



REPORT TO BUCHAN AREA COMMITTEE – 27 JUNE 2017

COMMUNITY COUNCIL PROJECT GRANT APPLICATION– DEER COMMUNITY COUNCIL ON BEHALF OF STUARTFIELD COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION

1. Recommendation

1.1 The Committee is requested to –

(a) consider an award of £950 to Deer Community Council on behalf of Stuartfield Community Association towards the restoration of the Reverend James Robertson gravestone

2. Background/Discussion

- 2.1 A total of £7,605 was made available to the Buchan area for disbursement to Community Councils for administration and project grants for the financial year 2017/2018.
- 2.2 The Committee agreed, on 18th April, 2017 (Item 14), that the administration grant paid to each Community Council would be £425 and that an additional £35 would be paid to cover the cost of registration under the Data Protection Act. It was further agreed that the remaining balance of £3,465 would be made available for project grants of up to £1,000 or 80% of the total cost, whichever is the lesser.
- 2.3 Deer Community Council has submitted an application on behalf of Stuartfield Community Association for funding towards a rather unusual heritage project based around the Stuartfield Congregation Church, the Manse and the people who lived there over the last 200 years.
- 2.4 The aspect of the project that the funding is requested for focuses on the restoration of a gravestone in Old Deer Churchyard erected in 1831 marking the burial place of the first two wives of the first minister, James Robertson. He lived and preached in Stuartfield for 30 years before moving to America and then Canada after the death of his second wife.

- 2.5 He had 15 children, who despite hard times caused by poverty and limited opportunities during their early lives in Stuartfield, went on to become very successful individuals with some descendants becoming quite prominent people. A son, Peter, became a headmaster of one of the first private schools in Aberdeen, his brother-in-law was an artist to Queen Victoria. Peter's grandson, William Robertson Smith, is regarded as one of the best scholars to graduate from Kings College in Aberdeen and arguably the greatest Old Testament scholar of his age.

Some of them became lawyers, becoming members of the Queens Council, whilst William rose to the head of the legal profession for the whole of the Province of Quebec. Another son was the owner of several industrial companies, a member of parliament rising to the position of Treasurer for the Province of Quebec and has a street in Sherbrook named after him. Finally one daughter wrote some 15 successful books, one based on her life growing up in Stuartfield which is still available today.

A number of items remain to remind us of the existence of this Church and these include the original communion goblets stored in the Peterhead Congregational Church, old parish rent books, the original minute book and account book found in the Mitchell Library in Glasgow which have been transcribed to reveal interesting information about church life in Stuartfield during the 19th century. A geophysics survey recently conducted uncovered the west side of the church foundations. Living descendants of the minister has been traced in Canada, Australia and Germany.

- 2.6 The Stuartfield Community Association commissioned a conservation assessment report on the gravestone as they were concerned that, although in reasonable condition for its age, it was deteriorating and because of its importance to the history of Stuartfield, they want to restore and protect it for future generations.
- 2.7 Two quotes were obtained for the restoration work and they would like to progress with the one that proposed to carry out the repairs that were highlighted in the conservation assessment, amounting to £1,188.00
- 2.8 A huge amount of volunteer time has gone into researching the history of the church and its occupants, talks are given on the subject as well as the present Manse occupants participating in the Aberdeenshire Council "Doors Open Days" programme.
- 2.9 The Community Association are asking for £950.00 towards the cost of the restoration of the gravestone. The balance of the funding will be paid by the Community Association.
- 2.10 The Head of Finance and Monitoring Officer from Business Services have been consulted and any comments received have been incorporated into the report.

3. Scheme of Governance

- 3.1 The List of Committee Powers in Part 2A of the Scheme of Governance enable the Committee to consider applications for and approve the award of grants to Community Councils within the approved budget under 3.3 of Section B.

4. Equalities, Staffing and Financial Implications

- 4.1 An equality impact assessment is not required because the report does not propose any change to previous allocation arrangements.
- 4.2 There are no staffing implications arising from this report. Supporting the work of Community Councils helps to sustain communities within Buchan.
- 4.3 The Community Council budget for the current financial year is £62,000, therefore no additional financial or staffing implications arise as a result of this report.

Ritchie Johnson
Director of Business Services

Report by Maureen Stephen
14th June 2017