

CONGLETON TOWN COUNCIL

COMMITTEE REPORTS AND UPDATES

COMMITTEE:	Council						
MEETING DATE AND TIME	10 th August 2023 7.00pm	LOCATION	Congleton Town Hall				
REPORT FROM	David McGifford Chief Officer/Serena Van Schepdael – Responsible Financial Officer (RFO)						
AGENDA ITEM REPORT TITLE	10. Vale Allotments Association Grant Application						
Background	<p>The Vale allotments were bought by Congleton Green Spaces Trust in 2016 and supported by a campaign led by Congleton Sustainability Group.</p> <p>The Vale Allotments Association which currently manages the Vale Allotments are looking to purchase them from its current investors/owners. The total amount required is £37,000 and an application was presented to the Finance and Policy Committee for £5,000 to go towards the total required.</p> <p>Finance and Policy can only approve grants up to £3,000 and due to the nature of the request on the purchase of land the application needs to be presented directly to Council. Our Grant Fund Policy states we do not cover core costs so the application does not fit under these rules, however, we hold General Power of Competence and can forward this application for discussion under that power.</p> <p>There is a significant shortage of allotments in Congleton however the proposal will only contribute to protecting what is currently at the Vale Allotment site rather than contribute towards potential new sites which are currently quite difficult to identify within our town boundary.</p> <p>We are aware that grants are currently being sought from various sources to achieve the amount required, ordinarily when seeking grant support you need to be able to demonstrate where the match funding will come from.</p>						
Options	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Do nothing as it is not generating additional allotments and the funds requested would be used to repay original investors and protect the site.2. Initially agree to underwrite up to £5,000 as this will demonstrate support when making other funding applications. Up to £5,000 would be released once the balance of £32,000 or more has been achieved via other sources. If this is agreed we would need the council to agree to a transfer from The Capital Contingency Earmarked Reserve into a short-term Allotment Reserve of £5000						
Updates	<p>An update on the application details was received from the applicant on 27th July 2023:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Section 2.3: The target figure given of £37,000 includes £35,900 for the land purchase itself, and an estimated figure of £1,100 for legal costs and expenses.• Section 2.5: The pledges and grants received to date are as follows: <table border="1"><tr><td>█ grant</td><td>£375</td></tr><tr><td>█ grant</td><td>£250</td></tr></table>			█ grant	£375	█ grant	£250
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	██████████ pledge	£2,000	
	██████████ pledge	£25,000	
	██████████ pledge	£2,500 (to be confirmed)	
	Other pledges	£150	
	Total	£30,275	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We are therefore £6,725 short of our target, so would be very grateful for support from the Town Council to help close that gap. <p>(NB: Redacted names of Grants/Pledge groups redacted)</p>		
Decisions Requested	For Council to consider the options provided or agree an alternative solution		

Congleton Town Council
Application for Financial Assistance

Part 1: Applicant(s) and Project Details

Application Reference Number (office use only)	GR06-2324
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1.1	Applicant(s):	Peter Lane
1.2	Representing:	Vale Allotments Association
1.3	Email Address:	██
1.4	Tel No.	██
1.5	Project Title:	Purchase of Vale Allotments site
1.6	Project Objectives:	To enable the purchase of the Vale Allotments site by the Vale Allotments Association Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) for community benefit. Through ownership by a CIO, the site would be preserved in perpetuity as an open space in the centre of Congleton providing allotments for members of the Congleton community, including provision for those who are disadvantaged.
1.7	Brief Project Description:	The Vale Allotments Association has the opportunity, up to the end of 2023, to purchase the site from the current owner, the Congleton Sustainability Group, which wishes to sell.
1.8	Details accounts/budgets	See below. As a new organisation the VAA has no accounts to submit. Future income will consist of allotment rents which are currently around £500 per annum in total.

Part 2: Cost Details / Resources / Timescale

2.1	Total Cost of Project:	£37,000
2.2	Total contribution sought:	£5000 on an "all or nothing" basis – if the purchase is not achieved then the contribution would be returned
2.3	What will the money be spent on?	Purchase of site from the present owner, Congleton Sustainability Group
2.4	Any ongoing costs:	No

2.5	<p>Details of confirmed match funding include source</p> <p>Cash:</p> <p>In kind:</p>	<p>£375 was awarded in April 2023 by the [REDACTED] Fund.</p> <p>Grants are also being sought from [REDACTED] the [REDACTED] and other grant-giving bodies, while donations will be sought from businesses and private individuals and potentially through crowd-funding.</p>
2.6	Resources needed:	None other than funding.
2.7	Estimated timescale of project from start to finish:	<p>Approximately 14 months. The VAA was set up in November 2022, with the initial aim of gaining Charitable Incorporated Organisation status. An application to the Charity Commissioners was made in January 2023 and confirmation of CIO status was received on 9th May 2023 (Registered Charity Number 1202990). There are many precedents for allotment groups setting up as CIOs. The current owner, Congleton Sustainability Group, has agreed to sell the site to the VAA if the purchase price can be raised by the end of December 2023.</p>

Part 3: Potential Benefits / Outputs

3.1	<p>What are the potential benefits/outputs to residents of Congleton</p>	<p>The objectives/purposes of the CIO are:</p> <p>“To benefit the residents of Congleton and the surrounding area without distinction of gender, sexual orientation, race or of political, religious or other opinions by providing allotment facilities in the interests of social welfare for recreational leisure time occupation with the objective of improving life for the residents”.</p> <p>The VAA also places great importance on promoting for the benefit of the public the conservation protection and improvement of the physical and natural environment in, and bordering allotments, in particular through the conservation of natural resources, the improvement of wildlife diversity and providing opportunities for learning about sustainable horticulture.</p> <p>Furthermore, the VAA intends as landlord to ensure that a restrictive covenant on the land is fulfilled to allocate at least two of the allotment plots for the use of those with learning difficulties and other special needs, young offenders and others in society who may benefit from the experience of working on an allotment, also to ensure that allotments are provided at reasonable rates, with concessionary rates for disadvantaged members of the community including those on low income (defined as those in receipt of Universal Credit).</p> <p>Two full plots are also set aside as a community orchard, the produce of which is offered to the Old Sawmill (a community benefit organisation), Congleton Foodbank, or other similar organisations.</p>
3.2	Are there similar services/projects provided in the area	<p>The only similar allotment site is the Hillary Avenue allotment site, owned by Congleton Town Council. Both the Hillary Avenue Allotments and the Vale Allotments have long waiting lists despite including half or third size plots to help reduce the number of people waiting. The Town Council is currently setting up a Landsharing scheme (Community Food</p>

		<p>Project/Airbnb Gardens) which hopes to match those wishing to grow food with homeowners or tenants who have gardens they would be happy for someone else to make use of.</p> <p>Due to the very significant under-provision of allotments in Congleton compared with other towns in Cheshire East, there is a need for existing allotments to be retained as well as for many more opportunities to be created. The Vale Allotments has the advantage of a very accessible location, close to the older and more densely built areas of Congleton where many residents do not have space to grow food. The site is open, sunny and well-drained with good soil, set within the ecological corridor of the Howty Valley and adjoining a Local Wildlife Site.</p> <p>A further advantage is that the land has been in horticultural use for as long as records can be found, and the current allotments have been present for over 60 years, so there is well-established use and management, currently by the Vale Allotments and Gardening Association (VAGA). Members of the Vale Allotments have a strong social and community ethos as well as there being a background of decades of experience.</p> <p>The closure of the site between 2014 and 2015 by a former owner was devastating and the VAA and VAGA now have a strong wish to put the ownership of the site on a much sounder footing than at present.</p>
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Part 4: Evaluation

4.1	<p><i>How will the project be evaluated and who will carry out the evaluation?</i></p>	<p>The project will be evaluated by VAA but all information (other than the names of individual donors) will be made publicly available through the VAA website (currently in preparation) and through an end of year report. A grant activities monitoring form will be completed and submitted to the Town Council.</p> <p>A Business Plan is in preparation by VAA and this will include provision for annual reviews and reporting by the Trustees following purchase. The accounts and all activities, income and expenditure will be made transparent and publicly available.</p> <p>The project will be successful if the money required to purchase the land is raised.</p> <p>Purchase of the site by the VAA CIO would open up opportunities for enhancement of the Vale Allotments which have been very constrained by uncertainty over future ownership and the debts incurred in saving the site from development or other uses.</p>
4.2	<p><i>Describe how you will promote the Town Council in your project.</i></p>	<p>The Town Council will be listed as a backer, including on any future crowd funding page, on the VAA website (currently in preparation) and on the Vale Allotments Facebook page, where agreed to be appropriate by VAGA. It will be included in future press releases or when other public information is provided. The Town Council logo can be added where appropriate.</p> <p>The Vale Allotments lies within a few minutes' walk of the Town Hall. VAGA members already take an active part in town centre activities</p>

		<p>including the Congleton Food and Drink Festival, Congleton Green Week and Congleton in Bloom, and it is expected they would continue to do so. The support of the Town Council would be very gratefully acknowledged and mentioned in any publicity by VAA and it is anticipated that even stronger links with the Town Council and its green initiatives could be developed in future, including through open days, educational visits, training sessions and so on.</p> <p>The Vale Allotment site and its cultural and natural heritage is a major asset to the town, particularly at a time when the social, recreational and health benefits of food-growing in a supportive and tranquil environment are recognised more than ever.</p>
4.3	<i>Please acknowledge you have read our Grant Application Criteria</i>	<p>Please see the Policy on our Grants page on our website: Grants - Congleton Town Council (congleton-tc.gov.uk)</p> <p>I/we have read the policy: YES</p>



Signature:

Date: 30.05.2023

p.p. Peter Lane (Chair, Vale Allotments Association)