

Briefing Note

Community Grant Application for proposed skatepark in Menheniot

1.0 Background

1.1 In April 2017, Cllr Medlen presented details of a new young peoples' project for sports activities being planned for the parish. Since then, the councillor has reported back to the public meeting at regular intervals with a progress report on plans to create a skatepark on the recreation ground adjacent to the Menheniot Sports Club.

1.2 Throughout this period, councillors have supported background work to the project by agreeing to fund the cost of printing, a consultation and planning advice from Cornwall Council. The total sum was £172.

1.3 On 21 September 2017, at the public meeting, councillors resolved to 'support the principle of a multi-activity centre in the village, with all options open as to the level of funding the parish council might provide.' (Minutes Item 112/2017). At the last public meeting on 17 May 2018, Cllr Sneyd asked that the council adopt the park as a council project. Councillors have declined the request at that time but asked that more information in the form of a business plan be provided so that they could make an informed decision later.

1.4 Mr Keith Goldsmith, a personal consultant to the project, has submitted an application for a Community Grant to the parish council for consideration at the public meeting being held on 21 June 2018. This Briefing Note is circulated to councillors to explain and clarify the situation.

2.0 Community Grant Application

2.1 Mr Goldsmith has submitted an application for £2,000 to cover the cost of making a planning application and as a contribution towards the cost of removing soil at the location of the proposed park. (Appendix 1). Because of the size and scope of the proposal, additional information is attached to the application (Appendix 2).

The MSPG is a new organisation and does not yet have a formal meeting and reporting structure. They have confirmed that they meet monthly where possible or communicate via email to make their decisions. They do not hold an independent bank account, and because their expenditure has been limited (see 1.2 above) they have no accounts to supply. However, they have submitted a costing for the project amounting to approximately £53,000 (Appendix 3).

2.2 The Parish Clerk has carried out an assessment of the application as presented (Appendix 7).

3.0 Council Grants

3.1 In June 2015, the parish council voted to introduce a system for managing grants and donations. This consists of a 'Small Donations' pot (worth £250 annually) that can provide small grants up to £50. There is a separate fund 'Charitable Donations' (worth £500 annually) that may make awards of up to £100. The third source of council funding is the Community Grant for sums in excess of £100. Application is made by way of an application form. Awards are considered twice a year (April and November). There is no upper limit to the amount the council may agree, but it will be limited by the amount remaining in the Community Grant budget (currently £5522).

3.2 Councillors have strictly enforced the conditions attached to the Community Grant. However, on 2 March 2018, councillors received a late application from the Menheniot Parochial Church Council for £3,800 to cover the cost of graveyard maintenance. The application was received two days after the closing date (28 February 2018) for Community Grants. Councillors agreed to make an exception on this occasion, and resolved to accept the application on this occasion, but councillors stated that *'they would not accept any further late applications to the Community Fund, and referred all applicants to the terms and conditions published on the council's website'*. Item 38/2018

3.3 This grant application from MSPG was received on 7 June 2018, which is outside the time frame for considering Community Grants.

3.4 Terms & Conditions of the Community Grant state that:

Permissions

If your project requires permissions to take place, this must be granted before we will pay you the money. This may include planning permission, street licences or public liability insurance. It is your responsibility to check beforehand.

The parish council cannot fund, in advance, any part of a project that needs planning or other permissions.

3.5 The grant application states that the money will be used 'to start the planning process' and has included a sum of £300-500 in the budget to cover the cost of making the planning application.

At the time of writing, no planning documents have been received by Cornwall Council. This means that the council has not been invited to comment on the planning application as a consultee by Cornwall Council.

If the parish council agrees to fund the cost of the planning application, then it is agreeing to support the application but without having sight of any planning documents. This would be contrary to councillors Code of Conduct where their honesty and integrity may be called into question, their accountability to the public might be compromised and they might not be using the council's resources (funds) prudently (Stewardship).

3.6 There is a further sum of £3,000 included in the skate park costings for 'removal of soil'. No request for groundworks has been requested, and so no permission has been given.

4.0 Options

4.1 Accept the grant application and make an award in part or in full. This will require councillors to make an exception to their terms and conditions, and reverse a decision made in March 2018. It will also overrule its own terms and conditions. By making the award (and funding the planning application), councillors leave themselves open to legal challenge of predetermination of the planning application when it is made.

4.2 Decline the grant application. The applicants should be encouraged to raise funds independently of the parish council in order to pay for the planning application.

In January 2017, the parish council adopted a Pre-application Protocol which encourages project developers to engage with the Local Planning Authority (Cornwall Council) and the parish council at an early stage in their applications to ensure that appropriate advice is given and public consultations undertaken. Guidance for applicants is published on the parish council's website.

If due planning process is followed and the plans are approved, the parish may at that point consider making a contribution to the cost of the project through the Community Grants process in the normal way.

4.3 Postpone the decision. Adopt the skatepark as a parish council project and agree a ringfenced budget to fund it partly or in full. To progress this option, councillors will need a detailed business plan, part of which should include case studies from other parishes, a public consultation and detailed costings. This will have implications for the council's Community Grant reserves and impact on the funding opportunities open to the MSPG.

5.0 References

5.1 Appendix 1: Menheniot Skate Park Group Application

5.2 Appendix 2: Feasibility Study Background

5.3 Appendix 3: Project Breakdown

5.4 Appendix 4: Female Skating

5.5 Appendix 5: Extracts from parish council minutes April 2017-May 2018

5.6 Appendix 6: Community Grant Terms & Conditions

5.7 Appendix 7: MSPG Grant Assessment

Author: John Hesketh

Date: 15 June 2018