
Agenda Item: Grants & Subsidised Lettings

Meeting Date: Monday, 31 March 2025

Contact Officer: Deputy Town Clerk/RFO

The purpose of this report is to present the Committee with grant requests from local organisations so they may agree dispersal.

Background

The Council maintains budgets for general discretionary grants and subsidised letting grants for groups or organisations which require financial assistance towards projects, costs and venue hire in order to provide services for the residents of Witney. Grant requests are usually considered by this Committee bi-annually at meetings in June and January, however there is occasion when they need to be considered at other times of the year due to Council Committee timeframes.

In the current year the budgets are as follows:

- Discretionary Grants (4100/407) - £20,000
- Subsidised Lettings – Corn Exchange/Burwell Hall (4110/407) - £1,800
- Subsidised Lettings – The Leys/Other (4110/202) - £10,000
- Annual grants - There are also specific budgets for a number of annual grants to organisations. For this meeting, they are covered in a separate report.

At the beginning of this financial year there was no funds brought forward from the previous 2023/24 financial year.

Current Situation

Discretionary Grant Applications

1. Witney Dramatic Society – A request has been received for £7,300 to upgrade the groups lighting stock. Further details are included in the application and supporting information **Appendix A**.

This item was deferred from previous Committee meeting so the Chair of the Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee and officers could meet with representatives from the group. This meeting took place on 7th March where further details of the proposal were received.

The existing lamps are halogen which are decades old (pic attached as **Appendix B**), their length of use is poor and it is very difficult and costly to get replacements. They intend to replace the oldest stock first and advised a modern audience expects several colour changes in a production.

Officers also discussed Witney Dramatic Society utilising the Corn Exchange for their performances in the future, and whether there could be any negotiation over hire.

The Society does have a production booked in the Hall during the last week of October but representatives advised there were restrictions at the Corn Exchange which made it less viable– the wings are limited, there are stairs out the back which makes it less accessible, the changing rooms and toilets are not as accessible they were historically, there was little storage, and it was difficult to book times each week for practice.

The reserves in the groups account are committed for other equipment and technical upgrades i.e. laptop etc. There is no financial support from the group's current Landlord so representatives also suggested submitting a West Hive application with WODC depending on the town council's decision.

In terms of wider benefit, productions would help the continuation of this group which celebrates its 80th anniversary in 2026 and would provide the opportunity for them to be more mobile and efficient.

2. Following the recent report to the Parks & Recreation Committee concerning the use of portable toilets at West Witney Sports Ground, Members may like to consider awarding a grant to Witney Parkrun towards paying for the use of toilets at the West Witney Sports & Social Club on Saturday mornings.

It is understood the Club is willing to open on the basis of toilet use and providing refreshments but previously the latter has not been viable for them to continue. The awarding of a grant for this purpose would provide a toilet facility for Parkrun until such time as the new facilities are built and negate the need for the existing Portaloo's.

3. Witney Town Band – Two requests have been received for the forthcoming financial year from the band. One for its annual grant of £660 which pays for performances at civic events throughout the Council year, and a second for the subsidised hire of the Corn Exchange later in the year for a fundraising concert – The Council has already indicated it was willing to provide this on submission of a form and supporting documents. Applications and supporting documents are attached as **Appendix C**.

Subsidised Lettings

1. Third Party Events – Summer 2025

In previous years, the Council has provided subsidised hire to cover the Witney Pride (Saturday 24th May) and Witney Carnival (Saturday 12th July) costs at the Leys Recreation Ground.

In addition, the Council has a partnership agreement with Witney Music Festival and has covered the cost for the hire over the duration of the Leys event.

Damage deposits are still requested from all hirers to mitigate against any damage to the land/sports pitches by the users.

2. Witney Youth Council

At the Stronger Communities Committee meeting it was suggested the Council may like to provide subsidised hire to the Youth Council to hold a cultural event during 2025

Grant monitoring 2024-25

Due to other matters, it has not been possible for officers to progress further grant monitoring following the last meeting. This will be deferred to the next meeting of the Committee.

Other Matters

The remaining budget for the £50 for fifty grants scheme is £1,300. It was recommended at Stronger Communities that this be allocated towards the provision of APCAM WeGame sessions in the new financial year (£1,000). Officers request the remaining £300 be allocated towards the VE Day 80th Anniversary celebration which has grown into a larger event.

It was also a recommendation of the Stronger Communities Committee that the remaining budget from the discretionary grant fund be utilised in the new financial year towards the provision of APCAM mental health drop-in sessions (£2,600).

The Committee should note the above sessions would also require subsidised letting so the income for the Corn Exchange is not unduly estimated.

Impact Assessments

The Town Council has a duty to consider the effects of its decisions, functions and activities on equality, biodiversity, and crime & disorder. Consideration should also be given to effects on the environment, given the Council's Climate Emergency declaration in 2019.

- a) Equality – by providing grant funding to APCAM, the Council would be supporting young people. By supporting Witney Dramatic Society, the Council would be supporting them providing entertainment to all ages and demographics.
- b) Biodiversity – no direct impact from the contents of the report.
- c) Crime & Disorder – no direct impact from the contents of the report.
- d) Environment & Climate Emergency – no direct impact from the contents of the report.

Risk

In decision making Councillors should give consideration to any risks to the Council and any action it can take to limit or negate its liability.

The Council has policies and criteria for which it uses to award its grants to ensure public funds are allocated and used appropriately. If awards are deviated from these criteria, a robust reason should be given and agreed by the Committee.

The Council must ensure they are satisfied with the information provided in order to award funds and request further information if not. To not do so could incur reputational risk.

Social Value

Social value is the positive change the Council creates in the local community within which it operates.

Benefits to Witney's community - young, elderly, disadvantaged and vulnerable people within the town are all covered both independently and jointly by several of the applicants.

Financial implications

At the Annual Council Meeting held on 17 May 2023, the Council invoked the General Power of Competence under which the ability to award these grants is made.

- The remaining grants budget balance is £10,920 (4100/407)
- The cost of opening West Witney Sports & Social Club for 2 hours on a Saturday is approx. £40. For six months this would equate to £1,040.

- The hire charge for Witney Pride in 2025 is £730
- The hire charge for Witney Carnival in 2025 is £1,810
- The hire charge for Witney Music Festival in 2025 is £3,280 (this includes extra days as agreed in the January Committee meeting).
- The balance for subsidised letting at the Leys Recreation Ground in 2025-26 is £5,500 (4110/202). If the above were to be agreed it would leave a shortfall of £320 which would need to be sourced from a further budget.
- The use of the Corn Exchange for the Youth Council is up to £205 depending on the evening used.

Recommendations

Members are invited to:

1. Consider the request of a grant for Witney Dramatic Society
2. Consider the request of a grant and for subsidised use of the Corn Exchange from Witney Town Band
3. Consider a grant for Witney Parkrun to pay for the weekly use of toilets in West Witney Sports & Social Club
4. Consider subsidised hire for the community events being held at The Leys in the summer of 2025
5. Consider the suggestion of the Stronger Communities Committee to provide subsidised letting for the Youth Council to hold a cultural event in the Corn Exchange
6. Consider the recommendations of the Stronger Communities Committee concerning the utilisation of the underspent £50 for fifty grants scheme towards APCAM youth & mental health events during 2025-26. These sessions will also require subsidised letting in 2025-26.