



SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL



Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee


9 February 2023

Report of Councillor Kelham Cooke,
Leader of the Council, and Councillor
Annie Mason, Cabinet Member for
People and Safer Communities

Best Kept Village Competition

Report Author

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Purpose of Report

To consider the purpose and effectiveness of the current Best Kept Village Competition and provide a recommendation on its future.

Recommendations

It is recommended the Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- 1. Recommend a change to the parameters of the SK Volunteer Awards to incorporate the Best Kept Village competition into the awards from financial year 2023/2024 rebranded as the Best Village Community Award..**

Decision Information

Does the report contain any exempt or confidential information not for publication?	No
What are the relevant corporate priorities?)	Clean and sustainable environment High performing Council
Which wards are impacted?	All wards

1. Implications

Taking into consideration implications relating to finance and procurement, legal and governance, risk and mitigation, health and safety, diversity and inclusion, staffing, community safety, mental health and wellbeing and the impact on the Council's declaration of a climate change emergency, the following implications have been identified:

Finance and Procurement

- 1.1 Any financial implication for the 2023/24 SK Community awards has been considered as part of the budgeting process. It is envisaged that including the Best Village Community Award within the SK Community awards will provide the Council with a saving compared to the current mechanisms that it operates under.

Reviewed by: Richard Wyles, Chief Finance Officer

Legal and Governance

- 1.2 There are no legal and governance implications related to this report.

Reviewed by: Graham Watts, Assistant Director of Governance and Monitoring Officer

2. Background to the Report

- 2.1 The Council's Corporate Plan 2020 to 2023 contains the key priorities of ensuring that the district is a clean and pleasant place to live and managing our finances and assets effectively. The Best Kept Village competition gives a sense of pride of local residents by maintaining and showcasing the areas in which they live.
- 2.2 Prior to 2019, Countryside Charity, formally known as the Council for the Preservation of Rural England and the Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE), acted as agents for the Council in the organisation of a district wide annual Best Kept Village competition. Participation in the competition was funded by the

Council at an annual cost in the region of £3,500. Villages who were successfully judged as being the best kept had opportunity to participate in the national Best Kept Village competition. This arrangement came to an end in 2019 due to lack of resource in the Lincolnshire branch of CPRE.

- 2.3 Since 2019, the Best Kept Village competition has been delivered in-house by the Council under the brief that villages with a population of less than 5,000 were to be automatically enrolled in the competition and judged. Villages with a population of over 5,000 were excluded from the competition.
- 2.4 Under the current competition category winners receive a framed certificate and the following prizes:

Classification	Population	1st Prize	2nd Prize	3rd Prize
Small Villages	Population 100 to 500	£400 plus gold coloured litter bin	£300	£200
Medium Villages	Population 501 to 5,000	£400 plus gold coloured litter bin	£300	£200

- 2.5 During the current financial year, all qualifying villages (of which there were approximately 100), were visited by a Council Officer who then compiled a short list of winners. Representatives from the Lincolnshire Gardens Trust visited the short-listed villages and confirmed the winners. Mileage was being claimed by the Lincolnshire Gardens Trust.
- 2.6 The costs for the current financial year equate to £5,973 which is made up of the cash prize fund, gold litter bins, framed certificates, Officer time and mileage expense.

3. Key Considerations

- 3.1 The current cost of living crisis and the impact this is having upon many organisations (including the Council), presents an opportunity to explore how the competition is delivered going forwards to improve the service provided and reduce the financial commitment of the Council.
- 3.2 Whilst it is appreciated the competition forms a sense of pride within the local communities, a considerable amount of work is undertaken by the Council's Officer responsible for the scheme to ensure it is successful.
- 3.3 The Council Officer, who managed the competition and carried out the task of visiting all the qualifying villages and short listing them, is no longer working for the Council. As there is now a resourcing issue, this presents an opportune time to review the operation of the competition and to determine whether it remains viable.

- 3.4 Many neighbouring local authorities stopped their best kept village competitions when the CPRE ceased in 2019.
- 3.5 There are a total of 128 settlements within South Kesteven based on the Village Assessment Audit 2022. This is made up of 58 small villages, 16 large villages, and the remaining 54 settlements are classed as open countryside due to their size and facilities within. Given the sense of pride which local residents within the district demonstrate, by maintaining and showcasing the areas in which they live, Members are asked to debate incorporating the Best Kept Village competition into the SK Community Awards and for it to be rebranded as the Best Village Community Award. Consideration should be made to the inclusion of all villages within the district, regardless of size, the opportunity to take part and receive recognition for their pride and dedication.
- 3.6 The SK Community Awards coincide with the nationally recognised Volunteers Week (1st to 7th June annually) and are open to nominations from the public between 1st June and 18th September. Nominations can be received directly through the Council's website, through submission of an application form or through the support of an Officer completing the form on an applicant's behalf should they be unable to complete. It is envisaged that the judging of the Best Village Community Award will be undertaken in the same manner as the other award categories and that photo evidence will be allowed to be submitted as part of the application process. This would then negate the need for a Council Officer to visit each village application.
- 3.7 Previous winners of the SK Community Award have received certificates and inscribed crystal trophies. The cost of the 2021 SK Community Awards to the Council amounted to £646.63 in total, which represents a significant reduction in cost compared to the current Best Kept Village scheme, however this was a reduced event due to covid 19 restrictions. The cost of the 2022 SK Community Awards to the Council amounted to £5,000, this did also include an evening awards presentation although still demonstrates a saving to the Council.

4. Other Options Considered

- 4.1 The Council could continue to operate the competition using the same mechanisms it has since 2019, however given the increase in associated costs and the vacant position left by the previous Officer responsible, this is no longer considered to be a viable option.
- 4.2 To help with reducing the cost of the competition, yet enabling district residents to feel a sense of pride of their local area, an alternative reward package could be offered. There could be prizes awarded for a first and second result only, with the prize being a framed certificate. However, the issues around staffing the judging of the competition would remain.

- 4.3 Villages could have the option of applying to enter the Best Kept Village competition rather than being automatically entered and paying a registration fee. This would potentially reduce the amount of entrants and generate some income to offset against the overall costs of the competition. Again, the staffing resource required would present an issue.
- 4.3 Another option would be to follow suit of other local authorities in the area and to cease operating the competition from 2023 onwards. Given the current financial challenges the Council is facing, this would save the Council at least £5,973 per year, based on the costs incurred for 2022.

5. Reasons for the Recommendations

- 5.1 The opportunity to include the Best Kept Village Competition within the SK Community Awards and for it to become the Best Community Village Award represents an opportunity for the Council, and communities, to continue to celebrate community pride and achievement, whilst balancing this against the Council's current financial challenges.