

FOREDOWN TOWER

Appendix 3: Option Appraisal

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS	
<p>DESCRIPTION</p> <p>▶ Mixed use community facility incorporating meeting and event space and equipment storage for community groups, and facilities and equipment for group access onto the South Downs (with a focus on excluded groups). Scope for increasing allotment space and developing a community farm to operate alongside the Tower with some shared facilities and client groups. Improved 'pit stop', information and facilities for independent walkers and cyclists. Community management of the facility would be encouraged and the opportunity to pass the building into Community Ownership would be explored.</p>	
Strengths	Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong strategic fit • Good access onto the Downs • Active complimentary programmes within Council and partner agencies • Secure open space around tower • Links to wildlife site and allotments • Potential external funding streams • Community support to keep tower open • No reliance on competitive visitor market • In-principle partner support for option 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good working base for community groups • Established and equipped access point into the Downs for excluded groups – walking, cycling, riding etc. • Build stronger community links w. Tower • Develop and empower community management and ownership • More positive use of wildlife site land • Community engagement with producing own food • City-wide community farm resource for disabled groups • Improved facilities for current community users, groups and independent walkers & cyclists
Weaknesses	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to two floors of building need improving • Repairs and refurbishment necessary • Inadequate catering facilities • Building hot in summer, cold in winter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development/refurbishment costs too high • No external funding • Lack of community and partner engagement • Local objection to losing current visitor attraction • Lack of Political will and Officer capacity

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access road and car park rough and pot-holed • Limited parking spaces • Building layout and construction precludes significant re-design 	<p>within Council to deliver a success</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inability to secure ongoing funding
<p>STRATEGIC FIT</p> <p>This multi-use Option fits strategic objectives in 4 areas:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. For B&H Council it is an opportunity to turn what is currently a drain on resources with no obvious way of increasing visitor numbers and revenue without significant investment over a number of years into a useful and viable asset managed by the community. The building would remain open to the public and part of the landscape but with higher levels of use and stronger links to the surrounding countryside and local community than at present. 2. The Council has, through its “Downland Initiative”, strategic objectives to support and encourage greater access to the Downs for excluded groups within the City. Natural England, delivering DEFRA’s strategic objectives outlined in the report “Outdoors for All” are also engaged in encouraging countryside access for these groups. This feeds down into programmes delivered by the South Downs Joint Committee (and any future national park authority). <p>Wider access to the countryside for a wide range of people not currently active is also a growing part of the health agenda, with investment in “Health Walks” programmes and access initiatives to assist in recovery from mental health problems.</p> 3. The Government have introduced a number of policies aimed at empowering local communities and have made them the central aim of the recent Local Government White Paper. This includes actions to enable Councils to more easily transfer the ownership of Council owned assets to Community Groups, the development of Community Land Trusts and encouragement for social enterprises or Community Interest Companies to manage and deliver local services. 4. There is increasing public interest in sourcing local produce with a reliable provenance and in growing their own food. This is illustrated in the rise in demand for allotments and the growth of community led farm projects. There are a number of different approaches to developing and running Community Farms – good examples are the Swansea Community Farm, Stroud Community Agriculture, and in Brighton itself, the Care Co-op Community Farm at Stanmer Park. <p>The wildlife site and allotments attached to the Tower are in council ownership and the adjoining farmland is owned by the Council and leased to tenants. The opportunity exists to draw together the elements of the Tower and its immediate garden area, the wildlife site and allotments and the immediately adjacent farmland into a mixed use community development that combines a base for community groups, a “stepping-off” point for access to the Downs for excluded groups, and a community farm that provides a facility for disability and mental health groups to work with their clients, and an opportunity for the local community to get involved in producing their own food.</p> <p>Adopting a multi-use approach to Foredown Tower and its surrounding land would create the opportunity to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develop a range of income streams from services using the Tower and Wildlife 	

site's facilities and services;

- bid for grant funding designed to support access and community farm projects;
- engage the local community in the management and future of the Tower and wildlife site;
- create ongoing working partnerships with partner agencies (e.g. South Downs Joint Committee, National Trust, Primary Care Trust);
- establish a long term base for excluded groups to gain access to the countryside

Big Lottery funds have recently been allocated to "Changing Spaces", a national environmental programme focusing on three priority areas – community spaces, local community enterprise and access to the natural environment. It will invest around £200 million in environmental projects across England in partnership with other organisations including Groundwork, Natural England, the Association of Wildlife Trusts and Mind who are managing the programmes.

PLANNING AND HIGHWAY

The most pressing issue is the repair and refurbishment of the Towers interior spaces to make them accessible to all, more comfortable, and better equipped to house community facilities. This will need to be done for whatever option is pursued for the Tower's future if it is to remain open to the public. Despite its heritage and architectural quality the Tower is not a listed building so internal improvement will not be caught in regulation.

There is likely to be the need to develop ancillary facilities for equipment storage if this Option is pursued. Given the proximity of the Tower and wildlife site to both the AONB and local housing care will have to be taken in the design, placement and scale of any additional buildings to avoid compromising the amenity of the Downs or the environment for local residents. Early discussions with planners should take place to establish what would be acceptable on the site.

There may be the potential to include some residential development in a brief that includes both the Tower and wildlife site to offset development costs and receive some planning gain. The close proximity of the AONB (and potential National Park) boundary is likely to preclude any significant residential development, but the potential should be explored as a means of funding the community elements of the Option.

While this Option is unlikely to generate any significant increase in traffic movements there is likely to be the need to improve the access road to the Tower and to increase the size of the parking facilities. Lighting the road is likely to be resisted on the grounds of light pollution, but an improved surface, a moderate increase in parking space and the provision of a turning circle for cars and mini-buses would be necessary to improve vehicular access.

The provision of good access into the Downs for disabled visitors, and particularly wheelchair users, is likely to require some upgrading of the track running north into the countryside. There are many examples of best practice in providing accessible surfaces in the countryside that do not compromise the amenity value of the area and these techniques should be employed.

SITE USERS AND BENEFICIARIES

A mixed use development would provide facilities for a range of different beneficiaries:

- Disability and mental health groups using the countryside access and community farm facilities.

- Community groups using the Tower as a base or meeting/event space.
- Local residents using the allotments and community farm.
- Brighton and Hove residents using the Tower as a start point for walking and cycling in the Downs

SYNERGIES

The “Strategic Fit” section above identifies the synergies available through this option in policy terms. In terms of service provision the synergies are through:

- Working with the South Downs Joint Committee (and future National Park Authority), the National Trust, the Primary Care Trust and the Council’s own Social Services clients to provide a facility to enable access to the Downs for disabled, mental health and socially excluded groups.
- To work with those agencies already providing a service in the City to increase the capacity for access for excluded groups to gardening and food production.
- To work with local residents to provide a first class base for their community groups to meet, hold events etc.
- To offer local residents the opportunity to get closely involved in the production and consumption of their own produce with the attendant benefits to health and well-being.
- Working with local and national companies to develop their Corporate Social Responsibility role by offering ways to engage with the facility through work parties, staff secondment or sponsorship.

COMPETITORS

Early discussions would be essential with those agencies currently providing community facilities in the Portslade area to ensure that development at the Tower would not compromise their position.

The same goes for Care Co-ops who run the Stanmer Community Farm, and other community food groups in Brighton and Hove to ensure that any initiative at the Tower would be complementary rather than threatening.

SUSTAINABILITY ANALYSIS

Visitor Impact	Industry Impact	Community Impact	Environment Impact
<p>Loss of visitor attraction to City – but very little used at present with no sign of increasing demand.</p> <p>New development offering benefits to new user groups</p>	<p>Danger of displacing trade for existing agencies/facilities</p>	<p>Slight increase in traffic and some new build possible- need to manage opening times to avoid negative impact and design and site any development to retain amenity and residents privacy</p>	<p>Retention of historic building for public use. Possible new buildings – need to retain amenity value.</p> <p>Small increase in visitor numbers to Downs – marginal impact on footpaths. Community Farm more bio-diverse than commercial agriculture.</p>

RESOURCE ANALYSIS		
Funds	People	Timeline
Potential funding from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Groups • Service Users • Grant Funding • Sponsorship • Sale of Produce 	There would be two phases that required adequate staffing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Development Phase - consultation, planning and delivery of project primarily from internal Council resources and a stakeholder working group. - The Management Phase – the running and managed growth of the facility primarily from community and third sector resources. 	To Dec 2008 – discuss with community and potential partners – scope scale and shape of development; set up working party; produce fully costed business plan. To March 2009 – submit bids to funding agencies, secure partner funds in 2009/10 budgets Summer 2009 – start work on site
<p>DEVELOPER AND INVESTOR MATCH</p> <p>Brief initial discussions with partners (potential South Downs Joint Committee, National Trust, Sussex Wildlife Trust, Child Trust) suggest they are willing to work further on the option and to provide time and expertise in the planning and delivery stages.</p> <p>Other potential funding partners – Charitable Trusts, residential developers, local businesses - have not been sounded out.</p>		
<p>CURRENT KNOWLEDGE GAPS</p> <p>The initial brief for assessing the future for Foredown Tower did not allow for any substantial analysis of alternative Options. Discussions so far, and evidence from Council Officers, have identified interest in the proposal but not detailed engagement. Therefore knowledge gaps remain around:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the detailed costs of refurbishment and renewal of the Tower to make it “fit for purpose” (repair and access improvements have been estimated at more than £200,000 over 5 years) • the political and officer commitment to developing a new use for the site • the fit with other agencies and market demand for the services • the extent of engagement by development partners • the local communities response to the idea and willingness to get involved in its future 		

RISK ASSESSMENT			
Policy related	Economy related	Market related	Other factors
<p>Community opposition to idea and development of site. Planning objections to development.</p> <p>Mitigation – early discussions with community groups and planners to assess response before committing resources.</p>	<p>Grant funding not available for development.</p> <p>Mitigation – early discussions/outline bid to funding sources.</p> <p>Service/client groups not found.</p> <p>Mitigation – involve potential groups in business planning.</p> <p>Economic downturn reduces opportunity for residential development gain and corporate sponsorship/involvement.</p> <p>Mitigation – plan for involvement in later stages of initiative.</p>	<p>Services outlined in Option already supplied, no further market demand.</p> <p>Mitigation – discuss plans with community and agencies to refine plans to suit market needs.</p>	<p>Key partner disengagement with initiative.</p> <p>Mitigation – ensure involvement at all stages and devolve decision making and management to community and partner driven management committee.</p>

Next Steps
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish political and senior officer commitment to idea • If positive, open discussions with potential partner agencies, client and service groups and the local community to gauge market opportunities and willingness to work on new option. • Scope opportunities for grant funding and produce outline bid for review. • Discuss ideas with planners. • Enter discussions with businesses re potential sponsorship or CSR involvement. • Set up Working Group made up of interested parties and community stakeholders to shape fully costed business plan. Identify lead Officer(s) within Council to support Working Group, lead discussions with partner agencies, and produce bid(s) for funding.