

Request for Area Funding to support the work of Leisure and Recreation Service (Executive Decision)

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Purpose of the Report

To request funding towards a forest school taster event at Chard Reservoir and to give an overview of service delivery by Leisure and Recreation across the past year.

Public Interest

The Leisure and Recreation service manages a range of high quality services and facilities across the district, including Country Parks at Ham Hill and in Yeovil, Chard Reservoir Local Nature Reserve, Tourist Information Centres at Cartgate and in Petters Way, a small accredited museum in Yeovil and a large regional sporting venue; Yeovil Recreation Centre. The service aims to secure grant funding to enhance delivery for residents and visitors and where appropriate generate income to ensure that the facilities and services are sustainable.

Recommendations

- (1) That Members note the report and the work of the Leisure and Recreation Service.
- (2) That Members consider the application for funding of £1200 from Area West discretionary budget to fund a Forest School taster session at Chard Reservoir during February Half Term.

Background to Leisure and Recreation

The Leisure and Recreation service pulls together the service areas of Countryside, Heritage, Tourism and Yeovil Recreation Centre. The Countryside service manages a number of strategic South Somerset sites at Ham Hill Country Park, Yeovil Country Park and Chard Reservoir Local Nature Reserve. Yeovil Recreation Centre offers outstanding sports and open space leisure facilities. The Tourism service operates the Tourist Information Centre (TIC) at Cartgate on the A303 and a further TIC from Petters Way, it also delivers a range of services to support local tourism businesses and destination marketing projects. The Community Heritage Access Centre (CHAC) in Yeovil is an accredited museum which cares for around 30,000 objects and 6,000 photographs. The Leisure and Recreation service has a strong record of working with volunteers, delivering successful events and accessing grant funding.

Overall the Leisure and Recreation Service manages, safeguards and enhances strategic recreational, heritage and tourism facilities in South Somerset. Its work enables residents and visitors to access, enjoy and learn about South Somerset. Consequently people love where they live and South Somerset is a visitor destination of choice. Overall the team's delivery contributes to a financially sustainable future for the service.

The work of the service is in line with a three year business plan (2018 – 2021) which sets out the direction and objectives of the Leisure and Recreation Service. The plan measures the success of the service annually and aims to reduce the overall cost of running the existing teams as part of the

Council's wider commercial strategy. The plan includes ambitious projects that deliver enhanced health and wellbeing outcomes for residents and visitors and also commercial gains to create a sustainable future for the service.

Service Delivery 2019

Heritage Service – Community Heritage Access Centre (CHAC)

CHAC has developed its outreach materials with the help of skilled volunteers including an annual calendar, a WWII walking leaflet and leaflets describing the collections. Over the year they have welcomed 371 visitors to view the collection and carry out research and through outreach talks and events met a further 990 adults and children. Nearly 200 hundred days of volunteering were donated and two volunteers celebrated thirty years of volunteering with the Heritage service. A grant enabled the purchase of a new museum grade display case for Yeovil library that has a program of exhibitions that are both locally relevant and nationally pertinent. With the help of the new Community Heritage Officer new projects to work with the NHS and to develop the digital archive for CHAC are progressing.

Tourism

By diversifying and increasing the quantity and quality of retail lines stocked we have increased sales (against the same period for last year) by 31% at Cartgate Tourist Information Centre. The center still delivers its primary function of visitor information but through retail and ticket sales has improved income generation. The Centre now stocks products from twenty local suppliers. A project to restore the River Parrett Trail was started and is ongoing through this winter, with a planned launch for April 2020. A new partnership with Visit Somerset was launched to ensure a joined up destination offer for South Somerset. The team delivered a leaflet exchange in March to support local tourism businesses.

Yeovil Recreation Centre

The team welcomed Junior Parkrun every Sunday morning and the annual race for life event in June. It hosted the school cross country championships and a variety of athletics and hockey development courses and sessions in partnership with Clubs. The Activity Officer ensured that there were trail activities available at each school holiday and improved engagement across social media. Planning permission and Football Foundation approval were granted to make internal changes to the John O'Donnell pavilion to reduce the number of changing rooms and create a multipurpose studio and community space and a high quality indoor café. Fundraising continues towards a 2020 delivery phase. In the current winter season we have welcomed new junior football clubs to the site and our superb grounds maintenance team secured the runners up prize in the national industry awards.

Countryside Service

In January 30 acres of land at Ham Hill were purchased with a £233,000 grant from the National Heritage Memorial Fund and following on from this the team have recently submitted a 1.6 million project proposal to the National Lottery Heritage Fund. The project seeks funding to ensure the future protection of the Scheduled Monument, enhance biodiversity and deliver a sustainable countryside site. The Ham Hill rangers and volunteers delivered a six week pop up activity centre for the school

summer holidays which welcomed 2622 people across 42 days with 334 visitor feedback surveys completed. Further grant funding totaling c.£11K was secured for projects like a new children's leaflet at Ham Hill and Park Yoga enabled by the sites Friends Groups. The ranger team have delivered a successful series of events across the sites totaling 78 events with 3524 participants. The Chard Volunteer Group secured 340 free trees from the Woodland Trust, which were planted to fill gaps in the recently laid hedge along the Paintmoor Lane boundary. The volunteer team at Chard Reservoir donated over 700 volunteer days in 2019, which equates to two full time rangers. The ranger teams ran two drop in events at Chard Reservoir in 2019, one being themed around 'bushcraft' and another themed around 'bugs'. The Community Heritage Officer secured grant funding from Somerset Skills and Learning for a third Forest school taster afternoon in late August. Over 450 children in total attended these events over the year.

Budget Request

Members are asked to consider granting £1200 from the Area West discretionary budget towards a Forest School taster session at Chard Reservoir LNR which will be open for families to attend during February half term and will be organised and led by our Community Heritage Officer Becky Russell.

The Forest school taster session that was held in August this year attracted over 150 participants and the feedback received from participants on the day was very positive and many people expressed they would like to see more similar sessions run in the future. If funding is secured for another Forest School taster day, the session will be themed around birds, with a bird nature trail, bird feeder activity, bird crafts and traditional activities such as fire lighting, campfire cooking and den building. The Chard Reservoir Volunteer group would support the activities and crafts and promote the reservoir and its wildlife. Funding would cover materials and equipment including printing flyers/posters/trail guide, staff (including extra ranger cover) and an external provider to deliver an activity, such as bird of prey handling. The Forest school taster session will be delivered for 3 hours allowing families to drop in at a time convenient to them.

Financial Implications

£1200 funding to be awarded from Area West discretionary revenue budget to enable support to projects within Area West.

Council Plan Implications

The work of the Leisure and Recreation Service delivers across the Environment and Healthy Self-reliant Communities themes of the Council Plan.

Environment – to keep south Somerset clean, green, attractive and sustainable we will:

- Maintain and improve the provision and quality of open spaces and parks.
- Be a leading council in developing and adopting a Green Agenda to promote sustainable environment, economy and communities.

Healthy Self-reliant Communities - to enable healthy communities which are cohesive, sustainable and enjoy a high quality of life we will:

- 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.

In the Area West Chapter under Environment –

- Develop Chard Reservoir as a visitor destination

Carbon Emissions and Climate Change Implications

The countryside service manages over 700 acres of land, to five year land management plans, that consider the priority habitats and species supported by the unique sites. As far as possible conservation work is carried out in a traditional manner reducing the need for use of power tools and chemicals. The ranger team are investigating the use of battery powered power tools and will replace their fleet once grant funding has been secured to enable this. Annually the service plants on average 500 trees and plans more for future years. At Yeovil Recreation Centre the floodlights on the AGP and Athletics track are the largest user of electricity and both replacement LED bulbs and Solar PV for the pavilion roof are currently subject to a business case to replace them. Once the carbon footprint for each site or team are available the teams will work to reduce them.

Equality and Diversity Implications

Overall the Service provides a variety of opportunities for people to engage with the work of the teams. Where possible a range of activities are offered that enable people with differing physical and mental health to engage with the work of the teams e.g. countryside volunteering. The Passport to Leisure scheme is valid for all countryside events and bookings at Yeovil Recreation Centre. All front line staff have received dementia friends training including those in our café outlets. When events are planned access and alternative routes are considered to ensure physical access is available for wheelchairs and pushchairs wherever possible. The main countryside sites have easy access trails published on the websites and the country parks have audio trails and Yeovil has a tactile map including braille text. Additionally Ham Hill has a tramper vehicle for hire at no charge.

Background Papers

None
