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Neighbourhood Portion of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) for Bath

GRANT APPLICATION FORM

Project title:	Village Agents for Bath
Amount of funding sought from the Neighbourhood portion of CIL for Bath fund	£90,000 over two years

Section 1: Applicant details

Organisation:	West of England Rural Network (WERN)
Locality or ward which will benefit from this project:	Weston, Combe Down, Foxhill, Larkhall and Fairfield (and other locations where we have clients are Odd Down, Oldfield Park, Southdown, Twerton, Lansdown, Bathwick)

Section 2: Project Details

2.1 Please provide a clear description of your project proposal – including your outcomes and objectives (maximum 300 words)

When people are struggling or overwhelmed, finding a way out is not obvious. Asking for help is difficult or even where to even start. We will provide a free, confidential, face to face pathway for residents to access services, specialist advice and practical help to improve day to day life, health, and wellbeing. Whether we meet them at a local community social group, through someone they know or directly by self-referral, it starts with listening to them and a conversation about adding more options. If immediate action is required to avoid a crisis, we have the Community Wellbeing Hub partners to call upon for food, emergency grants, solutions to avoid eviction, hospital admissions and carer breakdown. A Village Agent also finds support and solutions from very local resources, tradespeople, cleaners and help with practical tasks, Plus a wide range of charities, local companies, and statutory services. The aim is to address immediate needs, examine what changes can be made to avoid recurrence and looking at longer term plans when they are ready for that discussion. We know that people are not always able to articulate

the full context of the issue, so we help them unpick that story and support a plan they are willing to take forward.

With the person's consent, a complex case is escalated to a weekly multi-agency meeting where Community Wellbeing Hub partners can be consulted for additional support and advice.

We wish to continue to bring people out of a cycle of just getting whether that's financial or caring for someone they love. Our bespoke service addresses many inequalities with a compassionate approach that empowers people to accept new assistance when they may have said no in the past.

2.2 Please tell us briefly about your organisation, for example is it a charity, residents' association, etc.

West of England Rural Network (WERN) is a charity and company limited by guarantee. Our mission is to work with communities, organisations, groups, and individuals across the West of England to improve the quality of their lives.

Our Village Agent service was set up in 2010 with 3 part-time staff, covering just 10 rural parishes in the Chew Valley. By 2012, two more Village Agents expanded our reach to what is now known as 3 Valleys (Chew, Somer, and Cam) In 2017 the service was added to the Virgin Care SD52 contract for Wellness. 2020/1 Covid recovery funding (B&NES Public Health and Sec 106 money) presented the opportunity to tackle unmet needs and address inequality within the remainder of B&NES backed by notable advocates with the Local Area Forums. In 2022 our expansion into urban Peasedown St John, Combe Down and Foxhill, and rural Bathavon began a 2-year pilot to gauge the level of wider need and gather evidence beyond a proof of concept. That level of need has been proven with significant positive outcomes for residents.

People ask, "What is a Village Agent?" The answer is simple – "What do you need, how can we help you. Or we will find someone who can?" We are directed by the needs of individuals creating an ethos of flexibility and responsiveness, applying core skillsets as required. Our response to Covid was effective and immediate with our client base of 25 increasing to 200 within the first 2 weeks of lockdown as everyone over 70 was ordered to stay at home – helping set up community volunteers for delivering essentials to neighbours. 90 volunteers recruited and coordinated to act as stewards for the vaccination site in Midsomer Norton. Homes for Ukraine brought over 100 new people to rural areas and we co-delivered welfare visits and support for community groups. The cost-of-living backlash coincided with our expansion in 2022 bringing us younger people, families and many living on the edge of financial collapse. We accepted a large grant from Quartet Community Foundation to distribute directly to individuals and vital community groups providing essential food packs and hot meals. We are partnered with Age UK now delivering the resources of the Community Wellbeing Hub at the RUH and Community Hospitals. Each new challenge has been met full on with creative thinking and much enthusiasm.

2.3 Have you or your organisation previously applied for funding from the Neighbourhood Portion of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) for Bath?

No

2.4 Is this a new project or does this project link into an existing project? (Include a breakdown of how you plan to allocate the funding)

Revenue income is difficult to secure but as a Charity, we will continue to bring into the area additional funds for community development as we have in the past 2 years. One fund benefitted six hundred people (£11,000) with either direct cost of living payments to individuals

or larger amount to essential community-based groups (Weston Hub, Oasis Pantry in Southdown, Foxhill Focus, Foxhill Toddlers Group and two Lansdown social groups. The viability of these groups is essential to people getting support close to where they live and where they can meet their Village Agent.

Our application is to support continuation of the current Village Agents service in Bath that is not included in our core sub-contract with HCRG. Funds we hold will not stretch beyond December 2024 at which point we are required to start redundancy procedures. Securing one more year (2 would be even better) for three part-time staff hours will allow time for conversations with B&NES Council Commissioners regarding inclusion within a new core contract, being reviewed during 2024 – this conversation was due during 2023 but delayed by core contract rollover. On the basis of Invest to Save, Village Agents provide excellent value and an essential service for Bath and North East Somerset residents with evidence of return-on-investment ratio of up to 9:1. This project has the advantage of sitting alongside our established core service with management and infrastructure already in place.

Our primary costs are staff pay and associated overheads (HR, travel, phone, and IT costs.) We would prefer a 2-year grant of £90,000 to get us through to 2027.

Village Agents

Details

3 x 14-hour posts

Revenue Costs

£45,000 (12 months)

£90,000 (24 months)

Project Manager (pro-rate for this project)

5 hours per week – costs included in Village Agent rate.

Timeline / Activity

Determined by funds being released to us.

Immediate

Continuation of current service in Weston, Combe Down and Foxhill and Combe Down (2 post holders)

Within 2 months

Recruitment of third post older for Larkhall/Fairfield

Revenue income is difficult to secure but as a Charity, we will continue to bring into the area additional funds for community development as we have in the past 2 years. One fund benefitted six hundred people (£11,000) with either direct cost of living payments to individuals or larger amount to essential community-based groups (Weston Hub, Oasis Pantry in Southdown, Foxhill Focus, Foxhill Toddlers Group and two Lansdown social groups. The viability of these groups is essential to people getting support close to where they live and where they can meet their Village Agent.

Would like to start as soon as money becomes available.

2.6 Target Completion Date:

24 months from the start

2.7 Please provide more detail on the proposed timeline for the delivery of key components of your project including any targets and how these will be evaluated. (You may wish to include a table with dates and outcomes for example).

This is a continuation of current work with 2 staff in place. A third postholder is leaving us to take a master's degree course in September 2024 but we will be unable to recruit a replacement with funding insecurity.

2.8 If planning permission is required for this project - has it been granted?
If Yes - please include the dates and reference numbers for these permissions.

No

2.9 Are there any planned changes which will have an effect on the premises or location where your project is to be located?

No

2.10 Are there any planned changes in the circumstances of your organisation's operation or **financial position** that you're aware of which may prevent this project being completed?

Our core service sits within the HCRG Wellness Service (SD52) which is under review during 2024 for 2025 onwards. Whilst we are optimistic that we can respond to any new service level agreement criteria, they are as yet unknown. We are not yet able to enter into discussions about there being a universal offer across all of B&NES which many supporters are asking for.

Section 3: Funding Criteria

The project must address the specific impacts of new developments within the city or locality from which the funding has been generated.

This application must show that the project either:

- *Supports the development of the relevant area by funding the provision, improvement, replacement, operation, or maintenance of infrastructure.*
- *Addresses other demands that development places on the area.*

3.1 How does the project address the specific impacts of new development(s)? (Maximum 300 words)

- Does it fund the provision, improvement, replacement, operation, and maintenance of infrastructure?
OR
- **Does it address another demand that development places on the area?**

(You may consider this on a ward basis, a locality basis, or a city-wide basis.)

Our pilot in Weston, Combe Down and Foxhill, where significant developments created a shockwave of consequences, has been provided direct support for people living on their own, hit badly by Covid and the cost-of-living crisis. Village Agents address the lesser known or unanticipated demands on statutory services as a preventative and earlier intervention response. We have become the first port of call for people who just want to sit and talk through a problem.

Retirement developments have brought security of tenure but also separation from friends and long-term neighbours. Most sites do not provide social activities or opportunities to get to know their new neighbours. One GP told us “ I have tried speaking to staff but they said that they are unable to help this lady attend social groups or offer anything onsite to reduce her anxiety and loneliness” Our solution was to secure Attendance Allowance for transport to social groups a few miles away and someone to help her with paperwork and shopping. It has given her a new lease of life. If funding is secured through CIL, we would like to start discussions with managers of older people developments to explore solutions.

Weston has older residents in dire need of more support at home to live independently and out of hospital. Unpaid carers (who don't self-identify as such) are exhausted and need respite. Medical systems increasingly need IT skills and equipment to make an appointment or order medication. If our funding is secured a programme of addressing digital exclusion is very necessary which we can facilitate with Age UK and the emerging Ageing Well in B&NES initiative.

Foxhill residents bring situations that they have no mental strength to tackle on their own. They need an advocate to source specialist advice and reassure them they are not alone.

- 3.2 How does the project benefit the area where development has taken place? (If your project has city-wide impact you will need to demonstrate how the broader community in the city will benefit.)

Our Village Agents service started with rural communities but is equally relevant and needed in city “villages”. We are not restricted by National organisation's criteria for access or branded for a specific age group or need. We also mirror the open-door policy of the Community Wellbeing Hub and fully utilise and help develop their resources. We are no longer tucked away in North East Somerset (where our team are busier than ever). The only restriction we have in continuing in Bath and immediate surrounding areas is revenue funding for urban based personnel. Our pilot has proven that the ever-increasing complexity of need is not daunting us.

Our work is proactive and aimed at encouraging people to speak to us sooner rather than later before they have reached a tipping point. This preventative approach places more emphasis on

self-care and responsibility and builds resilience for individuals and communities. But we do not assume people have the knowledge, skills, or mental strength – that is where we call upon Community Wellbeing Hub Partners such as Clean Slate, Bath Mind, DHI and others.

For people of all ages, the weekly Foxhill Focus at St Andrew Church attracts 60-70 people for midweek respite or the Toddlers group that includes a hot meal, companionship and contact with their Village Agent, Ruth. She in turn brings in specialist advisors to combat fuel poverty, utility bill debt and applications to B&NES Welfare crisis grants. Age range of clients in most need here is 45 - 64 and mostly living on their own. Pre-covid finances were tight and benefits unclaimed to due to be reviewed. 18 months of lockdown and no face-to-face services brought escalating debt, depression, anxiety increased use of alcohol and poor nutrition. Ruth is now the first person they seek out for a confidential conversation.

- 3.3 Please provide evidence which shows how the community has been listened to and what support exists for your project?

Our key evidence, which we are immensely proud of, is that that the majority of people who we help are self-referrals. In 12 months of inward referrals, 55% are from individuals and family members who have found us or heard from people they know. They trust that we will listen find a way forwards for them. Twenty-five percent are from medical professionals who are concerned about living circumstances, finances, food and fuel poverty, carer breakdown and social isolation. Their patients have reached a tipping point in their physical and mental health. Twenty percent of referrals come from other professional services that know they can only help so far and now need a local and “hand holding” service to pick up from what they have achieved so far. Amongst all professional who send people to us, is a frustration that they done have the answer or solutions. That is where our service is able to step up to the plate. All the above tell us that they we are needed now more than ever.

Responding to the needs of individuals is the ultimate aim for delivering personalised service with each conversation focused on a person’s immediate need often at a point of crisis, then looking at the root causes and which specialist services (using via the Community Wellbeing Hub partnership) are appropriate. Where trends of need are detected, we are able to seek solutions such as the small grant scheme for individuals and community-based groups.

There is recognition from elected members, (who already refer their residents to us), B&NES Council statutory services, GPs and other NHS that the Village Agent service should continue in Bath (and across all on B&NES)

- 3.4 Have you consulted your ward councillor(s) about this project?

We have support from Kevin Guy, Matt McCabe, Dina Rivero, Fiona Gourley for our wider project in B&NES
We are about to ask Cllrs. Onkar Saini and Bharat Pankhania for Combe Down plus Ruth Malloy and Malcolm Treby for Weston.

Section 4: Funding Information

4.1 Total Cost of Project:	£110,000
4.2 Amount of funding sought from the Neighbourhood Portion of CIL fund:	£90,000

4.3 Please provide a detailed breakdown of the costs for the delivery of this project, specifying how the funds will be allocated to different aspects of the project (including personnel, supplies, equipment, outreach etc).

As in 2.4 above:

Our primary costs are staff pay and associated overheads (HR, travel, phone, and IT costs.) We would prefer a 2-year grant of £90,000 to get us through to 2027.

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. (2 post holders)**

Within 2 months

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4.4 Can you provide evidence that your proposals will provide value for money (for example – have you obtained more than one quote for a service or item)?

We cannot know yet how many people will ask for help, however, with a guide of 300 beneficiaries, £300 investment per person is modest when we are bringing into the local economy unclaimed benefits such as Attendance Allowance >> £106 per week that will be used to have new care support or Welfare grants for white goods and household items that will mean better meals or reducing utility bills by as much as £250 per month because they were on the wrong tariff or Council Tax reduction because the person has a qualifying health condition.

As partners within the Community Wellbeing Hub (CWH) we have the benefit of recent analysis undertaken to develop the business case for the future of the CWH. Global Futures were asked to carry out an independent review for monetary value. The monetary benefit of 6 months of referrals to the CWH, directed to the Village Agents, June to December 2023 (for a sample of 68 people) was calculated. An extract from that analysis relevant to our service shows the following for 64 clients:

Societal Benefit Reduction in Social Isolation £54,054

B&NES Council Avoidance of Hospital admission £218,810

ICB – Integrated Care Board Avoidance of Care Home admission £28,825

Total £301,689

Measuring wellbeing outcomes is also increasingly requested by commissioners and funders and we fully embrace the use of ONS4 as the preferred measure. This is four questions relating to life satisfaction, feeling worthwhile, happiness and anxiety levels. HM Treasury value ONS4* an increase in life satisfaction by a one-point change at £14,170. Our average increase across one hundred clients is 2.1 increase. Our average decrease in anxiety levels for one hundred clients after delivering positive solutions is two but 2.4 in Foxhill (15 people)

- * [Wellbeing guidance for appraisal - supplementary Green Book guidance.pdf \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

4.5 Does this project benefit from any source of matched funding? (Include sources, dates, funds agreed/expected and amounts):

Nothing for 2025 onwards

4.6 Provide a breakdown of the efforts of volunteers in supporting this project. Please include number of hours, types of volunteers, geographical reach, if known.

We support community-based groups that have their own volunteers.

4.7 Please specify any other additional funds which have already been agreed:

None secure beyond December 2024

4.8 Please specify any funds which have been applied for but are awaiting a decision:

We will also look at Medlock and other possibles for this area.