

Report to: Salisbury Area Board

Date of Meeting:

Subject: Harnham Bunker - Community Asset Transfer

Purpose of the report:

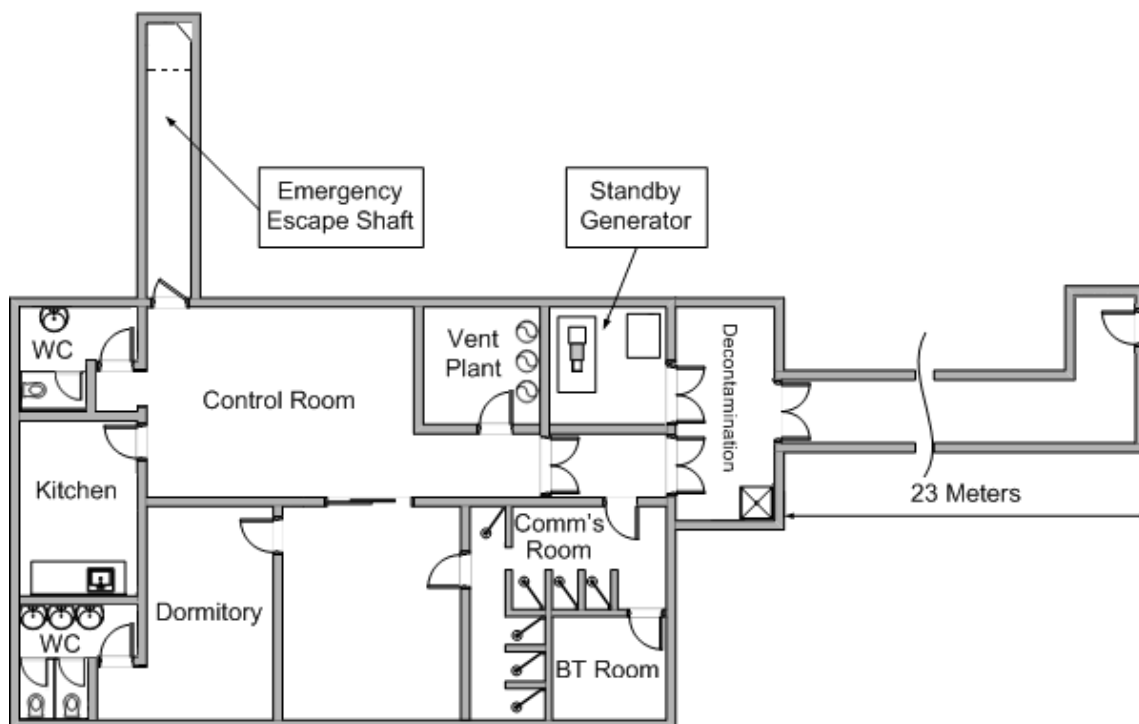
To consider a proposal to facilitate the transfer of the Bunker at Harnham to a community interest company established specifically to provide activities for young people in the area.

Area Board Objective:

To provide positive leisure time activities for young people in Salisbury

Harnham Bunker

Harnham Bunker is a former post war underground military telephone exchange in a small area of woodland at the junction of Old Blandford Road and Grasmere Close on the southern outskirts of the city. There is little evidence of the building above ground with a small fenced entrance cutting (cut into the wooded slope) accessed by a short track from the road junction. Immediately north of this is a fenced compound with a large cell phone mast. The entrance consists of a heavy steel door, once inside a wide passage slopes downwards into the bunker for 23 metres. The layout of the Bunker is set out below.



Apart from some limited storage, the Bunker has remained unused for over 25 years. Upon the creation of Wiltshire Council in 2009, the Bunker was transferred to the ownership of Salisbury City Council. Under the terms of that transfer, if the City Council seeks to dispose of the site, Wiltshire Council has the right to have the asset returned or to take a 50% share of the proceeds from any open market sale. Salisbury City Council has sought to find community uses for the building but adaptation costs have been prohibitive for most

interested groups. The City Council has subsequently notified Wiltshire Council of its intention to dispose of the building on the open market.

Expression of interest – The Sound Emporium (TSE)

Members will be aware that an agreement was reached between the Area Board and TSE to provide a temporary music based youth club at Grosvenor House (now known as Hendrix House). This was ratified by the Council earlier this year and TSE now run sessions on three nights each week. The agreement with TSE required an evaluation after 6 months of operation. This was reviewed by the Community Area Manager and in accordance with the wishes of the Area Board, a further extension of the service was agreed until 31 December 2015. The Council has made clear that it does not intend to renew the agreement after that date and will then proceed with the disposal of the Grosvenor House site to assist with the cost of funding the community campus programme at 5 Rivers. The campus at 5 Rivers would not be a suitable alternative venue, due to the space required and the need for secure storage of the expensive equipment used at Grosvenor House. This will leave TSE without a venue for its activities from January 2016.

The Community Area Manager, the Chair of the Area Board and Salisbury City Council (SCC) have been in discussion with TSE to find a way of continuing the very highly regarded and popular services and Harnham Bunker has emerged as a preferred location. TSE have visited the site and have expressed a strong interest in acquiring the site for its activities. During the discussions it was made clear to TSE that the Council and SCC could not consider a community asset transfer to a private company and TSE have acknowledged this and agreed to set up a separate 'not for profit' community interest company to facilitate any transfer.

Business Case

TSE have commissioned architects to review the works needed to convert the bunker into a suitable and safe premise for youth and community activities. This will involve planning and consultancy costs, modifying the internal layout, improving the electrical and ventilation systems and providing a suitable alternative escape in case of fire. It is anticipated that these costs will be in the region of £150k. TSE have sought external funding for these costs and are confident they can raise £50k. This leaves a shortfall of £100k. TSE recognise that all future maintenance, utility, NNDR and running costs will need to be met through operating income and will not be supported by the Council or SCC. There is a small income derived from the lease of land for the mobile phone mast and this can be applied to support the operating costs if the site is transferred.

TSE have been asked to produce a sustainable business plan setting out; how the new facility will operate, management arrangements and financing. TSE are working on this for consideration by the Board if an 'in principle' decision is favourable.

The Rowbarrow 106 Agreement

When the Rowbarrow developments were approved; two Section 106 Agreements were signed with the developers requiring contributions towards the cost of providing a community facility on the site. An area of land was subsequently identified for this facility. However, residents when consulted expressed a desire for the identified site to be retained as open space and do not favour a new build facility. The cost of any new build is likely to

be substantially more than the £306k available through the S106 funds. Therefore the prospect of providing a community facility is unlikely, meaning that c£306k of S106 funds currently remains unallocated. Planning officers have examined the original S106 Agreements and are confident that the money could be utilised to improve or develop nearby community facilities in the close proximity of the Rowbarrow estate. The Harnham Bunker is less than 10 minutes walk from the estate. This would provide the additional funding required to convert the building for use by the community. This would leave funds remaining which could be applied for the benefit of other nearby halls to increase the quality and capacity of community facilities in close proximity to the estate – the Harnham Memorial Hall, Friary Community Centre and Britford Memorial Hall all lie nearby.

Salisbury City Council

The Harnham Bunker is currently owned by the City Council; therefore any transfer of the Bunker will require the approval of the SCC. Discussions have been held with SCC and the indication is that it is willing to support this project in principle, subject to agreement of the detailed terms of any transfer. If the transfer proceeds as recommended, then SCC can either transfer the asset directly to the new community interest company, or hand back the asset to the Council who will then arrange the legal transfer. This is a matter for SCC to decide. In either case, Wiltshire Council can help with the legal process, using the community asset transfer template developed by the legal team.

Summary and next steps

The opportunity to utilise a redundant public asset to secure a dedicated space for youth activities in the south of the City is an exciting prospect. TSE have a proven track record in delivering excellent services for young people in safe and well managed spaces. Subject to planning, the site would be ideal for the use proposed given its location and sound insulation properties. It is secure and sufficiently separated from local residential properties to minimise any impact on neighbours – further conditions could mitigate that further (for example, limited weekday hours and no use on a Sunday). The availability of S106 funding and the possibility of revenue income from the mobile mast agreement makes the project financially achievable, subject to TSE producing a financial viability plan outlining how all future operating costs will be secured.

Recommendations

That the Area Board supports in principle the approach set out in this report, subject to the following:

1. Further discussion with SCC regarding the terms of any transfer and the arrangements involved.
2. Receipt of a business plan from TSE and confirmation that an appropriate not for profit vehicle has been established
3. Conditions restricting hours and days of use to minimise any impact on neighbouring properties
4. Conditions facilitating wider community use of the building.

5. Submission of a planning application by TSE for the works and change of use proposed
6. Confirmation that a S106 contribution of c£100k may be allocated to support the project
7. Further consideration of how the remaining S106 contributions may be applied for the benefit of the Rowbarrow estate and East Harnham residents

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