

Heather House Community Centre PIN

Heather House is a community facility that is owned and managed by Maidstone Borough Council. It is located on Bicknor Road, Park Wood, Maidstone, ME15 9PS, backing onto the Parkwood Recreation Ground. It provides facilities for indoor sports and leisure activities in one of the most deprived wards in the borough.

The facilities on offer within Heather House are as follows;

- Chamberlain Hall, a sports hall of 250m².
- Reed Hall, a sports hall of 100m².
- Committee Room, of 43m².
- A kitchen with cooker, fridge, hot water urn and microwave.
- Disabled toilet.
- Ladies and gents toilets.
- Parking for c40 vehicle with two dedicated disabled bays.

In terms of usage & revenue, the main activities on offer are;

- Boxing, within Reed Hall that is leased to Maidstone Boxing Club.
- Short matt indoor bowls, via bookings to the Chamberlain Hall from three clubs.
- Yoga.
- Roller-dance.
- Children and adult parties.
- Meetings in the committee room.

Whilst Heather House is important to the community, usage and revenues have reduced over recent years as the facilities on offer have become dated and in need of renewal. Accordingly the Council has undertaken some preliminary cost plans for options to either;

- Redevelop the existing facility, to include making additional provision for sports changing rooms as well as a social lounge and licensed bar area to be utilised by the Royal British Legion. The Council estimates that the net cost of such a proposal would be c£2m.
- Refurbishing the existing facility at a cost of c£0.75m.

The Council has explored possible funding sources, these include;

- Sport England.
- Kent County Council and Community Hall Grant Scheme.
- Big Lottery Fund – Reaching Communities England.
- Football Foundation – Premier League & The FA Facilities Fund.
- Maidstone Borough Council.
- N.B. it appears that the prospect of accessing monies from grant giving bodies such as the above are enhanced if the facility is stewarded and / or managed by a voluntary / community group.

Therefore, the Council is seeking interest from suitable voluntary / community groups that may be interested in helping to secure a long-term and flourishing future for Heather House, by perhaps providing some or all of the following;

- Long-term stewardship of the facility, perhaps through a Trust.
- Operational management of the facility.
- Capital funding to assist with either the redevelopment or refurbishment of the facility.

In terms of securing a funding package for the redevelopment or refurbishment of the facility, the Council feels that this could come from a combination of a community / voluntary group and the Council committing some funds, and then the selected community / voluntary group using this as a basis to seek match funding from external grant giving bodies.

Furthermore, the Council feels that the appeal of the project to grant giving bodies would be much enhanced by working in collaboration with the local community to develop a clear and compelling design brief as well as the commissioning of some preliminary architectural design work to bring the vision to life. Therefore, in tandem with this procurement exercise, the Council is undertaking a programme of community engagement in early 2019 to better understand the current usage and demand for community facilities within Park Wood, as well as to establish a clear brief as to what amenities should be provided within a redeveloped or refurbished Heather House.

Therefore, responses from voluntary / community groups are invited to the following questions;

1. The name of your community / voluntary group.
2. The nature of your community / voluntary group.
3. Would your community / voluntary group be interested in participating in the project?
4. Would your community / voluntary group be willing to manage the new or improved facility?
5. Would your community / voluntary group be willing to steward the new or improved facility without long term support from the Council?
6. Would your community / voluntary group be willing to contribute monies to fully or part-fund either a new or improved facility?
7. Does your community / voluntary group have a demonstrable track record of delivery on other similar projects in the UK? If so, please provide examples.
8. Would you be willing to collaborate with other voluntary / community groups to help develop a sustainable business plan for the facility? Or would you prefer to work just with the Council?