

North Norfolk Sustainable Communities Fund

- Summary: In March 2020 Cabinet approved a recommendation to:
- Change the name of the Big Society Fund to the North Norfolk Sustainable Communities Fund (NNSCF).
 - Refocus the NNSCF to encourage a wider and more diverse range of projects from communities across North Norfolk.
 - Give additional weight to projects with positive environmental outcomes which demonstrates the Council's commitment to the Climate Emergency it declared in 2019.
 - To support the delivery of identified Council priorities in respect of Quality of Life and Climate, Coast and Environment.

This report provides an overview of the North Norfolk Sustainable Communities Fund during its first year of operation.

Recommendations: Cabinet to receive the report and note the contribution that the NNSCF makes on Council priorities as well as the impact that Covid 19 has had on applications to the NNSCF and the provision and delivery of community projects.

Reasons for Recommendations: To ensure the NNSCF continues to reflect Council priorities to build sustainable communities and respond to the Climate Emergency declared by the Council in 2019.

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| Cabinet Member(s) Cllr. Virginia Gay | Ward(s) affected All |
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Officer - Sonia Shuter – Health and Communities Manager

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The North Norfolk Sustainable Communities Fund (NNSCF), which replaced the Big Society Fund was launched in June 2020. Sustainable Communities are places in which people want to live and work, now and in the future. They meet the diverse needs of existing and future residents, are sensitive to their environment, and contribute to a high quality of life.

- 1.2 The Big Society Fund was originally financed from a proportion of the second homes council tax returned by Norfolk County Council. This funding has now ceased, and the finances to support NNSCF are being taken from accrued community reserves of approximately £1m. The annual budget is normally £225,000 however last year an additional £50,000 was allocated to the NNSCF resulting in a budget of £275,000. Any unspent budget is returned to the reserves.
- 1.3 The Council declared a Climate Emergency across the District in April 2019. In addition to enhancing the sustainability of local communities, projects funded by the NNSCF should reflect the priorities of the Council in respect of climate change. Additional weighting is given to projects that clearly demonstrate that they have focussed on carbon reduction, reducing the environmental impact of their project and / or conserving or enhancing the biodiversity of their local environment.
- 1.4 To reflect the priorities of the Council in respect of quality of life, weighting is also given to applications which promote, encourage or support healthy lifestyles, increase accessibility and promote the physical, mental and social wellbeing of communities.
- 1.5 To widen access to the Fund amongst all communities across North Norfolk, and to allow for a wider range of beneficial projects to be supported, equal priority is given to revenue and capital projects.
- 1.6 A simplified application process was set up for smaller revenue or capital projects below £1,000.
- 1.7 In order to make best use of the funding available, all applications are expected to identify a level of match funding commensurate with the type and size of the organisation and value of the project.

2. North Norfolk Sustainable Communities Fund 2020 / 2021

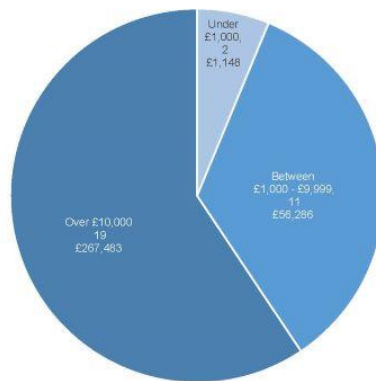
- 2.1 The NNSCF Panel is politically balanced and consists of seven members of NNDC appointed by NNDC's Cabinet.
- 2.2 The Panel meets quarterly in June, September, December and March to consider grant applications over £1,000 and up to a maximum limit of £15,000. The Panel recommends that grant applications are either approved, not approved or deferred. Grants recommended for approval will identify the amount of funding to be awarded and any conditions that should be applied to the grant award. Recommendations made by the Panel will be submitted to the Leader of the Council, as the Senior Executive Member for approval and authorisation within one week of the Panel meeting.
- 2.3 The Chair and or Vice of the Panel meet monthly to consider grant applications under £1,000. The Chair and or Vice Chair of the Panel recommends that grant applications under £1,000 are approved, not approved or deferred. Grants recommended for approval will identify the amount of funding to be awarded and any conditions that should be applied to the grant award. Recommendations made by the Chair and or Vice Chair will be submitted to the Leader of the Council as the Senior Executive Member

for approval and authorisation within one week of the recommendation being made.

3. NNSCF applications

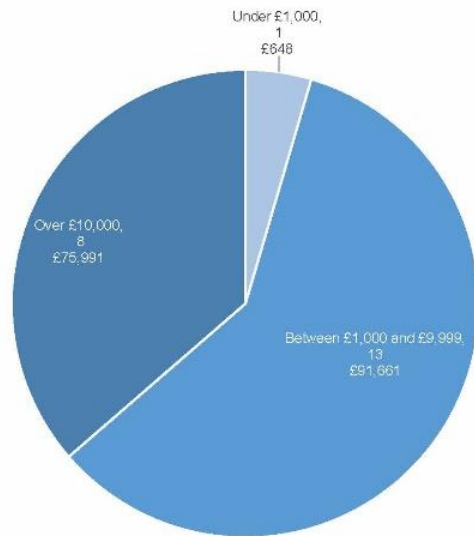
- 3.1 In the last financial year, the Panel met remotely in September, December and March to consider applications to the NNSCF. Due to the impact of Covid 19 and the refocus of the fund, the Panel did not meet in June 2020. In addition the Chair and Vice Chair of the NNSCF met virtually when needed to consider applications under £1,000.
- 3.2 Thirty two organisations in total submitted grant applications to the NNSCF requesting funding of £324,917. This was 18.5% more than the budget allocation of £275,000.

Breakdown of Grant Requests to the North Norfolk Sustainable Communities Fund
2020-21



- 3.3 Of the thirty two applications received in the last financial year, two applications were not presented to the Panel as they were either incomplete or withdrawn by the applicant. In total, twenty two applications were awarded a grant. Four applications were deferred pending further information, three of which were subsequently awarded a grant. Eight applications were not approved although one resubmitted a new application which was subsequently approved. Grants awarded from the NNSCF during its first year of operation totaled £168,300

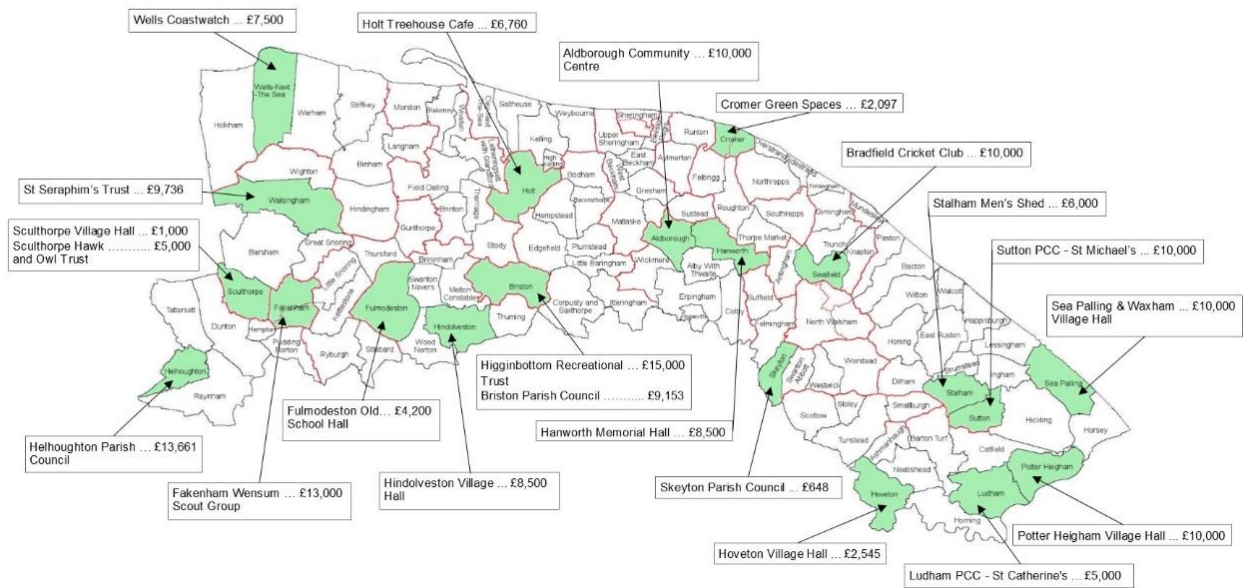
Breakdown of Awards Made by North Norfolk Sustainable Communities Fund
2020-2021



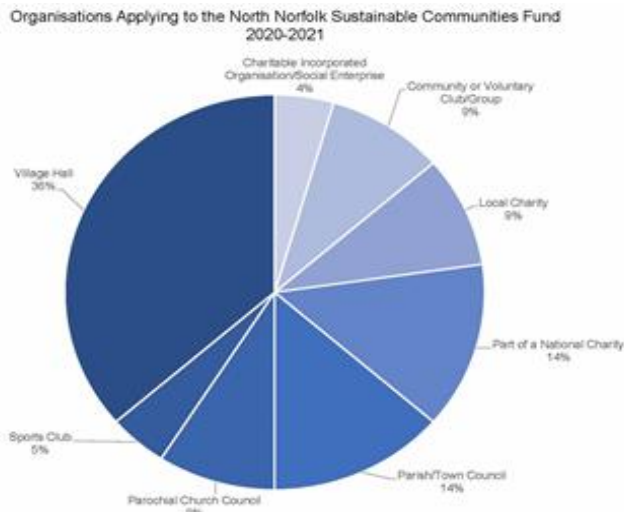
3.4 Parishes awarded a North Norfolk Sustainable Communities Fund grant



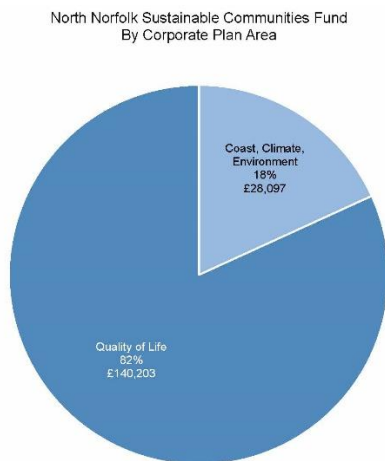
North Norfolk Sustainable Communities Fund
Grant Awards 2020-2021



3.5 Type of organisations applying to the North Norfolk Sustainable Communities Fund



3.6 NNSCF applications in relation to Corporate Plan priority



Over 80% of the projects awarded funding related to the Quality of Life Corporate Plan priority. It is acknowledged that greater promotion needs to take place to encourage more applications for projects that meet the Coast, Climate and Environment priority as well as support the delivery of the North Norfolk District Council Environmental Charter.

4. Impact of Covid on applications, projects and organisations

Compared to the last year of the Big Society Fund, there has been a decrease in applications to the North Norfolk Sustainable Communities Fund during its first year of operation. It is recognized that the NNSCF is a new fund and it may take time for it to become established. However, the main reason for the reduction in applications is due to the impact of Covid 19. Organisations advised that due to uncertainty re Covid and practical issues such as committee members being able to meet to discuss an

application or the ability to get quotes for the works, they decided to delay applying to the Fund.

Organisations applying for a NNSCF are being asked to complete a Covid Impact Form as part of application and monitoring process. This asks:

- How has Covid 19 affected the organisations and the service it provides
- What impact has been noticed on the users of the service
- What is the potential long term impact on services provided or are any changes in service due to Covid anticipated.
- If any financial support has been received from NNDC and how it has been used.
- What actions have been taken to mitigate against the impact of Covid
- What is the anticipated impact of Covid on the organisations long term sustainability

Feedback has shown that Covid continues to have a significant impact of the majority of community organisations. Government grant funding has helped mitigate against loss of income. However, the continued uncertainty around another wave and potential lockdown is causing a lack of confidence limiting organisations' desire and ability to commit funds or progress projects. There is also a concern that users of services awarded funding will not return once lockdowns ease as they will lack confidence to return to previous activities. Where feasible some organisations have adapted their offer to include a web based service. This has helped retain users and in some cases attracted new users. As restrictions ease, lock down lifts and confidence is restored it is expected that there will be an increase in applications to the fund in the next financial year.

Continued publicity and promotion of the NNSCF particularly to encourage applications in respect of environmental projects will continue.

5. Financial Implications and Risks

The funding for the NNSCF is taken from allocated reserves. It is envisaged that if the normal annual grant budget of £225,000 is spent. There are sufficient reserves for the Fund to continue for approximately four years.

6. Equality and Diversity

- 6.1 There are no identified equality or diversity implications. The need to increase accessibility is integral to the NNSCF. One of the Panel Members, Cllr. Spagnola offers advice and support to applicants to ensure projects are as inclusive and accessible as possible.

7. Crime and Disorder

There are no crime and disorder implications

8. Conclusion

- 8.1 The NNSCF was launched in the midst of the Covid pandemic. This clearly had an impact on the confidence of organisations to apply for and progress

projects. Despite this grants totaling £168,300 were awarded to twenty two organisations to fund projects that will support sustainable communities.

- 8.2 Closer engagement with NNDC's newly appointed Environmental Policy Officers will help promote the NNSCF as well as encourage and support more applications for projects that will contribute towards achieving NNDCs Coast, Climate and Environment priority and the Environmental Charter.