

Ernest Stevens Trusts Management Committee –

31st January 2024

Report of the Director of Finance and Legal Services

Request for Grant – Friends of Wollescote Park

Purpose

1. To consider the request for a grant from the Friends of Wollescote Park (FOWP).

Recommendations

2. It is recommended that the Committee consider the request for a grant as detailed in the report.

Background

3. Ernest Stevens made various donations of property which were to be used for specified purposes. These have been identified as individual Trusts and detailed below:
 - i. Mary Stevens Maternity Home and Public Park Charity.
 - ii. Mary Stevens Park, Recreation Ground and Park, Norton.
 - iii. Stevens Park, Quarry Bank.
 - iv. Stevens Park and Recreation Ground Foundation, Wollescote
4. Only the Stevens Park and Recreation Ground Foundation has investments, which generate income for disbursement.
5. Previously the management of the above trusts was delegated to the Stourbridge Area Committee. Members will be aware that following the consultation on Area Committees and the introduction of Community Forums, the four Ernest Stevens Trusts are now combined under the control of this Committee as Trustees.
6. In the application of the income of the Foundation, the Trustees have discretion to give preference to the area of the former Urban District

of Lye and Wollescote and to meeting the needs of the people resident therein.

7. There is no set maximum amount stipulated in the Trust deed for a grant. However, in the past, the Trustees have tended to apply the criteria that the grant should be a maximum of £5,000 or 50% of the total cost of a capital project.

Application – FRIENDS OF WOLLESCOTE PARK (FOWP)

8. A grant application has been submitted by the Friends of Wollescote Park. The proposed project is to add two interpretative lecterns and to improve the signage to the Walled and Sensory Garden.

This project will benefit all visitors to the park. The target beneficiaries are the entire community and beyond. The project will particular benefit those accessing the Black Country Mental Health (BCMh) Walled Garden Project, Exercising in the Park, Sons of Rest members and FOWP volunteers. FOWP has a good working relationship with the BCMh project and a supporting letter has been provided by their group. In addition, these works will assist in the Council's application for Green Flag Award status for Wollescote Park in 2024.

9. The organisation has 42 active volunteers and 2,600 social media followers and the aims of the organisation are detailed in the FOWP constitution and are *“To provide a community focus for individuals and organisations who may have an interest in the sustainability and betterment of Wollescote Park and the areas of Woodland Walks known as the Hob Green Dingle.”*

FOWP is an active and entirely volunteer-driven community group, who undertake projects & activities that promote, protect and are for the betterment of Stevens Park in Wollescote (Stourbridge).

They value the park as a place of historic and environmental beauty and as a precious green space where local people come together, across the generations, to enjoy wildlife, to exercise and to relax.

The group is inclusive and welcomes volunteers of all ages, genders, and ethnic groups. Activities that the group undertakes use our natural green space for eco-well-being, physical and mental health, support social connections to others and combat loneliness.

10. FOWP have a weekly volunteer gardening group that has created and maintains the Sensory Garden, a monthly pop-up café and French Boules activities on a Friday morning. They regularly organise

community litter picking (most recently with Hob Green Primary School and Wollescote Scouts), organise well-attended community events and have been directly involved in building a successful Park Active Group in the park. They have a lively Facebook page and have over 2600 followers from the community and feel this social media presence helps them to be "in touch" with the needs of people locally.

11. FOWP is an active community group and raises funds for improvements in the park. The group have recently spent monies part-funding a defibrillator, contributing to the upgrades to the play equipment, investing in Sensory Percussion instruments for the Sensory Garden and paid for an artist to complete a mural on the wall adjacent to the changing rooms. They are currently funding the annual "Meet Santa" event that offers families locally an opportunity for their children to Meet Santa at no charge.
12. FOWP receive no external funding for the Sensory Garden project and therefore, use funds raised to pay for essential gardening items compost, plants, and gardening equipment. These items are used by the volunteers to maintain the Sensory Garden.
The FOWP has made no other applications to the Trust in the last 5 years.
13. FOWP have provided financial information for consideration. The bank balance as at 31/3/2023 was £5,440.01 with annual expenditure being £8,706.69 and annual income being £8,729.12.
FOWP and Dudley MBC have obtained 3 quotes for the work. The preferred supplier's quote is £6,114.00, inclusive of VAT. After adding £220 for installation costs by DMBC plus any additional graphics, artwork and printing costs in relation to the information to be included within the signage, the estimated total cost inclusive of VAT is estimated to be £7,000.
In addition to this application, the FOWP submitted an application to the Halesowen Community Forum in relation to these works. This application was confirmed as being successful in November 2023 and a grant of £5,000 was approved. Therefore, the request of the Ernest Stevens Trust Management Committee is a maximum of £2,000.

Finance

14. No grants have been paid during the current financial year.
15. At a previous meeting of the former Finance (Stevens' Bequests), Sub-Committee, Members agreed to maintain the "real" spending power of the bequest as a fundamental part of the investment

strategy. However, as a result of the levels of inflation over the last two years and the last property valuations being in March 2020, the “real” spending power calculation is no longer an appropriate basis to calculate available funds on this occasion.

16. Given the above, the more appropriate basis is on a cash basis. As at 31/3/23, the balance of funds available was £141,155, of which approximately £60,000 is still required in relation to the funding of the heritage wall at Wollescote Park. As detailed in paragraph 13, the grant request of this Committee is a maximum of £2,000.

Law

17. The Council is successor to the former Stourbridge Council by virtue of the Local Government Act 1972.
18. Section 139 of the Local Government Act, 1972 empowers the Council to accept, hold and administer gifts of property, where it enables them to discharge any of their functions, and where the gifts are for the purposes of benefiting the inhabitants of their area.
19. The law relating to Trusts which are charitable is contained in various acts, the main one being the Charities Act 2011.
20. The conditions under which a gift is to be administered are contained in the Deed creating the Trust and any subsequent schemes made by the Charity Commission.

Risk Management

21. The proposals in this report do not lead to any material risks.

Equality Impact

22. The Trusts have been set up to benefit the public in certain geographical areas of the Borough as outlined in the Deeds of Gift.

Human Resources/Organisational Development

23. The proposals in this report do not have any direct Human Resources / Organisational Development implications.

Commercial/Procurement

24. The proposals in this report do not have any direct Commercial implications. Activity is subject to the conditions set out in the Deeds creating the Trusts and any subsequent schemes made by the Charity Commission.

Environment/Climate Change

25. The proposals in this report do not have any direct impact on the environment or climate change.

Council Priorities & Projects

26. The aims of the Trusts include the provision of facilities for recreation or other leisure time occupation with the object of improving the conditions of life, or such other charitable purposes as the Council may determine. This will contribute to Council Plan objectives to Grow a Strong Visitor Economy, Develop Green Space and Reduce Social Isolation.



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List of Background Papers

Application form and quotes
Accounts and bank statement – Friends of Wollescote Park