

## WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE 3 NOVEMBER 2009

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**Title:**

**PHILLIPS MEMORIAL GARDENS IMPROVEMENT PROJECT**

**[Portfolio Holder: Cllr Roger Steel]**

**[Wards Affected: All Godalming Wards]**

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**Summary and purpose:**

This report sets out the progress to date with the development of an improvement project for Phillips Memorial Gardens, summarises early feedback from the Heritage Lottery Fund and the seminal 'Friends' Group, and seeks the views of the Executive on the proposed way forward.

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**How this report relates to the Council's Corporate Priorities:**

The proposals contained within this report will directly contribute towards the Council's 'Environment' and 'Leisure' priorities through protecting and enhancing an important public open space in the heart of Godalming and improving opportunities for all to take part in culture.

**Equality and Diversity Implications:**

The proposed project will improve access to all across the site as well as providing an opportunity for all sectors of the community to take part in its development and ongoing management through membership of the 'Friends' group.

**Resource/Value for Money implications:**

This project requires a commitment in the short and longer term to both develop a strong funding bid for Heritage Lottery Funding, and to demonstrate a strong commitment to improved maintenance and management of the site going forward. Any decision to proceed with this project therefore needs to be taken with an understanding that adequate resources will need to be made available to ensure success.

Should the bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund be successful, it will bring in up to 75% of the project cost, meaning the Council will benefit from substantial external investment in a key asset.

As is set out in the body of this report, the capital cost of the project is still largely unknown. It is therefore proposed that a specialist consultant be employed to quantify the potential cost of the project more accurately. It will be necessary to bring forward an element of the 2010/11 capital allocation for the project to finance this.

### **Legal Implications:**

The Phillips Memorial Cloister is a Grade II Listed Building, and it is commonly believed that owners of a listed building are legally obliged to maintain it. This is in fact not the case. Their legal obligation is simply not to demolish or alter it in any way that affects its special interest without first receiving listed building consent.

However, if a listed building does fall into significantly poor repair, the authorities may serve a 'repairs notice' or, where the building is unoccupied, an 'urgent works notice'. In the event of non-compliance by the owner, the authority may then undertake the work itself and claim the cost back from the owner.

In either case, the authority could be a District, the County or, in certain cases, the Secretary of State. Of course, it would be pointless for an authority to serve a notice on itself.

In the case of the Phillips Memorial the issue relates more to the moral imperative on the Council to maintain its own historic buildings and 'lead by example', but also its credibility in taking enforcement action against others may be brought into question should it come to light that it was not maintaining its own listed buildings in good order.

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### **Background**

1. The Phillips Memorial Gardens and the Burys Fields are made up of several distinct areas of land running east to west along the River Wey in the centre of Godalming. When viewed as one site, the park totals approximately 4½ hectares in size (11 acres).
2. As well as the Phillips Memorial Cloister (erected in memory of the Titanic's Chief Wireless Telegraphist, Jack Phillips, and designed by key players in the Arts & Crafts Movement, Gertrude Jekyll and Hugh Thackeray Turner), the site also accommodates the town's war memorial, a very popular children's play area, a skatepark, a football pitch, a bowling green (home to Godalming & Farncombe Bowling Club), the rectory manor animal pound and a bandstand. It is also home to a range of different landscape features and habitats from the formal, mown areas around the cloister to the conservation meadows to the east of the bowling green and the prominent, mature willows along the river's edge. It is this diversity both in terms of habitat and uses, combined with the site's heritage value and its amenity value to the people of Godalming that makes it such an important local asset.
3. The Cloister is the largest of any memorial constructed to commemorate a single Titanic victim and was built largely from publicly donated funds and opened on 15 April 1914, exactly two years after the loss of the Titanic.
4. The memorial as it stands today has been the subject of a number of alterations over the years, the most notable of which was in 1965, when the southern cloister was replaced with an open timber pergola structure.

5. 1991 saw the cloister being listed as a Grade II Listed building, and this was followed in 1993 with another phase of restoration, initiated and part-funded by the Surrey Gardens Trust to commemorate the 150th anniversary of Gertrude Jekyll's Birth

### **Community Involvement**

6. During April and May 2008, letters were received by WBC from The Godalming Trust, the Surrey Gardens Trust, and the Arts & Crafts Movement in Surrey, all expressing concerns about the condition of the memorial and the planting within it, and making suggestions as to how this might be rectified, with a particular focus on the impending centenary of the sinking of the Titanic in 2012. During this time, interest was also expressed by a number of local individuals in getting involved in the improvement and ongoing management of the site.
7. In response to this interest, a meeting was called at the beginning of March to give these interested parties an opportunity to discuss their concerns, hopes and aspirations for the site with a view to developing an improvement plan and possibly forming a 'Friends' group to take ownership of the plans going forward.
8. This meeting was well attended by representatives from a number of different groups and was very successful; it was agreed that the site was in need of improvement and that a 'Friends' group (to both get involved in hands-on maintenance, and to give strategic direction) would be a great benefit to the site.
9. As a result a follow-up public meeting took place on 20 August 2009. This was attended by over 20 people, some representing local organisations and interest groups, and others simply local residents and site users. Although differing views as to the exact scope and relative importance of any developments on site were expressed by those in attendance, it was unanimously agreed that the site was in need of attention, and would also benefit from an increased level of community involvement.
10. Those present concluded that a 'Steering Group' (consisting of members of the various organisations represented and any other interested individuals) should be formed. This group would help to coordinate the project with WBC and may, over time, evolve into a formal 'Friends Group'. In the meantime, they would carry out some user surveys on site, actively promote the project and seek more volunteers. This group will be meeting again in November 2009.

### **Funding the Project**

11. In order that improvements can be made to the site, it will be necessary to find funds to make the project possible.

12. As a starting point, a sum of £50k is currently allocated in the Council's Capital Programme for the financial year 2010/11. This funding is intended to act as 'pump-priming' money to enable the Council/ Friends Group/ interest groups to seek alternative external partnership funds and make a full-scale refurbishment project possible.
13. Although, of course, the cloister is often the main focus of attention on site, it is proposed that the refurbishment project looks beyond the cloister, to result in a fundamental refurbishment of the whole site. This would involve the improvement of the children's playground, the refurbishment and (in places replacement) of paths throughout the site, the enhancement of planting schemes, and the replacement and improvement of on-site interpretation and signage among other things.
14. In order to achieve this, various funding options have been explored with the hope of raising sufficient money to carry out the project.

#### HLF 'Parks for People Fund'

15. The most promising funding option is the Heritage Lottery Funds' (HLF) 'Parks for People' programme- a programme of grants (of over £250,000 and under £5m), intended to regenerate parks of national, regional or local heritage value in the UK. A number of criteria must be met for a project to be eligible, as follows:
  - At least 25% partnership funding needs to be found by the applicant.
  - The project must comply with the programme's definition of a 'Public Park', which is, 'An existing designed urban or rural green space, the main purpose of which is for informal recreation and enjoyment'.
  - It must meet all five Programme Outcomes, as follows-
    - Increasing the range of audiences
    - Conserving and improving heritage value
    - Increasing the range of volunteers involved
    - Improving skills and knowledge through learning and training
    - Improving management and maintenance
  - It must meet all three priorities, as follows:
    - The community values the park as part of their heritage
    - The park meets local social, economic and environmental needs
    - Park management actively involves local people
14. A 'pre-application enquiry form' was submitted to the HLF at the beginning of April 2009, and feedback on this has now been received, which indicates that the proposed project at the Phillips Memorial Grounds is potentially a very strong contender for funding. A follow-up site meeting with representatives of the HLF has also now been held, and this has consolidated their view that the site has the potential to fulfil all of the funding criteria and obtain a grant.
15. Having obtained this 'in principle' approval of the project at pre-application stage, the application process now has two further stages.

16. This two-stage process is competitive at both rounds and there are two deadlines per year to submit both Round 1 and Round 2 applications (February and August). There is however clearly a time pressure to get the project completed in time for the 2012 centenary and so it will be necessary to prepare and submit a round 1 bid as soon as possible.
17. The HLF Grants Officer has advised that, in order to enable us to complete our planning and submit a strong application, we should aim to submit a Round 1 application for the February 2010 deadline. This application is intended to set the background for the project and provide the HLF with sufficient information to enable them to assess whether the project is worth pursuing to Round 2. There is also an option to bid for a 'development grant' at this stage to enable the appointment of a consultant or member of staff to develop the project in preparation for a Round 2 application.
18. A decision on this bid would be made in June 2010 and, if a Round 1 pass were awarded, it would then be possible to submit a Round 2 application in February 2011, for a decision in June 2011. The aim would then be to prioritise works to the cloisters to complete this aspect of the project by the 2012 centenary.
18. Given the tight development timetable, it would be necessary to undertake as much advance planning as possible before submitting a Round 1 application, and to demonstrate in the Round 1 application that all the Round 2 requirements have been considered and identified and that the time, resources and costs to complete these during the development phase have been considered.
19. This is clearly a good opportunity for the Council to carry out a flagship project in Godalming and would not only result in a much improved park, but would also serve to consolidate and build upon the current interest in the site amongst local organisations and individuals.
20. However, a significant commitment would be required by the Council in terms of time and resources to fulfill all the grant requirements. Furthermore, the HLF makes it very clear that the Parks For People programme is not solely focused on capital improvements and that a good deal of work will need to be carried out to ensure that its other objectives (particularly around learning, training, volunteer opportunities and increasing audiences, for example) are met.
21. Finally, in order for the application to be successful, it will also be necessary for the Council to demonstrate its commitment to a 'step change' in management and maintenance of the site going forward (including a commitment to an ambitious 10-year site management plan, and an undertaking to seek and attain Green Flag status for the site for at least 7 years after project completion). Whilst an element of this improved and increased maintenance and management may be funded as part of the grant funding, the applicant would also be expected to demonstrate a good level of commitment itself (meaning, in real terms, an increase in revenue funding for

the park). Further detailed information on the potential financial impacts of the project will be brought to a future meeting.

22. At the public meeting of 20 August, some concerns were expressed at the potentially onerous requirements of the HLF funding process in terms of the quantity of work required to complete a successful application, the tight timeframe involved, and the risk of 'diluting' the project by taking a 'whole site' approach when it was felt that focus should be primarily on getting the cloister into good condition in time for the 2012 centenary celebrations. Others however felt that this was an opportunity not to be missed, and that every effort should be made to bring about sustainable improvements across the site.
23. It was requested that both views be made clear to the Executive and that further thought be given to whether the Council should pursue the wider project or instead narrow its focus to the area immediately around the cloister itself, developing a smaller-scale project using the existing WBC capital allocation and any locally-derived S106 moneys and infrastructure tariffs, combined with any other sources of external funding that could be secured.

#### Other Funding Opportunities

24. In order to fulfill the HLF requirement of 25% partnership funding it will be necessary to explore any other external funding opportunities available for the project.
25. The Council's Grants Officer is currently exploring other funding opportunities, focusing specifically on funders that are interested in projects dealing with built heritage and public open space.
26. Unlike the aforementioned HLF funds, many of these grants are not open to applications from local authorities and would therefore require involvement from the voluntary sector- another strong argument for the eventual formation of a constituted 'Friends' group to take a lead on this.
27. Another potential funding avenue is the S106 and Infrastructure Tariff system, which, although currently subdued by the global financial situation, has the potential to generate some reasonable sums of money before project implementation in 2011.
28. It is proposed that, throughout the HLF application process, other funding opportunities continue to be explored, and that all S106 and Infrastructure Tariff moneys secured in the Godalming area for Environmental Improvements are also ringfenced for the project. Assessing the cost of the project
29. The capital cost of the project is still largely unknown, however, it is safe to assume that the single most expensive element of work would be the refurbishment of the cloister itself.
30. In order to quantify the potential cost of the project more accurately and with specific reference to the Cloister, it is felt that a detailed Conservation

Management Plan should be prepared. This would require a specialist consultant to be employed, and in order to finance this work it would be necessary to bring forward £10,000 of the 2010/11 capital allocation for the project.

### **Resourcing the project development phase**

31. As explained above, the HLF programme allows for an application to be made for development funding between Phase 1 and Phase 2. This will enable a consultant or member of staff to be appointed to progress the project should the Phase 1 application be successful. In the meantime however, a considerable amount of work will be required to submit a strong Phase 1 application. It is therefore recommended that an Officer's project group be formed, comprising representatives from the Parks & Landscape Service, the Countryside Service, the Historic Buildings Officer and the Grants Officer, to drive the project forward.

### **Possible Devolution of the Cloister to Godalming Town Council**

32. In accordance with this Council's policy on devolution, discussions have taken place with Godalming Town Council over the past two years exploring the possibility of responsibility for the memorial cloister being transferred to the Town Council, or to a charitable trust, once it has been returned to a reasonable condition.
33. This issue was discussed with the HLF Grant Officers who expressed some concerns and suggested that it could weaken the Council's application. Their main area of concern arose from the fact that any longer-term objectives and obligations linked to an offer of grant would be difficult to enforce if responsibility for the site (or part of it) was transferred to a third-party organisation following completion of the capital works, as no formal contract would exist between the HLF and the new managing organisation.
34. Therefore, if the Council's strong desire to devolve responsibility for the site remains, and there is also a wish to proceed with submitting an application to the HLF, a mutually acceptable way forward needs to be agreed. Officers have spoken with the Town Council and their view is that they would not wish to jeopardise a potential bid and that in the circumstances the Town Council would be content for the site to be improved and not necessarily devolved.

### **Conclusion**

35. The Phillips Memorial Gardens are an important local asset in terms of built and natural heritage and recreational and amenity value, and this can be demonstrated by the current level of interest being shown in the site.
36. The Council has a great opportunity over the next three years to capitalise on this interest and to deliver a flagship parks improvement and development project in time for the centenary of the sinking of the Titanic in 2012.
37. The development and implementation of such a project requires a commitment in both the short and longer term to both develop a strong

funding bid for Heritage Lottery Funding, and to demonstrate a strong commitment to improved maintenance and management of the site going forward. Any decision to proceed with this project therefore needs to be taken acknowledging these facts, and with an understanding that adequate resources will need to be made available to ensure success.

### **Recommendation**

It is recommended that the Executive:

1. agree to the formation of an Officer's project group to take the project forward and instructs this group to work with the new steering group to put together a 'Phase 1' Parks For People application in time for the February 2010 deadline;
2. agree that, in order to meet the requirement of the Parks for People fund that 25% partnership funding is found by the applicant, the proposed project be considered as a high priority for the next three years for any S106 and Infrastructure Tariff moneys coming forward for 'Environmental Improvements' in the Godalming area;
3. instructs officers to seek alternative third-party funding for the project which can either be used as partnership funding for the wider project or provide an alternative to the HLF funding should the HLF bid be unsuccessful;
4. agree that, in order to accurately quantify the potential costs involved in the project (with specific reference to the Cloister), a suitably qualified consultant be appointed to produce a 'Conservation Management Plan' for the site as soon as possible, and that £10,000 of the 2010/11 draft capital allocation of £50k for this project be brought forward to finance this; and
5. instructs officers to seek confirmation from Godalming Town Council, that because of the potential risk to HLF funding, it would be content for Waverley not to progress the devolution of this site and for the land to continue in Waverley's ownership.

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### **Background Papers**

There are no background papers (as defined by Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972) relating to this report.

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