

Rother District Council

Report to:	Cabinet
Date:	9 January 2023
Title:	Levelling Up Parks Fund Grant
Report of:	Deborah Kenneally, Head of Neighbourhood Services
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Timpe
Ward(s):	Sidley
Purpose of Report:	To seek approval to accept an £85,000 Levelling Up Parks Fund Grant
Decision Type:	Non-Key
Officer	
Recommendation(s):	It be RESOLVED : That the £85,000 Levelling Up Parks Fund Grant be formally accepted to deliver open space improvements to Sidley House, Bexhill.
Reasons for Recommendations:	Sidley House open space and play area is an under-utilised public space in need of investment. Doing so will increase its benefit to the community and enable Rother District Council funds to be used to maintain and improve other public open spaces.

Introduction

1. The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities' Levelling Up Parks Fund (LUPF) seeks to improve the equality of access and quality of green space in over 100 neighbourhoods across the UK through the creation or significant refurbishment of an urban green space. Rother District Council is amongst the pre-selected authorities eligible for a LUPF grant of £85,000.
2. LUPF stems from the Government's recognition of the importance of parks and open spaces to people's physical and mental wellbeing which was particularly apparent during the global COVID-19 pandemic. Public spaces can support a variety of activities, encourage social interaction, promote health, well-being, social and civic inclusion.
3. Through LUPF, the Government seeks not just to increase access to quality open space in deprived urban areas, but to increase tree-planting in urban areas and pride in our local places. To this end, the grant is broken down into:
 - Up to £47,500 capital for the creation or improvement of the open space
 - Up to £18,500 revenue for project prep, creation and maintenance
 - Up to £19,000 'tree uplift' for tree planting and related costs

4. LUPF recipients are encouraged to deliver projects before the end of the current financial year but flexibility on the project's timeline will be built into the Memorandum of Understanding enabling implementation of the capital works to push into the spring and early summer whilst the tree planting will proceed in February/March.

Options

5. Several open spaces have been considered for the funding including Masons Field on the Tillingham Estate in Rye, Darvel Down in Netherfield and Levetts Wood and Field in Sidley. However, although the total grant is £85,000 almost 50% is for costs other than capital works which will only facilitate modest improvements. It was not considered possible to deliver complete and meaningful projects at these sites with the funding available.
6. The open space and children's play area at Sidley House in Bexhill has been identified as the best fit with the Government's aims, grant amount and timeframe. Being a compact site, it better lends itself to delivering community benefit through a small budget. As the deadline for expressions of interest was 3 October 2022 in order to qualify for the funding, an application has been submitted for Sidley House and has been approved by the Fund's administrators.

Details of the proposals

7. At present the open space and play area is of limited interest and does not draw residents in. Use of the LUPF at Sidley House will provide a purpose for people to visit and deliver the following:
 - a) An inviting and usable open space with more of a 'park-like' feel through the introduction of seating, improved access and tree planting.
 - b) An improved local play facility for children of pre-school age through to age 8.
 - c) Environmental benefits associated with trees.
8. The beneficiaries will include users and staff of the on-site Early Help Service 0 - 19 who operate from the former Children's Centre, the neighbouring nursery and doctor's surgery, as well as children and families from All Saints CE Primary School and the wider community, many of whom live locally in flats and therefore have limited access to open space. These stakeholders together with the Heart of Sidley and others offer routes for consultation and engagement during the project's planning and delivery and subsequent use of the facilities.
9. Further small improvements to increase the usability of the space may be made in consultation with local stakeholders in the years following the project's delivery, funding allowing.

Conclusion

10. The open space at Sidley House has the potential to be a more beneficial asset to residents of this deprived ward. The adjoining children's play area is in a poor state of repair and either needs to be refurbished or removed.

Rising costs make it increasingly difficult to deliver new projects through the parks and open spaces revenue budget.

11. Following a site visit and discussion with officers, the site and proposal have been confirmed as suitable by the Government's appointed LUPF advisors who administer the Green Flag Park Award. There is also community support for the project to be taken forward.
12. If accepted, the LUPF Grant could be used to deliver modest improvement in the short term with supporting resources for maintenance without the onerous bidding requirements associated with most grants, although recipients are required to complete a project evaluation including a community survey between October 2023 and March 2024.

Financial Implications

13. There is no match funding required from the Council so low impact on Council finances other than a small level of general maintenance estimated to be no more than £300 in years 1 and 2 and increasing to £450 thereafter.

Legal Implications

14. Legal expertise may be required to review the terms and conditions of the Grant award prior to acceptance.

Crime and Disorder

15. Improved facilities have the potential to attract misuse, but equally improve the lives of others.

Environmental

16. The project will make a small contribution towards increased tree canopy cover in Bexhill.

Sustainability

17. LUPF includes a proportion of money that can be used for maintenance. This will be critical in ensuring the successful establishment of new trees and planting.

Equalities and Diversity

18. Measures will be taken as far as is practicable within the site constraints and budget to improve the accessibility of the site in terms of physical access and the range of facilities and equipment available so as to encourage use by a more diverse audience, including the elderly and those who benefit from sensory stimulation.

Other Implications	Applies?	Other Implications	Applies?
Human Rights	No	Equalities and Diversity	Yes
Crime and Disorder	Yes	Consultation	No
Environmental	Yes	Access to Information	No
Sustainability	Yes	Exempt from publication	No
Risk Management	No		

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Appendices:	None
Relevant Previous Minutes:	Not applicable
Background Papers:	None
Reference Documents:	None
