

SAVE HORSHAM REC ROOMS

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

Former REC Building, Horsham

Prepared by: Save Horsham REC Rooms

Website: savehorshamrecrooms.co.uk

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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.