



East Dean & Friston

P a r i s h C o u n c i l

Date: 7th June 2018

Title: Report Item 10 – Parish Council Grant Scheme

By: K Larkin (Parish Clerk)

Purpose: To provide information on grant applications received

Recommendations: a) To note the report
b) To consider the request from the Parochial Church council for a regular annual churchyard contribution
c) To approve requests for grants from other organisations and arrange payments

The Council's grant scheme and expenditure limits

There is a limit to the amount the parish council may spend in any one financial year on things for which they have no specific power, and this includes grants and donations. Section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972 allows the council to spend money 'for the benefit of the area' where it has no specific power. The cap for 2018/19 is set at £7.86 per elector. EDF had 1420 registered electors in December 2017 when the Roll was last revised, so the theoretical spending limit is £11,161.20. Money spent on mowing greens in private ownership and mowing roadside verges counts towards the total, and will amount to approx. £5,280 in the year, and a further £500 will be donated to the council's Charity of the Year, leaving approx. £5,380 available for other grants and donations, subject to budgetary constraints. The council has set aside a budget of £2,000 for grants and donations in this financial year.

Annual Churchyard Contribution

The PCC Treasurer has written requesting the parish council to make a regular annual churchyard contribution e.g. of £1,000 pa. A former councillor recalls that up until at least 2003 there was an annual contribution of £1,000. Accounts held in the parish office show the following donations from 2011 onwards: £250; £250; £500; £500; £1,500; £1,400; and none in 2017.

The parish council should always consider the legal basis of its expenditure. In the Local Government Act 1894, section 8.1.i and k there is a prohibition on donations to the Church of England - unless it is intended to provide a public clock or unless there is a formally closed churchyard whose maintenance has become the responsibility of the parish and/or District. Nevertheless, many parishes do in fact make such donations, and legal advice given to the SLCC is that the case is arguable, as the prohibition arose from circumstances that no longer apply: 1894 was the year when the Church of England was formally separated from

the State. The old Vestry Meetings which had run all parish affairs from time immemorial were disbanded and replaced by two new authorities: the parish council to deal with civil affairs and the parochial church council to deal with church affairs. Obviously a major task of the legislators was the allocation of assets and incomes between the two new bodies, and the whole ethos of the legislation was to produce a tidy and clear-cut separation. Most of the 1894 Act has since been superseded by the Local Government Act 1972, but the prohibition on donations to the church has escaped attention. It is a fossilised remnant from 1894, but will not be repealed unless someone takes a case all the way to the High Court. No one has done so, and the provision is widely disregarded.

The justification for paying contributions specifically for churchyard maintenance is that the churchyard is in one sense a “civic facility”. That is because residents of the village have a right to burial whether or not they are members of the church. When the churchyard was extended with grant funding from the parish council in recent years, this had the benefit of increasing the capacity for future graves - something which was clearly in the interests of the whole community. In the present clerk’s time (2011 onwards) no auditor, either internal or external, has ever queried the churchyard contributions which have been clearly shown in the accounts.

However, no budget was set aside for a churchyard contribution in the current financial year. The council would need to release funds by virement from another budget heading. A budget update is in preparation for use alongside this report.

Grant applications from village organisations

Applications have been received from the Bowling Club; the Community Watch; the Hedgehog Street; the parish magazine; the Table Tennis Club; and the Village Hall Trust, for the production of the Village Diary. These applications are being circulated to councillors in a separate confidential appendix.