

## Executive Summary

A parent's view of Forest School Camps:

There is something greater than the sum of the parts, something intangible. It's about the philosophy, history, rhythms and processes of FSC - how they encourage you to connect to something deeper. This ageless connection to the earth - it's all true. And I was a cynic.

It's a connection that feels timeless and vital. They love the rituals, the singing - shockingly - and the sense of passing on a way of being that brings out the best in people. FSC gives my cool, clever, lovely boys the space to breathe. To think. To dream. And that, in this increasingly connected world - where so much exciting, seductive stuff competes for their attention - is priceless.

Forest School Camps is a children's camping charity that celebrated its 70th birthday in 2017. It is an organisation run entirely by volunteers, whose tireless passion and dedication organise and deliver camping experiences for over a thousand children each year.

One of the work streams is an ongoing cycle of unpacking, maintaining, storing and subsequently repacking equipment ready for the camping seasons; Easter, Spring and Summer. This work is carried out at its stores site, owned by FSC, near the village of Haddenham in Cambridgeshire.

From a practical point of view, FSC relies on the stores operation to provide camps with working equipment. As well as this the volunteer process of unpacking, cleaning and maintaining the equipment embeds knowledge and skills within the organisation and fosters respect, care and appropriate operation of the equipment.

FSC has a high retention rate with most children choosing to train to become staff when they turn 18. 'Ex Pathfinder' training occurs at Haddenham where the young people are introduced to their new role and encouraged to share the volunteer responsibilities involved both on and off camp.

This vital work and training is now under threat as the condition of the buildings at Haddenham are in an extremely dilapidated state, making it difficult for the volunteers to carry out their work effectively and leading to a decline in numbers. Not only is the accommodation cramped, but the operation of the kitchen, the electrical installation, gas installation and heating are all significantly below an acceptable standard. Although temporary measures are

being taken to continue the operation these are costly and difficult for the volunteers to manage. Taken altogether these factors are an immediate and ongoing threat to the organisation which could potentially mean some or all of the camps are cancelled in the near future.

Going forward Forest School Camps wishes to plan for its long term future and recognises that a comfortable, functioning stores base is essential; in terms of meeting statutory and regulatory requirements, to be able to effectively attract volunteers and to effectively introduce new staff to support the organisation.



FSC has therefore commissioned this feasibility study, carried out by ZCD Architects, alongside wider consultation exercises, to fully understand the needs of the organisation, the operation at Haddenham and the likely capital investment required.

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To carry out the work, FSC formed a steering group to develop a brief for ZCD Architects and provide input and feedback for the feasibility study. Further input has been received from a Structural Engineers and a Quantity Surveyor; Blue Engineering and Morgan Carr Surveyors respectively.

The steering group has explored three options which will provide FSC with the necessary evidence to make a decision as to how to move forward and give potential funders confidence that appropriate investment is being made to secure the long-term future of the organisation.

In terms of the consultation exercise, FSC involved the wider organisation in broader thinking about the future of FSC in order to begin a process of full involvement in the project. The results of the consultation exercise will be presented separately and have helped inform this process as well as allow FSC to look beyond the site at Haddenham to potential other locations to house the stores operation.

The three options explored in this feasibility report are:

#### **Option 1: Do nothing**

#### **Option 2: The minimum rebuild with some repair and refurbishment to existing buildings**

#### **Option 3: Full rebuild to maximise site potential and operation.**

*An option for relocating is beyond the scope of this report, however the study provides accommodation and briefing information which could support a review of a potential site.*

The 'do nothing' **Option 1** which, even with the best efforts of the volunteers to make do with the facilities, risks the operation being closed down for Health and Safety and Environmental Health reasons. The current condition of the buildings are contributing to dwindling volunteer numbers. There are also unnecessary equipment replacement costs.

The other two options explore the opportunity to rebuild and/or make improvements to the buildings and landscape. Both are potentially viable solutions given that the planning authority has confirmed that through the site's continued use by FSC it has become an 'established use' for 'storage, maintenance and occasional camping'. The local authority will therefore support new build and refurbishment proposals required to continue the stores operation at Haddenham.

**Option 2** proposes the least amount of rebuild; one new 'Social Building' which would significantly improve the experience for volunteers (shown on adjacent page) and a new storage building which will be fit for purpose and

protect the equipment from damp, mould and the affects of inclement weather.

The refurbishment of the remaining buildings could provide improved facilities for the repair and maintenance of the equipment as well as providing more WCs, showers, changing spaces and washing and drying areas for equipment.

Option 2 has been given a preliminary budget cost, including fees of £1,325,000 (exc VAT)

A more extensive **option 3**, of full rebuild offers the following additional benefits:

- A potentially reduced phasing programme
- Greater external space in the centre of the site
- Reduction of VAT due to all new build work

Option 3 has been given a preliminary budget cost, including fees of £1,752,000 (exc VAT)

This report and the steering group recommend that FSC proceed with securing funding to develop the scheme within the scope of **Option 2**; refurbish and rebuild.

The result of this capital investment, will create long term benefits for the organisation:

- Adequate accommodation space
- Increased volunteer numbers from improved facilities
- A more efficient process which could give time to carry out other activities such as additional training
- More inclusive and accessible environment
- Reduction in running costs
- Reduction in damage and loss of equipment
- Removal of dangerous asbestos
- Improvement of working conditions
- A pleasant and flexible space to meet and relax
- Space to engage, enjoy and learn about tools and equipment
- Long term security and sustainability for FSC to continue provide the same camping experience for 1000s of children over future generations

If Option 2 is pursued it will be possible to begin the work on site within 12 months, although this will be subject to securing funding as well as approvals and other organisational work streams within FSC.



Impression of a potential new building on the site at Haddenham providing social, kitchen, dining and training facilities