



ADUR & WORTHING
COUNCILS

Joint Strategic Committee
9 July 2019
Agenda Item 16

Key Decision [Yes/No]

Ward(s) Affected:

Highdown Gardens - Preserving Stern's Legacy

Report by the Director for Communities

Executive Summary

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to confirm that Worthing Borough Council has been successful in its application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund (HF) (formerly HLF Heritage Lottery Fund) for funding of £813,200 to preserve the horticultural heritage and increase and improve accessibility to the gardens.

2. Recommendations

It is recommended that Joint Strategic Committee:

- 2.1 resolve to accept the terms of the grant
- 2.2 resolve to approve the addition of the £813,200 HF funding to the Capital Programme
- 2.3 resolve to release the Council resources allocated to the project.

3. Context

- 3.1.** Highdown Gardens sits on the South Downs, 150ft above sea level, between the West Sussex settlements of Angmering and Goring below. Overlooking the sea, the Gardens contain a collection of rare plants and trees, collectively deemed a National Collection. Created from a chalk quarry where there was little soil and very unfavourable conditions for plant growth, the Chalk Garden at Highdown is the achievement of Sir Frederick Stern (1884 – 1967) and his wife, who leased then purchased the 8.52 acres (3.45 ha) in 1909 and worked for 50 years to prove that plants would grow on chalk. The Gardens were created during a period when many expeditions were sponsored to China and the Himalayas to collect rare and beautiful plants. Many of the original plants from the early collections can still be seen in the Gardens today, particularly plants collected by Reginald Farrer and Ernest Henry Wilson, renowned plant hunters.
- 3.2.** Stern was awarded many honours, including the Victoria Medal of Honour by the Royal Horticultural Society in 1941. He was chairman of the John Innes Horticultural Institute from 1947 to 1961, vice-president of the Royal Horticultural Society in 1962 and vice-president and treasurer of the Linnean Society from 1941 to 1958. Stern was knighted in 1956 for his services to horticulture. He was considered the foremost expert in chalk gardening, and Highdown Gardens was his 'living museum'.
- 3.3.** On the death of Sir Frederick in 1967, aged 83, Lady Stern carried out his wishes and left the Gardens to Worthing Borough Council who have maintained them, with free admission to the public, to this day.
- 3.4.** Highdown Gardens is a unique sizeable garden on solid chalk and remains one of the, if not the, foremost Chalk Gardens in the world. That's why it's so special. Not only that but Highdown has a rich social history much of which is hitherto untold and which this project will help to bring to the public's attention. Sir Frederick mixed in high circles and many historically important figures made private visits to the house and gardens including Edward, Prince of Wales, shortly before the abdication crisis, Elizabeth, Duchess of York, the Queen Mother and former Prime Minister David Lloyd George. Fascinating pictures of these visits, many of which have never been seen before, will form part of the visitor experience.

- 3.5.** Following an unsuccessful round one bid to the HF in 2015/16, Worthing Borough Council was successful in a second bid in 2017. The Council was granted £96,500 to run Round One (Development Phase) through 2018, which was match funded by £30,000 by the Council. The Development Phase specification and application for full Round Two (Delivery Phase) funding was submitted in February 2019.
- 3.6.** As of 26 June 2019, WBC has been awarded a HF grant of £813,200 towards conserving the plant collection and delivering an associated programme of activities and capital works.
- 3.7.** The HF project has a three year duration and will begin once permission to start is granted; this is anticipated to be August 2019.
- 3.8.** The core aims of the project are to:
- Address the threat to the plant heritage, and save the garden for future generations;
 - Communicate its significance to a wide range of audiences;
 - Actively involve the local community in its exploration, appreciation and care.
- 3.9.** The HF Approved purposes for the grant are:
- Recruit/appoint new staff posts (Plant Heritage officer and Engagement and Volunteering officer).
 - Deliver a comprehensive propagation and audit programme of the National Collection.
 - Produce a digital archive of the Stern collection that is publicly accessible.
 - Deliver a programme of capital works as outlined in the application materials.
 - Undertake a programme of learning, education and outreach provision as detailed in the Activity Plan.
 - Create new interpretation and educational resources at Highdown in collaboration with local schools, colleges and community groups.
 - Establish and deliver volunteer recruitment/training programme.
 - Provide vocational training at Highdown Gardens for local college students, and provide work experience placements for two horticultural students.
 - Acknowledge National Lottery funding on site, online and in all activities.

- Monitor the project regularly and produce a final evaluation report, meeting National Lottery Heritage Fund requirements.

3.10. Match funding of £119,019 has been allocated in the WBC Capital Programme 2019/20.

3.11. The investment into Highdown Gardens is an exciting example of how the Council is delivering on the ambitions contained in 'Platform for our Places', in particular in its commitment to responsibly steward our natural resources.

4. Issues for consideration

4.1. The grant will be paid subject to WBC complying with the HF standard terms of grant, attached as a background paper.

4.2. In addition to the standard terms of grant, WBC must observe the following additional conditions in respect of the project:

4.3. Within 28 days of the grant offer letter (26 June 2019) WBC must send a certified copy of the JSC decision to accept the terms of grant.

4.4. Within one month of the end of each of the 10 years after the work is finished, WBC must send to the HF detailed accounts, certified by the chief financial officer, showing the funding and resources WBC used at Highdown Gardens in the year before.

4.5. Despite clause 16 of the Standard terms of grant, WBC may lease or let part or parts of the Property for purposes which are consistent with the Approved Usage and for any periods the HF have first approved. However, the leases or lets must always be at a full market rent and WBC must use the rental income for the purpose of carrying out the Approved Purposes or generally for the benefit of Highdown Gardens.

4.6. Within 28 days of the date of Permission to Start, WBC must apply to the Land Registry for a restriction to be entered using the following wording: "No disposition of the registered estate by the proprietor of the registered estate or by the proprietor of any registered charge, not being a charge registered before the entry of this restriction, is to be registered without a written consent signed by the Trustees of the National Heritage Memorial Fund or their conveyancer".

5. Engagement and Communication

5.1. The level of community support exhibited through the action plan development has been outstanding. Many new community partnerships are proposed and organisations are poised to engage, including:

- Breathing Spaces
- Plumpton College
- Sight Support Worthing
- Thomas à Beckett Infants and Junior School
- Creative Waves
- Northbrook MET College
- Angmering Camera Club
- Worthing College
- Durrington Library / West Sussex Library Service
- Worthing Museum
- West Sussex Records Office
- South Downs National Park Authority
- Plant Heritage
- Oak Grove College
- The Highdown
- MIND

5.2. Public Consultation undertaken to prepare for the project has been numerous, using a variety of channels both online and offline. Audiences targeted have been local visitors and non-visitors, the main delivery partners, disability groups, and heritage and horticultural groups.

5.3. The success of this project will be communicated widely through online and offline media channels. Regular updates on the progress of the project will be supplied to all channels and special events and media days will be held as the work continues. A newsletter will be produced and special attention will be given to ensuring National Lottery players are recognised for their contribution to the project. Focus on the exotic and rare plants to be propagated and protected and the many fascinating stories surrounding the gardens will also be spotlighted. The Council's impressive stewardship of the gardens for the last 50 years should also be communicated. It is thought that Highdown is the only garden in the UK of such international importance that is in the care of a local authority.

6. Financial Implications

6.1. 2018/19 Development Phase Budget and Outturn was as follows:

Budget:

| | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Heritage Lottery Initial Allocation: | £96,500 |
| South Downs National Park: | £5,000 |
| S106 receipts: | £30,000 |
| Total Budget: | £131,500 |

Development Stage Actual Spend:

| | |
|-------------------------|----------------|
| Heritage Lottery Award: | £55,811 |
| S106 Receipts | £26,043 |
| Total Spend: | £92,854 |

6.2. In addition, JSC on 5 March 2019 approved the carry forward of £50,000 from the overall 2018/19 Capital Investment Programme underspends to fund the anticipated shortfall in funding for the Highdown Gardens Infrastructure Scheme (paragraph 8.2.2 ii).

6.3. The 2019/20 final budget profile for the Phase 2 project is:

| | |
|---------------------------|-----------------|
| Heritage Lottery: | £813,200 |
| Council Resources: | £46,040 |
| S106 receipts: | £73,960 |
| Southdowns National Park: | £5,000 |
| Total Budget: | £938,200 |

6.4. As part of the bid, the Council has committed to taking the project forward after the external funding has ceased. The overall net revenue impact of running the new facilities in the park is estimated to be £38,000 a year which will need to be accommodated in the budget from 2022/23 onwards. However, by re-activating the Highdown Trust to generate additional income via fundraising, it is expected that the final cost to the Council will be lower than this.

7. Legal Implications

- 7.1 Highdown gardens is a charity registered in England and Wales. It is governed by a Deed of Gift dated 19 February 1968 and a Charity Commission Scheme of 11 July 1983. Worthing Borough Council is the sole Charity Trustee.

The Charities objectives are recorded as a *“Garden for the benefit of the public as an amenity open space park or pleasure ground to the intent that the same shall forever form a natural approach to the south downs from the built-up area of the borough of Worthing”*.

- 7.1 Section 1 Localism Act empowers the Council to do anything that an individual may do, subject to any pre existing legislation.
- 7.2 Section 111 Local Government Act 1972 empowers the Council to do anything (whether or not involving the expenditure, borrowing or lending of money) which is calculated to facilitate, or is conducive or incidental to, the discharge of any of their functions.

Background Papers

- JSC Minutes 05.03.19, 11.09.18.
- Heritage Fund Grant Offer Letter 26.06.19
- Standard Terms of grant

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Sustainability & Risk Assessment

1. Economic

- Additional income will be generated as a result of this project - through the sales of propagated plants, leaflets and guides, tours and events.
- On the same conservation footprint, The Highdown operates independently of the gardens. However, with an improved offer, there are opportunities to gain sponsorship.

2. Social

2.1 Social Value

- More people and a wider range of people will have engaged with the history of the gardens and the wider SDNPA area. Consultation has shown that 16% of visitors are under 35, and 14% self-declared a disability. By extending the opening hours it is expected we will attract more younger visitors.
- It has been noted that the use of the gardens by education groups has reduced, partly due to curriculum changes. As well as co-creating new resources with primary school age children, our activity programme offers opportunities for the involvement of young adults that might not otherwise think to visit the gardens (e.g. film project with Worthing College, work experience for young adults with special education needs in oak Grove College.)

2.2 Equality Issues

- The improvements to physical accessibility will enable wheelchair users to more easily engage with the heritage.
- With the help of Sight Support Worthing, we will be training volunteers to offer guided tours for blind or partially sighted visitors.

2.3 Community Safety Issues (Section 17)

- Matter considered and no issues identified.

2.4 Human Rights Issues

- Matter considered and no issues identified.

3. Environmental

- The horticultural heritage will be in a better condition due to the focus of the propagation programme, as well as being better maintained, managed, appreciated and valued.

4. Governance

- The investment into Highdown Gardens is an exciting example of how the Council is delivering on the ambitions contained in 'Platform for our Places', in particular in its commitment to responsibly steward our natural resources.
- As well as assigning £120,000 as match funding for this project, Worthing Borough Council have committed not to reduce the existing staff numbers or level of maintenance budget during the project and for the subsequent 5 years. In order to mitigate the financial risk of delivering on this commitment, the project will look to increase revenue streams at Highdown, look for partnership opportunities and sponsorship, and review governance to allow the application to additional funding streams.