

Executive Report

Ward(s) affected: Holy Trinity

Report of Director of Service Delivery

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# Future Management and operation of Chantry Wood Campsite

## Executive Summary

In March 2019, the Executive considered the options available to the Council in relation to the Chantry wood campsite. It decided that public consultation should be undertaken and the results reported back to the Executive to inform its decision on the future of the campsite.

Consultation exercises were undertaken during 2019 via a range of methods.

The key messages resulting from the consultation are that there is strong public support for the continuation of public camping at Chantry Wood, there is an appeal of the basic facilities and that people would be willing to pay a higher fee.

Respondents were also supportive of the idea of using this area for a forest school but were concerned about the loss of private camping.

Finally, some residents indicated that the Council should consider enabling volunteers to run the site and this, together with other information gathered, has been added to the original options appraisal.

## Recommendation to Executive

- (1) That the Chantry Wood Campsite continues in its current form with increased fees as set out in "Option B2" of this report (paragraph 5.7).
- (2) That the Council continues to engage with forest school operators to explore options to increase outdoor education whilst maintaining a camping facility.

## Reason(s) for Recommendation:

To implement arrangements at the campsite that respond to the views expressed during the consultation and protects the natural environment and reduces the operational cost to the Council.

**Is the report (or part of it) exempt from publication? No**

## 1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. This report set out the responses from: the public consultation carried out in November 2019, site users feedback collected during the summer season 2019 and the local consultation undertaken in February 2019, to enable the Executive to reach a decision on the future of the camp site.

## 2. Strategic Priorities

- 2.1. A number of Council policies and strategies cover the management of the Borough's countryside estate. These include the adopted Countryside Vision, the Play Strategy, the Surrey Hills AONB Management Plan and the provision of SANGs in the Local Plan.
- 2.2. These policies and strategies seek
- to protect and enhance the natural environment for future generations
  - to encourage access, education and enjoyment of the natural environment
  - to reduce negative impacts from activities on residents, landscape, biodiversity and other recreational activities

## 3. Background

- 3.1. The Chantry Wood Campsite was originally subject to review because the current buildings required investment and there were operational costs and difficulties for the Parks Service to effectively manage the site.
- 3.2. The original report was considered by the Executive at its meeting on 8 January 2019 and this considered the following options:

Option	Capital Cost	Operational Cost	Constraints
A: Fully refurbish campsite with upgraded facilities	£313,000	(£2,500)	Traffic, Habitat, Impact on Neighbours, planning permission, Building Regulations
B: Continue current operation with small facility improvements	£58,500	£2,000	Due to the constraints on building regulations, this option was not consulted on.
C: Continue current operation without changes to the facilities	£36,000	£5,000	
D: Carry out small scale refurbishment to lease area for forest school use	£36,000	(£7-9,000)	No camping facilities
E: Lease area for forest school use without facility improvement	£17,000	(£4,000)	No camping facilities
F: Return site to grassland/ woodland	£8,000	0	
G: Consult on options	tbc	tbc	

- 3.3. The Executive met again on 7 March 2019 following public representations and decided:

- “(1) That subject to paragraph (2) below and a further report to and decision of the Executive, the proposal to lease Chantry Wood campsite (Barn and firepits) to a forest school operator, as approved provisionally by the Executive on 8 January 2019, be amended to a proposal to grant a non-exclusive licence(s) in respect of the Chantry Wood Campsite for use as a forest school, with the continued shared use for camping and use by community groups and families at weekends and in holiday periods.
- (2) That the proposal referred to in paragraph (1) above be delayed for 12 months, during which time the Council shall:
- (a) undertake further discussions with the local community to seek to ascertain a preferred option for the future management of the campsite, including other options in terms of the educational aspects relating to woodland and countryside awareness;
  - (b) undertake as soon as practicable the minimum level of works to the building to make it weatherproof and secure in 2019 for continued use as a campsite;
  - (c) confirm provisional bookings for the campsite for 2019;
  - (d) undertake further monitoring of usage of the campsite;
  - (e) engage with potential operators to establish the future viability of a forest school operating a campsite at Chantry Wood Campsite, and that this be reviewed by the Executive once responses are received; and
  - (f) postpone the proposed small-scale refurbishment and upgrade works pending the review of responses received from potential forest school operators.

Reason: To respond to concerns raised by local residents during and following the recent consultation.”

- 3.4. Since 7 March 2019:
- (i) Further discussions with the local community and consultation exercises have been undertaken.
  - (ii) Works have been undertaken to allow the camp site to continue to operate.
  - (iii) Bookings were honoured.
- 3.5. During 2019 there were 992 bookings covering 91 nights.
- 3.6. Detailed discussions with Forest School operators have not yet taken place, as the potential constraints resulting from the public consultation will need to be included in those discussions.

#### **4. Stakeholder engagement/ Consultations**

- 4.1. A local consultation was carried out following the Executive meeting on 8 January 2019. Residents and interest groups were contacted. These included local residents, the Tyting Society, Holy Trinity Amenity Group and customers who made provisional bookings.
- 4.2. The detailed actions and responses received in the local consultation were outlined in the Executive report 7 March 2019, Appendix 2.
- 4.3. The local consultation received 12 responses with a further 5 responses received as a result of a blog published by a member of the public. In addition, some other correspondence has been received.

- 4.4. Over the summer 2019, the Council collected onsite feedback from campers using a comment form. The form provided space to make comments on the campsite and its facilities without asking specific questions.
- 4.5. Twelve feedback forms were returned that all commented positively on the location but not the facilities, apart from two comments on the access track.
- 4.6. Following the summer camping season, the Council engaged an external consultancy company (SMSR) to carry out a wider consultation exercise. This took place in November 2019.
- 4.7. The following stakeholders were included
  - Non-users
  - Users (including previous campers / family groups)
  - Scout/ community groups
  - Schools that previously booked the campsite
  - Forest school providers
- 4.8. The consultation included the following activities:
  - I. Online consultation open from 24 October 2019 until 30 November 2019. A total of 459 residents completed the survey. The consultation was advertised via a press release and posters displayed at Chantry Wood. Of the online users, all were deemed to be Guildford residents. Of those 48% had never used the facility, 19% had used it once, 22% had used it 2-5 times and 11% more than 5 times.
  - II. Two focus groups held at the Council offices on 12 and 13 November. 25 residents attended the groups consisting of a mix of users and non-users – mainly recruited from the Citizens’ Panel and previous users (family groups/ Scouts) and forest school providers.
  - III. Face to face interviews with 3 individual residents and 2 forest schools.

## 5. Stakeholder responses received

- 5.1. The detailed stakeholder responses are outlined in the report SMSR (Appendix 1).
- 5.2. The key issues raised by stakeholders are summarised below.
  - I. No support for large scale development
  - II. Desire to retain camping for the public
  - III. Concerns regarding traffic on local roads
  - IV. Concerns regarding the bluebell woodland that surrounds the campsite
  - V. Concerns that access to Chantry Wood would be restricted or parts of Chantry Woods were sold off which were the result of misinformation
  - VI. Request for more Stakeholder engagement and provision of more detail on the various options
- 5.3. The consultation results regarding the future operation of the camp site are summarised below:

Option	Preferred option	Second choice	Total % for first and second choice
A: Fully refurbish campsite with upgraded facilities	15%	29%	44%

B: Public campsite with the basic existing facilities the facilities	60%	19%	79%
C: Campsite for schools and scouts only	9%	32%	41%
D: Forest School	18%	12%	30%
E: No campsite.	9%	6%	15%

5.4 The table below summarises the results of the qualitative consultation on the options:

Option A: Fully refurbished campsite	Little support to justify a large investment to the site and there are concerns about the impact on the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.	Improvements to the water supply and provision of electricity on site are only deliverable in this scenario.
Option B: Continued public camping with basic facilities.	Strong desire for public camping, including a willingness to accept higher camping fees. The existing facilities were rated poor by 22% of respondents.	Further details are explored below
Option C: Campsite for school and scouts only	No strong support this option, which can be attributed to the desire to retain public camping.	The lack of responses received from community groups indicates that there is little demand from this customer base
Option D: Forest School	There is support for the Forest School in principle, but this was overshadowed by the desire to retain public camping.	Further details are explored below
Option E: No campsite	Although the possibility to return the area to natural habitat found some support, it has been the least popular option.	

5.5 No responses were received from the five schools that were contacted.

5.6 In relation to the preferred option of continuing public camping, the following should be noted:

- (i) It is not practical to install toilets with direct connections to the cesspit without a better water supply that would comply with Building Regulations.
- (ii) The campsite will need investment in order to extend the life of the current facilities. The levels of investment are detailed in section 9.
- (iii) Consultees recognised the financial challenges of the running of the campsite and there were suggestions made to explore the running of the campsite bookings by a third party.

(iv) Within the qualitative analysis some residents indicated that the Council should consider enabling volunteers to run the site. This has been included in the options appraisal. No firm proposals have been received at this stage however.

5.7 Continuing with the stated preferred option, the qualitative assessment suggests that the following would be acceptable to the public.

Option	Consultation responses	Estimates	What does it mean to the customer
B1 Basic facilities run by GBC	Current charges at £4.75 Considered value for money	Net cost to the Council in 2018-19: £3,306 Net cost to the Council so far in 2019-20: £7,609 which includes reactive repairs of £6,943	Customers pay the same amount for the camping facilities, subject to agreed inflation increases.
B2 Basic facilities run by GBC with increased charges	Consultation identified that there is support (73%) to increase camping fees of up to £10 per person. (A previous increase in fees led to a drop in customer numbers however)	For example £9.50/ person. Could achieve surplus in the region of £3,000	This would mean campers would need to pay more money to camp with the same facilities.  A detailed pricing structure is outlined in 8.3. Subject to inflation increases.
B3 Basic Facilities – run by volunteers	This has been proposed by a number of respondents	Assuming this could generate an income that could be re-invested in the facilities.	As B1. plus Volunteers would need to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take bookings and answer queries</li> <li>• Visually inspect buildings, bollards, taps, fire pits, benches, chemical toilets</li> <li>• Prepare toilets (sweep out, place chemical toilets into toilet blocks)</li> <li>• Inspect campsite for dog fouling prior to bookings</li> <li>• Meet to unlock the site and provide introduction to campers (be available for changes in arrival times)</li> <li>• Be on call to respond to issues, in particular unauthorised groups turning up on site</li> <li>• Remove litter daily for large groups</li> <li>• Remove litter, and empty chemical toilets if required and clean toilets and barn after departure</li> <li>• Monitor and replenish usable items (toilet roll, toilet fluid,</li> </ul>

			disposable gloves) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Check fire is out following bookings</li> <li>• Secure site</li> </ul>
B4 Basic facilities – run by forest school	This has been considered as an option but has not found support from forest school operators without considering the full extent of business limitations.	As it stands this scenario is currently unlikely to be deliverable in the short term as this is outside the forest schools business model	

5.7.1 The financial estimates based on realistic assumptions of visitor that may not occur as estimated. The estimated numbers aim to reflect an average group size over the year. Visitor numbers may change year on year. Estimates assume no significant increase in use during the winter months.

5.7.2 The camping fees illustrated include a VAT charge that is not applied to the net income.

5.7.3 The cost of administration (for the booking is not known and not factored into the assumptions.

5.7.4 The Council has previously supplied fire wood in order to discourage campers from collecting wood from the surrounding areas. Due to a change in forestry operations, firewood cannot be provided in future.

## 5.8 Options for Community Group Camping

5.8.1 There was no strong support for this option as standalone camping provision.

5.8.2 Responses received from 11 groups appear to reflect that there is little demand from this customer group.

5.8.3 This option would continue provide camping opportunities for community groups who are largely self-sufficient.

5.8.4 Some feedback received raised safeguarding issues as a reason why the site is less used by scouts, guides and schools, because the campsite is fully accessible to the public at all times.

## 5.9 Options for Forest Schools

5.9.1 The qualitative assessment identified that there is support for a Forest School in principle, but this has been overshadowed by the desire to retain public camping.

5.9.2 Further detailed discussions with Forest School operators have not yet taken place, as the potential constraints resulting from the public consultation will need to be included in any discussions. Feedback received indicates that it is unlikely that Forest School Operators would consider it viable to operate public camping provision.

5.9.3 As it stands, Forest School operators are not confident that they could include a public campsite operation into their business model.

5.9.4 The public reaction towards the forest school proposal have made some operators reconsider the suitability of the campsite as a long term operation.

## **6 Executive Advisory Board Comment**

6.1 The Community EAB on 13 February 2020 was invited to express views in respect of the recommendations to the Executive to agree Option B2 that the campsite continued in its current form with increased fees as shown in shown in paragraph 5.7 of the report and that the Council continued to engage with forest school operators to explore options to increase outdoor education whilst maintaining a camping facility. The reasons for the recommendations were to implement arrangements at the campsite that responded to the views expressed during the consultation whilst protecting the natural environment and reducing the operational cost to the Council.

6.2 The following points and comments arose from related questions and discussion:

- The continued use of the site as a private campsite enhanced by the addition of a forest school was welcomed.
- Funding predictions set out in the report were scenarios based on assumptions regarding the numbers of child and adult users and that all users paid the same rate.
- Whilst the minimum price per booking for use of the whole site had increased and a further charge was made per additional adult per night, many consultees had indicated that they were content to pay a higher charge and were in favour of the single use option.
- Although a capital investment of £22,000 to rebuild both toilet blocks to increase their accessibility to disabled people and make them more pleasant received some support from councillors, consultation responses had not indicated strong support for this improvement which would lead to price increases.

6.3 The Chairman summarised the EAB's views that the Executive should explore the possibility of making some limited disabled adaptations to improve the campsite's facilities, that Option B2, to continue to provide basic facilities operated by the Council with increased charges, be supported, and that the Council should continue to engage with forest school operators to explore options to increase outdoor education whilst maintaining a camping facility.

## **7 Equality and Diversity Implications**

7.5 Please refer to the EQiA from the previous report in Appendix 2.

## **8 Financial Implications**

8.5 The net cost for the operation of the campsite in 2018-19 was £3,306 and in 2019-20 (to date) £7,609 which includes reactive repairs of £6,943.

8.6 A review of the pricing structure that doubles the general fee per person could potentially achieve break even or achieve a small surplus depending on uptake by customers.

8.7 Proposed Prices:



<b>Proposed Price</b>	<b>Previous price</b>
Adults £9.50/ person/ night	£4.75/ person/ night
Children under 4 years old: no charge	Children under 3 years old no charge
Children under 16: £4.75/ person / night	£4.75/ person / night
Scouts / Guides and affiliated groups: £4.75 / person/ night	£4.75/ person / night
School groups: £4.75 / person/ night	£4.75/ person / night
Minimum charge: £30 per booking. (previously £15)	£15 per booking

8.8 Potential scenarios in 2020-21 based on average expenditure are as follows:

<b>summary</b>				
resistance	5%	10%	15%	20%
expenditure	6,149	6,056	5,963	5,901
income	(9,460)	(9,217)	(8,975)	(8,732)
net income	<b>(3,311)</b>	<b>(3,161)</b>	<b>(3,012)</b>	<b>(2,831)</b>

8.9 A review of the pricing structure appears to be supported by 73% of sites users. It is not possible to predict customers' acceptance of a new pricing structure and no exact estimates have been made yet to predict a revised income.

8.10 These figures are theoretical estimates, and may change, for example if discounts for children or community groups are applied.

8.11 It is assumed that any surplus generated would be re-invested in the campsite infrastructure.

8.12 Please note that work has been carried out to the buildings since compiling the report in Appendix 2. A further detailed assessment of costs would need to be carried out to identify the exact refurbishment costs.

8.13 Possible capital investment scenarios are:

<b>Works</b>	<b>Cost</b>
Minimal work to buildings are safe for immediate use.	This was done in 2019 at a cost of £6,900
Work to address foreseeable issues in order to extend the life of the existing facilities	Replace roof of toilet blocks and decorate by 2021: £5,500 Replace doors to both toilet blocks with self-finished steel by 2021: £3,500 Re-paint exterior of barn and an allowance for sundry repairs by 2024: £3,500
Works to implement small improvements for example	Re-paint exterior of barn and an allowance for sundry repairs - £3,000 Refurbish barn including timber repairs, partitioning, insulation, lining, solar lighting, roof covering, etc. - £40,000 Re-build both toilet blocks to make them both

	<p>accessible to the disabled and more pleasant - £22,000 (Includes extending water supply to suitable locations)</p> <p>Move the toilet facilities into one end of the barn and construct dedicated storage on the footprint of the existing - £16,500</p> <p>Construct a dedicated chemical toilet emptying point, as typically found on caravan sites, to make this activity less arduous - £4,000</p> <p>Add some paved areas in and around the facilities to make them more useable and easier to keep clean - £3-5,000</p>
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## 9 Legal Implications

- 9.1 Title of the campsite land and surrounding area was purchased by the Council on 4 February 1938. The conveyance contains restrictive covenants which will require further investigation and legal advice prior to any disposition of the land.
- 9.2 In addition, the campsite land and surrounding area is designated to be green belt land pursuant to a Deed dated 7 April 1942. The Deed limits the use of the land and details consents which are required for any disposal of this land.
- 9.3 Planning permission will be required to change the use of the land. Building on the land is limited by its designation as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

## 10 Human Resource Implications

- 10.1 There are no Human Resource implications arising from this report.

## 11 Conclusion

- 11.1 As reported previously, there are challenges and costs associated with continuing with the operation of the campsite in its current or a refurbished format.
- 11.2 The consultation that took place in November/ December 2019 comprised of an online survey eliciting 459 responses, two focus groups utilising 25 members of the citizens' panel and 5 in depth stakeholder interviews.
- 11.3 The preferred options for the use of the campsite in rank order were:
- 1) Option B – a campsite for the public with basic facilities 79%
  - 2) Option A – a refurbished campsite for the public 44%
  - 3) Option C – a campsite for schools and scouts only 41%
  - 4) Option D – A campsite for forest school education 30%
  - 5) Option E – No campsite 15%
- 11.4 There is strong public support for the continuation for public camping at Chantry Wood, and the appeal of the basic facilities was highlighted.
- 11.5 Previous users (165 out of 225) indicated that they would be willing to pay a higher fee.
- 11.6 210 respondents consider that it currently offers value for money and indicated high satisfaction levels with the current provision.

- 11.7 Respondents were in principle supportive of the proposal to use this area for a forest school but were concerned about the loss of private camping. There continues to be a limited understanding of what a forest school is by the public.
- 11.8 Respondents to the consultation also raised concerns about potential impact on the Chantry Wood bluebell habitat and traffic on the local roads that would limit commercial potential of the site.
- 11.9 Further detailed discussions with Forest School operators have not yet taken place, as the potential constraints resulting from the public consultation will need to be included in the discussions. Feedback received indicates that it is unlikely that Forest School Operators would consider it viable to operate public camping provision.
- 11.10 In any future scenario the Council may require the introduction of rules or restrictions to the use of the site for example to comply with safety regulations or to limit impact on the environment and other site users.
- 11.11 Given all the feedback and further analysis it is recommended that public camping continues to be provided at Chantry Wood camp site with increased fees being introduced.

## **12 Background Papers**

Executive reports considered on 8 January 2019 and 7 March 2019.

## **13 Appendices**

Appendix 1: Chantry Wood Campsite Consultation

Appendix 2: Chantry Wood Campsite Consultation (More information)