

Beaudesert & Henley in Arden JPC – Budget Planning Group

Summary of findings regarding the implications of potential JPC involvement in promoting and ensuring the sustainability of the following community organisations; Henley Library, Henley in Bloom, The Hub and Henley War Memorial Trust.

Henley Library

Whilst the Library appears to be well organised and functionally effective it is not used by a large number of residents – 450 visits a month. Like most libraries it has a questionable future in the 21st century with library usage declining year on year nationally. It is likely however that it is very important to the people that do use it. It is very much dependent on Judith Lindley for its operational energy.

It has just received a JPC Mini –Grant to keep it solvent this year, having exhausted its reserves. For it to run next year it requires a grant from the JPC of circa £8,000 (£3,500 given in 2016/7).

If the JPC decide to give this grant it should be conditional on JPC representation on the Library Board in order to examine in more detail the real need for it to continue beyond 2017/8, what alternatives might be possible to meet the needs of the core users and how might costs be reduced – rent is £5,500 per annum!

Henley in Bloom

This organisation lives within its means, although this includes £3000 from the JPC. Its reserves currently represent a year's activity cost.

The organisation is however reaching a decision point with regard to plant watering – its present water bowser truck is in what is probably its last year of life. The group need to decide whether to replace it or go for a contracted out watering service (as is the practice in some other towns). In either case this would almost certainly require a bigger input financially from the JPC – either towards capital or operational costs.

It is recommended that the JPC maintain the current level of grant for 2017/8 and work alongside H in B to develop the best watering strategy. There should also be work done to develop better support from Henley

businesses where they currently put in less than £2000 per year with 75% of that coming from just five companies!

The Hub

The Hub is a well-used facility serving a broad cross section of the community, in particular the youth where it fills a key role vacated by the Local Authority. Unfortunately with the current “austerity” climate making grants and donations hard to come by and with its reserves run down, The Hub has ceased to be viable without significant JPC funding. To continue at the current level of activity (and possibly develop further) the JPC grant would need to increase from £8,500 in 2016/7 to circa £20,000 in 2017/8. Consideration should be given to making a longer term commitment – 3 years – in order that better quality staff can be recruited and retained. This in turn would make The Hub far less dependent on Peter Crathorne.

The HWMT

This organisation has by far the most complex issues as outlined in the notes of 22/12/16 but essentially;

- The Memorial Hall is in good shape and self-sufficient and whilst currently dependent on Duncan Bainbridge’s management, could easily be run by someone else taking over.
- The playing fields harbour a number of self-sufficient, self-contained and well run clubs but problems arise from the Football and Cricket Clubs where the level of ownership is not the same and a more “pay & play” attitude exists. This has meant great difficulties in maintaining the playing fields satisfactorily on a voluntary basis.
- This is even more apparent with regard to the Pavilion usage where it has lapsed into a very poor condition. Possible plans to improve the facility don’t appear to be particularly viable and in any case don’t address the issue of changing facilities for female sports participation and disabled access.
- In addition to not encouraging female participation, it is clear that many non-Henley residents use the facility and the charges for the facilities are far less than those charged, for example, by WCC.

The proposal to increase JPC Grant funding to a level that would enable contract maintenance and the hiring of a part time manager is difficult to support in light of these last two points.

It is also noted that within the proposal the Part time manager would carry out the duties covered by the Parish Clerk in many other locations and it is possible that a local authority (JPC) is more suited to managing a “pay & play” facility.

Serious consideration should be given to the possibility that, in terms of the way residents now engage with community activities, the HWMT has served its purpose and the JPC should consider taking over some or all of its facilities.

This would have a number of advantages including the guaranteeing of ongoing management and oversight i.e. the JPC will always be there and is constantly renewed.

Funding should continue at the same level as this year subject to a commitment from the HWMT to participate in a proper review of the best way forward for the Trust and the JPC in maintaining these facilities in Henley. This review to be concluded in time to include any necessary changes to the JPC’s budget or Precept for 2018/9.