

Report to	-	Cabinet
Date	-	3 September 2018
Report of the	-	Executive Director
Subject	-	Sussex Wildlife Trust – Community Wildlife Garden Grant Application

Recommendation: It be **RESOLVED:** That a grant of £50,000 be awarded to the Sussex Wildlife Trust, to be met from the Medium Term Financial Strategy earmarked reserve, subject to the Discovery Centre proceeding.

Head of Service: Ben Hook

Lead Cabinet Member: Councillor Mrs Hart

Introduction

1. An application has been received from the Sussex Wildlife Trust (The Trust) for a grant towards the cost of a Community Wildlife Garden. The works are part of the overall 'Discover Rye Harbour' project, of which the Garden is an integral part.
2. The Trust had applied through the Community Grant Scheme; however, the application does not meet the criteria as the grant scheme cannot be used to support projects with a total cost of more than £300,000. Whilst the total cost of the Community Wildlife Garden is under this amount, it is part of a larger project, as explained further in this report. Hence, this report coming to Cabinet.

The Applicant

3. The Trust is a long-standing (57 years) charity that protects wildlife and the natural environment, connecting people with it, across Sussex. It manages over 30 nature reserves and has more than 30,000 members and 450 dedicated volunteers. Almost 5,000 children belong to its junior branch, Wildlife Watch, and over 10,000 visit its Environmental Education Centres. It has managed, protected and nurtured the unique Rye Harbour landscape and habitat with care and expertise since taking over that responsibility from East Sussex County Council (ESCC) in 2011.

The Wider Project

4. The Discover Rye Harbour project will comprise of a new low-impact and fully-accessible Discovery Centre with a planned adjacent Community Wildlife Garden at its heart. The total project is worth £4million and represents an investment that will transform the way both local people and tourists engage with the Reserve and the wider natural environment in the region.

5. It is anticipated that the completed project will attract new visitors from across the UK and overseas to come, stay and spend in the area. This will also have the wider impact of increasing visitor numbers to Rye and Winchelsea nearby as well as the many other towns and villages across Rother District.
6. The Trust has stated that the completed project will meet the identified demand for hands-on exhibition and education facilities backed by an extensive programme of fun, inspiring activities, courses and events for people of all ages; it will also stretch the tourist season by offering much-needed shelter from the elements, together with a comfortable café/lounge from which to view the spectacular array of wildlife in its natural setting.

The Community Wildlife Garden

7. The Community Wildlife Garden will be adjacent to the new visitor Discovery Centre at Rye Harbour Nature Reserve. A plan for the proposed Garden is set out at Appendix A. The Garden will be a relaxing, welcoming and easily accessible public space open free of charge all year round and maintained by community volunteers. It will feature the following:
 - Extensive planting and shingle planters featuring native, rare and endangered plants of the Reserve
 - Interpretation panels to promote learning about the rare species and their habitats
 - Level and stepped seating and table using natural materials
 - An accessibility ramp to the Discovery Centre, its café and all of its educational, interpretation and convenience facilities to provide easy and safe access for mobility and visually impaired visitors
 - An outdoor education and meeting area for learning, events, group discussions and informal social gatherings
 - Specially created habitats for bees, spiders and other insects of the reserve
 - Wheelchair access to the tarmac service road leading to the Centre and beyond into the Reserve
 - A cycle rack for visitors or cyclists on the Sustrans national cycle network
 - An external water tap for dogs
8. The Community Wildlife Garden will offer extensive volunteering opportunities and an area both for organised activities and quiet relaxation. The Garden is an integral part of the vision for the wider project.

Meeting Corporate Objectives

9. The Discovery Centre and its Community Wildlife Garden are positioned to act as a high profile Gateway Hub for visitors to the entire region, bringing major sustainable economic and cultural benefits. Rother District Council's Core Strategy identifies the promotion of Rye and Rye Harbour for green tourism with particular reference to the careful management of the Rye Harbour Nature Reserve. Similarly, the planned closure of nearby Dungeness nuclear power station in 2028 has led Rother and Shepway Councils to identify the visitor economy as the principal sector for growth – and the natural environment its key asset. In late 2017, the two Councils went further, identifying the proposed new Discovery Centre at Rye Harbour as a key entry

and focal point for visitors to learn about other nature sites within the area. Moreover, the Core Strategy gives the highest regard to, and protection of, the conservation of the internationally important ecological site, within which the Nature Reserve lies. The Discovery Centre (which includes the laying out of the Community Garden) already has planning permission, subject to conditions, and is regarded as a key facility to both help manage access to the international site and to increase awareness of its importance.

Costs

10. The Trust has provided costings for the Community Wildlife Garden as set out below:

Costs:	Amount (£):
General making good	2,000
Stepped seating area (24m ²)	12,000
Grassed reinforced areas including under ramp (126m ²)	15,750
Paving to education area (140m ²)	10,500
Ramp access to education area	2,800
Balustrade to ramp and stepped seating	6,000
Planters/seating (22)	6,600
Soft landscaping/planting	5,000
Cycle racks	2,000
Contractor management costs and labour charges	10,024
Contingencies (design & inflation)	12,863
Total	85,537

11. The Trust has committed £34,537 to the project and has received £1,000 funding from Rye Community Shop. They are applying for £50,000 from Rother District Council to complete the Garden. Whilst this request is greater than 50% of the project costs, the wider project has an estimated cost of £4million with funding of £2.8million secured to date. Funding committed so far includes:

- Friends of Rye Harbour Nature Reserve £1.5m
- RDPE European Funding £900k
- WARR Partnership European Funding £75k
- Garfield Weston Foundation £200k
- Other Trusts £15k
- Individual donations and Gift Aid £95k
- Events £15k

12. The Trust has submitted an expression of interest to ESCC for additional funding through the South East Local Enterprise Partnership's latest Local Growth Fund round.

Resources Available

13. As the scale of this project is beyond the remit of the current community grants scheme, funding for this scheme will have to be found elsewhere. If Members were minded to approve the funding request, the cost could be met from the Medium Term Financial Strategy earmarked reserve.

Conclusion

14. Sussex Wildlife Trust are a longstanding and respected organisation, investing significant resources into the 'Discover Rye Harbour' project along with a number of other organisations committed to regenerating this area into a public space with facilities which will encourage learning, community inclusion and increase tourism to the area.
15. The recommendation is that a grant of £50,000 be awarded to the Sussex Wildlife Trust; to be met from the Medium Term Financial Strategy earmarked reserve subject to the Discovery Centre proceeding.

Dr Anthony Leonard
Executive Director

Risk Assessment Statement

Failure to support this grant application could result in the loss of opportunity to expand on community facilities at Rye Harbour.

The risk to Rother District Council is mitigated in that the grant for the Garden is linked to the success of bringing forward the whole project for the Discovery Centre.

