

**WEST SWINDON PARISH COUNCIL****Community Grants****1. General Information:**

1.1 West Swindon Parish Council has received two grant applications for consideration:

- Toothill Scouts - £16,850
- Freshbrook Church - £10,000

1.2 Both grants would be payable from budgets set aside for community buildings.

**Toothill Scouts:**

1.3. Toothill Scouts are a long standing occupant on the farmhouse site and seek funding to replace the existing hut with a new roof with guttering. The aim of this is to reduce water escaping into the building and on the exterior walls. The Organisation has provided a quote from a preferred contractor. The organization currently provides sessions for three groups with a total of 80 children participating per week. They hold a long waiting list. Access is also given to other organisations wishing to use the facility. The organisers hope that ensuring the building is watertight will extend the potential for mixed use of the building. They currently occupy with 7 years remaining on a 10 year lease.

1.4 Implications: This is a high cost renewal on an ageing building structure. In terms of budget, there is funding available for this project within the sum set aside for this Toothill site.

**Freshbrook Church:**

1.5 Freshbrook Church are applying for a contribution towards internal improvements to the interior ceiling and lighting. The Church offers

1.6 There is scope for interpretation over the legality of funding improvements to places of worship for example, **8(1)(i) Local Government Act 1894** prohibits such financial support and that – unlike other aspects of that Act – there has been no subsequent legislation that decisively overrode the prohibition. S.8 enumerates the powers of parish councils and 8(1)(i) reads as follows:

“(i) to execute any works (including works of maintenance or improvement) incidental to or consequential on the exercise of any of the foregoing powers, or in relation to any parish property, *not being property relating to affairs of the church or held for an ecclesiastical charity.*” [emphasis added].

There is no definitive position however, there is debate that the **Localism Act 2011** and the ‘General Power of Competence’ supersedes the Local Government Act

1894, and that the 1894 Act is still perceived as a barrier, preventing investment in church buildings by local authorities.

- 1.7. In support of this application, Freshbrook Church have provided a list of current users. This includes a mix of faith-related activities alongside an open house lunch for the community on first Tuesday of every month and a baby and toddler group during term time.

## **2. Options:**

- 2.1 The Parish Council needs to consider the level of investment requested alongside the physical state of the building leased to the Toothill Scouts. The Parish Council could consider liaison with Swindon Borough Council regarding transfer of the asset or site to underpin the investment.
- 2.2 The Parish Council needs to consider the legislative framework for funding improvements to Freshbrook Church. If it wishes to progress towards supporting the grant application, it could consider making a part contribution towards Freshbrook Church improvements and could proportion this to a particular part of the building or as a percentage relating to the proportion of activities that are non faith related.

## **3. Recommendations:**

- 3.1 That the Parish Council considers the merits of both grant applications and the benefit to the local community.

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**3. Recommendations:**

3.1 It is recommended that

n of Interest to the be approved by the Planning & Environment Committee

Paula Harrison  
Parish Manager