criteria of the fund and to satisfy the requirements to award funding.

The project aims to build a Community Hub building within the garden that will be used all year round by the community for activities in the garden that will support their health and wellbeing.

## **Executive Summary:**

1. The Farncombe Community Garden (FCG) was initiated by GPs at Binscombe Medical Centre in 2017, inspired by social prescribing as a way of improving people's health and wellbeing.
2. The YFS application is to develop a new wooden cabin within the community garden that will include a meeting space and kitchen, alongside their existing free standing accessible toilet facilities. The installation of this new community area into the existing garden will mean the users will be able to participate in gardening activities all year round. In addition, the building will act as a hub for the local community.
3. The project objectives include tackling loneliness, social isolation, mental health and supporting social prescribing. It will be inclusive to all who are seeking to share the health and well-being benefits of being outdoors. The project aims to connect people more closely to the natural world on their doorstep and encourage community cohesion as individuals of all ages and backgrounds work together towards a common goal.

## **Project Summary**

4. The FCG is located on land adjacent to Broadwater Lodge Care Home in Farncombe within the electoral division of Godalming North in Waverley. The site is accessible off Sumers Road on foot, with close transport links by bus and it is less than a mile from Farncombe station.
5. The site covers approximately 3,000 square metres and has a variety of open grassland, hedge row, brambles, and low-density woodland. The garden encompasses an orchard, pond, fruit and vegetable beds, a sensory garden, fire pit, woodland, compost toilet and bins, woodworking area and car park.
6. Since its initiation in 2017, FCG has had over 100 volunteers and successfully hosted community initiatives including Walking for Health, an art group and a residential chaplaincy project. They hosted their first open day this year which was attended by 269 people. Consultation with the community during this time has highlighted an enthusiasm for nature-based community projects, and FCG have been keen to develop this further, however the main barrier has been the lack of shelter, toilet and kitchen facilities.
7. FCG have completed a needs assessment of their local area. According to the "Community Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny" published by Waverley Borough Council in September 2020, Farncombe is ranked 1 in Surrey in terms of

‘Vulnerable Population Dimension’. This measure considers where there is likely to have been disproportionate impact of COVID-19 based on the prevalence of particular groups with pre-existing vulnerabilities e.g. people with disabilities, people with mental health conditions, older people who live alone and Carers. FCG believe their project can bring therapeutic benefits to these members of the community and have various letters of support and interest from organisations who offer social prescribing such as Dose of Nature and local GP practices.

8. The site is located directly opposite the local secondary school and the educational benefit of the project is an important part of the vision. Both this neighbouring school and local primary schools have made links with the garden, identifying an opportunity to use the space as an outdoor classroom and for therapeutic practices such as eco therapy which they have seen a recent demand for. The garden also borders a dementia care home, and a key priority of the project is that the site is completely accessible so that it is an inclusive space for the whole community to enjoy.
9. Alongside the accessibility features, the cabin will also have solar panels, an air source heat pump and the walls, floors and ceilings will be insulated. The choice of cabin is based on quality of materials for longevity, good insulation and energy efficiency. Tree surveys and ecological surveys have been completed, with no ecological issues found. The project was granted planning permission in July 2023.

## Details

### Description of project benefits

10. The benefits of the project include:

- I. Sharing gardening skills and promoting horticulture
- II. Opportunities to interact and improve health and well-being
- III. Improved community facilities to enhance, connect and combat isolation
- IV. Increased volunteering opportunities for all ages
- V. Supporting the Council's green objectives through increasing biodiversity, reducing carbon emissions and noise pollution

### Consultation:

11. Have your say, which featured Farncombe Community Garden, received 295 comments. The application has also benefited from a significant number of signatures and supporting letters from local residents.

12. Letters of support have been received from the following organisations, groups and individuals:

- Halow Project

- Freemantles School
- Dose of Nature
- Broadwater School
- Fountain Centre
- Broadwater Lodge Care Home (Care UK)

13. The Divisional Councillor Penny Rivers fully supports the application.

14. The Your Fund Surrey Advisory Panel were consulted by email in July 2024. 6 Panel members support the application, 1 declined to comment and 1 did not provide a response.

**Risk Management and Implications:**

15. The applicant has provided an overview of risks against the project in Table 1 below. Officers consider there to be adequate control measures in place.

**Table 1. Summary Table of Risks and Key Mitigations**

<b>Risk description</b>	<b>RAG</b>	<b>Mitigation action/strategy</b>
Health and safety – of building and during construction		Properly fencing off this part of the site with notices of hazard; Securing site with strong padlocks; asking for risk assessments from contractors; Relevant health & safety notices to be displayed in risky areas
Supplier issues		Obtain 3 quotes, keep in regular contact with chosen supplier

**Financial and Value for Money Implications:**

16. YFS funding is requested to contribute towards the wooden cabin which will include a kitchen, electricity connection, heating and solar panels. The project has applied for £114,000 which equates to 79% of the overall project costs. The remaining monies needed for the project have been raised or are expected from various sources (see Table 2).

17. Table 2. Financial Summary details the £30,000 of other funding against the total project cost of £144,000. Table 3 details the total project cost breakdown.

**Table 2. Financial summary**

<b>Amount applied for:</b>	£114,000
<b>Total project cost:</b>	£144,000
<b>Percentage of cost against total:</b>	79%
<b>Have other funding sources been secured?</b>	Yes

<b>Other funding:</b>	£30,000 – Broadwater Lodge Care Home  In 2023, Farncombe Community Garden also received £13,580 for the accessible pathways from Neighbourhood CIL
<b>Volunteer contributions:</b>	£910
<b>Non cash contributions:</b>	£0
<b>Is there a commercial element to the project?</b>	No
<b>Amount suggested for funding:</b>	£114,000

**Table 3. Project Cost breakdown:**

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Total Cost (Inc. VAT)</b>	<b>YFS Funding</b>
Wooden Cabin including kitchen, solar panels, heating and electricity connection	£138,000	£108,000
Contingency	£6,000	£6,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>£144,000</b>	<b>£114,000</b>

18. 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.

19. Future operating cost projections include £4k a year for maintenance and garden equipment, £2k a year for utilities and insurance, and £1k for other operational costs. Based on the fundraising to date and expected income from open days, plant sales, workshops and building hire these costs will be able to be covered on an ongoing basis.

**Section 151 Officer Commentary:**

18. The Council continues to operate in a very challenging financial environment. Local authorities across the country are experiencing significant budgetary pressures. Surrey County Council has made significant progress in recent years to improve the Council's financial resilience and whilst this has built a stronger financial base from which to deliver our services, the cost of service delivery, increasing demand, financial uncertainty 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 deliver financial efficiencies and reduce spending to achieve a balanced budget position each year.

19. In addition to these immediate challenges, the medium-term financial outlook beyond 2024/25 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.
20. As such, the Section 151 Officer supports this application. This funding request is for investment into a community area, which will be managed by the trustees and management committee. The YFS contribution of 79% is relatively low risk given the nature of the project and the support from the local community. This should be a low operating cost project. Future cost projections, primarily maintenance and equipment, have been based on a similar project within Surrey, and based on the donation and funding that have already been received, these costs should be covered by future donations and open days.
21. 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 £114k would be c£9k.

#### **Legal Implications – Monitoring Officer:**

22. 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.
23. 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:**

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 the local community and particularly those with 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.

#### **Other Implications:**

26. 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.

<b>Area assessed:</b>	<b>Direct Implications:</b>
Corporate Parenting/Looked After Children	No significant implications arising from this report
Safeguarding responsibilities for vulnerable children and adults	No significant implications arising from this report
Environmental sustainability	Supporting the Council's green objectives through increasing biodiversity, reducing carbon emissions and noise pollution
Compliance against net-zero emissions target and future climate compatibility/resilience	Supporting the Council's green objectives through increasing biodiversity, reducing carbon emissions and noise pollution
Public Health	The project has a positive impact on wider health outcomes, encouraging activity and social interaction.

**What Happens Next:**

27. Following approval of the funding, a notice of the records of decisions taken will be published within 3 days of the decision being made.

28. Officers will prepare the relevant schedules and funding agreements to enable payment of funds and monitoring and evaluation of the project against its outcomes.

29. 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:**  
 Divisional County Councillor  
 Corporate Finance - SCC

**Annexes:**  
 None

**Sources/background papers:**  
 Your Fund Surrey Criteria  
 Your Fund Surrey Governance Document

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