



# ST BONIFACE FIELDS DEVELOPMENT

TOWN COUNCIL MEETING

REPORT 58/17

14 AUGUST 2017

The purpose of this paper is to ask Members to consider and agree a proposal for the development of the fields opposite the site of the current Island Free School building

## NO. DETAILS

### 1) BACKGROUND

- a) The Town Council meeting of 10 July agreed to include three sites as potential areas for inclusion on its Regeneration Plan.
- b) One of these is the two fields opposite the current site of the Island Free School that are owned by the Isle of Wight Council and leased by the school for the last three years; a site plan is attached with this Report.
- c) The Island Free School have installed four Portakabins on the fields, three in the upper field near the older one and one very large one in the lower field.
- d) The School is due to vacate both fields by 31 August after removing all four of the Portakabins and returning the field to meadow.
- e) We have been in discussions with both the Isle of Wight Council and the Island Free School about the future of the site and an outline proposal for its development as a Community resource has developed from them.

### 2) THE OUTLINE PROPOSAL

The proposal is for the development of the area as a community resource providing additional spaces for the growth activities of the town's lively voluntary sector, new allotments in a town that currently only has three, a new education and training facility and the care and maintenance of a valuable green space.

### 3) THE PORTAKABINS

- a) The large two storey Portakabin in the lower field will be removed by the Education Funding Agency by the end of this month, restoring the large green space that will again be available to residents and visitors for activity and enjoyment.
- b) The three linked Portakabins installed and owned by the Island Free School in the upper field provide a total of 145 square metres of new floor space for a wide range of community activities; the floor plans are attached with this Report.
- c) The existing Planning Permission (P/00174/17) for these expires on 9 April 2018 but the Island Free School plans to remove them at the same time as the larger one both to save costs and to enable them to comply with their 31 August deadline.
- d) The older Portakabin near the set of three is proposed as the new home for the Ventnor Men's Shed currently based in a High Street shop too small for its potential growth; as part of its rent agreement, it is willing to take on caretaker and maintenance responsibilities for the whole site.
- e) In discussions with the Free School's Headteacher, the Town Council has been offered the opportunity to purchase the three Portakabins in the upper field.
- f) If this outline proposal is adopted by the Town Council, the option to purchase them will be determined in Agenda item 17 for this meeting.
- g) If agreement on price is reached with the Free School, the purchase will be funded from the surplus generated by Salisbury Gardens representing a further contribution from its development to the community life of the town and making no call on the Precept.
- h) New Planning Permission will be required to keep the Portakabins on site beyond the expiry date of the current one on 9 April next year.

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#### 4) COMMUNITY USE

- a) There will be consultation with the town's voluntary organisations on the uses of the site including its Portakabins so this section of the Report lists just some of the uses we are already aware of and discussions are already underway with two more organisations.
- b) *Youth Offer*
  - The Town Council has used the Youth Offer funding made available by the Isle of Wight Council since its closure of the Island-wide Youth Service on 30 September 2014 to extend local provision substantially including, for the first time in recent years, to Upper Ventnor.
  - We have also been able to establish an effective and experienced professional youth worker team.
  - The loss of Ventnor Youth Centre and the closure of the important facility at Café 34 provided by Ventnor Together have left the latter without an alternative site – in spite of much searching – and the town with a shortage of space for the extension of activity which is both possible and very desirable.
- c) *Men in Sheds*
  - Men in Sheds grew out of the Town Council's *Our Place* programme, promoted by local film maker David George's *Better Shed than Dead* film of an approach to activities for men that was becoming increasingly popular.
  - Originally based in the lower ground floor of Ventnor Central it has developed into a well-organised community organisation with a membership of over 30.
  - With the predicted closure of Ventnor Central, the group re-located last month to a High Street Shop that is not big enough to provide the range of activities, or growth in membership, that they are planning for.
  - If the Town Council takes over the site, Men in Sheds will take up the older of the four Portakabins at a rent to be agreed.
- d) *Local Artists*
  - The town has a long tradition as a home for art and artists across the range of specialisms as demonstrated most recently by the activities of Ventnor Fringe and Ventnor Exchange.
  - There has been much discussion of the value of a dedicated studio base for artists that would both be of real value to them as well as a significant addition to destination Ventnor.
  - One of the Portakabin's rooms would make an ideal studio base.
- e) *Allotments*
  - Remarkably for a semi-rural town of 6,000 population the Town Council is only currently able to provide three Allotments with the demand for more evidenced by a waiting list of over 20.
  - The upper field is clearly good grounding for Allotments as the Free School has successfully established four.
  - There is room for many more with the actual number depending on detailed site planning and consultation with those experienced in allotments.

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#### 5) EDUCATION & TRAINING

- a) The Green Room's use by both the Isle of Wight Council's Adult Learning service and the education & training arm of the Prison Officers' Association (POA) has demonstrated the demand for and the value of local access to professional trainers to local residents.
  - b) We want to build on that with larger groups and extended content including preparation for apprenticeships and vocational training to at least Level Three.
  - c) Our own experience from employing two apprentices in succession over the last three years has established a confident relationship with the professional training provider HTP and if this proposal is adopted our planning would involve developing that into a
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partnership for course delivery on site.

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**6) MAINTENANCE**

- a) The site requires significant maintenance whether this proposal is accepted or not and the willingness of Ventnor's Men's Shed, with its members' extensive experience of all related trades to incorporate the necessary oversight and tasks within their letting agreement is an extremely valuable community contribution.
  - b) Consequently, we are confident that the Portakabins, fencing and border walls will be maintained to high standards throughout the life of the project.
  - c) Management of the trees, in view of their importance to the site in general, the Green space in particular and compliance with the site's 2008 Covenant, will require financial support: a local Tree Surgeon estimated an initial cost of £850 to deal with overhanging branches and two Sycamores threatening the stability of part of the boundary wall.
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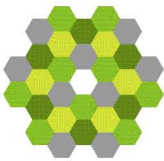
**7) FUTURE DEVELOPMENT**

- a) Indications are that an application for a further three-year temporary planning permission for the Portakabins would be likely, particularly if it included an indication of a move to a permanent replacement building after that term.
  - b) That opportunity would enable the Town Council to test fully the value of the development to the town.
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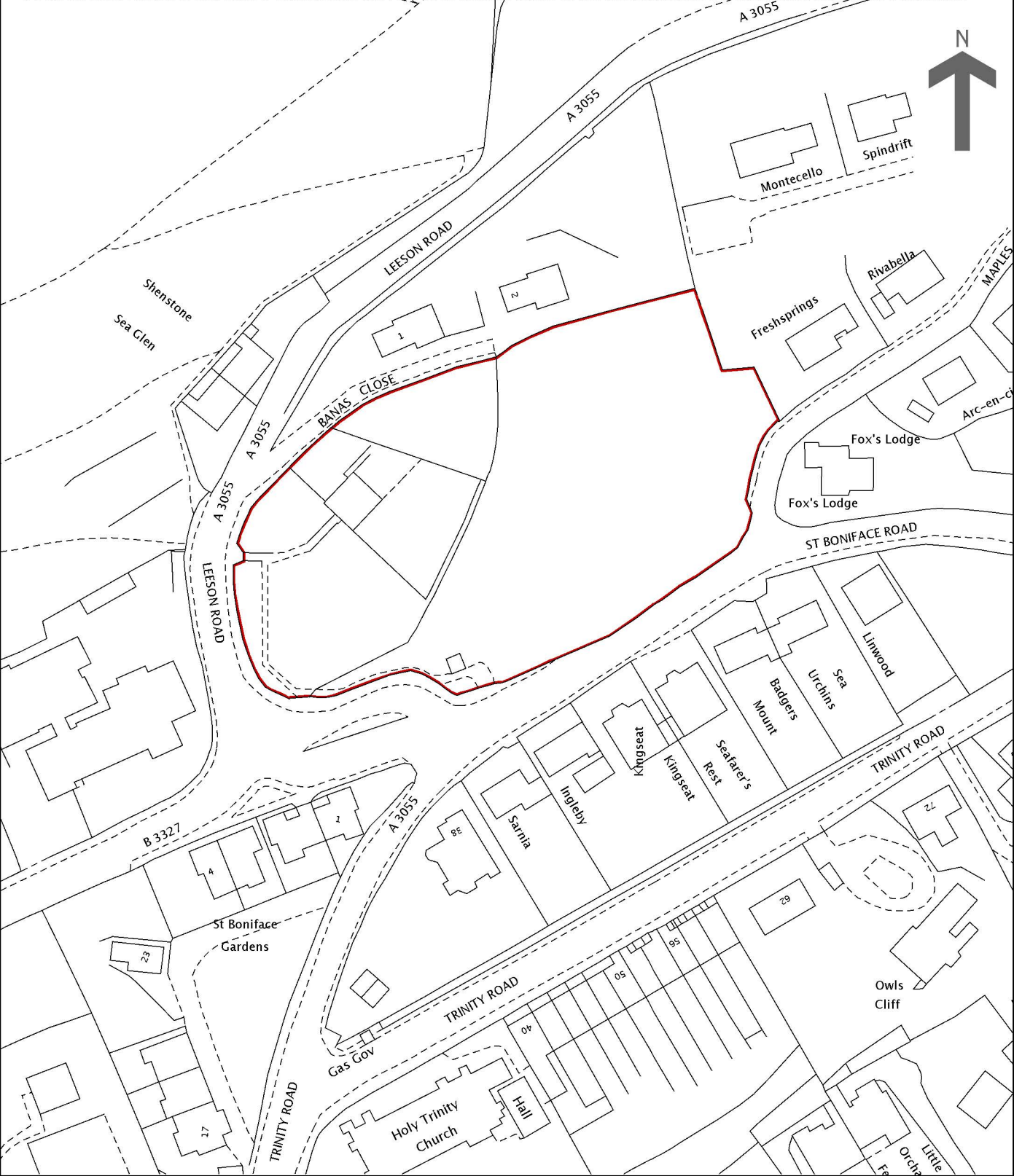
**8) RECOMMENDATION**

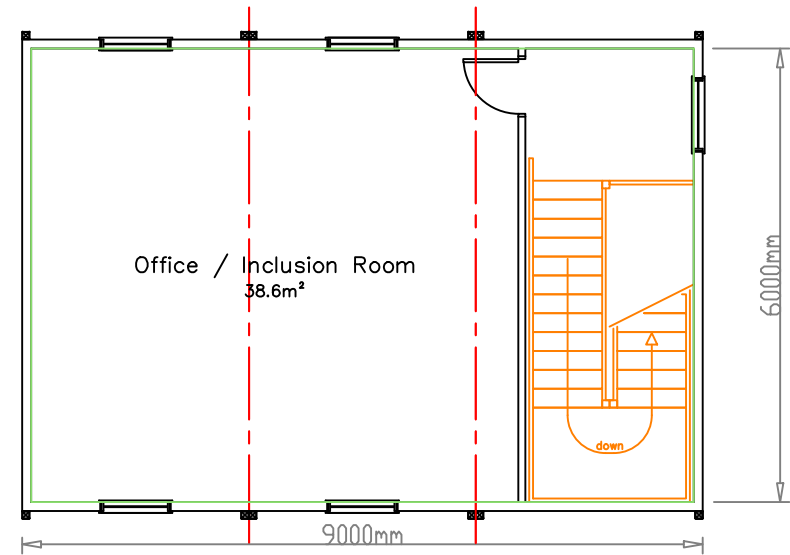
The Town Council is recommended to:

- i) ask the Isle of Wight Council for the use of the site either by freehold transfer or long lease;
  - ii) complete negotiations with the Island Free School for the purchase of the three Portakabins within a range to be agreed at item 17 of the Agenda for this meeting;
  - iii) authorise the Town Clerk to arrange for the preparation and submission of an appropriate planning application reflecting the usages and time scale identified in this outline proposal; and
  - iv) agree the use of funds from the Salisbury Gardens' account for the purchase of the Portakabins, the planning application and initial set up of the site.
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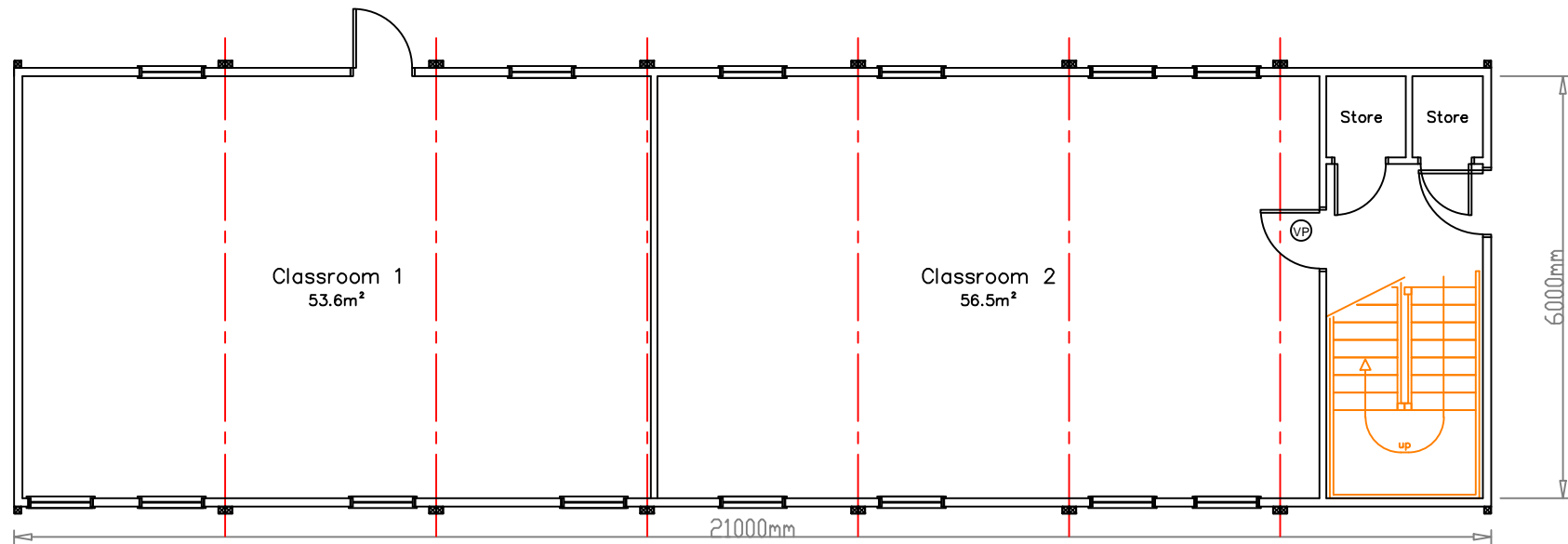


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First floor



Ground floor