

Birchden Wood Visitor Facilities

Introduction

Birchden Wood is a Forestry Commission site adjacent to Harrison's Rocks, a natural sandstone feature, owned by the British Mountaineering Council (BMC).

Birchden Wood's dense white barked birch woodland is a result of the storm of 1987 which blew down much of the commercially planted conifers. The birches seen here today have regenerated from the natural seed bank and the woodland is an important feature of the local landscape.

Harrison's Rocks is one of a few climbing areas in the South of England. Although it is a separate site to Birchden Wood, the toilet, simple camping area and car park at Birchden are an important facility for climbers who travel to spend a day or two at Harrison's. The forest is also popular with walkers, cyclists and young families who make use of its easy access trail and enjoy the interpretation and sculptures.

Current facilities and managerial arrangements

The car park, campsite and toilet block at Birchden are leased from the Forestry Commission by Sport England (SE) who have a funding agreement with the BMC to manage and maintain them. The facilities are used by climbers and visitors to the forest.

The agreement between the Forestry Commission, Sport England and the British Mountaineering Council expires in November 2014. The Forestry Commission are not currently resourced to manage the facilities and unless a viable alternative is forthcoming, it is most likely the toilets and campsite will close.

Online Discussion

An online discussion was held between the 2nd of December and the 25th of January 2014 where stakeholders in the forest discussed views and ideas.

The general consensus from the discussion, most strongly voiced by users of Harrison's Rocks, was that it was important to keep the toilet block, camping area and car park open. There was strong support for a community group to take over the management of the facilities as a solution as well as interest from other organisations. There was an understanding from participants in the discussion, that a charge for use of the facilities may have to be implemented to support the management of the facilities, but any development should be kept low key.

The main points from the discussion have been used to develop some of the aims and objectives to be addressed in a submitted expression of interest. While the discussion is now closed it can still be viewed online along with a discussion summary by following links on the Birchden Wood webpage. www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/INFD-8ZUF6X

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Expression of Interest

We would like to invite expressions of interest from organisations able to enter into a lease agreement with the Forestry Commission, to take on the management and maintenance of the visitor facilities at Birchden Wood. Our objective with the Expression of Interest (EOI) exercise is to find a partner who we can work with to seek a sustainable way to keep the visitor facilities open.

Expressions of interest would need to demonstrate this and address the aims and objectives outlined in the application template.

Tenancy Process

- The Forestry Commission are looking to offer a lease with flexible terms at a peppercorn rent.
- The Forestry Commission expects to offer a minimum lease term of three years to support the inward investment made to the facilities. The precise term of the lease will be flexible to accommodate the needs of both parties, and will include a mutual break clause to cater for the unexpected. Additional lease terms will be developed to meet the needs of the parties and the facilities"
- We do not undertake to accept the highest priced offer for the lease of the facilities.
- We reserve the right to cancel or withdraw from the process at any stage.

If you are interested in submitting an expression of interest, please complete the Application Template below.

Things you should know

1. This Expression of Interest refers to the toilet block, camping area and car park at Birchden Wood, Groombridge Sussex. OS Grid Reference TQ533 363. A map with the area shaded in green and outlined is provided in **Appendix 1**.
2. There is currently no income generated from the use of the toilet, campsite or car park and no infrastructure in place to do so.
3. Any organisation managing the facilities at Birchden Wood needs to comply with the standards set out in **Appendix 2**.
4. An estimated break down of costs for maintaining the visitor facilities can be viewed in **Appendix 3**. These are based on similar sites throughout the Public Forest Estate.
5. Organisations submitting an EOI, and proposing any site developments, should make their own investigations regarding planning restrictions. The Forestry Commission recognises that some development may be required in order to sustain management of the facilities but this should be low level and in keeping with the surroundings.

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Example developments

Acceptable proposals	Unacceptable proposals
Introduction of car park charges at a reasonable tariff, with concessions for locals	New buildings
Operation of mobile catering, beverage and ice cream outlet	Expansion of the car park
Re-organising campsite	Introduction of new attractions/activities

6. The FC was the world's first State Forest Service to gain full Forestry Stewardship Council accreditation. The FC have achieved ISO 14001 (Environmental Management System) and in light of these the FC strives to source merchandise that is appropriate to location and the organisation's sustainability ethos. The FC also manages its waste, energy, transport and way of operating in accordance with ISO14001 and expects its business partners to operate and co-operate with this policy.

Expression of Interest Application

Please type your answers into the boxes below or, if answering the questions on a separate sheet or document, ensure you answer all questions and number your answers accordingly.

A The Site (The area where the visitor facilities are situated. Outlined in Appendix 1)	
A1	Please explain how you would propose to achieve the site aim: To manage the site respectful of the natural environment and for the quiet enjoyment of visitors to Birchden Wood
A2	Please explain how you would deliver the following site objectives: - To keep the site tidy and presentable and of a good standard for visitors to Birchden Wood - To work with the Forestry Commission to ensure safe use of the site (For example if high winds force closure of the site or forest operations are taking place) - To keep site development to a minimum

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B The Toilet Block	
B1	Please explain how you would achieve the aim: To practically manage and maintain the toilet block for public use and ensure it is secure, clean and fit for purpose
B2	Please explain how you would achieve the following objectives: - To keep the toilet block open to the public between the 1 st of March and the 31 st of October. Please outline the times the toilet would be open and closed. - To keep the toilet block managed and maintained to the standards outlined in Appendix 2 and to an agreed maintenance schedule.

C The Camping Area. If you do not have specific proposals for the camping area, this does not prevent you submitting an EOI	
C1	Please explain how you would achieve the aim: To manage the camping area and visitors using the facility. Please outline any charging policy and how you would collect fees.
C2	Please explain how you would deliver the objective: - To provide information to campers regarding use of the camping area and manage non compliance.

D The Car Park. If you do not have specific proposals for the CP, this does not prevent you submitting an EOI	
D1	Please explain how you would deliver the aim: To ensure the car park is available for use by visitors to Birchden Wood and Harrison's Rocks throughout the year. Please outline any charging policy and how you would collect fees.

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E Working with visitors and the local community	
E1	Please explain how you would achieve the aim: To ensure a good level of service is provided to visitors to Birchden Wood
E2	Please explain how you would deliver the objectives: - To ensure new activity on site has minimal negative impact on the local community - To manage complaints and ensure issues are addressed within an acceptable time scale. - To provide accountability and transparency in the service you provide
E3	What is your contingency plan for the facilities should your organisation be unable to continue to manage the facilities within the agreement period?

F Finance. If there are shortfall's in funding this should not restrict you submitting a EOI	
F1	Please explain how you would achieve the aim: To secure a viable and sustainable way to keep the visitor facilities open at 0 or low cost.
F2	Please explain how you would deliver the objectives: - To cover the costs of managing and maintaining the site's visitor facilities. - To sustain management and maintenance

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G Please provide us with two references		
G1	Reference 1 Organisation name:	
	Contact name, phone number and email	
	Brief explanation of relevance to Birchden Wood / facilities management. Max 150 words	
	Reference 2 Organisation name:	
	Contact name, phone number and email	
	Brief description relevance to Birchden Wood / facilities management. Max 150 words	

H Insurance	
H1	Please confirm you have or will have the appropriate level of insurance. Evidence of this will be required before any lease is offered.

I Organisation Details		
	Question	Your Answer
I1	Full name of organisation, business or sole trader	
I2	Contact details (Name, Phone, Mobile, email)	

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I Organisation Details		
	Question	Your Answer
13	Company or charity registration number if applicable.	
14	Length of time your organisation has been operating.	

Declaration

I declare that to the best of my knowledge the answers submitted in this Expression of Interest are correct. I understand that the information will be used in the process to assess my organisation's suitability to be invited to tender and I am signing on behalf of my organisation. I understand that the Forestry Commission may reject this Expression of Interest if I have failed to answer all relevant questions fully, or if I provide false or misleading information.

Name:

Date:

Signature:

Capacity or Title:

For and on behalf of:

Return your completed form before 12 noon on Friday 21st of March 2014 to:

Victoria Tustian,
Project Co-ordinator Harnessing the Energy of the Community,
Forestry Commission, East of England Office, Santon Downham, Suffolk, IP27 0TJ

| T: 01223 775102 | M: 07867 461792 |
| E: victoria.tustian@forestry.gsi.gov.uk |

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Application Evaluation Process & Weightings

Our objective with the Expression of Interest exercise is to find a partner who we can work with to seek a sustainable way to keep the visitor facilities open.

We will evaluate your application using the evaluation matrix below.

To ensure the relative importance of the aims and objectives is correctly reflected in the overall scores, a weighting system has been applied.

Some questions are pass/fail and are fundamental requirements of the process. If you do not answer any one of these questions appropriately, we may reject your submission in full and not evaluate any further questions.

Title	Weight	Agreed Marking Criteria
A The Site	10%	<p>Weighted Questions</p> <p>0 = No response or totally inadequate No response or inadequate response.</p> <p>1 = Major Reservations / Constraints The response simply states that the applicant can meet some of the requirements set out in the question or statement of requirements, but have not given information or detail on how they will do this.</p> <p>2 = Some Reservations / Constraints The applicant has provided some information about how they propose to meet most of the requirements as set out in the question or statement of requirements. There is some doubt in their ability to consistently meet the full range of requirements.</p> <p>3 = Fully Compliant The applicant has provided detailed information covering all elements of the question, detailing how they propose to meet all the requirements as set out in the question or statement of requirements. This gives full confidence in their ability to consistently meet the full range of our requirements.</p> <p>4 = Exceeds Requirements The applicant meets the required standard in all respects and exceeds some or all of the major requirements, which in turn leads to added value.</p>
B The Toilet Block	30%	
C The Camping Area	5%	
D The Car Park	10%	
E Working with visitors and the local community	15%	
F Finance	30%	

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G References	Pass / Fail	Please provide details of two referees
H Insurances	Pass / Fail	You must either confirm that you have the following levels of insurance in place for each and every claim rather than on an aggregate basis or, alternatively, undertake that should you be awarded a lease such levels of insurance will be available to you and that you undertake to maintain these levels of insurance for the duration of the contract.
I Organisational details	Pass / Fail	Please provide all details requested

Questions or queries

Please contact:

Victoria Tustian, Project Co-ordinator Harnessing the Energy of the Community
Forestry Commission, East of England Office, Santon Downham, Suffolk, IP27 0TJ

T: 01223 775102 | M: 07867 461792

E: victoria.tustian@forestry.gsi.gov.uk

Closing date

Before 12 noon on Friday 21st of March 2014

Next steps

We will confirm we have received your EOI and will contact you by Friday the 28th of March 2014 to let you know of our decision.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Map indicating area where visitor facilities are located

Map (Separate pdf)

Appendix 2 Standards

Standards that must be met for a public toilet and car park include:

- 1 – Building and car park must be formally inspected at least once per annum (copies of inspection reports should be made available upon request). Any defects or hazards recorded and dealt with accordingly in a timely manner.
- 2 - Tenants should comply with all clauses stated within the Lease.
- 3 – A Building Manager must be easily contactable at all times for any emergency repairs reported by general public.
- 4 – Only Contractors with appropriate qualifications, experience and insurance for the works they are undertaking shall be used.
- 5 – Buildings should, as far as is reasonably practicable, meet current Building Regulations standards. Of particular relevance to public toilets are: Part B (Fire Safety), Part G (sanitation, hot water and water efficiency, see also Water Supply Regulations 2010), Part H (drainage and waste disposal, see also item 9), Part M (Access, see also Equality Act) and Part P (Electrical Safety).
- 6 – Health and Safety guidance on: Risk Assessment, Welfare Facilities and CDM Regulations.
- 7 – Only FSC or PEFC timber should be used for any repairs or alterations.
- 8 – Any alterations to the building or car park should be agreed with the Landlord in writing prior to commencement of any works.
- 9 – Environment Agency discharge exemption conditions must be adhered to (limit of 2m³ per day currently, monitored via water meter readings on peak usage days). Pollution incidents should be dealt with in under 24hours.
- 10 – Waste disposal duty-of-care legal obligations must be met, ie a copy of waste carrier's license, showing waste that can be transported and waste transfer notes/season tickets for all collections.
- 11 – A current copy (updated annually) of the FC Environmental Policy should be displayed at premises and implemented by the Tenant so far as is reasonably practicable.
- 12 – The Building and Car Park must be kept in a condition that is fit for purpose at all times. If an issue arises, they must be closed to the general public immediately until they have been returned to a fit state.

Appendix 3 Estimated Costs

The following costs are based on similar sites throughout the Public Forest Estate.

Maintenance Costs

Annual costs for the maintenance of the facilities are estimated at £4,900.

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#	Item	Frequency (yr)	Unit Cost (£)	Annual Cost (£/yr)
1	Electrical Installation Condition Report	5	3000	600
2	Plumbing	1	500	500
3	Sewerage	0.25	200	800
4	Carpentry/roofing/painting	1	1000	1000
5	Car park/pot holes/storm drains	2	2000	1000
6	Water bills	1	300	300
7	Electric bills	1	300	300
8	Litter Collection	0.25	100	400
	TOTAL PER ANNUM AVERAGE			4900

Cleaning costs

To clean the toilets daily during the peak season (March to October) can cost between £5-6,000. In addition most toilet facilities require a number of deep clean sessions through out the year, after vandalism or before the toilets re-open each season, which cost, on average, £500 per session.