

Heritage Lottery Fund Assessment Panel

Grant Application

Recommendation: Rejection of £4,795,000

Reference No:

HG-04-51084 ()/020 7591 6132)
Received 21 December 2004

Title of Project:

College Farm Development

Applicant:

College Farm Trust

Type of Applicant:

Registered charity in England

Location:

London Borough of Barnet

Type of Application:

Heritage Grants, Stage One

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| Priority: LOW |
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Priority

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|---|------|
| Everyone can learn about, have access to & enjoy their heritage | FAIL |
| Conserves & enhances our diverse heritage | FAIL |
| Encourages more people to be involved in their heritage | FAIL |

Risk

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|---|--------|
| Importance of the project to the heritage | LOW |
| Project Planning and Management | HIGH |
| Financial need and Viability | HIGH |
| Avoiding risk | HIGH |
| Measuring Success | MEDIUM |

Previous Awards

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| PPG £38,200 (HF-03-51119) for the cost of a consultancy support to work up a Conservation Management Plan, Audience Development Plan, an Access Plan and a Training plan. |
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Financial Summary

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| Total Overall Cost | 6,335,072 |
| Acquisition of College Farm from Highways Agency (discounted price) | 500,000 |
| Purchase of the flats, 47 and 49 Fitzalan Road | 440,000 |
| Purchase of agricultural tenancy from current occupiers | 480,000 |
| Repair and Conservation Work (inc. 5% construction contingency) | 713,518 |
| Building work | 1,419,254 |
| Professional Fees related to the costs shown above (10% of construction contract) | 373,235 |

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| Equipment, including computer hardware | 68,250 |
| Project costs in past 12 months | 0 |
| Materials | 10,000 |
| Vehicles | 20,000 |
| In Kind costs - difference between commercial value (£2,088,000) and discounted value (£500,000) | 1,588,600 |
| Other capital costs | 45,000 |
| Total Capital Costs | 5,657,857 |

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|---|----------------|
| Staff costs | 30,000 |
| Start Up 1 Archivist and 1 part-time curator for 3 years Project Manager and 2 Project Officers for 3.5 years | |
| Recruitment Costs | 5,000 |
| Project specific costs (design, writing, printing, education materials) | 80,000 |
| Training for staff and volunteers | 10,000 |
| Measuring the project's success | 20,000 |
| Total Activity Costs | 145,000 |

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|--------------------------------------|----------------|
| Contingency @ 10% | 250,601 |
| Inflation (Dec 2004-June 2006 at 8%) | 200,481 |
| At 8% | |
| Non recoverable VAT | 81,133 |
| Total Other Costs | 532,215 |

Partnership Funding

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|---|------------------|
| From organisation | 0 |
| In Kind Value of Highways Agency 'discount' | 1,588,600 |
| Project costs in past 12 months – purchase of flats | 0 |
| Total Partnership Funding | 0 |
| HLF Calculated Grant Requested (100%) | 4,746,472 |

Development Funding

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|--|----------------|
| Architectural work | 45,000 |
| Quantity Surveyor | 15,000 |
| Other (Project Director and Manager) for one year only | 50,000 |
| Total other costs | 110,000 |

Partnership Funding towards development funding

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|--------------------------------|---|
| From organisation (secured) | 0 |
| Grants and donations (secured) | 0 |

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|--|----------------|
| Total partnership funding | 0 |
| HLF Calculated Grant Requested (100%) | 110,000 |

Summary and Recommendation

College Farm Trust is applying for a Stage One Pass of £4,746,472 and a development grant of £110,000.

College Farm (3.5ha), situated in Finchley in the North London Borough of Barnet, has been on this site since the 17th century, is situated in a Conservation Area and contains four Grade II listed

buildings (the farm buildings, silo, farmhouse and tearoom). The Trust would like to undertake a development of the listed buildings to house artefacts, provide educational facilities and increase livestock levels in order to create a self-sustaining community attraction, that offers access to an educational experience to all ages and abilities in an original industrial setting.

The heritage significance of the project focuses on the buildings and the important role the farm has played not only in the scientific and industrial development of milk production but also the commercial dissemination of milk to the masses. It is a farm that is a much loved and important part of Finchley's community and has enjoyed a lot of local interest and support over the years.

Although suspected from the onset of HLF's discussion with the Trust, it has become clearer with this bid that the organisation, from Trustees down, is lacking in the sort of leadership and experience required to take this bid forward effectively (even though there is a need and the basic idea and the heritage asset is of merit and interest). The applicant has not followed the advice of HLF in pitching its bid at a more realistic level so value of money is a significant issue, especially given the cost of purchasing the staff flats (£440,000) and buying out the agricultural tenancy (£480,000).

Areas of this bid and some of its supporting documents are of poor quality; on the most basic level the bid is lacking in important information such as business planning, programme, cost breakdowns, story line and fit out designs to enable officers to assess the bid. There are policy issues that present genuine hurdles – such as private gain, conflicts of interest within the Trust, ineligible costs and the lack of cash partnership funding. All this adds to a very high risk project.

If this bid is rejected there is a risk that the Highways Agency could withdraw its offer to sell the site at a discount rate (which could mean the site being put on the market and possibly lost) but this threat alone is not enough to keep this bid alive. If more time can be given, post rejection, HLF will need to encourage a fundamental review of the Trustee Board, the project leadership and the funding structure before this project has a hope of getting off the ground.

In conclusion the project cannot be supported and reason for it being rejected is that it does not adequately meet any of HLF's three key priorities alongside the significant policy concerns that have been raised.

Reasons for rejection

Policy and viability: the in kind partnership funding is not valid which contributes to overall concerns that the project is not viable.

Weak Management: the Trustee Board, supported by the Project Director, lacks the expertise and experience to run a project of this size effectively

Value for money: The size of the grant request does not match the conservation and public access benefits being put forward which make the project poor value for money

Access and heritage engagement: there is insufficient evidence in the bid to demonstrate that the project will provide access in its widest sense or be able to engage audiences, through interpretation and education activities, the heritage significance of the site.

Background

The farm was a fully operational dairy farm until the 1970's when the Express Dairy Company was taken over and the site was sold to the Department of Environment. A popular 'museum' was closed and 'broken up'; during 1973 and early 1974 the farm closed when the last 10 cows left. College Farm stood empty until 1976 when farmers Jane and Chris Ower were granted a lease of 4 years. The Owers were soon offered a full time yearly live in tenancy at the farm and occupied the site over the next decade to house a family, a range of livestock, livery stables and eventually a riding school and an animal feed/saddlery shop. Throughout the 1980s and 90s the farm was open to the public and enjoyed a regular number of school visits and hosted country fairs and other events. Up to the 1990's it was open to the public enjoying local support, offering a wide range of activities and providing a unique insight into the community's dairy heritage and culture.

In 1998, the College Farm Trust was formed to save the farm because the landowners, The Highways Agency, were threatening to sell it. The Agency finally issued a press statement stating that they intended to put College Farm up for sale, in the spring of 1999, by tender to the highest bidder. A subsequent appeal to the Ministry of Transport resulted in a fixed price (below market value) being agreed to allow the Trust time to raise funds. The foot and mouth epidemic then hit the farm hard and many of the animals had to be sold or destroyed, visitor numbers and events dropped, leaving today the farm shop as the major form of income for the Owers.

In 2004, HLF awarded a project planning grant for the cost of a consultancy support to work up a Conservation Management Plan, Audience Development Plan, an Access Plan and a Training plan. Although the Conservation Management Plan drawn up by Purcell Miller Triton is acceptable the other three documents are lacking in depth, notably the Training Plan which is not in line with HLF guidance.

Project Proposal

At the heart of this project is the Grade II listed Stable Block where the main activities will take place. Proposals include an education centre and main exhibition space in the old milking parlour; a further exhibition area to tell the Express Dairy story; a lettable meeting or temporary exhibition space, a kitchen serving a cafe area in the covered west courtyard; workshops for display of craft and farm skills; and new lavatories. Immediately adjacent to the Central Stable Block, and directly accessible on arrival from the shop and ticketing facility, visitors will be encouraged to visit the Silo, which is to be an interpretation cinema (15 minute film). In addition, the site will be a working farm, and the scheme provides for new housing for the animals and a Wildlife. The scheme is as follows:

1. Purchase of College Farm from the Highways Agency (the purchase of the agricultural tenancy from the Owers is an additional cost).
2. Purchase, repair and conversion to buildings (47 & 49 Fitzalan Road), to house Trust Offices, Staff Flat and Garaging
3. Demolition of Bottling Plant, Workshop, Wagon Store and Straw Store
4. Repair, conservation and services to Central Stable Block, including shop and ticketing, Education Centre, Meeting/Temporary Exhibition Space, Main Exhibition Space/Express Dairy Story Areas, Kitchen, Lavatories, Workshops and creation of cafe area (15 tables and 60 chairs)
5. Conversion of the silos for an 'interpretation cinema'
6. Repair and refurbishment of Old Dairy (Tearoom) – for events letting
7. New build Barns, with links to Central Stable Block, to house animals and stables
8. New build external poultry pens
9. Repairs and service installation to Shire Horse Shed
10. Repairs to existing 19th century farmhouse (45 Fitzalan Road) including fencing to west and east. [farmhouse to continue to be occupied by the existing farm manager]
11. Works to existing retail store and offices [not part of the bid activities].
12. Repairs to cobbled yard and new gates to old Wagon Store area (between Animal Barn and Workshops)
13. Creation of Wildlife Trail, planting and picnic area (landscaping, paving, picnic tables); Tractor Rides Area; Children's Playground
14. Creation of Coach/Service Entrance Gates (Fitzalan Road)
15. Drainage improvements throughout site
16. Start up staffing costs (not explained/specified) – Farm General Manager/Outreach Education Officer/Bookings Clerk, Catering Assistant Manager, Catering Assistant, Farm Hand Maintenance/Voluntary Community Workers
17. Education and promotional materials (not specified)
18. Costs of measuring the project's success

Policy Implications

There are four policy issues: 1) the validity of the Highways Agency valuing the property at £500,000 at a special discount price for the charity and the charity including the difference between the discount price and the open market price (£2,088,600) as in kind partnership funding; 2) The discounted freehold sale is to be subject to a clawback clause for a term of 25 years, whereby the Highway Agency will be entitled to 75% of any additional value over and above the open market value of the property at the time resulting from change of use; 3) the sale of the tenancy agreement is a further concern: the tenants, the Owers, started to occupy the derelict farm over 25 years ago which was let on a full agricultural tenancy from 1976. The commencing rent of £1500 per year has not been reviewed; the tenancy is now valued by the College Farm at £480,000; 4) The Owers appear to be involved in the running of the Trust, still live on the site and it is proposed will continue to run the ring-fenced retail concern on the site and act as advisers. There may also be issues of conflict and private gain in this structure e.g Jane Ower is the College Farm Trust bookkeeper, Chris Ower is at the forefront of fund-raising approaches to other bodies.

Visited By

TBC

Assessment against criteria:

I The project makes sure that everyone can learn about, have access to & enjoy their heritage

Until the Spring of 2001, the farm according to [REDACTED] Feasibility Study was open daily to public, who enjoyed access to view the animals, buildings and art gallery/farm museum). The farm had approximately c.20,000 visitors annually with a small entry fee; schools arranged visits to the farm in the summer months. Underpinned by a comprehensive market evaluation, visitor numbers are now predicted at around 42,000 a year for this project from a wide range of types and age groups.

The Trust has not submitted an Education Policy or Plan but has attached that of LB of Barnet 2002-7 so the approach of the Trust, in this key area, is unknown. An Education Plan for the site would be crucial to informing the interpretation and storyline.

The Stable Block will house interpretative displays and exhibitions about the history of dairy farming and production with educational space and interactive learning for school groups. The new buildings on site will house animals and provide space for the interpretation of general farming practices and historic country life. There will be space in the courtyard for traditional farmers' markets and demonstrations of traditional rural practices e.g. blacksmithing. The Conservation Management Plan sets out the history of the farm and its activities but there is no actual information (story line and plan) as to how this will be converted into an interpretative exhibition and how the information will teach/engage visitors.

Full access is intended but only physical access has been tackled in the access plan. An in-out arrangement on the north side on Fitzalan Road around the flat block has been proposed to help with the movement of vehicles, especially lorries delivering to the storage barn and the rear of the stable block. A new entrance to the site is proposed on the east side of the retail store to address the problem of access and orientation to the south side of the building. The new entrance leads to a small parking area on the existing hard-standing to the south of the retail store. The public visiting the farm would generally park on the surrounding streets as they have previously done. Visitors would then arrive on foot along the pavement of the new entrance to the east of the retail store and walk across to the front of the Central Stable Block.

2A The project conserves & enhances our diverse heritage

The project enables the purchase of the historic farm but it is not clear how the buildings, land and animals will be managed. It is also not clear what items will be owned by the Trust, whether these are objects /archives of museum quality and how they will be cared for.

The project is underpinned by a feasibility study and condition survey (1999) and a conservation plan and gazeteer provided by Purcell Miller Tritton. The proposals to demolish unsafe buildings and repair and conserve the key (listed) buildings on the site seem sensible and are likely to be acceptable. English Heritage have been kept informed. The management proposals for the historic buildings run to a page only and require further development.

There is nothing in the bid about bio-diversity or nature conservation and it is a concern that the land side of the bid seems to have been overlooked.

2B The project encourages more people to be involved in their heritage

The Training Plan included in the bid does not meet HLF's requirements. There is nothing specific in the bid that indicates the development of conservation and craft skills, or mentions apprenticeship positions and work placements. The approach to volunteers is very vague.

In terms of audiences, the bid explains that the primary target market will be LB of Barnet with about 20% of this total being made up by school visits. The secondary market includes all the remaining north London Boroughs and Hertfordshire. It is expected that the farm will attract principally children and their children, elderly people and tourists visiting friends and all ethnic races. However, the applicant has not yet targeted its audiences and say that once the project begins it is the Trust's intention to contact prospective users through adverts in the local press, through the Finchley Society circular by contacting schools and Barnet Council to interface with the national curriculum and by issuing questionnaires to local residents. The results of these consultations will help inform exactly how the scheme develops and what facilities are available. This information does not explain whether there is any particular push for new audiences although arguably because the farm has been closed for some time all the proposed audiences are new.

College Farm Trust has submitted with its bid Barnet's Equalities Policy 2002/3 which is not really relevant to its own bid and therefore this remains an area unaddressed.

3 Importance of the project to the heritage

Information about the farm collections is vague in terms of heritage merit. Correspondence on the file refers to some 3/4 items belonging to [REDACTED]: 1500 milk bottles, 20/30 pictures, 20 cream crocks, Milk Churns, 50/60 Diecast Models, ED Trophies, ED Magazines, ED Uniforms, ED Ephemera, photographs, books, Kitchen Memorabilia, Memorial Plaque, Building Plans, 16mm films, Video Tapes, ED Long Service Awards, ED China, ED Marketing exhibits, 2 Mini Milk Floats, 1 Milk Float and 1 for restoration – ED and other Memorabilia. The College Farm Trust owns a milk float. There is a suggestion that Express Dairy and The Dairy Council may have other items available. Is [REDACTED] going to donate the items, are any of the items of museum quality/what degree of heritage importance, has statutory advice been taken?

The proposed conservation benefits are based on a clear understanding at least of the buildings. The historic and architectural importance of the farm was confirmed in 1986 when all the 1880s buildings were listed Grade II. Four years later the farm was given added protection when it was designated a Conservation Area. The land on which College Farm stands formed part of the sub-manor of Finchley or Bibbesworth, first called a manor in 1319. Sheephouse Farm originated in the leasehold estate held in 1708 by Richard Bradford. Sheephouse Farm was bought by the Express Dairy Company in the 1860's and renamed College Farm because of the views of Christ's College in Hendon visible from every field. In 1883, his architect Frederic Chancellor designed the picturesque group of buildings which is still the main feature of the farm today:

- The Central Stable Block (Grade II), design around two courtyards. The spine building between the courtyards housed the milking parlour, where visitors could watch milking in progress through

a glazed screen. Flanking the entrance were an office and laboratory

- The Diary, now called the Tea Room (Grade II) equipped with pans for cream setting. The walls of this building are decorated with a display of Minton tiles from the firms "Rustic Figures" series
- Pair of silos (Grade II)
- The Farm Manager's House (Grade II)

Frederic Chancellor's practice is known to have been concerned with over 720 works, for which records exist in the Essex Record Office. The bid describes how a bound folio of bird's eye-view perspectives and plans in the Record Office drawn through the 1850s and early 60s shows Chancellor designing model farmhouses, homesteads and farm buildings for landowners all over the country. Wade Martins describes College Farms as "one of Frederic Chancellor's finest" and this is born out by inspection of his surviving drawings. The plan form of College Farm was not new but is a coherent design reflecting the best practice of its day which was intended to serve as an example to other dairy farmers. As a model establishment, College Farm was a success. In 1891 it had c.40 cows in milk, producing c28,000 gallons of milk a year. However, with the introduction of milk separation equipment in 1890s, the Dairy ceased to be used for its original purpose and was converted to a tea room. In 1921, Titus Barham, George's son, installed equipment for the bottling of tuberculin-tested milk. The bottle plant buildings are those to the west of the Central Block.

The project in its outline form may not comply with local, regional and national strategies given the omissions in the bid that has been noted. The project at this stage may not contribute directly to the sustainability of the asset if it proves to be unviable.

The physical access proposals are set within the policies of the conservation plan and appear sensitive to the needs of managing the heritage asset although a access audit would be beneficial even at this early stage.

The project accords with the strategy of the Trust in so far as it reflects its aims and objectives (apart from the last listed which is to relieve members of the public who are deprived or physically disabled or have learning difficulties, by providing facilities as remedial, recreational and therapeutic activity as the bid does not address this).

Information is too sketchy to tell whether the designs of the new buildings extensions, building conversions or exhibitions are desirable in aesthetic terms.

4 Project Planning and Management

This is the weakest aspect of the bid making the project particularly high risk. At present there appears to be no real leadership of the project, the designated Project Director, [REDACTED], is a former Trustee who has stood down to fill the role and appears uncertain about a number of facts relating to the farm and the bid. The Project Director will act as the principle contact for, and be supported by, the specialist consultant team (project management conservation architecture, engineering, cost consulting, interpretation and access).

The organisation, in the form of the Trustees, has little relevant experience and certainly no track record for a project such as this even though they are described in the bid as being experienced and all professionals, with "an excellent knowledge of the site and its history". Specifically the Trust consists of a solicitor (particularly concerned with property and valuations); a retired surveyor; an MP, a financier and a marketing specialist. Education is a key omission and a major problem seems to be fund-raising which appears to have been largely led by [REDACTED], the farm tenant (who stands to make £480,000 from the sale of the agricultural tenancy included in the bid).

On-going advice is being sought from English Heritage and Barnet Council on heritage and Local Authority education issues through [REDACTED] who have been involved up to now and know the site well.

A Feasibility Study was carried out some 6 years ago by [REDACTED] and although things have clearly moved on, and some things are out of date, this is the most comprehensive document in the bid.

Consultation with the community and local education bodies does not yet appear to have been carried out but is intended at the next phase of work.

The applicant expects a decision in June and to start the development work immediately with completion in December 2007. There is no detailed programme available. Outline planning permission will be applied for in late 2005 and full planning permission and listed building consent in late 2006. This would suggest that the applicant is planning an 18 month development period given that a Stage Two will not be accepted until this is in place.

5 Financial need and Viability

Value for money and viability is another high risk in this project. Viability is wholly reliant on the income being generated by tickets and other revenue. There is no cash partnership funding and it is not clear yet whether the in kind monies provided are acceptable. There is no fund-raising strategy in the bid documentation.

There are some high acquisition costs involved, even though discounts have been given. HLF will need to take valuation advice on the three purchases (farm, flats and agricultural tenancy).

The repair and refurbishment costs are outline and the low side, although VAT, inflation, contingency and professional fees are all included at acceptable levels.

This is essentially a new venture and the applicant has no track record and since formation of the Trust the barest minimum in terms of annual expenditure has been spent.

The Business Plan is very cursory and optimistic and simplistic in its approach. Operating costs including salaries (£128,000) and marketing (£35,000) are estimated at c. £380,000 a year. Against this the Business Plan predicts around 70,000 visitors (20,000 of these for events) a year which will yield c. £200,000 in ticket revenue (£6 per adult, concessions etc), c. £29,000 in retail, c.£35,000 in catering and c.£114,000 in fixed income (e.g. rental, markets, events). If these figures are to be believed then the project is viable, including when run through a sensitivity analysis (30,000 visitors would be break even according to the plan.), although a number of costs (such as building and farm repair and maintenance, depreciation, purchase of animals) do not feature in the project cost breakdown.

6 Identifying, charting and managing risk

The project may not come in on budget as the costs seem to be on the low side. Expert advice is needed to check all this. There is a sensitivity analysis but the sensitivity analysis is based on the projected figures being accurate and officers suspect that the Business Plan is over optimistic so the baseline is flawed. A management structure is in place but it needs developing further and more clarity on the expertise represented.


The applicant accepts that a key risk to the project is the risk of delay or cost increases but feel the provision of a Business Plan and a competent specialist consultant team reduces this. However, the Business Plan could be affected by all sorts of external circumstances but at least the applicant is not running other projects that would affect it.

Outline planning consent has not been secured – the freehold has not been handed over by Highways Agency yet

7 Measuring Success

The applicant has identified the key aims and objectives of the project, the areas in which action may be required and measures of success. There are no practical means set out for acting on findings and the applicant has asked for grant funding for measuring success.

Name
Position
Date


Casework Manager
14 Feb 2005

Appendix I- Detailed breakdown of eligible project costs and partnership funding

Appendix II – List of items submitted with bid

List of items submitted

Application Form

Conservation Plan Vol 1 and Vol 2 (Purcell Miller Tritton)

College Farm Memorandum and Articles of Association

Project Management Structure

Details of Trustees

Chairman's Report (College Farm Trust) July 2004

Education Development Plan 2002-7 for London Borough of Barnet

Project Director CV

College Farm Trust Accounts 2002-3

Document's relating to gift of property from Highways Agency to Trust

Confirmation of procurement

Barnet's Equalities Policy

Photos of Farm

Design Statement and outline plan

Brief for appointment of Interpretation/Access Specialist

Brief for the appointment of a conservation consultant to develop management plan

Valuation details for property

Acquisitions Policy and existing exhibits list

Letters of support

Outline Business Plan

Market Evaluation

Feasibility Study ()

Summary of staffing positions needed

Missing: Appointment of Project Director, Copy of Education Policy, Business Plan incomplete (?); Options Appraisal (NPV); Feasibility Study; Training