



HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL CONSULTATION

Proposals to adjust access and charges to the Enda Ryan Poppy Pods at Tile Barn Outdoor Centre

March 2022

Introduction

The Council is carrying out this consultation with military personnel and their families who currently access the Enda Ryan Poppy Pods at Tile Barn Outdoor Centre near Brockenhurst, Hampshire. This facility is owned and operated by Hampshire County Council (HCC). As part of the consultation, we will seek views on the proposals from all interested stakeholders including the Armed Forces Community Covenant Fund (AFCCF), Ministry of Defence (MOD), Royal British Legion (RBL) Brockenhurst branch and members of the military community who have access to use the facility.

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.

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.

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 (see Appendix B). The Serving Hampshire Consultation provides the framework to support this consultation on proposals which are set out below.

1.0 Proposals

- 1.1 To enable all Tile Barn customers to access the Poppy Pod facility throughout the year, including military and non-military customers.
- 1.2 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.
- 1.3 To develop a means-tested approach to maintain access for low-income military personnel and their families.

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2.0 What are the details of these proposals and why are they needed?

2.1 Tile Barn Outdoor Centre's mission is to enhance access to all its outdoor education and recreational facilities, which includes the Poppy Pods. This means that the Centre is proposing to open-up access to the Poppy Pods for non-military users of the Centre alongside military families during weekends and holiday periods. The Centre proposes that military families will be offered a priority booking window for one month before the Pods go on general sale. This will ensure military families have first refusal for popular holiday periods.

2.2 The Poppy Pod facility was established in 2016 by grant funding from the AFCC, HCC and the RBL. Since then, HCC and the Centre have maintained and developed this facility for service users within its revenue budget. 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.

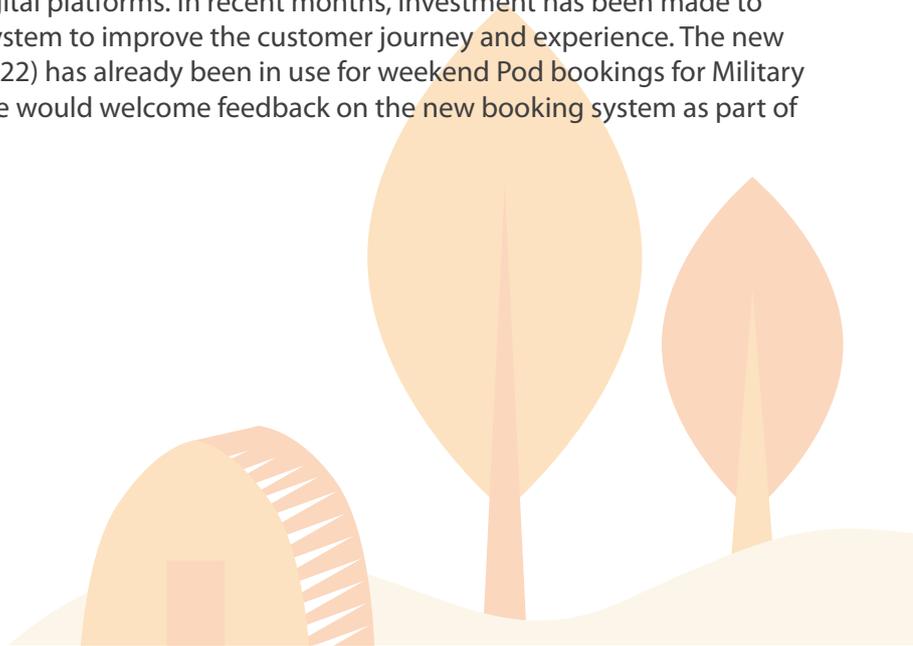
2.3 Some of the financial support Tile Barn receives from HCC will be removed in April 2023 and the Centre is required to operate in a financially sustainable way, meeting enhanced revenue targets whilst maintaining facilities such as the Poppy Pods for future users. This approach is in line with comments 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.

2.4 The Centre also proposes that the current booking fee would be replaced by a discount payment scheme, where a discount code will be provided to military families enabling reduced prices based on the public rate. Proposed pricing can be seen in **Appendix B**.

2.5 The Centre recognises that these proposals may place an increased financial burden on some military personnel. The Centre therefore proposes to phase the introduction of charges over the next 12 months by offering an enhanced discount of 25% off the standard publicised rate for both peak and off-peak periods in 2022, reducing to a standard military discount of 15% from 1st April 2023.

2.6 One of the original purposes of the Pods was to provide "a facility where Armed Forces personnel and their families can come together and share support" (2014 AFCC Grant Application). The Centre proposes advertising at least two military-only weekends per year, specifically targeted at respite for physically and mentally disabled personnel and families and those on low-incomes. Access for these weekends would be 100% free and allocated on a means-tested basis. We propose to engage with current military charities (i.e Blesma, RBL and MOD unit welfare officers) to develop a system which enables this to happen.

2.7 The Serving Hampshire – Balancing the Budget Consultation identified that improved end-to-end customer-friendly journeys could be achieved through digital platforms. In recent months, investment has been made to update the Centre's website and Pod booking system to improve the customer journey and experience. The new online booking portal (introduced in January 2022) has already been in use for weekend Pod bookings for Military families during March and April 2022. The Centre would welcome feedback on the new booking system as part of this consultation.



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3.0 What are the expected impacts that this will have on the Armed Forces Families and its current arrangements with the Centre?

| Current arrangements | Proposed arrangements |
|--|--|
| <p>3.1 Provision of current military family bookings</p> <p><i>The current arrangements are that members of the full time serving military or veteran military personnel once registered have full and complete access to stay in all 20 Poppy Pods with their family during all weekends or school holiday weeks between March and October each year.</i></p> <p><i>The cost to the family is a £15 booking fee per pod/per night. Total cost of a stay for a family of 4 for a weekend is £30 or for a 4-night week £60. Larger families can still access the pods but would have to book 2 adjacent pods thus doubling the cost.</i></p> <p><i>This access arrangement has been in place since 2019 when we changed from an annual membership fee system. At this time the military families paid an annual membership fee and had free access to the pods once a member. This led to large numbers of cancellations of pods mostly at last minute meaning we had an underutilised facility.</i></p> | <p>a) Except for the provision of military-only weekends (see item (b) below), all customers of Tile Barn Outdoor Centre, both military and non-military, will have equal opportunity (subject to the priority booking window referenced in item (c) below) to book a stay in the Pods during weekends and school holidays periods, subject to when the facility is open.</p> <p>b) The centre would advertise a minimum of two 'military- only' free weekends specifically targeted at respite for physically and mentally disabled personnel and those on low income. We envisage engaging with current military charities (i.e Blesma, RBL and MOD unit welfare officers) to refer suitable families and administer their stay with the centre.</p> <p>c) Military families will also be offered a priority booking window for one month before the Pods go on general sale. This will ensure military families have first refusal for popular holiday periods.</p> <p>d) The current booking fee would be replaced by a discount payment scheme, where a discount code will be provided to military families enabling reduced prices based on the public rate. Please see item (e) below and Appendix B for details.</p> |
| <p>3.2 Military discounts</p> <p><i>The current arrangements are that members of the full time serving military or veteran military personnel once registered pay a £15 booking fee per pod/per night.</i></p> <p><i>This is a 77% discount based on our current public rate of £65 per pod per night in the peak period. The discount equates to 62.5% in the low season when the current public rate is £40 per pod.</i></p> | <p>e) The Centre proposes to introduce a military discount code providing a 25% discount from the public rate for both peak and off-peak periods during 2022, reducing to 15% discount from 1st April 2023. Proposed pricing can be seen in Appendix B.</p> <p>f) The Centre would continue to advertise at least two military only free weekends. Please see item (b) above.</p> |
| <p>3.3 School and youth group bookings</p> <p><i>Schools and youth groups can currently book the pods during term time Monday-Friday for outdoor educational experiences in the New Forest in line with the service mission.</i></p> <p><i>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 (prices INC VAT).</i></p> <p><i>"We strive to improve the lives of our customers and deliver a safe, highly valued, cost effective and quality focused service through the provision of accessible outdoor education and recreational facilities."</i></p> | <p>g) The Centre does not anticipate altering the access arrangements for these user groups however the pods may be used by schools and youth groups at weekends and school holidays if there is availability.</p> |

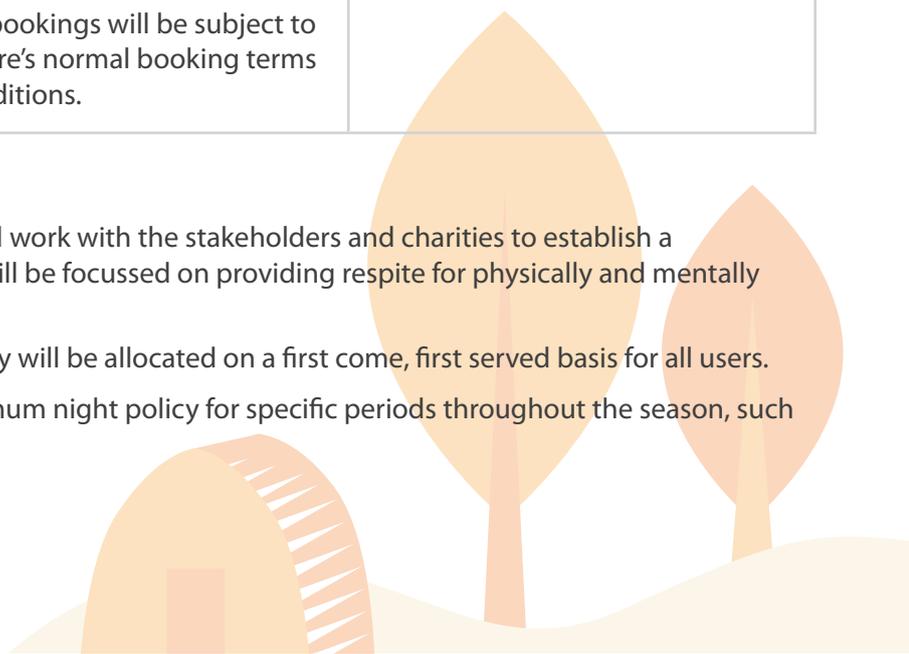
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| <p>3.4 Stakeholder use</p> <p><i>The centre supports the local branch of the RBL with free facility use at tile Barn during the local Anzac commemoration event held on the last Sunday in April. This includes use of the pod roundhouse area and the Anzac room of the Bunkhouse building.</i></p> <p><i>This is largely organised and supported by the Brockenhurst branch of the RBL.</i></p> | <p>h) The Centre proposes to continue offering this support to the RBL and will liaise with them around their access needs.</p> |
|--|---|

4.0 Summary of proposed Poppy Pod customer journey

| Stage 1: Military personnel register with the Poppy Pod scheme | Stage 2: Pod bookings & availability | Stage 3: Military mailing list |
|--|--|--|
| <p>Military personnel and families register for the Poppy Pod scheme on the Centre’s website.</p> <p>The Centre will then verify applicant military credentials and email a discount code for members to use when booking a Poppy Pod.</p> | <p>One month before the pods go on general sale, the Centre will open an early booking window for military members. The Centre will communicate this to members by email.</p> <p>All customers will book pods directly through the Centre’s website. Customers will be able to request specific pods and the Centre will accommodate this if possible.</p> <p>Pod availability will be in real time and payment will be taken at the time of booking.</p> <p>Military families will be able to use their discount code at the checkout stage.</p> <p>All pod bookings will be subject to the Centre’s normal booking terms and conditions.</p> | <p>Registered military users of the Poppy Pod scheme will be emailed with updates and information on when the military only weekends dates become available.</p> |

5.0 Other key points

- 5.1. If the proposals are adopted, the Centre will work with the stakeholders and charities to establish a mechanism for military only weekends. These will be focussed on providing respite for physically and mentally affected personnel and those on low incomes.
- 5.2 If the proposals are adopted, Pod availability will be allocated on a first come, first served basis for all users.
- 5.3 The Centre will continue to operate a minimum night policy for specific periods throughout the season, such as bank holidays.



6.0 Next steps

Thank you for reading through the above information. You are invited to give your views on the proposals. Your views will be considered before a decision on the proposals is made. You can submit your views by completing our online form or by emailing the Centre.

[CLICK HERE TO COMPLETE OUR ONLINE FORM](#)

[CLICK HERE TO GET IN TOUCH BY EMAIL](#)

Important: This consultation is open from Monday 28 March 2022 to Sunday 1 May 2022.

Privacy notice

Hampshire County Council is seeking your views and comments to inform its approach on operations at Tile Barn Outdoor Centre. The information you provide in this response form is being collected for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest in the exercise of official authority vested in the County Council, and for reasons of substantial public interest.

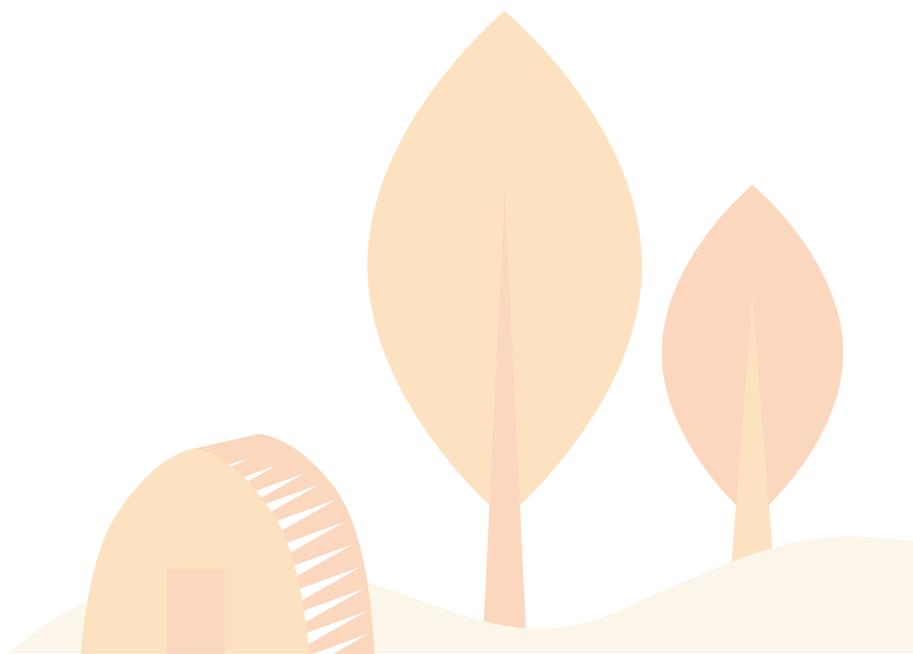
We will use the information to understand what people think about the perceived impact of the potential options. All data will remain within the UK/EEA or (European Economic Area) and will only be shared with third parties where they are undertaking data processing on behalf of Hampshire County Council.

We will keep your personal information securely for two years, after which it will be deleted or destroyed. You have some legal rights in respect of the personal information we collect from you.

Please see our Data Protection page (www.hants.gov.uk/aboutthecouncil/strategiesplansandpolicies/dataprotection) for further details.

You can contact the County Council's Data Protection Officer at data.protection@hants.gov.uk.

If you have a concern about the way we are collecting or using your personal data, you should raise your concern with us in the first instance or directly to the Information Commissioner's Office at <https://ico.org.uk/concerns/>.



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Appendix A - Comments relating to Hampshire Outdoor Centres in the Serving Hampshire – Balancing the Budget consultation

The following statements are comments from people who contributed to the Serving Hampshire – Balancing the Budget consultation which relate to Tile Barn Outdoor Centre and directly or indirectly the Poppy Pod village.

Do you have any further ideas on how the County Council could generate additional income?

- Charge market rates where appropriate
- Could additional (paid for) services be provided to generate income and provide valuable experiences for young people, especially when we already have great facilities like Calshot.

Please describe what, if any, impact the County Council's options for balancing its budget could have on you (or your organisation or group).

- Decrease of job security. Increase in household costs (council tax etc). Loss of outdoor activity centres. Deterioration of road network.
- I feel the outdoor activity centres are important for character development of young people.
- Personal finances have been stretched over the last year and continue to be. Introducing charges for things such as outdoor areas would make us unlikely to go as a family due to cost, which would be a shame for both our family's wellbeing and other small businesses within these places i.e. we are more likely to treat the children to a small treat from a café somewhere if we don't have to pay for car parking.
- For my family it would also be a great shame to let the Hampshire Outdoor Centres or Countryside Services decline as they provide an important outlet to nature and new experience for children/youth locally.
- With regard to the cuts to outdoor centres: This sounds like access by schools will be reduced, and only children/families that can pay will be able to utilise the facility (these are educational facilities - not holiday parks!).
- I disagree with any more money being spent on outdoor activities. It's non-statutory and a nice to have, therefore get rid of it from Council responsibilities, and the cost should be fully recovered by its users and not the public.
- Outdoor centres and parks are immensely important to our wellbeing and should be maintained.
- Countryside Service and Hampshire Outdoor Centres: We all know that easy access to greenspace and outdoor activities are so important to health and well-being of people of all ages and abilities. There should be free access to all residents to natural open green spaces and outdoor activities are crucial for many children and young people to explore and develop their self-confidence and spatial skills. I am sure that these services are more important than ever to most residents especially following the Covid-19 restrictions. I hope that open and free access will continue to all HCC owned countryside spaces and the outdoor centres can be used much more.

Do you have any further comments on how the County Council could balance its budget?

- Fees could be increased for things like outdoor activities and parking at the country parks.
- Please don't cut this area - a decent cultural sector, outdoor spaces, libraries etc. are so crucial for communities and wellbeing. The pandemic has truly highlighted this
- If the Outdoor Centres are a non-statutory service, why not consider ceasing to provide it altogether? There are other outdoor centre providers out there that are used by schools so, the sector would still be provided for.
- Hire of venues for weddings, camping, group sessions etc.
- Libraries should remain free; all other activities should be self-funding through attendee charges.
- Outdoor education centres should be cost-neutral if they are discretionary.
- I can only comment on the ones I use, which are parks and outdoor areas, archives and libraries and all fabulous.
- Run outdoor fitness and training classes at parks. More outdoor camping areas to hire.

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- Country Parks and outdoor areas are essential to the health and well-being of the nation as has been discovered during the pandemic.
- Outdoor space as we know is more vital than ever, do not make the mistake of putting it out if reach for all by introducing excessive charges.
- Country Parks and Outdoor Centres should offer more services/attractions and ways to spend money.
- We should be doing everything we can to keep libraries and outdoor areas accessible to all.
- Look at ways to generate more income from these services, eg) Outdoor and Library services.
- For a civilised society and an engaged creative population we need proper provision for leisure activities and cultural programmes. We need to keep up our parks, green spaces, libraries and theatres, as well as youth programmes and safe spaces for children to explore and grow
- Great idea to focus on driving revenue at Calshot. Getting the basics right such as an easy to find website and services would be helpful as the current digital offer is holding back opportunities.

Appendix B - Proposed military & public prices

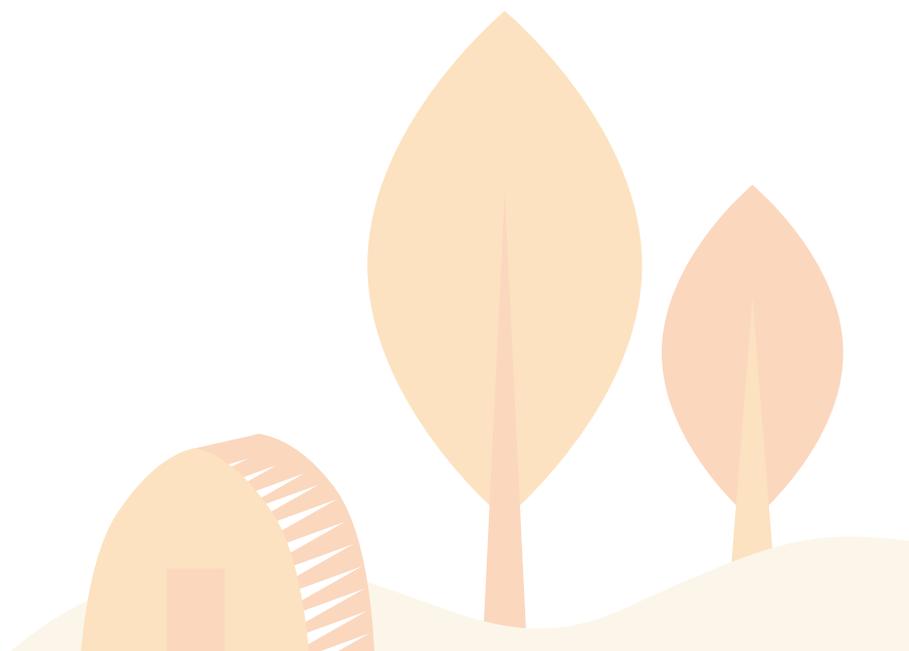
| | Current military price | Proposed military prices 2022 (25% discount) | 2022 Public price | Proposed 2023 military prices** (15% discount) |
|----------|------------------------|--|-------------------|--|
| Peak | £15.00 | £51.19 | £68.25 | £58.01** |
| Off peak | £15.00 | £31.50 | £42.00 | £35.70** |

Peak pricing: 1 May - 30 September

Off peak pricing: 1 October - 30 April

*All prices are including VAT at the appropriate rate.

** 2023 prices will be subject to a RPI increase.



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