

Report to SOAG's Executive Committee
HERITAGE LOTTERY PROPOSALS

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT:

- To remind Committee of how we arrived at this point
- To summarise the Technical sub-group's analysis of Fylde's Heritage Lottery Fund bid.
- To ask the Committee to support or to amend the attached draft letter as our response.
- To determine to whom the response should be provided

BACKGROUND

In January 2001, the Council heard that the gardens needed £2.03 million to restore them. They said they could not afford this, and in April 2004, the plans were re-prioritised down to £0.95 million, *(by deleting all work to the Ashton Institute, and repairing rather than replacing the glasshouses, together with other savings)*.

After Mr Bell's arrival, the scheme was re-prioritised once again in 2004, *(mostly to incorporate fees, overheads, and capitalised revenue costs)*. The revised figure - including these costs - increased to £1.94 million

Subsequently, the Council came to the view that it could not ignore the Institute, glasshouses and gatehouses, and undertook a survey of them. This resulted in their being added back into the plans. The Institute was proposed for re-siting. The glasshouses were to be demolished and replaced with a smaller, relocated 'Winter Garden', and the lodge gatehouses improved.

The cost of this work has not been published, but we are reliably informed it has increased the cost to around £3.3 million.

The North West region of the Heritage Lottery Fund has a cash limit of £2 million per grant. The Council believes it will receive more favourable treatment regionally rather than nationally. Partly because of this, and partly because it does not want to spend more than £2 million, it undertook yet another re-prioritisation to reduce the £3.3 million down to £2 million. This is to be its bid proposal.

It also hopes to submit a second bid *(called Phase 2)* for something under £1 million at some future date. This will require only 10% match funding by the Council.

Having previously dealt exclusively with SOAG on these matters, the Council now sought support for its revised proposals from a wider range of groups in order to satisfy the Heritage Lottery Fund requirement that the scheme as proposed has the support of the community. Around 21 groups were invited to comment.

SOAG was also asked to consider the merits of the new proposals, and to temporarily set aside the dispute over how they should be funded. We agreed to do this, and established a Technical sub-committee to look into the details of the proposals.

THE PRESENT POSITION

A note of the meeting with Paul Norris, Darren Bell and Cclr Mrs Pagett is attached. It sets out the Council's "Masterplan" for the Gardens, and ideally, it should be read before continuing with this report.

The fundamental question to be addressed is how each of us sees the gardens.

In a nutshell, Mr Bell sees them as a community park full of activity, and believes that bringing money-making opportunities into them is a key aspect of their development. SOAG's technical group see them as tranquil heritage gardens to be restored to their former glory, in keeping with the Victorian/Edwardian style of the town, and focusing on floral beauty in a centre of horticultural excellence. These views are not readily compatible.

Whilst welcoming and supporting several of the individual elements of the plan, the Technical sub-committee believes the overall direction is not what is wanted or expected, and is not able to recommend support for the overall direction of this present re-prioritisation of the lottery scheme as it is now proposed.

The sub-committee met twice, firstly, May 7th to consider the issues in principle, and secondly and on June 18th to consider the detailed proposals. By the first meeting, they had not received the costing details that had been asked for, and pressed the Council to provide them. Eventually the Council refused to do so, citing commercial confidentiality as the reason.

The Council did, however, provide some indication of the priority attached to each aspect of the scheme. They also provided (*probably unintentionally*) the details and the costings for Phase 2 of the work, so the sub-committee was able to make some better progress at understanding what was happening.

The sub-group also considered whether we should simply make our views known to FBC - accepting they will probably be ignored if they do not agree with the Council's views - or whether we should publicise our views more widely than just to the Council, and if so to whom. They also considered

whether our aim should be to provide the Council with early warning of what might be more widespread public dissent, or whether we should try to change the Council's approach to their new 'Masterplan'.

In this regard, the sub-group recommends we send copies of the letter to the Council, the Heritage Lottery Fund, English Heritage, and the Garden History Society, but not to the media at the present time. It believes that seeking to change the Council's approach using public opinion and the media would be as fruitless as previous attempts have been, and that SOAG should maintain a stance of dignified and principled opposition, without actively seeking conflict with the Council, but responding with vigour if publicly criticised by the Council for our position.

The notes of the sub-committee's meetings are attached, together with a draft of a letter to FBC.

The Executive Committee is asked to consider these documents and to decide SOAG's formal response.