

Andrew Williams – The Bid

Given the extensive financial requirements of the town centre overall, any, prospect of getting support with any elements of the scheme was obviously something we were very keen to look into. So, being aware that there was at that time, a Parks for People project running, we decided that we would bid for that lottery funding, in recognition of the fact that this was a historic park, and there was funding available to restore those sorts of areas.

I think there was two or three key elements to being successful. I think one was the time and effort we put in preparing the bid. Secondly the fact that we were committing a proportion of the funding ourselves as a council, and I think, it's key in the Heritage Lottery funding process that there is a degree of match funding and we were prepared to put in 30% of the cost. And I think the one key element which gave us the advantage over some of the other applications and was very important in, in the water gardens application, was the involvement of the community and the Friends of the Water Gardens. Clearly being able to demonstrate that there was community support and interest in the project, that there was a, an active group of volunteers who were playing a key role in that, and I think at every stage of the, of the process, that was an important part of our advantage in terms of the bid. Right through from formulating the bid, to having the Friends of the Water Gardens present on the day when the assessors visited. I think at every stage that has proved to the Heritage Lottery Fund that this was a real community based scheme.

I suppose the ultimate high, there will be two. One has happened and one is to happen. One was being successful in winning the bid, cos clearly, the option of not winning the bid would have meant we'd have had to have drawn back on some of our plans and really dealt with those things that were most urgent rather than having a comprehensive, refurbishment of the gardens. So winning the bid was, was a high point and I think the second high point for me will be, seeing the completion of the work. It's often said when you're doing, any project whether it's in your house or anywhere else that, it's very difficult to see the benefits of a scheme while 90% of it are being done. But you really begin to see in the last 10% that, it coming together and I think, that's going to be an exciting part of the project when you actually see how it's coming together and how the improvements are really beginning to take place and how it makes it a, a much improved environment. But, undoubtedly, and, whether it's because it's a historic garden, whether it's because we were applying for lottery funding and again there's lots of hoops to jump through, but, there have been some lows in the process. There's been moments when we've thought, we're not going to get the funding that we wanted, the water quality directives, the requirements of.. the environment agency, are very different now, to what they were, when the gardens were constructed in the sixties. And the expectations on, how some of these things will be dealt with are very different. And it's very challenging to manage the modern day requirements of the water quality directives or the environment agency against Historic England's requirements to maintain the gardens in their original.. designs. So, there are points where you think, well, the requirements of, of one,

organisation are going to be difficult to meet, bearing in mind the requirements of another, and you think, will we ever overcome, and get a way forward, and, and there's been points where I thought, this is going to be a difficult thing to overcome or, there are agencies which have the necessary power to stop us doing particular things, and you think if we don't satisfy those, this project isn't going to get off the ground, and there's points where, you do begin to wonder if it's ever going to happen, but thankfully we are where we are.