

Surrey Heath Borough Council

Executive

20 September 2022

Support for social inclusion charity in Surrey Heath

Portfolio Holder:	Cllr Rebecca Jennings-Evans
Strategic Director/Head of Service	Nick Steevens
Report Author:	Sue McCubbin Recreation and Leisure Services Manager
Key Decision:	No
Date Portfolio Holder signed off the report	26 August 2022
Wards Affected:	St Michaels/All

Summary and purpose

To grant a lease for the Men's Sheds to use the London Road Recreation ground Pavilion to set up a Men's Sheds for Surrey Heath. to allow them to establish a group for Surrey Heath support the creation of a Surrey Heath Men's Sheds group which is a charity that addresses loneliness in the community by creating a hub for people to meet to undertake practical tasks together rather than in isolation. The group would like to enter into a five year lease arrangement with Surrey Heath Borough Council to make use of the London Road Recreation Ground Pavilion to create a local group to support residents. There is no group currently operating in the borough.

Recommendation

The Executive is advised to RESOLVE that the Council enters into a lease arrangement with the Men's Sheds registered charity group applying a community rent subsidy as outlined within the report to support establishing and delivering their services;

1. Background and Supporting Information

- 1.1 Men's Sheds is a recognised charity (<https://menssheds.org.uk/>) Men's Sheds (or Sheds) are similar to garden sheds – a place to pursue practical interests at leisure, to practice skills and enjoy making and mending. The difference is that garden sheds and their activities are often solitary in nature while Men's Sheds are the opposite. They're about social connections and friendship building, sharing skills and knowledge, and of course a lot of laughter.
- 1.2 Sheds are whatever the members (or Sheddors as they are called) want them to be. Although labelled sheds, they often aren't sheds at all. They can be

empty offices, portable cabin's, warehouses, garages, and in at least one case, a disused mortuary. Some Sheds are purpose built workshops, but they rarely start out that way. Many don't have premises at all in the beginning and instead form a group that meets regularly for the social connection, company and camaraderie until they can find somewhere to kit out with tools. Many Sheds get involved in community projects too – restoring village features, helping maintain parks and green spaces, and building things for schools, libraries and individuals in need.

- 1.3 Activities in Sheds vary greatly, but you can usually find woodworking, metalworking, repairing and restoring, electronics, model buildings or even car building in a typical Shed. Sheds typically attract older men, but many have younger members and women too. Whatever the activity, the essence of a Shed is not a building, but the connections and relationships between its members.
- 1.4 The London Road Recreation Ground Pavilion is an empty community facility that has been dormant for a number of years other than use for odd event such as theatre in the park. It is no longer used as a club house or for showers and changing. It is in a central location and benefits from being in a park that activities that the group could consider offering have a broader spectrum of possibilities.
- 1.5 The Pavilion has been advertised for lease or hire on a number of occasions over the years and whilst initial interest has been shown the building has then ultimately been deemed as not suitable for each and every interest.

2. Reasons for Recommendation

- 2.1 The objective of the charity is to promote social inclusion for the public benefit by acting to reduce social exclusion of people, it is a charity which is recognised as benefiting vulnerable adults. Surrey Heath does not have this specific offer within the borough currently.
- 2.2 Men's Sheds have committed to making the interior of the pavilion fit for their purpose, with any changes being subject to consent from the authority, which will see internal improvements and removal of redundant pipework, decorating, electrical upgrades, heating upgrades and decommissioning old showers as part of the work that their members will undertake. This not only makes the premises fit for their purpose but improves the standard of the current pavilion.
- 2.3 This pavilion has been empty and a target for vandalism over the years so having a group operating out of the pavilion will bring a presence not only to the pavilion but to that side of the park.

3. Proposal and Alternative Options

- 3.1 The Surrey Heath Men's Sheds group are looking for larger more suitable premises but are very keen to start the group as soon as possible, the pavilion

will suit their initial needs until they can identify a larger facility as the group becomes established and needs new premises.

- 3.2 The pavilion may be of interest to other providers so we could advertise the opportunity on the open market to determine whether there is any other commercial or non-commercial demand for the building.
- 3.3 The facility could be mothballed, however this has the potential to attract more ASB/vandalism which would lead to further deterioration of the property and potentially increased costs for security and repairs.

4. Contribution to the Council's Five Year Strategy

- 4.1 The Council's five year strategy suggests that by working with the voluntary sector that more can be achieved by working together. This would be an opportunity to demonstrate that that by supporting this charity to become established in the borough that the policy is being applied in practice.
- 4.2 Granting of this lease supporting the Health & Quality of Life and the Effective & Responsive Council 5 Year Strategy objectives

5. Resource Implications

- 5.1 Commercial rental for this property has been valued at £3495 per annum. It has been empty for a number of years (10+) with no demand for a lease, only occasional use.
- 5.2 The proposal to support the charity would be for the charity to receive a community rent subsidy to reduce the commercial rent to a level that supports the charity to get an established operational group for Surrey Heath.
- 5.3 Due to the improvements to the facility that the Men's shed would deliver and working in partnership with the charity it is proposed that a two year rent free period be applied. It is usual to provide rent free periods where the tenant is undertaking works at its expense.
- 5.4 Following the two year rent free period the commercial rental would be payable for the premises but we will apply a rent subsidy while a community use is ongoing. The implications of which are a 90% rent subsidy be applied for year 3 (£350), 85% rent subsidy Year 4 (£525) and an 80% rent subsidy be applied year 5 (£700)
- 5.5 As a charity the Men's Sheds will be eligible for Business Rate relief however they would need to apply independently for that relief.
- 5.6 The proposal sees the Men's Sheds be responsible for 100% of utility costs.
- 5.7 Internal cost implications would be for legal to agree the lease and an ongoing landlord/tenant relationship.

- 5.8 The Council retains discretion to remove the commercial rent subsidy in the event that the premises are no longer used for community use (but not the rent free period because this is given due to the tenant's works to improve the premises)

6. Section 151 Officer Comments:

- 6.1 The financial implications are outlined in the report above.

7. Legal and Governance Issues

- 7.1 The Lease will be prepared by legal services and contain provisions to reflect the heads of terms agreed with Men's Sheds and other provisions appropriate for a community lease

8. Monitoring Officer Comments:

- 8.1 Although approval to grant community leases is delegated to the Head of Legal and Democratic Services, the delegation provides for discretion to refer such leases to the Executive for approval. Given the heads of terms provide for incremental decreases in rent reduction and some internal refurbishment of the building, the Head of Legal and Democratic Services considers Executive approval would be appropriate.

9. Other Considerations and Impacts

Environment and Climate Change

- 9.1 Men's Sheds work locally with local groups and schools to deliver projects. For example trees felled as part of the Esso pipeline project have been given to the Men's Sheds to build benches that will then be put back onto SHBC sites post completion of the pipeline works.
- 9.2 This charity works responsibly to enable environmental improvements giving back to the local community,

Equalities and Human Rights

- 9.3 The members of this group, called Shedders, can be all ages and whilst the charity is called Men in Sheds is open for females as well as males. Everyone is welcome.

Risk Management

- 9.4 No matters arising.

Community Engagement

9.5 The mere nature of this charity is that it embeds itself in the local community in delivering projects, increasing membership and most importantly reducing social exclusion.

Annexes

None

Background Papers

Community rent subsidy paper from the Men's Sheds charity