

**MEETING: 23/09/2015**

**Ref: 12673**

**ASSESSMENT CATEGORY - Improving London's Environment**

**Forest Young Men's Christian Association of East London**

**Adv: Joan Millbank**

**Amount requested: £94,854  
(Revised: £80,320)**

**Base: Waltham Forest  
Benefit: Waltham Forest**

**Amount recommended: £80,400**

**The Charity**

Established in 1969, Forest Young Men's Christian Association for East London (commonly known as Forest YMCA) addresses social deprivation in Waltham Forest, which has high levels of child poverty, unemployment, youth crime and homelessness. It is an independent charitable company affiliated to the global YMCA movement. While founded on, and informed by, Christian values the charity's services, jobs and volunteering opportunities are open to all. Services include: supported accommodation for 300 vulnerable young people; a work experience and employment project; school based after-school clubs; youth provision; leisure and fitness facilities; and running Brooks Farm Outdoor Learning Centre (a city farm), which is the focus of this bid.

**The Application**

The applicant is seeking a three year grant to employ its first full-time Farm Education Officer who will be responsible for delivering environmental education work including food growing, animal husbandry and biodiversity workshops. Beneficiaries will be pupils from local schools, young families, older people, disabled and vulnerable young people, together with the wider community. Initial costs have been adjusted following the assessment meeting, hence the revised request.

**The Recommendation**

The charity has strong links locally and an established reputation in working with schools. Brooks Farm offers Forest YMCA the vehicle to expand its reach and its contribution to local communities. While this will be a new venture, the charity has links with another outdoor learning centre and a community farm in Romford. It has also established connections with other London-based city farms (Hackney, Spitalfields and Mudchute) and is a member of the Federation of Community Gardens and City Farms.

***£80,400 (£34,400; £22,400; £23,600) towards the cost of a full-time Farm Education Officer and project running costs.***

**Funding History**

Meeting Date	Decision
24/07/2003	£22,000 towards the salary and on costs of a project co-ordinator.
18/04/2002	Declined. Request for general provision for homeless people, not meeting any of the Trust's stated priorities.

**Background and detail of proposal**

The farm occupies a 1.5 acre self-contained site adjoining Skelton's Lane Park in Leyton. It is owned by Waltham Forest Council, which used to run the farm directly.

In April 2014 it passed the facility to the applicant on a twenty five year lease at a peppercorn rent. Four farm staff transferred over in order to retain skills and knowledge. The charity secured a £500,000 Community Assets grant last year to substantially refurbish the site. Improvements include two new classrooms, improved paths and toilets to enable disabled access, a café, and improved facilities for the care of the animals, insects and birds housed at the farm.

The environmental education programme will be promoted to 1,000 nursery, primary and secondary schools in North East London each year. In year one, 70 environmental education sessions (comprising of a classroom based activity, animal handling and a tour of the farm) will be delivered to benefit 2,100 pupils; this figure is expected to rise to 100 sessions and to benefit 3,000 pupils by year three. The on-site sessions will be enhanced by visits to the schools to offer hatch and brood sessions, and animal handling. In addition, schools will be encouraged to visit the farm at other times. Each year two young people housed by the charity will be supported to act as 'classroom assistants', where they will be helped to gain qualifications and employability skills. 30 local volunteers will also be 'trained' to help. All staff and volunteers will be trained in safeguarding and DBS-checked (Disclosure and Barring Service). Each year 80% of the pupils are expected to report increased understanding of nature, food and healthier eating while 80% adult participants are expected to report greater knowledge of the green environment and biodiversity.

### **Financial Information**

Total forecast income for in the current year 2015/16 is £6.2 million of which £6.0 million (96%) had been secured by May 2015.

At 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014 FYMCA had negative free unrestricted reserves of £20,074 against a policy to hold £1.3m equivalent to three months' worth of operating costs. FYMCA advised that in 2009/10 it embarked on a programme to purchase and redevelop its social housing properties and made the decision to designate its unrestricted funds and future generated surpluses towards this purpose. As this programme is near completion its current focus is to build its free unrestricted reserves. In January 2015 its Trustees agreed a strategy based on significant cost savings and increased income through its improved properties. This strategy has been implemented and its Trustees meet monthly to monitor its progress against its plan to meet the target by March 2017.

At 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014 FYMCA held net current liabilities of £20,074. It advised that it is selling one of its street properties which will provide approx. £350,000 as a cash buffer and payments to suppliers have been re-negotiated to help manage the organisation's cash flow.

FYMCA advised that its cost of generating funds is low as the majority of its income (90% in 2013/14) is from charitable activities. This comprises grant and contract income towards its letting and support services, as well as earned income through leisure facilities, community farm and catering. It advised that it expects the costs of generating funds to be higher in future years in line with its strategy to increase free unrestricted funds.

Year end at 31 March	2013/14 Audited Accounts	2014/15 Forecast Outturn	2015/16 Current Year Budget
<b>Income and Expenditure</b>	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>
Income	5,707,125	5,359,095	6,240,921
Expenditure	5,237,229	5,120,336	5,503,862
Unrestricted Funds Surplus / (Deficit)	(27,452)	238,759	737,059
Restricted Funds Surplus / (Deficit)	497,348	0	0
<b>Total Surplus / (Deficit)</b>	<b>469,896</b>	<b>238,759</b>	<b>737,059</b>
Surplus / (Deficit) as a % of turnover	8.2%	4.5%	11.8%
Cost of Generating funds (% of income)	273,931 (4.8%)	-	-
<b>Free unrestricted reserves</b>			
Free unrestricted reserves held at Year End	(20,070)	218,689	955,748
How many months' worth of expenditure	0.0	0.6	2.1
Reserves Policy target	1,300,000	1,300,000	1,300,000
How many months' worth of expenditure	3.0	3.0	2.8
Free reserves over/(under) target	(1,320,040)	(1,081,311)	(344,252)