

Report of the Town Clerk

Coastal Communities Fund

Background

1. Berwick Town Council resolved to support the formation of the Coastal Community Team (CCT) on 10th October 2016, after discussing a resolution moved by Cllr Goodyer. The only part of the report from Cllr Goodyer that was not adopted was the proposal that two councillors be appointed to the management team of the CCT - instead the responsibility for taking this forward was delegated to the Town Clerk.
2. Berwick Town Council has worked jointly with the CCT on projects and events like the Tourism Conference in 2017 which has helped inform the ongoing work of the CCT.
3. The CCT is an informally constituted body whose team meetings have been attended by the Town Clerk. The issue of whether councillors should attend these meetings has been raised by councillors, but the problem is, broadly, that council cannot delegate authority to councillors to act on its behalf, and councillors cannot, as a result of these meetings, direct the work of members of Town Council staff. This was the thinking behind the 2016 decision to delegate responsibility for this work to the Town Clerk, and the situation remains the same.
4. The CCT is chaired by the Chief Executive of Berwick Community Development Trust, and is supported by his staff. These arrangements are acceptable to the Ministry of Communities, Housing and Local Government who use the CCT (and other teams like it) as the delivery mechanism for the Coastal Communities Fund.
5. The latest round of Coastal Communities Funding is now available for expressions of interest. The CCT has made one bid, under the fast track mechanism for a range of revenue projects, and is to consider the capital bids that are forthcoming before deciding how it will act in relation to them.
6. CCF is designed to support the economic development of coastal communities by promoting sustainable economic growth and jobs, so that people are better able to respond to the changing economic needs and opportunities of their area. Applicants must demonstrate that their proposal fits with the broad economic priorities of the local area, directly or indirectly linking to a wider economic vision.
7. It is important to recognize that the process of awarding CCF is not clear cut, nor is it simple. Among the considerations CCTs have to take account of is whether, by allowing competing bids to go forwards, they risk confusing the issue or the perception arising that they are not united in their support for particular bids. The guidance provided is, nevertheless clear; *'Applications from areas with a Coastal Community Team (CCT)*

must provide a letter from their CCT showing support for the project, or tell us why this is not appropriate to their bid.'

8. The application process for capital projects under the main CCF scheme is a two stage process. Expressions of interest must be submitted by 30th April 2018; if invited to submit a full application as a result of the Expression of Interest the project sponsors, which cannot change between stage one and stage two, must be able, between July 2018 and 15th October 2018 to prepare a full application, a business plan and a capital delivery plan. In addition applicants will need to be able to demonstrate that they have a heritable lease on any land to be used for the scheme. This is a challenging timescale; in practice we would argue that many of those items need to be either completed, or to be fully scoped before the expression of interest is submitted in order to meet the October deadline. As the government guidance points out *Projects seeking over £100,000 from CCF for capital work involving land, buildings or other construction-related work should ideally have secured full Planning Consent (including any Listed Building and Conservation Area consents) by the stage one application deadline. At the very least, projects should have submitted an application for full Planning Consent by the stage one deadline, in order to be able to meet CCF timescales and requirements at stage two.* Members will be acutely aware of the likely timescale for a planning application, including the statutory consultation periods.
9. Details of the projects we are aware of will be circulated under separate cover.
10. It is anticipated that the CCT will meet and decide whether to provide an expression of support to each project. At the time of writing it is the opinion of many of those involved in the process that the CCT should only endorse one project. This provides a challenge to council; should it consider the projects itself, should it provide criteria for the Town Clerk to use while attending the meeting of the CCT, or should it simply choose to endorse all of the projects as being likely to deliver some benefit to Berwick?
11. The view of your officers is that there are three tests:
 - a. Does the project meet the objectives of the CCF?
 - b. Is the project in the interests of Berwick upon Tweed?
 - c. Can the project be delivered in a timely fashion?
12. At the time of writing we cannot comment on the individual projects, because the final details of their expressions of interest or likely timeline have not been circulated yet. Verbal updates will be provided.

Recommendation

1. That council provide guidance to your officers as to how the issue of support for CCF expressions of interest be addressed.