

# SAVE HORSHAM REC ROOMS

## FORMAL PROPOSAL FOR A TIME-LIMITED COMMUNITY-LED TRIAL USE

### Former REC Building, Horsham

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## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This document sets out a detailed and evidence-informed proposal for the temporary reactivation of the former REC building in Horsham through a **12-month time-limited trial** of a **commercially structured, mixed-use leisure, culture, and community venue**.

The proposal is founded on the principle that **continued vacancy represents an avoidable failure of place-making**, while irreversible disposal without testing alternative uses risks the permanent loss of community value. The proposed trial offers Horsham District Council (“the Council”) a **low-risk, reversible mechanism** to assess whether the building can viably support community use without ongoing public subsidy.

Crucially, this proposal **does not request transfer of ownership**, long-term commitment, or financial underwriting by the Council. It seeks only **temporary access under defined conditions**, enabling evidence-based decision-making in the public interest.

## 2. PURPOSE AND STATUS OF THIS PROPOSAL

This proposal has been prepared to:

- Support informed public discourse
- Assist the Council in discharging its statutory and fiduciary duties
- Demonstrate that alternative uses to disposal are capable of objective assessment
- Provide a structured basis for dialogue between stakeholders

It is submitted **without prejudice**, in good faith, and in recognition of the Council’s ultimate authority over the site.

## 3. CONTEXT AND STRATEGIC RATIONALE

### 3.1 Current Status of the Site

The former REC building is currently vacant. Prolonged vacancy presents:

- Ongoing deterioration risk
- Lost economic and social value
- Zero contribution to footfall, wellbeing, or place activation
- Reputational risk associated with visible dereliction

Vacancy is not a neutral condition. It carries **opportunity cost**.

### 3.2 Strategic Context

The Council operates within a framework of:

- Best Value duty
- Regeneration and place-making objectives
- Community wellbeing responsibilities
- Prudential risk management

In this context, the question is not whether the building should be reused, but **whether reuse options have been sufficiently tested before irreversible decisions are taken**.

## 4. PUBLIC INTEREST TEST

This proposal is advanced explicitly in the **public interest**.

### 4.1 Public Interest Considerations Include:

- Preservation of community infrastructure
- Youth provision and safeguarding
- Economic vitality of the town centre
- Efficient use of existing assets
- Evidence-based decision-making
- Avoidance of unnecessary disposal risk

A time-limited trial satisfies the public interest test by enabling assessment without pre-judging outcomes.

## 5. CORE PROPOSAL: A 12-MONTH TRIAL USE

### 5.1 Nature of the Request

The proposers request that the Council considers granting:

- A **short-term lease or licence**
- For a **maximum period of 12 months**
- Subject to clear termination and compliance conditions
- With no expectation of extension or permanence

### 5.2 Rationale for a Trial

A trial approach:

- Minimises exposure to long-term risk
- Enables demand and viability to be tested empirically
- Preserves all future options for the Council
- Aligns with prudent asset management

The absence of a trial removes the possibility of evidence-based assessment.

## 6. PROPOSED USE: MIXED-USE LEISURE, CULTURE & COMMUNITY VENUE

### 6.1 Strategic Use Class Rationale

The proposed use is intentionally **mixed-use**, avoiding dependency on any single income stream or activity. Mixed-use leisure venues are recognised within regeneration practice as more resilient than mono-functional community facilities.

### 6.2 Functional Components

The venue would incorporate:

- Indoor leisure activity (e.g. skating)
- Entertainment and casual gaming
- Cultural and performance activity
- Independently operated café / bar
- Off-peak community and youth use

Zoning allows partial activation, cost control, and operational flexibility.

## **7. OPERATING MODEL**

### **7.1 Governance Structure**

- Independent operating entity
- Clear management accountability
- No operational role for the Council
- Compliance with all licensing, safeguarding, and safety requirements

### **7.2 Phased Activation**

The venue would not open at full operational intensity from day one. Instead:

- Initial activation of core zones
- Progressive scaling based on demand
- Ongoing review and adjustment

This approach mitigates financial and operational risk.

## **8. COMMERCIAL FRAMEWORK AND REVENUE STRUCTURE**

### **8.1 Revenue Diversification**

Revenue would be drawn from multiple sources, including:

- Commercial food and beverage operation
- Pay-per-use leisure activities
- Ticketed cultural events
- Private hire and group bookings
- Seasonal programming

Diversification reduces reliance on any single market segment.

### **8.2 Cross-Subsidy Principle**

Peak commercial activity subsidises lower-margin community access. This is a recognised and widely used model in sustainable community asset management.

## 9. COST STRUCTURE AND FINANCIAL CONTROL

### 9.1 Anticipated Cost Categories

- Staffing
- Utilities
- Insurance and compliance
- Routine maintenance
- Programming and marketing

### 9.2 Cost Mitigation Measures

- Zoned opening hours
- Flexible staffing
- Limited capital expenditure during trial
- Incremental growth rather than fixed overheads

The proposal explicitly avoids structural works or capital dependency during the trial.

## 10. VIABILITY ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

Viability would be assessed against qualitative and quantitative indicators, including:

- Ability to meet operating costs
- Consistent utilisation
- Evidence of market demand
- Absence of reliance on public subsidy
- Compliance performance

Importantly, viability is assessed **in context**, not against artificial profit benchmarks.

# 11. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: HORSHAM DRILL HALL

The failure of previous campaigns, including the Drill Hall, is acknowledged.

## 11.1 Key Lessons Learned

- Single-use community models carry high risk
- Reliance on goodwill is unsustainable
- Councils require commercial realism

## 11.2 Material Differences in This Proposal

- Mixed-use from inception
- Commercial tenants embedded
- Defined exit mechanism
- Trial-based approach

This proposal has been deliberately structured to address those historic shortcomings.

# 12. RISK MANAGEMENT AND MITIGATION

## 12.1 Summary Risk Heat Map

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation
Financial underperformance	Medium	High	Diversified income, phased opening
Insufficient demand	Medium	Medium	Trial structure, adaptive programming
Operational failure	Low-Medium	Medium	Experienced management
Safeguarding breach	Low	High	Policies, supervision
Council exposure	Low	High	Short-term licence, break clauses

## 12.2 Risk Conclusion

The trial mechanism significantly reduces long-term risk while enabling evidence-based assessment.

## 13. GOVERNANCE, REPORTING & ACCOUNTABILITY

- Named responsible operator
- Quarterly reporting during trial
- Compliance audits as required
- Community feedback mechanisms

Transparency is fundamental to maintaining public confidence.

## 14. ALIGNMENT WITH COUNCIL OBJECTIVES

The proposal supports:

- Regeneration and place-making
- Town centre activation
- Youth provision
- Social cohesion
- Asset optimisation

All without imposing ongoing cost to the public purse.

## 15. FORMAL REQUEST

In light of the above, the proposers respectfully request that Horsham District Council:

1. Engages constructively with this proposal
2. Considers enabling a 12-month trial under defined conditions
3. Allows viability to be tested empirically
4. Retains full discretion over long-term outcomes

This approach balances prudence with opportunity and protects the public interest.

## 16. STATUS OF THIS DOCUMENT

This is a **public, non-binding proposal**, submitted to encourage informed discussion, transparency, and evidence-led decision-making.