

To: Member Councils - Shropshire

Dear Colleague

In discussion with Chris Child from Energize / Shropshire Wildlife Trust and Community Resource an opportunity has arisen for SALC to consider an application for funding via Crowdfund Shropshire under the Government's UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

The potential project aims to support the improved health and wellbeing of local communities across Shropshire by offering a subsidized bench/es for Shropshire's local communities.

Research amongst many agencies (see below) has demonstrated that a well-placed public bench can;

- Offer people a place to sit and rest so that they are more likely to move and walk around their local area. This is especially true for people who experience mobility challenges. Obviously, you sit on a bench, but studies show that people will do a lot more local walking if there is somewhere to go and sit. So surprisingly and counter-intuitively, sitting outdoors actually encourages walking.
- Provide a place to meet and connect with others. Opportunities for social connection are important, particularly for those living on their own. Also, when space is shared, everyone benefits – studies show that shared places become safer and more interesting.
- Offer a chance to benefit from the outdoors and nature. Our parasympathetic nervous system kicks in outdoors so that we feel calmer and more peaceful, even in an urban setting (though sitting near to nature – plants, trees, water, grass – amplifies this relaxing effect and is a natural mood-booster).

Therefore, the project aims to place benches across Shropshire in places which encourage walking, connection with others and a chance to benefit from local nature/green space. This would be our criteria for allocating benches and benches will also be marked up with appropriate messages to encourage these activities.

At this expression of interest stage, we are not asking for exact locations but please note that it would be the respective Town / Parish Council's responsibility to place the benches in places where you have permission to do so and you would also be responsible for the installation and any associated costs.

Through the Shropshire Green Spaces and Active Travel Fund the project hopes to be able to provide a bench/es at a cost of £100 each to the Parish / Town Council, with the balance coming from the Fund. All benches would be sourced from local sustainable woodland and of an appropriate standard to last up to 30 to 40 years. Funds would need to be secured before 31st March 2025 and we envisage that benches would be delivered in the spring / early summer of the same year.

If you are interested in participating in the project, please can you confirm by email indicating:

- How many Health & Wellbeing benches you would be willing to contribute to – up to a maximum of 3 (three).
- The parish/town council would be willing to donate £100 towards each bench and that this £100 would be placed via a crowdfunding campaign

(Please Note:- the other £200 approx. would be covered by the Shared Prosperity Fund via Shropshire Council, Green Spaces and Active Travel Funding.)

- The Parish / Town Council would take responsibility for placing the benches in places which meet the above criteria, where you have permission to do so and that you would be responsible for the installation and any associated costs.

Please note the submission of this expression of interest is in principle only and does not form any legally binding agreement on behalf of either party.

In the event of the project being oversubscribed, funding will be allocated on a first come first serve basis.

Expressions of interest should be emailed by **5pm on Wednesday 22nd January**. I appreciate this is a tight timescale but unfortunately, we are being driven by the requirements of the Fund.

Hope this may be seen as a beneficial project to your Council and local community and look forward to hearing from you.

Many thanks.

Chris

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