

The Forestry Commission's proposed café and toilet building development at Jeskyns Community Woodland

Q&A

Last updated: 20th October 2012

Document Audience

This document is a public facing document intended for Forestry Commission staff, and members of the public.

Background

Jeskyns Community Woodland was opened to the public in 2007 and now welcomes 1000's of visitors a year.

In 2012 the Government asked the Forestry Commission to improve its efficiency. Therefore in spring 2012 we held a public consultation to ask our visitors and stakeholders how we could manage Jeskyns with less central government funding.

The overwhelming response was that we should focus on generating income from the site and the most popular method of achieving this was to create a café facility on site.

Therefore a planning application for a modest café and toilet development at Jeskyns is due to be submitted to Gravesham Borough Council in October 2012.

This document seeks to answer a range of questions about the proposed scheme.

1. Is there real public support for this project?

Yes. Since opening in 2007 we have been inundated with requests from visitors via emails, letters and completed visitor satisfaction questionnaires to provide catering and toilet facilities on site. This is supported by feedback from the recent public consultation, in which a café development was rated as the most popular of the five suggested income generating schemes.

Jeskyns Public Consultation Feedback Q&A

2. What are the benefits of providing a café?

Apart from providing a great place for a hot cuppa and a chat with a fellow visitor, we anticipate that the café will also generate a modest rental income. This income will enable us to supply and maintain a public toilet facility on site and will also contribute towards the costs of the general upkeep and maintenance of Jeskyns.

Since opening to the public in 2007, we have had many requests to provide toilet facilities on site. By providing toilets, Jeskyns will be made more accessible to a wider range of visitors including families with young children, the elderly, the disabled and organised school and uniformed groups.

3. Where will it be located?

The proposed location is approximately 100m south of the existing car park (see attached map). This location has been chosen because:

- It is easily accessible to the widest range of visitors.
- It has minimal visual impact from the road, upon neighbouring landowners and the wider parts of site.
- It takes advantage of the natural view point.
- It accommodates the numerous services running in and around the car park area including a high pressure gas main and overhead and underground power lines.
- It allows for easy service vehicle access and utility connections from Henhurst Road.

4. What will it look like?

The building and the landscaping plan around it have been designed by a team experienced in preparing similar schemes in sensitive landscapes. This will ensure that the proposals fit well within Jeskyns and are suited to the countryside setting. The building will be timber clad to further reinforce the rural and wooded nature of the site using either Sweet Chestnut or Western Red Cedar from sustainable sources.

The proposed design is a single storey building with a mono-pitch dark brown or slate grey roof. The building will measure 18.3 metres in length by 4.3 metres wide and 4 metres high and will have a hard standing area for external seating.

It will have two unisex all accessible WC's fitted to one end of it (see attached drawing for further details).

5. Who will run the cafe?

Jeskyns Public Consultation Feedback Q&A

To help support the local economy and to maintain local distinctiveness, the café will be run by a private company. The enterprise which will provide the café service will be procured through an open and fair process to secure a financially sound business model and excellent customer service.

Public sector procurement is governed by the UK Regulations that implement the EU Procurement Directives.

We will happily accept any informal expressions of interest and will pass on details of the procurement exercise once they become available.

6. I thought the government purse was empty - how is the build being paid for?

We believe that the initial upfront cost to build this café is a worthy investment to provide a regular long term income. This type of annual revenue will help make Jeskyns more financially sustainable and secure into the future.

7. Is this not just "over commercialisation" of Jeskyns?

We are very proud of what we have achieved to date at Jeskyns and know that many of our regular visitors also love it just the way it is. We know that the new café build presents a significant change.

However we do not believe that change and development equates to over-commercialisation when it is undertaken in a measured, careful and sensitive way.

The cafe building has been designed so that it is sensitive to the landscape and has been sited close to the car park to minimise impact upon the wider parts of site. The tenant will be carefully selected to ensure that the refreshment provided meets the Forestry Commission food standard which is "food that is locally distinctive, freshly prepared, safe, healthy and good to eat."

We firmly believe that the creation of this café with its associated toilet facility will enhance the experience of many visitors as well as allow access to a wider range of potential visitors.

8. Why build this café when there are plenty of other café's in the area?

We are aware that there are café facilities at other neighbouring green space sites, however regular feedback from visitors and from the public consultation in particular has demonstrated that there is a real demand for this type of facility at Jeskyns.

Jeskyns is a busy and popular Forestry Commission woodland. In our experience of managing many other woodland sites with refreshment facilities across England, we believe that Jeskyns is capable of supporting a viable café business. We will work hard to maintain distinctiveness of our overall "offer" to minimise competition.

9. How long before we are likely to start seeing things happening "on the ground"?

Our proposals are subject to the Town and Country Planning Act, and we must submit a formal planning application to Gravesham Borough Council. We anticipate this application will be sent in October 2012. If approval follows we would hope to start construction in the early part of 2013, with proposed completion sometime in the spring of 2013.

10. How will you manage the inevitable increase in litter across site that comes with a café?

The potential increase for litter is a valid concern raised by many respondents to the public consultation. In an effort to address this issue we will:

- Ensure that a condition of the café business tenancy agreement includes management of site litter within a certain radius of the café.
- Continue to undertake regular litter patrols across the rest of site using in house staff, volunteers and the Community Payback Team.

11. What sort of food will be served?

The basic nature of the café facility itself lends itself to the preparation and selling of a simple menu of hot and cold foods. The particulars of the menu will need to be agreed in partnership with the successful caterer, however it will be a requirement of the tenancy agreement that the caterer pays due consideration to the Forestry Commission food offer policy which is as follows:

"When it comes to catering provision on Forestry Commission sites, we aim to provide food that is locally distinctive with freshly prepared food that is safe, healthy and most importantly good to eat. We aim to deliver this through menu choices that respond to a whole range of visitors to our woodlands."

12. What other income generating opportunities will the Forestry Commission be investigating alongside the café proposal?

Five income generating schemes were suggested as part of the public consultation.

Next to the café proposals, the proposal to raise income from the existing farm buildings was also a popular option. We have therefore now entered into a tenancy agreement with a local farmer for one of the farm buildings and this will bring in a modest income.

However, the income from the leasing of a farm building and proposed cafe will not be enough alone to meet the required savings.

Another proposal is the introduction of car parking charges. From our own experience and that of our green space neighbours, we know that parking charges could likely provide the sort of regular income that could underwrite many of the costs involved in running a site like Jeskyns.

Whilst the introduction of parking charges was not the most popular income generating scheme amongst the consultation respondents, many did comment that they would find them acceptable so long as the following three conditions could be met:

- an affordable annual pass would be made available for regular visitors;
- the charges would be sensitive to visit length and frequency;
- issues surrounding likely inconsiderate parking outside of site to avoid charges could be addressed.

We are very much aware of the fact that there is more work and consultation needed surrounding the proposal for parking charges. We plan to start undertaking this in the early part of 2013.

We will also continue to explore opportunities to reduce services and site management operations whilst still maintaining Jeskyns to its current high standards.

Jeskyns Public Consultation Feedback Q&A

13. If I want to comment upon the proposal who should I speak to?

We would welcome any comments, suggestions ideas or support that you may have. Please feel free to contact us directly.

We would also encourage everyone to review our planning application once it is submitted, and direct any comments through the Planning Department at Gravesham Borough Council. We understand that our planning application will be dealt with in the same way as any other application.

14. How can I be kept informed or keep in contact?

All respondents to the original consultation who provided their contact details will be kept informed via email and postal updates. Progress and information notices will also continue to be posted on site and on the Jeskyns website.

To be added to this distribution list, interested parties should contact the Jeskyns team via the contact details below.

Contact:

Email: jeskynsranger@forestry.gsi.gov.uk

Web: www.forestry.gsi.gov.uk/jeskyns

Tel: 01474 825118