

Community Grant to Hamdon Community Arts Project

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Purpose of the Report

Councillors are asked to consider the awarding of a grant of £12,500 towards the purchase of the ex-United Reformed Church (URC) in Stoke-sub-Hamdon by the Hamdon Community Arts Project (HCAP).

Public Interest

Awarding grants is a key way that SSDC supports and helps to deliver community projects sponsored by parishes and voluntary community organisations in the towns and villages across the district.

HCAP has applied to the Area North Community Grants Programme for financial assistance with the purchase of the ex-URC building. The application has been assessed by the Locality Officer who is submitting this report to enable the Area North Committee to make an informed decision about the application.

Recommendation

That Councillors award a grant of £12,500 to HCAP, the grant to be allocated from the Area North Community Grants Programme and subject to SSDC standard conditions for community grants (Appendix A).

Application Details

Name of applicant:	Hamdon Community Arts Project
Project:	Purchase of the ex-United Reform Church Building
Total project cost:	£100,000
Amount requested from SSDC:	£12,500
Application assessed by:	Adrian Moore

Community Grants Assessment Score

The table below shows the grant scoring for this application. Applications must meet the minimum score of 22 to be considered for SSDC funding under Community Grants policies.

Category	Actual score	Maximum score possible
A Eligibility	YES	Y/N
B Equalities Impact	3	7
C Need for project	4	5
D Capacity of organisation	12	15
E Financial need	6	7
F Innovation	3	3
Grand total	28	37

Background

The ex-URC building on North Street is a large, beautiful Grade 2* listed building in the conservation area of Stoke-sub-Hamdon. It closed as a church in December 2016 and the building is now being managed by the URC South Western Synod Inc. who are paying the costs of the facilities, and collecting rents from the three primary user groups currently in residence:

- **The Hamdon Play Group** - a committee run playgroup that has been in operation in the village for over 42 years, and is a registered charity itself
- **The Stoke Band** - which has used the church building for rehearsals, training and storage since 1945.
- **The Stoke Charity Shop** - which has been in operation for over 7 years, and has used the building

HCAP Committee was formed in 2017 and has a membership of existing URC user members, along with a supporting Steering Committee. HCAP has a formal constitution, and obtained Charitable Status in August 2019. The HCAP also have a Business Plan – *a copy of which has been circulated to members of Area North Committee under separate cover.*

Parish information

Parish*	Stoke-sub-Hamdon
Parish population	1,968
No. of dwellings	905

*Taken from the 2011 census profile

The Project

HCAP intends to conclude a bid for the purchase of the ex-URC building in North Street, Stoke-sub-Hamdon. HCAP and many supporting village residents wish to see the facility retained as a community facility for pre-school teaching, to continue to provide the safe and secure storage for the shop and meeting facilities to the existing primary user groups. These groups include: The Hamdon Play Group, which provides play and teaching for children aged 2-5 years for 38 weeks of the year, and for 30 hours per week. There are six staff, with 26 children on the register, and they achieved a 'Good' in their last Ofsted assessment in 2020.

Stoke Charity Shop, which uses two areas within the church for easily accessible storage and HCAP Committee, who have their meetings within the facility.

Following the purchase of the building HCAP want to provide for future users. The facility will be able to accommodate Music, Arts and Crafts. These groups include:

- Stoke Performing Arts Group (SPAG) - a group that produces and performs plays, and requires permanent storage space for props, costumes, scenery and other equipment and an eventual all year venue for rehearsals, staging, and lighting for future shows.
- Local artists - to display their work (this happened in September 2019, as a part of Somerset Arts Week exhibitions).
- An Arts and Crafts exhibition centre - for local arts and crafts, the first of which took place in October 2018.
- Music events - which have already included:
 - Young People's Music Festival in February 2018
 - Winter Ghosts event in March 2018
 - Madrigals to Mozart event in July 2018
 - Trio Arquebus event in November 2018
 - Faure Requiem in November 2018
 - Organ recitals in 2018 and 2019
 - Young Musicians competitions in 2018 and 2019

If HCAP is unable to complete its bid, the Church Synod has stated that it intends to sell the property on the open market, and its future use will be lost to the village as a community venue. The URC has been a community venue in the village since the early 19th century.

Local support / evidence of need

As part of its Feasibility Study in 2017, HCAP talked to other organisations within the village including the Parish Council and looked at the alternative potential facilities within the village:

- The Stoke Youth Centre (ex-West Street Methodist Church)
- The Stoke Memorial Hall
- Stoke Working Mens Club (WMC)
- The Lighthouse Building

HCAP concluded that none of the above facilities could meet the requirements of the existing and future URC building users due to:

- a) The Stoke Youth Centre's usage being limited to youth activities only within its constitution
- b) The Stoke Memorial Hall already being heavily utilised and being unable to accommodate the storage requirements of the existing URC primary users
- c) The Stoke WMC not being able to provide the facilities or permanent storage capacities required
- d) The Lighthouse facility being too small to meet the Band and Play Group requirements and unable to provide permanent storage facilities for the Charity Shop as it is used on 2 days a week as a café itself and 1 day a week for the Stoke Lunch Club

HCAP also held two Open Days in the URC building on 6th and 29th May 2017 to provide the community with an opportunity to see the building, find out about its use and its current users and to raise awareness of its potential closure. It also gave the community the opportunity to provide its ideas about future uses for the facility.

Project costs

Project costs	Cost £
Purchase price of the ex-URC building	100,000
Total	100,000

Funding plan

Funding source	Secured or pending	Amount £
Parish Council	Secured	12,500
Own Funds	Secured	25,000
Mortgage	Pending	50,000
SSDC	Pending	12,500
Total		100,000

Conclusion and Recommendation

It is recommended that a grant of £12,500 is awarded

Financial implications

The balance in the Area North Capital programme is £119,379. If the recommended grant of £12,500 is awarded, £106,879 will remain.

Grants are awarded subject to all other funding being secured before the commencement of the project and are on a % basis of the full project costs. Payment of the grant cannot exceed the grant award and is proportionally reduced if full project costs are under budget.

Council Plan Implications

Key priorities for Area North - Area Chapter:

- Healthy, Self-reliant Communities
 - Support a range of improvements to community buildings

Council Plan themes and Areas of focus for 2019/20

- Healthy, Self-reliant Communities

To enable healthy communities which are cohesive, sustainable and enjoy a high quality of life we will:

- ❖ Embed social value into all processes and activities to ensure we maximise the support we give to our communities
- ❖ Work with partners to reduce the impact of social isolation and create a feeling of community
- ❖ Work with partners to support people in improving their own physical and mental health and wellbeing
- ❖ Enable quality cultural, leisure and sport activities

- Environment

To keep South Somerset clean, green, attractive and sustainable we will:

- ❖ Promote a high-quality built environment

Equality and Diversity Implications

The project aims to provide for people across all age and interest groups in the local community.

Appendix A

Standard conditions applying to all SSDC Community Grants

The applicant agrees to: -

- Notify SSDC if there is a material change to the information provided in the application.
- Start the project within six months of the grant offer and notify SSDC of any changes to the project or start date as soon as possible.
- Confirm that all other funding sources have been secured before starting the project, if these were not already in place at the time of the application.
Acknowledge SSDC assistance towards the project in any relevant publicity about the project (e.g. leaflets, posters, websites, and promotional materials) and on any permanent acknowledgement (e.g. plaques, signs etc.).
- Work in conjunction with SSDC officers to monitor and share the success of the project and the benefits to the community resulting from SSDC's contribution to the project.
- Provide a project update and/or supply before and after photos if requested.
- Supply receipted invoices or receipts which provide evidence of the **full** cost of the project so that the grant can be released.

Standard conditions applying to buildings, facilities and equipment

- Establish and maintain a "sinking fund" to support future replacement of the building / facility / equipment as grant funding is only awarded on a one-off basis.
- Use the SSDC Building Control Service when buildings regulations are required.
- Incorporate disabled access and provide an access statement where relevant.