

Report to	Resources and Performance Committee
Date	8th February 2012
By	Director of Corporate Services
Title of Report	Western Area Barn
Purpose of Report	To seek approval for the provision of a barn for the Operations team, Western Area to be included in the proposed 2012/13 capital programme.

Recommendation: The Committee is recommended to
1. approve the Western Area Barn scheme for inclusion in the proposed 2012/13 capital programme, which will be reported for approval by the Authority on 13 March 2012.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report is to inform Members of the need for an effective operational base for the Western Area Team through the provision of a barn with safe, secure storage for equipment and meeting space for volunteers. This scheme is highlighted as the top short-term key priority for long-term infrastructure development within the Operations Department.
- 1.2 The Area Manager has, through consultation with Director of Corporate Services, Corporate Services colleagues, partners, staff, volunteers and our Health and Safety consultant, developed a design specification with contractors that will deliver for the needs of the organisation.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Western Area team of the Operations department are based at Queen Elizabeth Country Park as tenants of Hampshire County Council and the Forestry Commission.
- 2.2 The base is well placed in the Western Downs, with good communication links and facilities, being close to the A3, within five minutes of Petersfield railway station and there is a local bus service. Partnerships are not only with the Country Park and the Forestry Commission, but also with the Rights of Way department, Shipwrights Way Officer and Butterfly Conservation, who all share the main building.
- 2.3 The team occupy part of a small office above the visitor centre and the current storage provision at the depot is a shipping container on Forestry Commission land within the Country Park which also doubles as a workshop and tool-store. Whilst the office space is effective and adequate, the depot area has not received any investment for many years and is, therefore, well below standard with major issues regarding security, safety, working efficiency and, without development, remains the biggest single issue which jeopardises the development of the Western Area team and particularly volunteering opportunities. This is wholly unsuitable, being small, damp (leading to deterioration of high value tools, small machinery and equipment), inadequate and unsafe particularly for our volunteers. It is also insecure and has been broken into twice in the last three years.

3. Western Area Barn Scheme

- 3.1 The proposal is to create a barn in a surfaced, well-drained secure compound, with a workshop / tool-store and facilities to store materials on the ground floor. In the first floor loft space would be an area for meetings and training, for staff, volunteers and partners. This will provide:

- A future long term base for Western Area operations.
 - The new meeting area will provide significant improved working conditions for both staff and volunteers, as well as partners from time to time. This should enable more volunteer effort, providing additional in-kind commitment to the South Downs and work achieved on the ground.
 - A secure storage area, complete with security lighting and alarms, reducing the likelihood of burglary (thereby reducing insurance premiums) and improving the lifecycle of tools and equipment.
 - Security, confidence and more effective working for both staff and the team of dedicated volunteers, whose 'in-kind' contributions to meeting the National Park purposes are considerable.
- 3.2 The design specification of the proposed barn-style building has been worked up with staff and volunteer input as well as input from estates. The proposals are: 12.0 metres wide by 7.0 metres deep with locally sourced oak uprights 150 x 150 and heads 200 x 150, mortice and tenon jointed and secured with oak pegs. Pressure treated softwood rafters (150 x 50) and stud wall frames (100 x 50). Wherever possible the project and build for the barn would aim to maximise sustainability by using local labour and timber and maximising energy efficiency. Initial market research has identified that to purchase, install and provide appropriate security and health & safety measures will cost in the region of £0.113 million.
- 3.3 The Barn will also require planning permission and initial discussions have been held with the Planning Link Officer who has provided advice and support for the planning application. It is proposed that the contractor would submit the planning application for comments to the Area Manager and Planning Link Officer prior to submission. Under the South Downs National Park Authority's (SDNPA) Scheme of Delegation, applications made by or on behalf of the SDNPA would come to the SDNPA Planning Committee, except for the determination of minor developments; this area is covered by East Hampshire District Council.
- 3.4 The land upon which the Barn will be installed is owned by the Forestry Commission and negotiations are underway to obtain a longer term lease of a minimum of 20 years to ensure that the Authority has long term use of the Barn. The contract for the installation of the Barn will not be agreed until full value for money is assured and a long-term lease is contractually signed.

4. Resources

- 4.1 The scheme will be project managed by the Area Manager with support from Corporate Services in areas such as procurement and estates.
- 4.2 The proposed 2012/13 capital programme (subject to approval by the Authority on 13 March 2012) includes an estimate of £0.113 million for the purchase and installation of the barn. This budget also includes funding for security, external lighting and other health & safety equipment.
- 4.3 There are likely to be additional revenue running costs, such as heating the meeting room and increased lease rental payments which are unknown at this time. However, all future costs will be included in the 2012/13 Budget Monitoring reports and the following year's budget strategy.

5. Risk management

- 5.1 Ongoing security risks with the current provision of shipping container.
- 5.2 No input of resources would lead to a static status in the development of South Downs Volunteer Ranger Service, which urgently requires safe and secure facilities for existing volunteers as well as additional space to enable additional volunteers to be recruited.
- 5.3 Alternative accommodation has been researched, but there are no other suitable facilities in the area. Moving out of the area would lose us the established partnership working built up over the years, would lose some dedicated local community volunteers, with the associated reputational risk and the need to re-build in a new area, which would take considerable time

to forge relationships, recruit volunteers and generally get back to the capacity there is currently.

6. Human Rights, Equalities, Health and Safety

- 6.1 As directed by Corporate Services the Health and Safety consultant undertook a review of Health & Safety compliance of the area offices and facilities.
- 6.2 Major concerns were directed to the Area Manager and Director of Corporate Services that the storage unit currently being used suffers from being cramped and overcrowded, lacking suitable safe secure space for storage and maintenance of equipment. This has led to a highly unsatisfactory working environment, totally unsuitable for any workshop-type activity.
- 6.3 Draft plans of the 'barn' have been shared with the Health and Safety Consultant and feedback has been incorporated into the design.

7. External Consultees

- 7.1 Health and Safety consultant for the National Park Authority, Forestry Commission, Hampshire County Council, Highways Agency,

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Appendices	None
SDNPA Consultees	Chief Executive Officer, Director of Corporate Services, Director of Planning, Director of Strategy and Partnerships, Head of Operations, Chief Finance Officer. Western area South Downs Volunteer Ranger Service Western area team