

# National Heritage Lottery bid: Abbey of St Edmunds

<b>Report number:</b>	<b>CAB/WS/23/050</b>	
<b>Report to and date:</b>	<b>Cabinet</b>	14 November 2023
<b>Cabinet member:</b>	Councillor Ian Shipp Portfolio Holder for Leisure Tel: 07368 134769 Email: <a href="mailto:Ian.shipp@westsuffolk.gov.uk">Ian.shipp@westsuffolk.gov.uk</a>	
<b>Lead officer:</b>	Mark Walsh Director (Operations) Tel: 01284 757300 Email: <a href="mailto:Mark.walsh@westsuffolk.gov.uk">Mark.walsh@westsuffolk.gov.uk</a>	

**Decisions Plan:** The decisions made as a result of this report will usually be published within 48 hours and cannot be actioned until five clear working days of the publication of the decision have elapsed.

**Wards impacted:** Abbeygate Ward specifically.

**Recommendation:** It is recommended that Cabinet:

- 1. Considers the merits of the proposed joint National Heritage Lottery bid, with St Edmundsbury Cathedral and English Heritage and agrees to the stage one bid submission being pursued.**
- 2. Authorises the Director (Operations) to agree the final stage one submission documents, in consultation with the other partners to the bid**

**and based on approval from the S151 Officer and Portfolio Holder for Leisure.**

- 3. In principle to allocate £250,000 from the Section 106 funding already earmarked for improvements in the Abbey Gardens to the delivery phase of the project as contributory funding should the bid be successful at stage 1 development phase.**

## 1. Context to this report

- 1.1 The Abbey Gardens is a green flag award winning park which attracts around 1.3 million visits per year. Within the gardens stand the ruins of the former Abbey of St Edmund, the current cathedral building was one of the Abbey's churches. The Abbey ruins are English Heritage's most visited free to visit venue in the country. Given its popularity as a visitor destination it plays a significant role in helping boost the local economy.
- 1.2 Notwithstanding the above, there are some significant challenges facing the site which include:
- Paths in the Abbey Gardens and routes around the ruins which are not Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) compliant and are potentially hazardous for visitors to navigate.
  - A large proportion of the ruins in the gardens are fenced off because of erosion and English Heritage cannot afford to undertake all of these repairs in a timely fashion, because they simply don't have the funding.
  - Whilst there have been new interpretation panels installed within the Gardens interpretation of the site as a whole is poor.
- 1.3 The feedback from the NLHF concerning an initial point of entry submission has been positively received. Representatives from the NLHF have visited the site to observe what the key components of a bid would include, these being:
- Conservation of the highly vulnerable Abbey ruins
  - Improving and expanding the footpath network around the former Abbey.
  - Strengthening connectivity between the Abbey, River Lark, Cathedral and Town.
  - Increase biodiversity in the Abbey area.
  - Repurposing of an unused cathedral building into a heritage welcome centre.
  - Building of a west cloister which would link the centre to the cathedral.
  - Providing space for community activities, exhibitions and art installations.
- 1.4 There is a three-stage application process for a NLHF bid of the size we are proposing:
- 1) An initial expression of interest (which we have received positive feedback on);
  - 2) A stage one development/feasibility application; and
  - 3) A stage two delivery stage application.
- 1.5 The Heritage Partnership successfully applied for and received lottery funding to host the Abbey 1000 celebrations. On that occasion the Council was the lead the applicant.

## **2. Proposals within this report**

- 2.1 Working in partnership; St Edmundsbury Cathedral, West Suffolk Council, and English Heritage are proposing to submit a joint stage one National lottery heritage fund (NLHF) bid for funding to address the challenges outlined in 1.2 above. The Cathedral will be the lead applicant for this submission as the bulk of the capital spend will be on their land.
- 2.2 In order to make the bid, the NLHF will want to see a partnership agreement between the Cathedral, Council and English Heritage and this agreement has been drafted and is currently being considered by each partner.
- 2.3 The Cathedral have appointed and are funding a consultant to draw together the bid. WSC are holding around £250,000 of Sct 106 funding ringfenced for the Abbey Gardens which the Council could use as its contributory funding towards the bid.

## **3. Alternative options that have been considered**

- 3.1 If the Council chose not to support the bid, the Council would ultimately need to consider how else it would fund the necessary access and path improvements on its land. English Heritage have already indicated that they don't have the funding at their disposal to undertake all the works needed to the ruins in one go and this would therefore result in large areas of the ruins remaining fenced off indefinitely. The visitor centre and improvements within the cathedral could not be progressed. This lack of investment could ultimately impact on visitor footfall and negatively impact on the wider economy of the area.
- 3.2 Alternative funders for projects of this nature are currently few and far between and The National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) is the primary organisation for grants of this scale and nature.

## **4. Consultation and engagement undertaken**

- 4.1 The Abbey of St Edmund Heritage Partnership which was set up in 2016 is led by St Edmundsbury Cathedral and West Suffolk Council in collaboration with nearly 20 other public, private, and voluntary organisations. The development of the bid by the lead partners is being supported by the wider partnership group.

## **5. Risks associated with the proposals**

- 5.1 At this stage of the process there is little risk to the Council. If the bid is unsuccessful the partners would review the decision and decide whether to

bid again. If the bid is successful, the partners do not necessarily have to accept the stage one funding and can choose to reject it.

5.2 Not raising the necessary match funding required for the bid is a potential risk particularly for the cathedral as lead partner.

5.3 As with any project of this scale there will be differences of opinion as to the merits of the bids content. However, through the wider consultation which will be required as part of the stage two process, concerns and issues can be addressed and mitigated.

## **6. Implications arising from the proposals.**

### **6.1 Financial**

This report is seeking consent to make a Stage 1 development stage bid to the NLHF, our financial commitment should this bid be successful will be around £10,000, which will be matched by similar commitments from St Edmundsbury Cathedral and English Heritage.

Subject to the stage 1 bid being successful the stage 2 delivery stage bid will have a total project cost of around 9.7 million and the partnership will be seeking a grant of around 70% from the NLHF.

### **6.2 Legal compliance**

The draft partnership agreement has been drawn together by solicitors appointed by the Cathedral and will be reviewed by both the Council's legal team and English Heritage prior to submission.

### **6.3 Personal data processing**

There is no processing of personal data associated with the bid itself.

### **6.4 Equalities**

There are no obvious equality issues associated with the bid process itself. Should the bid be success it will be a means for funding access improvements around the Abbey Ruins.

### **6.5 Crime and disorder**

There are no obvious Crime and disorder issues to be considered at this bid stage.

### **6.6 Safeguarding**

There are no obvious safeguarding issues to be considered at this bid stage.

### **6.7 Environment or sustainability**

There are no environment or sustainability issues to be considered at this bid stage.

6.8 **HR or staffing**

There are no HR or staffing issues to be considered at this bid stage.

6.9 **Changes to existing policies**

There are no requirements to review and change Council policy as a consequence of this bid.

6.10 **External organisations (such as businesses, community groups)**

For the purposes of this proposed National Lottery Heritage Fund bid the Council, Cathedral and English Heritage are working in partnership. The Cathedral are the lead applicant, and the wider Heritage Partnership which includes nearly 20 other public, private, and voluntary organisations in and around the district have indicated their support for the initiative.

## **7. Appendices referenced in this report**

7.1 None

## **8. Background documents associated with this report**

8.1 None