

Subject:	Foredown Tower		
Date of Meeting:	16 September 2008		
Report of:	Director of Cultural Services		
Contact Officer:	Name:	Janita Bagshawe	Tel: 292840
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Key Decision:	No	Forward Plan No.	
Wards Affected:	Portslade North and Hangleton & Knoll		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE/ EXEMPTIONS

1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

- 1.1 This report sets out the progress made since the Culture, Recreation and Tourism Committee, at its meeting of 6 January 2008, asked officers to investigate Foredown Tower's future and potential ownership through consultation with local and regional stakeholders. These investigations were to include the potential for the building to be a gateway to the proposed South Downs National Park and an examination of how the Tower's marketing strategy could be improved to increase visitor numbers as well as better promotion of the Tower's educational facilities.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- (1) To keep the Tower open until October 2009 on the current public opening times.
- (2) To make an application to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for a Your Heritage grant to mark the 100th anniversary of the Tower in 2009.
- (3) To instruct the Director of Cultural Services and Director of Finance and Resources to enter into discussions and negotiations with Hove and Adur Sea Cadets for a full repairing 25 year lease on a peppercorn rent for the Tower for community usage, in order to provide new opportunities for young people in Portslade and to ensure the long term future of the Tower as a community facility.
- (4) To instruct that the lease agreement includes clauses that will ensure camera obscura demonstrations, educational opportunities for schools and opportunities for the use of the Tower by other community and interest groups including the Astronomers, as well as the caveat that the Cadets cannot use the Tower for band practice.

3. RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION/CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS:

- 3.1 Under the previous administrative arrangements, the Culture Recreation and Tourism Committee at its meeting on 16 January 2008 instructed officers to examine options for the future of the Tower and consider improvements to the Tower's marketing and better promotion of the educational facilities.

- 3.2 Following this decision, a cross departmental officer working group was established and an independent destination and marketing analysts Blue Sail (with experience of countryside attractions) was appointed to support the officer group in working through the options that Members requested were investigated.
- 3.3 At its meeting of 19 June 2008 the Culture Tourism and Enterprise Scrutiny Committee resolved that a special meeting of the scrutiny committee should take place prior to the Cabinet Member Meeting on 10 September 2008.

3.4 Marketing Improvements

- 3.4.1 The analysis of the Tower's visitor offer by Blue Sail concluded that its themes of downland, weather and astronomy did not provide a coherent joined up experience for visitors and that it had not kept pace with changing customer expectations. The camera obscura, its principal attraction, was rare but weather dependent and with limited appeal in a *high tec* age.
- 3.4.2 Based on its analysis of the Tower's visitor offer, Blue Sail concluded that significant funds would be required to improve the visitor experience and marketing spend, in addition to the funds that are required to maintain the fabric and address the Disability Discrimination Act ("DDA") issues. The size and setting of the building would always limit the scale and nature of its operation as a visitor attraction. Even with investment, the Tower would be a niche market attraction competing with a range of visitor attractions within the City and beyond.

3.5 Better Promotion of Educational Facilities at the Tower

- 3.5.1 Consultation was carried out by the officer group with schools that have used the Tower. Those consulted felt that the Tower needed work to make the site safe and secure and accessible to all and to develop more opportunities for effective learning. The current educational facilities were limited; there was a lack of hands on opportunities and disability access was an issue. Significant investment would be required to make it more appealing and relevant to schools.
- 3.5.2 The Blue Sail analysis of the Tower's current education offer was that its curriculum links were limited, it lacked basic facilities expected on school visits that the classroom facility was too small for mainstream classes and there was significant competition from attractions across Sussex. The adjacent wildlife site had little to offer and had no clear links with the Tower. It concluded that in terms of the educational market there was a poor product, fit and fierce competition.
- 3.5.3 Blue Sail also analysed the potential of promoting the existing educational offer to untapped niche markets for example, photography and art students, and concluded that the return on numbers would be very small and to achieve this small return, new specialist marketing would be required.
- 3.5.4 Discussions with a corporate business about developing an exhibition to support curriculum work on sustainable energy, the teaching of optics and other related science topics were held. However, the Tower was not viewed as sufficiently suitable to make it a destination for the geographical range of schools that the business required and that access also needed improvement.

3.5.5 There were also discussions with the business about using the Tower as a location for an exhibition to promote sustainable energy for the general public. However, the location, the size of the building, footfall and lack of infrastructure did not meet their requirements.

3.6 Access to the Downs

3.6.1 A future South Downs National Park may offer future opportunities for the Tower as an access point. The main organisations (National Trust, South Downs Joint Committee and Sussex Wildlife Trust etc) with an interest in the National Park are keen that access to the Downs is promoted through this end of the City. However these organisations are not in a position to take on the running of a visitor centre in this location but are willing to support promotion of walks from this access point and in other ways provided there is a fit with their strategic plans.

3.6.2 Foredown provides an access point to the Downs for the west of the city, whilst the main access point or gateway is likely to be Stanmer Park.

3.6.3 For this to be successful there would be a need for investment in the Tower, and surrounding highway infrastructure.

3.7 Community Use

3.7.1 Based on an options appraisal of the opportunities for the Tower, Blue Sail has made the recommendation that the Tower's main focus becomes a mixed use community facility for Brighton and Hove for access to the countryside and that Brighton & Hove City Council should explore the potential for the Tower's operation under community ownership.

3.7.2 The building could provide meeting, event and equipment storage for community groups, and facilities and equipment for group access onto the Downs. It could also provide improved 'pit stop' facilities for walkers and cyclists. It felt in particular that the Tower could be the access point to encourage hard to reach groups to use the Downs.

3.7.3 Alongside the Tower, Blue Sail felt that there was scope for developing a community farm, which could be considered separately from the Tower.

3.8 Hove and Adur Sea Cadets

3.8.1 Independently, the Council has received a very positive expression of interest from the Hove and Adur Sea Cadet unit for a lease on the Tower for use as a base, which has many elements in common with the Blue Sail recommendation of using the Tower for mixed community use. It is interested in establishing a new location for its main unit as part of an overall strategy of the Marine Society and Sea Cadets to extend service provision for young people. There is already a successful Sea Cadet division in Hove and a new Junior Division opening in September at Benfield School in Portslade for 10-12 year olds. The Tower would be the base for its programme for young people (12-18 years).

3.8.2 The Sea Cadets allow young people to have fun and adventure whilst at the same time learning life-skills in leadership and citizenship. There is the opportunity to obtain

nationally and internationally recognised qualifications in a wide range of activities including Duke of Edinburgh, Royal Yacht Association Sailing, BCU Canoeing and BTEC.

3.8.3 The Unit is also interested in developing a diverse range of other functions for the Tower engaging with other community groups to ensure that the use of the building is maximised. These uses include:

- Providing space for community/society hirings
- Providing space for the evening meetings of the Astronomy group/course
- Developing links with schools to provide training/learning opportunities on map reading, meteorology etc
- Offering the training programme of the sea cadets to other youth organisations by arrangement
- Establishing a catering facility that would be available to walkers and other users of the Downs
- Running a small sales outlet
- Running special events that would attract the public
- Retaining the Camera Obscura for demonstration to pre booked parties and also to arrange some general public access times at weekends on pre determined dates
- Developing links with key organisations that are interested in the Tower as a stepping off point for the Downs. For example, Sussex Downs Joint Committee in terms of information about walks etc from the Downs.

3.8.4 The Hove and Adur Sea Cadet unit is also keen to make use of any existing volunteers and interested parties in the preservation of the Tower and where possible, incorporate them on to a sub-committee to help manage the Tower.

3.8.5 The management of the Tower by the Hove and Adur Sea Cadets presents a strong fit with the recommendations of Blue Sail (community use), at the same time as minimising the Council resources that would be required at the development stage to reduce planning risk and ensure the right type of partnership vehicle evolves. The Tower would be used regularly throughout the year by the Unit and also would maintain its current functions. It would achieve the aspiration of providing an access point to the South Downs and increase the community involvement with the Tower and its future.

3.9 Management of the Tower by Other Organisations

3.9.1 Officers were asked to investigate whether University of Sussex, University of Brighton, the National Trust, South Downs Joint Committee, Sussex Wildlife Trust or the Landmark Trust would be interested in managing the Tower. The National Trust, Sussex Wildlife Trust and the South Downs Joint Committee are keen to encourage the use of Foredown Tower as an access point to the Downs, but would not be interested in taking on the running of it. The Landmark Trust rescues threatened historical sites and converts them as places to stay. This option was considered but not pursued as it would take the building out of Council ownership, investment from the Council could be expected and the camera obscura would need relocating. The Universities have not expressed an interest in taking on the building, though may support, for example, the Astronomy group.

3.10 Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF)

3.10.1 2009 is the Tower's centenary and the Heritage Lottery Fund has said it would be willing to take an application for the Your Heritage Grant Programme for a programme to mark the event. It will be an opportunity to stage an exciting range of exhibitions, workshops and other activities to celebrate the Tower's heritage.

3.11 Building improvements

3.11.1 The officer group updated the costs of building repairs for the Tower and "DDA" works. The cost of repairs has been estimated at £91,500 over a five-year period. Improvements to access are estimated at £133,000.

3.12 Foredown Tower Admissions

3.12.1 The admissions for the Tower have increased this year following the coverage in the local press. From April to August 2008 there have been 1839 admissions and £1697 income compared to 647 admissions and £1095 income for the same period in 2007-08.

4. CONSULTATION:

4.1 Stakeholder consultation included the National Trust, South Downs Joint Committee and Sussex Wildlife Trust as part of the Blue Sail destination marketing analysis. The options summarised in the report have been informed by this consultation. Comments received about the future of Foredown Tower have been taken into account in the report by Blue Sail.

4.2 Internal consultation included council officers in Environment, Children, Families and Schools and Strategy and Finance as part of the options development process by Blue Sail.

4.3. The Culture & Tourism & Enterprise Scrutiny Committee considered this report at its special meeting on 10th September. As this report has gone to print prior to that meeting taking place the views of the Scrutiny Committee will be made known at the Cabinet Member Meeting.

5. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

5.1 Financial Implications:

5.1.1 In 2008/09 the budget relating to Foredown Tower, within the Royal Pavilion & Museums division is approximately £38k. The amount for maintenance and office costs amounts to approximately £6k. With required repairs costs to the building estimated at £91k and DDA at £133k, the service is clearly not capable of meeting these costs, especially when competing demands for the authority's capital and planned maintenance resources are so fierce.

5.1.2 The recommendation of a full repairing lease (at peppercorn rent) would save the authority the repair costs quoted above, and additionally would provide a small revenue saving.

[Peter Francis, Accountant 28.08.08]

5.2 Legal Implications:

5.2.1 This potential project is at an early stage. The next step would be to agree detailed Heads of Terms of the proposed Lease and any linked partnership documentation, along the lines referred to in recommendations (3) and (4).

[Bob Bruce, Principal Solicitor 02.09.08]

5.3 Equalities Implications:

The Tower is not DDA compliant.

The recommendations in the report could potentially open up the use of the Tower to different users and provide new opportunities for young people in the area.

The recruitment policy of the Hove and Adur Sea Cadet unit is to recruit from all backgrounds regardless of race and religion. Subscription rates are kept as low as possible to be affordable for families on low income or unemployed.

5.4 Sustainability Implications:

5.4.1 The Tower is not considered sustainable as a visitor attraction in its current form.

5.4.2 Paragraph 6.2 of this report refers to a specific option relating to exhibition space promoting sustainable energy.

5.5 Crime & Disorder Implications:

There are no direct crime & disorder implications.

5.6 Risk & Opportunity Management Implications:

These have been integrated into the main text of the report, particularly at 3.8 and section 6.

5.7 Corporate / Citywide Implications:

See financial implications at 5.1 and section 7.

6. EVALUATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTION(S):

6.1 Status quo

To maintain the status quo, there is need for considerable investment in the building for which the Council would need to identify and allocate funding for a low return on its investment.

6.2 Develop the Tower as a centre to show case sustainable energy for the public

The business looking for a location for exhibition space for sustainable energy felt that the Tower did not currently offer sufficient space, transport infrastructure, parking or footfall to be of viable interest to them.

6.3 Develop the Tower to support science and art curriculum

The view of Blue Sail and the corporate business was that investment would be required to do this and that even with investment and development of a product that has a strong

national curriculum fit, the location and the restriction of the building would still make it difficult to attract a significant number of schools in a highly competitive market.

6.4 Develop the Tower as a mixed-use community facility

As detailed by Blue Sail. This option will require considerable Council resources at the development stage to reduce planning risk and ensure the right type of partnership vehicle evolved. It will require a lead group to come forward to manage the Tower as a mixed-use community facility. The community farm option would need to fit with the Local Development Framework and would require land to be put over to this use. There may be a risk in this option that the building wouldn't lend itself to the variety of uses that will make it viable.

7.REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS:

7.1 The Hove and Adur Sea Cadets are part of a long established organisation dating back 60 years. They are interested in a long-term lease, which would be necessary to attract external funding from grants and trust giving bodies. They have an excellent track record in fundraising. The unit is ready to start on negotiations immediately if the recommendation to lease the Tower to the unit is agreed. This recommendation would minimise the financial risk of running the Tower to the Council. An important community facility, in particular meeting the needs of young people, would be developed for Portslade. The building itself largely fits with the requirements of the unit. The current 'niche market' uses of the Tower would be maintained eg camera obscura, educational and astronomy and new uses would be developed. An important part of Portslade's heritage would be maintained and an access point to the South Downs with improved facilities, such as catering, could be provided.

7.2 The proposition put forward by the Hove and Adur Sea Cadets has elements in common with the recommendations of Blue Sail: the use of the Tower as a community facility for community groups, access point for the Downs and provision of facilities for walkers.

7.3 The Tower to remain open under current arrangements for 2009 to provide a lead in period for the negotiations on a lease and also for handover of management arrangements. It will also provide the opportunity to put on a series of celebrations (pending funding from HLF) to mark the 100th anniversary of the Tower and the start of a new era in its history.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendix

1. Blue Sail Report

