
REPORT TO	Annual Council	AGENDA ITEM: 12
DATE OF MEETING:	20th May 2010	CATEGORY:
REPORT FROM:	Director of Community Services	DELEGATED OPEN
MEMBERS' CONTACT POINT:	Marilyn Hallard, Design and Conservation Officer, x5747 marilyn.hallard@south-derbys.gov.uk	DOC:
SUBJECT:	Swadlincote Conservation Area Partnership Scheme	REF: Swadlincote PSiCA General
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	Swadlincote	TERMS OF REFERENCE: EDS03

1.0 Recommendations

That Members:-

- 1.1 note the willingness of English Heritage to continue to make contributions towards the Swadlincote Conservation Area Partnership Scheme (PSiCA) without match funding from the District Council;
- 1.2 in the light of 1.1 above agree that the PSiCA continues for a further three year period with applications determined by the Heritage Grants Sub Committee which includes representatives from English Heritage and Derbyshire County Council;
- 1.3 agree the District Council's ability to contribute to the grant fund budget be kept under review; and
- 1.4 subject to the approval of 1.2 agree that the Heritage Grants Sub Committee consider whether the operation of the scheme should be adjusted in the light of the reduced level of the budget.

2.0 Purpose of Report

- 2.1 To inform Members of the offer from English Heritage to continue to provide funding for the Swadlincote PSiCA grant scheme without match funding from the District Council and seek approval to continue the scheme on that basis.

3.0 Detail

- 3.1 The concept of partnership funding between English Heritage and Local Planning Authorities is long established and has an excellent track record of success in protecting and enhancing the special appearance of conservation areas and supporting local businesses. English Heritage's 'Heritage At Risk' campaign last year drew attention to the ways in which the special character of historic towns can be damaged and how local authorities, especially in partnership, can reverse damaging trends.
- 3.2 The Swadlincote experience bears this out. Partnership funding in Swadlincote started in June 2001 and since then it is estimated that the grant schemes have generated a £1.75m investment in the historic building stock. There have been some arresting schemes of complete transformation and the impact on the character of parts of the town is impressive. The appearance of the conservation area has been greatly enhanced, changing the town's image in a very positive way.

- 3.3 In June 2009 the Council received the East Midlands English Heritage award for its heritage-led regeneration in Swadlincote Conservation Area and was at that time encouraged by English Heritage to continue the PSiCA for a further three-year period. This was because the 'critical mass' needed for private investment to continue unaided has yet to be reached. The local English Heritage officer has expressed the view that if the funding stops the investment made to date could be wasted.
- 3.4 The future of the PSiCA was considered by the Environmental and Development Services Committee on 8th October 2009 (minute EDS/22 refers) and unfortunately although members fully acknowledged the positive impact the partnership had had on the historic environment of the town centre it recognised that current finances did not permit continuing with the scheme. A further report in 6 months time was sought to provide an update on the impact of withdrawing from the scheme. However this has not been possible as the downturn in the economy with recent closure of some national multiple shops has meant it is not possible to accurately assess over a short period those impacts that are a direct result of not continuing with the scheme.
- 3.5 The last three year Swadlincote PSiCA agreement between the funding partners (SDDC, Derbyshire County Council and English Heritage) therefore technically came to an end in March 2010.
- 3.6 However, in February 2010 officers had put together a bid to English Heritage in the form of a Delivery Plan, which set out what could be achieved with a notional annual budget of £50,000 (£40,000 English Heritage and £10,000 Derbyshire County Council) without a direct grant budget contribution from South Derbyshire District Council. In support of the Council's case the Delivery Plan also set out the proposed District Council investment in 2010/2011 of £1.1m in public realm improvements centred on The Delph. In order to achieve significant improvements the minimum total annual budget usually required by English Heritage is £100,000 per annum, the level at which this scheme has operated for the last three years.
- 3.7 The English Heritage approval is based on an unusually low annual budget of £30,000 (£20,000 English Heritage, £10,000 Derbyshire County Council) due to the low local direct grant input, the level of demand on their funds generally and in the knowledge that the impact in Swadlincote Conservation Area will be substantial as a result of South Derbyshire District Council's investment in the public realm works.
- 3.8 Should it be possible over the three year period to increase the local contribution to the grant's budget (either by a contribution from SDDC or other funding source) it would be possible, in principle and subject to availability of funding, to match this £ for £ with English Heritage funding.
- 3.9 The English Heritage funding offer of £20,000 per annum is conditional upon the local contributions being made as set out in the Delivery Plan. These are: £10,000 pa from Derbyshire County Council (which will be considered by the Leadership and Culture Cabinet on May 10th 2010 the result of which will be reported verbally) and; the South Derbyshire District Council investment of £1.1m Masterplan works. The District Council funding is a 'one off contribution' for the three-year period and is already secured from external funding with works due to start imminently.
- 3.10 The operation of the PSiCA scheme is dictated by principles set out by English Heritage and the aims, objectives and grant levels set out in the approved Delivery Plan submitted by the Local Planning Authority.
- 3.11 The rules of the Swadlincote PSiCA were established at its inception in 2007 and have resulted in excellent outcomes. Grants are given for both repairs and restoration of damaged and missing architectural building elements and also for well designed signs. Some repair work and all restoration works has been aided at 80% with the remainder aided at 50%.

- 3.12 The February 2010 Delivery Plan proposed that the aims and objectives of the scheme and the grant levels should remain as set out in the past. However given the modest level of the funding now available it may be prudent for the Heritage Grants Sub Committee to consider whether the operation of the scheme should be adjusted. For instance a small reduction in the higher grant level may not affect the level of grant take up and could help the budget to go further.

4.0 Financial Implications

- 4.1 There are no financial implications for the Council other than ensuring that the public realm works are implemented. The Council has contracted with Tarmac Ltd National Contracting to collaborate on these works and the contract should have commenced by the time of the meeting.

5.0 Corporate Implications

- 5.1 Participation in the PSiCA will continue to help achieve Corporate Plan theme Sustainable Growth & Opportunity by contributing towards the vitality and viability of the town centre as will the delivery of the public realm improvements as part of the long term Vision & Strategy for Swadlincote Town Centre.

6.0 Community Implications

- 6.1 A Vibrant Economy and a Sustainable Environment are themes that partnership working in the town centre have helped to deliver by ensuring the valuable heritage assets within the town centre are restored and replaced to reflect the distinctive historic character as a setting for businesses, shoppers and visitors alike. Appropriate investment in the town will halt environmental decline and secure its long term viability.

7.0 Conclusions

- 7.1 The benefits of partnership working are clearly visible in the improvements to the historic fabric of the town centre and should be supported when circumstances permit as the levered in match funding and benefits are considerable. Although current finances do not permit an SDDC contribution at this time officers will continue to investigate external funding streams and future opportunities for use at a more appropriate time.

8.0 Background Papers

- 8.1 Swadlincote PSiCA Grant Guidance Notes. Ref: Swadlincote PSiCA General
8.2 Swadlincote PSiCA Delivery Plan February 2010 Ref: Swadlincote PSiCA General
8.3 Email offer from English Heritage dated 22nd April 2010. Ref: Swadlincote PSiCA General