

**18<sup>th</sup> March 2015**

**Environment Committee**

**West Horndon Parish Council**

**Report of:** *Roy Ormsby – Head of Street Scene*

**Wards Affected:** *Herongate, Ingrave & West Horndon*

**This report is:** *Public*

## **1. Executive Summary**

- 1.1 The Council have received a request from West Horndon Parish Council for an increase in their grant. This has been request as a contribution from the Council to manage their park, on land leased to the Parish Council from the Borough Council.
- 1.2 The park was established in 2003, and a lease was signed on 24<sup>th</sup> July 2003 by the then West Horndon Park Association Ltd (WHPA). This was for use as a Doorstep Green initiative, which was under the auspice of the then Countryside Agency for the benefit of the residents of West Horndon.
- 1.3 Doorstep Greens are locally-owned and run public spaces across England, and were first created by the Countryside Agency (CA) in a project started in 2001. The Agency set out to find green spaces which could be organised into relatively small parks and then create a local charitable trust to own, fundraise for, and run each space in perpetuity.
- 1.4 Unfortunately, like many of these projects, the management has now changed, and the West Horndon Park Association Ltd has now ceased. The 80 year lease has been reassigned to the Parish Council, who are now responsible for the maintenance of the park.
- 1.5 On the establishment of the lease to WHPA, the Council agreed to provide £2,300 towards the cost of maintenance, commencing in April 2004, with the final payment in April 2008. This funding was to contribute to the initial start-up cost of the park, and to assist WHPA in developing a sound financial plan for the future.

- 1.6 The funding for the park has been held in an account by the Council, which currently has a balance of £14,099. The Council has also been contributing to this account, and in 2013/14 provided £3,300 to the maintenance of the park. Through this account the Council were paying the invoices for maintenance, which is mainly provided by the Council. This situation means that the Council are funding the maintenance, administering the fund, and repaying itself for the work on the approval of the Parish Council.

## **2. Recommendation(s)**

- 2.1 Members agree not to provide additional funding to West Horndon Parish Council for the maintenance of their park.**
- 2.2 Members agree to cease the £3,300 payment towards the maintenance of the park for 2015/16.**
- 2.3 Members agree to grant the remaining funding for the park, currently £14,099 to West Horndon Parish Council towards future maintenance of the park.**

## **3. Introduction and Background**

- 3.1 The park, since being established in 2003, has played an integral role for the community of West Horndon, and like many Parishes, West Horndon Parish Council now lease the land to enable them to provide a facility for local residents.
- 3.2 The leasing of land for local play provision by Parish Council's is an established way of providing local facilities. These are paid for by local residents through their precept, and enables the Parish Council to meet the needs of, and be accountable to local people.
- 3.3 The West Horndon Parks Association received substantial assistance with the development of the park, which included the purchase of a local property to enable access to the Park. At the Cultural Panel meeting held in June 2003 it was also agreed to provide funding of £30,000 towards the project, and an interest free loan of £88,000.
- 3.4 The Borough Council have therefore made a substantial contribution to the Park over the past 12 years, which is designed as a local facility for the residents of West Horndon. This is different to all other Parish

Council's, who have funded all costs through their precept, and local fund raising activities.

- 3.5 If a contribution towards the maintenance of the park is agreed, this would set a precedent, and therefore other Parish Council's could come forward to request funding towards the maintenance of their land.
- 3.6 The 2013/14 financial report for the Parish Council notes a balance of £68,065, and in terms of income, £11,678.26 was in the form of a grant from Brentwood Borough Council. The Parish report notes, that the funding from the Borough Council is set to reduce and disappear altogether in the future. The Parish Council are making provision for this, and to generate additional income through the precept. The report notes that this will increase from £22,253 in 2013/14 to £32,200 in 2014/15.
- 3.7 It is therefore felt that the Parish Council have a strong financial standing, and have increased their precept in 2014/15 to reflect any changes that may be made to the Borough Councils grant scheme.

#### **4. Issue, Options and Analysis of Options**

- 4.1 There is an option to continue to fund the Parish Council for the maintenance of the park. This however, would not be consistent with other Parish Council's, and could result in further requests to the Council.

#### **5. Reasons for Recommendation**

- 5.1 To ensure that grant support for Parish Councils is consistent, and that the maintenance of land not owned, or leased, by the Borough Council does not receive financial support.

#### **6. Consultation**

- 6.1 Discussions have been held with West Horndon Parish Council.

#### **7. References to Corporate Plan**

- 7.1 The grant aiding for maintenance is not included in the Corporate Plan.

#### **8. Implications**

##### **Financial Implications**

**Name & Title:** Chris Leslie – Financial Services Manager (S151 Officer)

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- 8.1 The financial implications are set out in the report. If the recommendations are approved, it will represent an annual saving of £3,300 per annum.

**Legal Implications**

**Name & Title:** Christopher Potter, Monitoring Officer and Head of Support Services

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- 8.2 The land is not owned by the Council so there are no obligations upon the Council to maintain the land. With regard to the discretionary grant funding, the report makes plain that such funding was time-limited and would cease in the future and that the Parish Council has been aware of this. Therefore, the Committee may exercise its discretion to stop the future funding if the Committee so wishes as no legitimate expectation of continuation arises in the circumstances.

**Other Implications** (where significant) – i.e. Health and Safety, Asset Management, Equality and Diversity, Risk Management, Section 17 – Crime & Disorder, Sustainability, ICT.

- 8.3 None

9. **Background Papers** (include their location and identify whether any are exempt or protected by copyright)

- 9.1 None

10. **Appendices to this report**

None

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