

**GRANT APPLICATION FORM - Neighbourhood Portion of
Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) for Bath**

Please return completed form to:

CONNECTING_COMMUNITIES@BATHNES.GOV.UK

1. Applicant Information

1.1 Name of Applicant
1.2 Name of Organisation
WERN. (West of England Rural Network)
1.3 Contact Address
5th Floor, Mariner House, 62 Prince Street, Bristol, BS1 4QD
1.4 Contact Telephone Number
1.5 Contact Email Address
1.6 Organisations Website Address
wern.org.uk
1.7 Name of Bank
1.8 Account Holders Name
1.9 Bank Account Number
1.10 Bank Sort Code Number

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2. About your application

2.1 Title of your project
Village Agents for Bath
2.2 Project Location
Weston, Combe Down, Foxhill, Larkhall and Fairfield, Odd Down, Oldfield Park, Southdown, Twerton, Lansdown, Bathwick and other Bath locations as capacity allows.
2.3 Are you aware of any plans that will have an effect the premises or location where your project is to be located?"
No
2.4 If this project has a reliance on support (including ongoing maintenance) from a B&NES Council Service this must have been agreed in advance of this application. Please provide details of the person that you have been working with and the details of what support has been agreed.
For clarity, our core Village Agent service, which does not cover the areas in this bid, provides the infrastructure for delivery. We are in the process of transferring to B&NES Council. The Commissioner is fully aware of this application and confirmed the objectives as added value to the core service.
2.5 Have you discussed the project with your local ward councillors?
Yes, most have been contacted and some are actively making referrals to our service.
2.6 How has the community been listened to and what support exists for your project?
Our work is led by the needs of the individuals we meet and the groups we support. There is widespread endorsement from residents, professionals and community leaders who recognise the gaps in provision and local need for such a service. It has been delivered so far in Weston, Combe Down, Foxhill and other locations surrounding Bath. When our proposal was first submitted in April this year we received a high number of comments from customers and professions with whom we work. That included GPs, health professionals, a local vicar and local volunteer leaders. Client feedback is evidence that Village Agents are their first port of call when they are struggling and need a trusted critical friend with excellent links to other professional services.
2.7 Is this a new project or does it link with an existing project?

This project will have the advantage of sitting alongside our existing core service with management and infrastructure already in place and with the benefit of Community Wellbeing Hub partnership governance (secure exchange of client data using Riviam) CIL funding will enable us to support people in Bathwick, Combe Down, Foxhill, Weston, Lansdown and locations nearby and allow us to expand into new areas we do not cover regularly.

Responding to individual needs as identified by GPs and via The Community Wellbeing Hub referral, we currently accept Bath residents who need face to face support that other services do not offer. That response will cease from March 2025 if we are unable to secure new money to cover cost of the 3 current staff.

On the basis of Invest to Save, Village Agents provide good value and an essential service for Bath and North East Somerset residents with evidence of return on investment ratio of up to £9 for each £1 invested.

2.8 Has your organisation previously applied for funding from Neighbourhood Portion of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) for Bath?

We applied in April 2024, unaware that the focus of the Spring panel would mostly be Capital projects. We hear that Revenue projects can usually also be submitted and have been successful in the past.

2.9 Are there any planned changes in circumstances to your organisations operation that we should be aware of?"

Our work is led by the needs of the individuals we meet and the groups we support. The longer term contract is for our core service (for Chew, Cam, and Somer Valley) I am also now able to confirm that our core contract will be extended beyond March 2025 under a Bridging Grant arrangement whilst Procurement is resolved.

3. Neighbourhood Portion of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) for Bath Criteria

Important Note:

This section is a key test that must be met for Neighbourhood Portion of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding to be recommended for funding .

You will need provide an explanation of whether this project relates to infrastructure.

or

something else that is concerned with addressing the demands arising from development.

An explanation is needed to show of how in planning terms this project supports development within Bath.

3.1 How does the project address a specific impact of the new developments?

We wish to address the demands arising from developments for older people and others with unmet needs. New developments bring new opportunities that come with expectations that are not always fulfilled. Retirement developments have brought security of tenure but also separation from friends and long-term neighbour networks. Our pilot included Weston, Bathwick, Combe Down and Lansdowne plus other within

Bath environs, where significant retirement developments created a shockwave of consequences for older people living on their own. They tell us their social isolation is not just about living on your own after 70+ years in established communities. The decision to downsize and move to "supporting living" was a tough one and always a compromise. Buyer's remorse is common. "I feel like I am living in God's waiting room here, but on my own." They do not want to upset their family or face more upheaval. Yet their wellbeing is affected and over time, which impacts on physical health as confirmed by their referring GPs.

Most sites have communal spaces, but few provide organised social activities or opportunities to get to know their new neighbours. GPs refer people for low mood and social isolation that is impacting their health and wellbeing. One referral note included: "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. A man living with depression, uses a wheelchair or mobility scooter but could not get from one area of the site to another where they have occasional social get-togethers. For a generation of people less willing to ask for help and express their needs, he will not be the only person needing our help to make changes. His Attendance Allowance now pays for a local lady helping him get around and have conversations that are lifting his mood every day. These are not isolate cases; we currently have 5 more similar requests to resolve.

If funding is secured through CIL, we would like to start discussions with managers of older people developments to explore new opportunities and help residents have more of a voice. Where that is not possible, looking outwards also offers more choice. The sad fact we hear is an assumption that all retirement developments have everything you need to create a new social network and companionship. We want to learn from those places where they have created thriving communities and bring more laughter and companionship to those that do not.

3.2 Does this project support the area where development that has taken place?

I have two examples of support that we have been providing so far. As a grassroots Charity, we were invited to apply for an enabling Quartet grant for distribution to those in most need of support through the cost-of-living crisis. As we are working closely with Bath based community groups; we were able to ensure they received money to keep their work in difficult times.

The volunteers told us - We noticed our guests arriving earlier and staying longer during the cold months. Our older guests tend to live alone and appreciate the warm midday meal and tell us how they really enjoy and look forward to the company and good conversations with each other and our volunteers. Our guests are not only from Weston but come from across Bath. Some getting two buses to join us. Our group not only feeds, but supports and befriends lonely, isolated, and marginalised people in our community and beyond. Our

guests and volunteers, together create a welcoming community with a real sense of belonging. Some of our guests have become regular volunteers at the group.

In addition, our Village Agent supported individuals with specific problems they were facing. Weston has older residents in dire need of more support at home to live independently and out of hospital. Unpaid carers (who do not 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.

We have a number of lonely widowers living in Combe Down, Odd Down, and nearby who we support to meet at Curo's Mulberry Park Cafe. We started with 3, now an average of 12 men, meet for breakfast and a chat. Some have known each other for years but lost touch. It is not the bereavement that brings them together but the shared history living in an area that has been transformed. A few were dead set against redevelopment and fought against change. Now they accept the improvements have been positive and supports their need for easy socialising. This group value our input and welcome new members. GPs, Social Prescribers and the Reablement team make referrals to us and this is one solution we want to continue to support.

As a Community Wellbeing Hub partner, we are part of the Frailty Pilot team, identifying older people who have slipped below the radar of medical services. Usually with multiple health conditions taking numerous medications (with conflicting consequences), have had unreported falls, are not yet having care support at home. These people are at high risk of accidental fall, hospital admissions followed by long recovery before going home. Our timely interventions are saving people's lives and also ensuring that their final years have more comfort and reassurance.

Please view our video on this subject:
<https://vimeo.com/946904680?share=copy>

3.3 Please provide any further details on how the proposal funds (a) the provision, improvement, replacement, operation, or maintenance of infrastructure or (b) anything else that is concerned with addressing the demands that development places on an area.

For us, local residents are the focus. Their resilience during the last few years has taken hard knocks. It might be financial, or it may be their mental health. We have been there to support individuals and groups alike. These lifelines need to continue to ensure that local residents receive the help they need.

Foxhill residents with age range 40s - 65 bring us 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. We bring professional advisors to their doorstep and support Foxhill Focus on St Andrews, the weekly lunch. Rev Malc says "I do not know what we would do without Ruth's help. She has become an essential part of our community." A visit from Jo Salisbury of Centre for Sustainable Energy for instance can be life changing - utility bill debt can be negotiated and reduced, payment plans set up and realistic tariffs agreed with suppliers. Grants are applied for and general advice about reducing costs is given. We have a number of people living in park homes asking for help with Calor Gaz, their only means of cooking. Citizens Advice are able to pay grants for off grid supplies.

Oasis Pantry has become an essential for people struggling to feed themselves and their children. They include people who are working and still unable to cover their day to day needs. The team there were pleased to be offered support and told us - We are supporting around 160 households in Bath, with a total of around 400 beneficiaries, of which 160 are children. We also have a significant waiting list of people who would like to join. We would like to buy additional fruit and vegetables to supply an increased number. (free of charge) to our pantry members, as supplies have become extremely erratic. We know that significant health benefits are derived from increasing the quantity of fruit & vegetables consumed, e.g. with helping to lower cholesterol and improve cardiovascular health. We would also like to purchase additional supplies of basic foods such as rice, pulses and tinned fish, culturally appropriate foods and those which are required for specific dietary needs (such as gluten free, dairy free). This enables the dignity of choice over what to eat for members. We know that some foods, particularly those for specific dietary requirements, are often significantly more expensive than the equivalent versions, and so that creates even greater pressures on household budgets. It is important to have a wide range of foods available with which to create healthy, nutritious meals, and so increasing protein through fish and pulses, and ensuring a more consistent supply of basics such as rice would enhance this. We gave them £2,000 to stretch their resources through the winter months.

4. About your project

4.1 Provide a brief summary of your project. Include the main objectives and goals. (a maximum word count 300 words)

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

The B&NES Village Agent project started 14 years ago in rural areas of North East B&NES when the council's priority was driven by low engagement with residents beyond Bath who we are not accessing services. Our work transformed people's lives "I had no idea this sort of help was available and we already pay for it."

We found creative ways to increase our cover by proving the work was preventative and saved statutory services money. And people did engage and the population of NE. B&NES learnt how to accept and ask for help much earlier. Each step to add more areas was hard fought and led to securing post Covid recovery funding for rural Bathavon. But it was clear that urban areas have more unmet needs and equal rights to have access to our service. In 2022 our expansion into urban Combe Down and Foxhill 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. Weston was not in our original plan but was a natural addition along with Lansdown, Southdown, Bathwick. We now try to accept referrals for anyone with a Bath postcode. This is especially important for people who need a face-to-face conversation. There is no other service that offers a home visit to discuss non-specific problems, or complex situations where it is not obvious where to start. We unpick the details, making manageable steps. towards signposting and onward referrals.

4.2 Elaborate on the project in more detail. Include information about the problem or need your project addresses, the target audience or beneficiaries, and the significance of the project. (a maximum word count 500 words; photos can also be provided)

People ask “What is a Village Agent?” simple answer – “What do you need, what can help improve things for you?. Or we will find someone who can?” As long as a person is a B&NES resident, over 16 and we have their consent, the journey can begin. We are directed by the needs of individuals creating an ethos of flexibility and responsiveness, applying core skillsets as required. 50% of our referrals are people who meet us at local groups or informal events. They may have heard about us from friends or neighbours and decide to refer themselves. A Village Agent dedicated to their area with local knowledge and key contacts. A conversation is confidential, free and proceeds at a pace that the person can cope with. Thereafter, other professionals get involved as required and that can become overwhelming. We walk beside them as each bit of the puzzle is tackled. For some, we are their first port of call because they are worried. This means we can be proactive and preventative, as experience in the Chew Valley 14 years ago.

The remaining 50% of referrals are from professionals. It may have been their GP or a colleague from within the Community Wellbeing Hub partnership. Increasingly, social services call us for advice and pointers because their statutory response will not cover all the issues they identified. Often local help will be better for them. The Neighbourhood Policing teams attend callouts that are not a police matter but they now know they have Village Agents to help find suitable solutions. In many cases, they need a short-term helping hand to navigate a system, or they are unable to complete a form that will bring them much needed new income.

Alongside all the above, we respond to unexpected needs that require unique solutions. 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.

This funding will allow us to bring those that are under the radar, are isolated and may feel they have been forgotten into contact with the help and support they now need. Securing 3 Village Agent posts will make a significant difference to Bath residents. This is an invest to save project and now an essential part of the infrastructure of B&NES.

4.3 Outline the key milestones and timelines for the project. Specify the start and end dates, as well as any important phases or deadlines.

Timeline Activity . Exact details will determine by date funds are released to us.
Immediate Continuation of current service in Weston, Combe Down and Foxhill and Combe Down and for Bath resident that are identified by Community Wellbeing Hub. (2 post holders)
Within 2 months - Recruitment of 3rd post older for Larkhall/Fairfield
End date determined by amount you are able to award.
Please be aware that 24 months funding will make a significant difference and allow us to evidence the longer-term viability of this service.

4.4 Explain how the project will address the identified problem or need and the positive changes it aims to achieve.

We aim to:

- Address the inequality of limited provision of Village Agents into areas of Bath that are not covered by our core contract.
- Provide support for anyone over the age of 16 who is a B&NES resident.
- Deliver a community-based triage service that sits beside the Community Wellbeing Hub and provides a direct link with a wide range of specialist services.
- Work with people to co-design a package of actions and onward referrals that meet their needs.
- Help people to gain insight into their living circumstances that place them at risk of accidental falls or injury, ensure they are able to attend medical appointments and are supported as they hear new information.
- Have open discussions with those who are unpaid carers but do not self-identify as such. For older couples, there is a fine balance of who is caring for whom. Both need preventative and ongoing support from the Carers Centre, Alzheimer's Society, Stroke Association and others.
- Reassure anyone living with mental health challenges that they can access a range of services that includes phone helplines and longer-term befriending.
- Introduce people to applying for Pension Credit, Attendance Allowance, Blue Badge parking and discretionary grant that will lift the financial burden.
- Help people find local providers for personal care, help at home, tradespeople for mending or fixing, local food deliveries.
- Where possible, link them with transport solutions.
- Help people reconnect with local friends or support them to find new activities that will enhance day to day living.
- Support local volunteers who are dedicated to running social activities, coffee mornings, food pantries and friendship groups. This may be with small grants that they cannot apply without a bank account or training for Food Safety and Hygiene or First Aid.
- Sit with people and just listen.

4.5 Describe how you will evaluate the success of the project.

We have a client monitoring and recording system for secure storage of all data and case notes. Within that we gather the output information such as age range, reason for they came to us, who referred them and what assistance they received. Alongside that, we also use the ONS4 Wellbeing Scale, now accepted as the gold standard measure (also know a Wellby). The four questions are asked when we first meet a new client and repeat the process as part

of the case closing. We are most interested in Q1 - Life Satisfaction and the fourth, Q4 - Anxiety level. Measured on a 1 -10 scale. The improvement in score is indicative of the positive impact of the work we are doing.

Across all geographic areas we cover, we currently have an average of 2.5 point increase in life satisfaction and an average of 2.2 decrease in anxiety. HM Treasury have calculated that increased life satisfaction by a one-point positive change has a social value (to society and economy) of £14,170 per person per year. Reducing anxiety levels have not yet been calculated.

For us, it is the stories behind each set of data, and we collate case studies regularly such as: Mrs R self-referred. She lives in a house with her husband and three other adults. For many years she has become less mobile and disabled by medical conditions that will get progressively worse. As she cannot climb stairs easily, she had been sleeping on a mattress

on the floor in the lounge for 3 years (which needs to be taken up and downstairs each day to give the family space). This was the immediate issue for her. Thank you for helping me. You have achieved more in just a few calls that anyone else and I have tried everywhere for help with this. I thought nothing would happen and given up, but this has really had influence on me and also the family.”

4.6 Does your project require planning permission?

If yes, please include the status, dates, and reference numbers.

No

5. Funding Information

5.1 Provide a high-level overview of the budget for your project. Include the overall cost of the project and the funding amount requested from Neighbourhood Portion of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) for Bath.

This is a Revenue project. We are proposing two options for your investment. 24 months and 12 months with the former having the advantage of momentum into the second year and therefore, meeting more people. Our team of 3 will be working 14 flexible hours per week with Project Manager providing critical case support, monitoring, and reporting. Complex cases that require multi-agency support are taken to weekly Multiple Disciple Team meetings by the Project Manager.

Requesting:

Year 1 - £46,764

Year 2- £47.887

5.2 Provide a detailed breakdown of the budget, specifying how the funds will be allocated to different aspects of the project (e.g., personnel, supplies, equipment, outreach, etc.).

A Detailed Breakdown has been provided.

5.3 Does this project benefit from any sources of matched funding. Include the sources, dates funds were agreed and funding which has been applied for but are awaiting a decision.

As a charity we are able to bring in small grants for the direct benefit of local people and the community groups they depend on. For example, in 2023/24 we were awarded £20,000 by

Quartet Community Foundation to combat the Cost-of-Living crisis and its impact on individuals and community groups. Our task was to distribute to the most in need and were. the biggest impact could be achieved. Areas that benefitted in Bath - Weston, Foxhill, Larkhall, Southdown and Lansdown. Grants to Oasis Pantry, Lansdown Friendship Group, Weston Hub, St Andrews Church Foxhill received a total of £8,000. We are willing to act as brokers in the same way.

For individuals, we access discretionary grants from St John's Foundation, St Monica Trust and other organisation that may have a specific focus.

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

The volunteers we support are based in the communities they serve so rather than recruit Wern volunteers, we place effort is helping community-based groups keep going. That is through small grants, training, and advice as they expand as in some cases they do not have a formal committee of hold bank accounts. We are able to help the smaller groups by making direct payment to venues for hall hire and heating or vouchers for purchasing food supplies. We are available to support any of their members or attendees.

5.5 I confirm that I understand successful applicants will be required to participate in council publicity

I can confirm that we are willing to do this.