

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Report

Committee:	Culture and Communities Select Committee
Date:	12 July 2022
Title:	Proposals to adjust access to, and pricing for, the Enda Ryan Poppy Pods at Tile Barn Outdoor Centre
Report From:	Director of Culture, Communities and Business Services

Contact name: Alistair Palmer, Head of Hampshire Outdoor Centres

Tel: 03707 798717

Email: Alistair.palmer@hants.gov.uk

Purpose of this Report

1. The purpose of this report is to seek a member decision on proposals to adjust access & pricing arrangements for military personnel and their families to the Enda Ryan Poppy Pods at Tile Barn Outdoor Centre.

Recommendation

That the Culture and Communities Select Committee recommend to the Executive Member for Recreation, Heritage and Rural Affairs that he approves the following recommendation:

2. That, following a recent consultation exercise, the Executive Member for Recreation, Heritage and Rural Affairs approves a revised approach to access and pricing for the Enda Ryan Poppy Pods at Tile Barn Outdoor Centre in accordance with Option 1 identified in paragraph 17 in this report. The revised approach will take effect from 1st September 2022.

Executive Summary

3. This report seeks to demonstrate the need, and to recommend a preferred option, for changes to the access and pricing arrangements for the Enda Ryan Poppy Pods at Tile Barn Outdoor Centre, to enable the Centre to achieve its SP23 saving targets and support the Centre for future revenue growth and investment.

Contextual information

4. The “Poppy Pod Village” was built in 2016 with funding from the Armed Forces Community Covenant Fund (AFCC £250,000), Hampshire County Council (HCC £86,000) and the Brockenhurst branch of the Royal British Legion (RBL £50,000). The Pod Village comprises of 20 pods each sleeping four persons and a central wooden roundhouse communal area, the facility has proven to be extremely popular since opening. Up to January 2021, there had been over 3500 member registrations to the scheme and military personnel and their families have enjoyed over 21,000 bed nights at an equivalent commercial value of £341,250.
5. Currently, registered military personnel/veterans and their families have exclusive access to use the facility at weekends and school holidays. The all-year-round price for a Pod stay is limited to a small booking administration fee of £30 a weekend and £60 a week. During term time, the Pods are used by schools and youth groups taking part in outdoor educational residential programmes at the Centre. The current 2022 cost to school users for using the facility is £16.38 per person or £65.52 for a pod with 4 occupants.
6. In July 2021 the Council carried out the Serving Hampshire – Balancing the Budget consultation regarding all Council services including the Hampshire Outdoor Centres – further details can be found at: <https://www.hants.gov.uk/aboutthecouncil/haveyoursay/consultations/balancing-the-budget> . The information which accompanied the Serving Hampshire - Balancing the Budget consultation identified that changes are required to secure the future financial sustainability of the Hampshire Outdoor Centres including Tile Barn Outdoor Centre. The Serving Hampshire Consultation provides the framework to support a consultation on the proposals which took place in March 2022.
7. In November 2021, the County Council agreed a package of savings proposals to be met by April 2023 (SP23) including a proposal to save £385,000 from the Hampshire Outdoor Centres of which £40,000 relates to the Enda Ryan Poppy Pods at Tile Barn Outdoor Centre. The Centre is therefore required to operate in a financially sustainable way, meeting enhanced revenue targets whilst maintaining facilities such as the Poppy Pods for future users. This approach is in line with comments received during the Serving Hampshire Consultation – Balancing the Budget Consultation, regarding the need for income generating services such as Tile Barn to become cost neutral, and in due course contribute to financially supporting other key HCC services.
8. The Centre performs regular maintenance works on the Pods and has recently invested £29,000 in a new solid resin floor for the Roundhouse. Further planned works include new porches for the Pods at an estimated cost of £15,000. The Centre has recently invested in a new online booking

system to improve the booking journey for Pod Members and other users of the Centre.

Finance

9. Tile Barn's SP23 Targets include a net revenue target of £40,000 from the Poppy Pods. It is anticipated that this revenue target will contribute to the future investment requirements of the Pod facility.
10. It is anticipated that the proposed access and pricing arrangements will generate between c£45k to £60k revenue in 2023 based on 70% utilisation. Actuals will depend on the breakdown of officer & non-officer bookings and non-military use.
11. The current actual income generated by the Poppy Pods (with a current utilisation rate of c85%) is £16k to £20k per annum.

Consultation

12. The Centre consulted 7,500 of registered users of the Poppy Pods on its proposals for the revised arrangements, identifying the following aims:
 - To enable all Tile Barn customers to access the Poppy Pod facility throughout the year, including military and non-military customers.
 - To secure the financial sustainability of the centre by maximising income from available assets which will support on-going maintenance and investment in the future.
 - To develop a means-tested approach to maintain access for low-income military personnel and their families.
13. In summary, the consultation proposed nearly equal access to the Poppy Pods for the public save that there would be two military-only weekends (targeted at respite for physically and mentally disabled personnel and military personnel on low income) and a one-month priority booking window for military personnel. The discount payment scheme for military personnel was proposed although the level was initially 25% reducing to 15% from 1 April 2023 (not differentiating military rank). See Appendix A for a copy of the original consultation document.
14. The Centre received 116 responses to that consultation. It has been assessed that 44 of these responses were negative to the proposals, 60 neutral and 12 positive. A summary of the consultation feedback is available in Appendix B.

15. The Centre shared the consultation paper with the Armed Forces Community Covenant and attempted to engage a dialogue on several occasions but did not receive a response.
16. Responses to the consultation provided the Centre with useful feedback and a range of opinions on the proposed arrangements. The consultation illustrated that many people have very strong aspirations to maintain military family access to the Pods in-line with the original concepts. Many people also acknowledged that these facilities need to be operated on a sustainable financial footing, enabling future investment. The Centre considered all the responses carefully and produced revised proposals in response to the views expressed, Option 1 below.

Options

17. The options for decision arising from the consultation are:

Option 1 - To implement the proposals as amended following the consultation as detailed in Appendix D (where identified as Option 1 or relating to Option 1).

Option 2 - To implement the original proposals as set out in the consultation documentation in Appendix A.

Option 3 - To seek alternative additional funding from the original funders to maintain operation of the Poppy Pods with the current access arrangements.

Option 4 - To continue with the current access arrangements, without additional funding.

18. The preferred route is **Option 1** under which the original proposals consulted upon have been adjusted to include:
 - Public access to nearly half of term-time weekends and the majority of, if not all, available school holidays.
 - A 2-month early priority booking window for military giving access to all dates across the year when the Pods are open.
 - A minimum of two 'military- only' free weekends specifically targeted at respite for physically and mentally disabled personnel and military personnel on low income.
 - Phased introduction of charges to military starting with 65% off the public price between 1st September 2022 to 31st December 2022. From 1st Jan 2023, officers will receive 25% discount and non-officers 50%.

The Centre has risk assessed the revised proposals and included mitigation measures. A full analysis can be seen in the exempt Appendix C (not publicly available).

19. If the recommendations are agreed, a review of the new Pod access arrangements will take place during Autumn 2023. The review will also focus on utilisation levels, pricing and customer discounts to ensure the financial viability of the Poppy Pods moving forward. The Poppy Pod Members will be consulted if there are any significant amendments proposed to the arrangements.

Equalities

20. A full equality impact assessment (EIA 160) has been undertaken. The proposals to adjust access and charges to the Enda Ryan Poppy Pods at Tile Barn Outdoor Centre have considered the impact on customers with protected characteristics. The EIA identified largely neutral or positive impacts for non-military customers, as the proposals will increase access to the facility, and for military customers as two 'military-only' free weekends will be specifically targeted at respite for physically and mentally disabled personnel and military personnel on low income. There will be a low negative impact for military families in poverty. The revised proposals take account of this impact and aim to mitigate to some extent the impact of increased financial costs by providing a minimum of two free weekends to military personnel on low income (as referenced above). Access for this will be means tested. Non officers will also receive a 50% discount off the public price.

Conclusion

21. The Centre's view is that adjustments are required to the access and pricing arrangements for military families using the Poppy Pods. The revised proposals ensure Tile Barn Outdoor Centre can continue operating the Pods in a sustainable manner, whilst retaining significant elements and benefits to military personnel and their families.

REQUIRED CORPORATE AND LEGAL INFORMATION:

Links to the Strategic Plan

Hampshire maintains strong and sustainable economic growth and prosperity:	yes
People in Hampshire live safe, healthy and independent lives:	yes
People in Hampshire enjoy a rich and diverse environment:	yes
People in Hampshire enjoy being part of strong, inclusive communities:	yes

Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents

The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)

Document

Location

None

EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT:

1. Equality Duty

The County Council has a duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 ('the Act') to have due regard in the exercise of its functions to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by or under the Act with regard to the protected characteristics as set out in section 4 of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation);
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation) and those who do not share it;
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (see above) and persons who do not share it.

Due regard in this context involves having due regard in particular to:

- The need to remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic;
- Take steps to meet the needs of persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it;
- Encourage persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

2. Equalities Impact Assessment:

A full Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) has been completed in relation to these proposals.

The proposals to adjust access and charges to the Enda Ryan Poppy Pods at Tile Barn Outdoor Centre have considered the impact on customers with protected characteristics. The EIA identified largely neutral or positive impacts for non-military customers, as the proposals will increase access to the facility, and for military customers as two 'military- only' free weekends will be specifically targeted at respite for physically and mentally disabled personnel and military personnel on low income. There will be a low negative impact for military families in poverty. The revised proposals take account of this impact and aim to mitigate to some extent the impact of increased financial costs by providing a minimum of two free weekends to military personnel on low income

(as referenced above). Access for this will be means tested. Non officers will also receive a 50% discount off the public price.