
Stourbridge Area Committee 2nd September 2009

Report of the Director of the Urban Environment

Mary Stevens Park HLF Bid and Gates

Purpose of Report

1. To inform the Committee of the outcome of the bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) Parks for People Programme and recommend a way forward.

Background

- 2 Mary Stevens Park is one of the Borough's premier parks and in recent years has benefited from investment through the Liveability Programme contributing to the creation of the Master Plan developed by the Council and the Friends of Mary Stevens Park. The Park has now been selected as one of the five Healthy Hubs which will be the focus of the Council's Healthy Towns Programme to encourage more people to take part in physical activities
- 3 For some years now there have been concerns about the condition of the Grade 2 Listed main gates. Following an independent condition survey in 2008 and a feasibility study into the possibility of securing external funding to restore the gates, a report was presented to the Stourbridge Area Committee (SAC) in September 2008 proposing that a bid be made to the Heritage Lottery Fund. Informal discussions with HLF about the possibility of submitting a bid to the Programme for the Main Entrance Gates alone were not received positively therefore the recommendation was for a comprehensive bid to improve and restore the heritage value of the entire park, to include the main gates. This recommendation was supported.
- 4 Working with both Council Officers, The Friends Group and in the region of 30 groups and organisations who use the park on a regular basis, our consultants Heritage Initiatives helped us to develop a long term development plan for the park and the gates which would cost approx £2million to deliver. A Round 1 bid for £94k funding to develop the Round 2 bid was duly submitted on 28th February 2009.
- 5 Members of the Area Committee requested that a plan be developed for the restoration of the gates in the event of the HLF bid being unsuccessful. The approximate cost of the restoration of the ironwork, stone pillars and lanterns at the main entrance is in the region of £205k. At its meeting in November 2008 the Stourbridge Area Committee identified a potential funding strategy utilising both its Capital Allocation and the Mary Stevens Trust which, over a number of years, could provide funding for the refurbishment of the main gates.

- 6 The Council's bid for Round 1 funding for Mary Stevens Park was considered by the Heritage Lottery Fund's Board of Trustees on 23rd June 2009. There was very strong competition in this first round of applications and we understand that the value of the bids submitted was in the region of three times the available funding. HLF have advised us that our bid for £94k to fund the development of a detailed Round 2 application was unsuccessful. Out of 17 applications to this first round of the Parks for People Programme, 7 projects were funded and we are advised that the Mary Stevens Park bid would have been the 8th had sufficient funding been available.
- 7 The HLF regional team have met with Council Officers to provide feedback on the bid, which was warmly welcomed. In particular the approach taken to stakeholder engagement was highly praised. It was felt that the project "could be an exemplar" which was reflected by the board's voting: 6 high and 3 medium.
- 8 At the regional level, our project assessment scored 4 highs, 5 mediums and 0 lows, in terms of the risk assessment for the project we achieved 1low and 2mediums, and on the basis of these scores, our application was the only bid from the West Midlands put forward for consideration by the HLF Trustees.
- 9 The regional HLF team recommended that we consider making a re-application to the February 2010 round of funding. They advised that we should strengthen those criteria in the bid which scored medium:
 - Heritage need
 - Meeting local social, economic and environmental needs
 - Increasing the range of audiences
 - Improving skills and knowledge through learning and training
 - Improving management and maintenance
- 10 The overall masterplan for the park, agreed with the stakeholders, sets out a vision to be implemented, in phases, over a number of years and the bid to HLF was to fund the first phase. It was felt that there was risk that the Council would not be able to deliver the future phases. In order to demonstrate the Council's commitment it was recommended that the re-application should be timed to follow the implementation of the Healthy Towns works, which are contained within the masterplan but funded independently, hence the recommendation for a February 2010 application.
- 11 It was also recommended that consideration be given to improving the level of match funding within the bid. Currently the Area Committee's offer of funding to support the restoration of the gates is only available in the event that the HLF bid is unsuccessful. If this could be considered as match funding it would therefore improve the chances of a successful application.
12. Should an application to HLF be made in February 2010, a decision would be expected in June 2010. A first round bid would provide funding to support the development of a second round bid which would be submitted in February 2011 for a June 2011 decision. Both Round 1 and Round 2 are competitive.

13. Alternatively members may wish to support the more immediate restoration of the gates using the funding identified in para 3 above. If this were the case, this would significantly reduce the heritage element and therefore likelihood of success of any future HLF application.
14. Clearly this a critical decision in terms of the future development of the park and members need to weigh up the potential longer term benefits that a successful HLF bid could bring to the park balanced against the shorter term need to address the condition of the gates.
15. Given the ranking of the project and feedback received from the HLF at both national and regional level it is the view of officers that one further attempt to make a successful HLF Stage One application be made, addressing the issues identified by HLF as in need of strengthening, and submitted to HLF in the February 2010 round of applications.

Finance

16. The costs incurred in preparing the Round 1 bid submitted in February 2009 were funded by existing DUE revenue resources. Any costs incurred in preparing a subsequent Round 1 bid would need to be funded from similar sources.
17. The funding highlighted in paragraph 3 of this report could be used to fund the refurbishment of the gates or as matchfunding for the HLF bid for the entire park, subject to Area Committee approval.

Law

19. Mary Stevens Park is held on trust by the Council under the terms and conditions of a deed of gift dated the 6 December 1929 when the land was donated by Ernest Stevens.

Equality Impact

20. The proposals contained in this report are in full accordance with the Council's Equal Opportunities policies and should in no way have any impact on different racial groups, disabled people, both genders and/or other relevant groups.

Recommendation

21. It is recommended that the Stourbridge Area Committee
 - notes the outcome of the Stage 1 Heritage Lottery Fund application
 - supports a resubmission of a Stage 1 Heritage Lottery Fund application for the Park Masterplan and refurbishment of all ironwork at the park and recommend the Cabinet Member for Environment and Culture to arrange for this submission for the February 2010 round of applications.

Background Papers

1. Condition Survey by dorothea Limited
2. Scoping Study by Heritage Initiatives
3. HLF Stage One funding application (February 2009)



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