

Chantry Wood Campsite Redacted Responses collated for FOI request No 629

Ref .No	Comments
1	<p>I am writing to you regarding the Chantry Woods campsite. As an infrequent but regular user of the site (both as a camper and a dog walker), I know I am one of a group of local people for whom the campsite is an essential and unique antidote to the usually frenetic family lives many of us lead.</p> <p>[REDACTED] I understand completely the need to reduce any losses in terms of the expenditure on the campsite, and I understand from Hendryk that it does not sit squarely within the work area of the Parks team. However, this site is special, and it does elicit a strong emotional response from users (many of whom go back year after year). There are few, if any, similar sites locally. I know from speaking to campsite users that they are keen to help the council come up with a solution that minimises the financial and ranger burden of the site, but which retains its use as a campsite, at the very least at weekends when it is sold out months in advance.</p> <p>I should like to offer to coordinate a number of campsite users to put our heads together with officers and members if appropriate, to see if we can come up with an alternative to the proposed external leasing of the site to a forest school.</p> <p>When arts funding was reduced a number of years ago there was a positive and constructive workshop session with the local community arts groups in the borough ([...]), and that resulted in a plan that met the council's needs and had the broad support of local groups.</p> <p>I do hope you will take us up on our offer to help develop a solution.</p>
2	<p>I'm writing in response to the council idea to close the campsite in the chantries. This has saddened me a lot. We live locally, [REDACTED] and come to camp at least once over the summer every year. My kids love this magical place and our family cherish our time there every year. We would like you to consider not closing. The camp site doesn't need any upgrade and is basic and perfect as it is. Please keep it going!</p>
3	<p>This is a request to please not close this campsite. It is a valued space by many families where people get to unplug, reconnect and enjoy the surrounding natural beauty. I would be a great shame and loss to take this away from the local community.</p>
4	<p>I am writing to complain about the planned closure of the Chantry Wood campsite for public use.</p> <p>The campsite within the borough of Guildford is a unique and special place to many families, including my own, which I have enjoyed using with friends and family for a number of years. To have a large open campsite only a few miles from home has meant that the site can be used at weekends after school, without the need to commute for miles to an alternative site. Although the council has suggested that the site is underused, I feel that this is only because the site is a well-kept secret and also because every booking gets exclusive use, when it could easily accommodate several small parties.</p> <p>The site is not advertised and the only sign at the site says private campsite only. Whilst I accept that it would be very expensive to bring the site up to modern campsite standards, it is something that I do not feel is necessary and the back-to-basics feel of the site, is part of its appeal.</p>

	<p>I accept that the site, could be used in partnership with the forest school, but the proposal is for daytime use.</p> <p>I cannot understand, why this should mean that the public cannot use the site at evenings or weekends, which when most people will want to camp.</p> <p>The losses, which the site is alleged to be making, could be off set by a slight increase in camp fees, or allowing several groups to share the site.</p> <p>I would happily do either of these and also pay a form of noise/nuisance deposit, if multiple groups were a concern.</p> <p>Also, some of the losses must include recent drainage works completed at the site, which I believe were part of a previous plan to upgrade the facilities.</p> <p>If this is the case, either the money didn't need to be spent, or the works should be adequate for a number of years, allowing the site to begin to cover it's own costs again.</p> <p>Personally, however I feel that to subsidize the site for a few thousand pounds, is not a great deal of money, for a town the size of Guildford, to offer such a unique facility.</p> <p>I would also like the council to allow the site to be used for a final trial year, with an effort to generate more income, before finally pulling the plug on this exclusive site, especially when nothing else is being offered as an alternative.</p> <p>I know of many local families, who will use the site and be prepared to support future changes, which still allowed public camping.</p>
5	<p>Please find below my response to the Council's informal consultation on the future of Chantry Woods.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Firstly, the Council rightly wants to maximise the use of the space and save money for the taxpayer. • At present, the Council forecasts 1,500 people a year at the campsite – largely local family groups, schools, Scouts, Guides, and indeed forest schools. All of these will lose out under the proposals. • The new proposals would reduce the use of the space. The forest school would cater for a maximum of 24 children per day. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o A typical nursery sees a mix of full-time and part-time provision. o At the top end you might see around a hundred or so benefit over the course of the year – a far smaller number than at present benefit from the site. o The Council are quoted as forecasting “up to 120 children per week” using the site (https://www.getsurrey.co.uk/news/surrey-news/chantry-wood-neighbours-say-campsite-15857052). This is wholly unrealistic – it relies on a different 24 children using the site every day. This is not how nurseries work. • The Council also say that they are doing this to save money. However, they say that the running costs of the campsite have increased due to maintenance, costs which will not be transferred to the forest school provider. In reality, the Council will continue to pay for repairs and maintenance, so this “saving” would evaporate. • The Council haven't considered simply increasing the current very low camping fees. With a small increase (from £4 to £6 per person, say) the campsite could quite easily be self-funding, whilst maintaining much greater access. If £6 per person was felt to be a barrier to access for some groups (schools or Scouts) then tiered pricing could be an option. • The Council haven't even considered mixed use – whereby a forest school provider could use the site on weekdays, and the campsite remain available to the public for bookings at the weekend. This could easily be facilitated by allowing for separate storage facilities in the barn. • At the moment anyone can book the campsite. In the future, use will be inequitable - restricted only to those children aged 3 or 4 whose parents can afford expensive private childcare. • Ironically, the forest school children will not be camping at all (they go home at 6pm). <p>So, under the proposals, thousands of current users will be prevented from camping so that</p>

	<p>a small number of hypothetical future users may exercise their privilege to not camp.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council says that having just one customer (a forest school) will be simpler and easier than having lots of customers as it does at the moment. But at the moment the campsite is diversified. The new proposals leave the taxpayer wholly dependent on the success of just one private business. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o There is a serious risk that in a year or two the forest school has never moved beyond one staff member, stops trading, or moves location. o The Council re-tenders, but having seen the difficulties, other forest schools are reluctant to step in or offer a lower price. The taxpayer is left with all the costs to bear and no income stream at all, having chased away all the campers. o Alternatively, the situation limps on - with the campsite unused most of the time and the Council unable to regain control of the asset. • We believe that the process for deciding the future of the campsite has not been sufficiently democratic or transparent, and that the analysis is not as robust as it should be. We strongly urge the Council to open up a formal consultation on the future of the campsite with stakeholders - defined as "Visitors to the Countryside/ Chantry Wood, Community Groups, current campsite customers" (taken from http://www2.guildford.gov.uk/councilmeetings/documents/s12478/Item%2006%203%20-%20Chantry%20Wood%20Campsite%20-%20App%203%20-%20Equality%20Impact%20Assessment.pdf). If the Council consults, it will be in a better position to understand the value of the campsite to the community it serves. • Closing the campsite (at the same time as describing the decision as "provisional" and saying there was consultation) was premature. We require that, for now, the Council keep the campsite open and honour the existing campsite bookings. • We ask the Council to be open to scrutiny, and act in a way that brings people with it, trusting in the merit of its own proposals to convince stakeholders.
6	<p>As a local resident, I have previously contacted some or all of you as local councillors on various issues. I'm contacting you on this occasion about Chantry Woods Campsite. I've also copied in the council's Managing Director on the basis that I presume this involves a consultation process authorised directly or indirectly by him or his officers; as well as the Directors of Planning and Regeneration ([...]), and Environment ([...]), who I've included on the basis that I'm not totally sure whose brief this issue might fall under in operational terms. [Name supplied (copied in here) emailed [the Local Councillors] about the transfer of control of this site out of public hands on the 13th February, and I want, first of all, to support what she said, and also register my opposition to the transfer of this publicly owned facility, to a private concern, meaning it will no longer be available to local people. This transfer of public facilities and services into the 'non-public' sector might at times be deemed a pragmatic response to austerity and the tightening of budgets by central government. It might even at times, when a facility can be shown to be poorly or under-used, be deemed a rational and sensible move. I can't easily argue with pragmatism like that, specifically when argued on the basis of evidence and prior, proper stakeholder consultation. However, what seems neither sensible nor pragmatic - no far, in my opinion, is doing this in a hurried way, giving the impression that there's something to hide, or a desire to avoid scrutiny or difficult questions. The way this has been handled so far appears underhand, even if it isn't, and at the very least suggests that the council, its officers and councillors, don't really want to consult properly with those who, let's not forget - particularly since the local government precept has been reduced so markedly - pay a very significant proportion of the budget you operate under. Having worked in the public sector in the past, and dealt a lot with government locally, regionally and centrally, I am fairly sure that's not true in this case. However it seems to me that it might be helpful to assure residents and taxpayers that due</p>

diligence and consultation has and is being carried out correctly. In the email dated 13th February from [...], she outlined the major issues with the proposals as they stand, and the consultation process. For the benefit of those who didn't see the original, I include the first four paragraphs below, which I think outline her opposition - and I suspect the position of others opposed to the closure of the site: 'I am appalled by the un-democratic approach that is being taken by the Borough Council to decisions on the future of Chantry Wood campsite.' No consultation has been done, not with the children's nurseries who currently use the site, the local families who camp there every summer (did you know that it gets fully booked up six months in advance?), or the wider community. This is outrageous. There was only a press release AFTER the provisional decision (on 9th January). At the bottom of the press release, it says "The council will now develop the forest school proposal further, following the consultation, with a view to leasing the site later in 2019." What's the point of consulting if the decision has already been made? This reeks of bad faith and tokenism. I note that no consultation on this matter appears on the Council's webpage listing current (open) consultations. I emailed the Council to find out how to make a representation, and received an email from [Countryside Manager] on 8th Feb with a deadline for responses by 24th Feb. This is only two working weeks. Incredible! Does anyone really consider this acceptable? The two open consultations on the Council's website have each been given 3 months. [The Countryside Manager's] email says that the instructions for how to respond to the consultation have also been emailed to the Tyting Society, the Holy Trinity Amenity Group and Councillors. Is that it? Are you seriously suggesting that is enough for a real consultation? Secondly, I would like the following questions answered by GBC:

1. What consultation has been undertaken with all existing (and past) users of the site, and can I see a copy of the results of that consultation? This includes casual users, the nurseries referred to in [redacted] email, as well as other local schools and organisations (including but not limited to the Scouts, Guides or others)?
2. What consultation has been undertaken with wider stakeholders: local residents for example, as well as other organisations who haven't used the site and who might be unaware of its availability?
3. Can I please see copies of any consultation referred to above?
4. Does the consultation you undertook conform to or align with any recommended best practice in terms of local government, or wider stakeholder relations practice, and if so, can I see a copy of that best practice?
5. What are the usage figures for the campsite over the past five financial years (for all users: private/personal and 'institutional')?
6. What has been the cost to the council of the maintenance of the current site over the past five financial years?
7. What has been the income from the site to the council over the past five financial years?
8. Where is any surplus reallocated (forecast or actual) - does it go back into the budget for maintenance of the site, or does it go back into general expenditure, or into specific projects/budgets?
9. Under what formal process has the Forest School been chosen to occupy the site, and can I see a copy of the methodology/process used?
10. What is the projected income to the council from the Forest School over the next five financial years, and where is it proposed this money be spent? Will it be recycled into the current, general budget, or will it be allocated in a specific area or areas?
11. What other organisations or private companies put bids in to use the site?
12. Is there any relationship, declared or undeclared, between any officers or councillors of Guildford Borough Council, and the directors, owners or employees (current or proposed) of the Forest School?

I will happily submit these through Freedom of Information (FOI) requests should that be the only route to getting them addressed, however I do expect that in the interests of transparency and fairness to those opposed to the transfer of the site, you will if necessary hold up the process in order for these questions to be answered fully. As I said earlier in this email, I don't think it's very helpful for a democratically answerable body like a local council to create the impression that you are avoiding proper consultation on an issue as important as the transfer of public facilities to a private concern. Whatever the reasoning behind the initial decision you made on the 9th January, it seems to me that making sure that the process you follow is vital to the integrity of the final decision. I look forward to your very prompt reply, given the end date of 24th February for consultation.

	<p>I am writing to voice concern over the approved proposal to adopt Option D for what was the Chantry Wood Campsite.</p> <p>Financial sustainability is at the heart of this decision. I do not think anyone would argue that funds are needed to refurbish the property. What is disconcerting however is the Council's emphasis on economic potential and financial benefits [4.1.2 and 4.1.3 respectively].</p> <p>The Chantry Wood Campsite was established for the benefit of the general public and the decision to pursue Option D could result in a negative and disproportionate impact in the community. While forest schools often engage disadvantaged communities, they remain privately funded and the vast majority of the students come from middle or upper income households.</p> <p>Prior to its closure, the campsite fees were nominal therefore a wonderful outdoor experience like camping was available to everyone. Leasing the land would effectively restrict use of the property to those who could afford it.</p> <p>While this topic should have received ample consideration and discourse, the only record of anything touching upon this was the equality assessment (Appendix 3) which does not sufficiently address the potential disparate impact of Option D.</p> <p>Further, Appendix 2 leaves the option available - presumably at the discretion of the Lead Councillor for Enterprise and Economic Development - to lease the property to an entity other than a forest school if it is deemed to be the best value [4.1.8]. If one of the arguments in favor of Option D was the support of forest schools, why has this stipulation been included?</p> <p>I would strongly urge the Council to hold a public meeting to give residents and campers an opportunity to comment on the matter.</p>
7	<p>The Chantries, including the campsite area, are highly valued as an amenity for our community; it is close enough for many to walk there. Our Group have been involved over the years with proposals for their management, and we are pleased that their designation as a SANG has not so far spoilt their countryside character. This designation has brought substantial funding to the area. We are grateful for the work done by GBC to maintain it.</p> <p>Despite studying the available information on the proposal, we remain unclear what benefits would be derived by a change in arrangements for the campsite – other than the uncertain potential to increase GBC income by a small amount.</p> <p>We fully support use of the woods for educational purposes by Guildford schools, but we oppose any exclusive leasing of facilities that could prevent the public and legitimate local groups from using them, and the leasing to commercial organisations. This is public land and such a scheme could create a worrying precedent. The matter deserves a proper public consultation. We would hope that this will be done when a lease agreement has been drafted, so that the consequences can be fully evaluated.</p>
8	<p>Thank you for meeting with us and also sending us the attached email. I have now spoken with a number of the Tyting Society and set out below some collective thoughts:</p>

	<p>1 Firstly we welcome the proposal to rent the site to a Forest School and encourage children to benefit from the beautiful area in which we are fortunate enough to live</p> <p>2 The requirement to use a minibus is welcome as this limits the extra traffic in the lanes, something that is ever increasing. However the start time of 7.30am is earlier than we discussed and we thought 8.30am was more appropriate</p> <p>3 Will the agreement have a time limit of say 1 year with an opportunity to renew from both the Council's perspective and also the Forest School - we would welcome this amendment as it gives both parties an ability to get out of the agreement if the project is unsuccessful for any reason</p> <p>4 You mention that the campsite will be used for 5 days per week - does this mean that weekend use is not permitted?</p> <p>5 There is a concern that the campsite will no longer be available to weekend campers. Based on your records the site had c1,500 visitors per year - is this just campers or does it include other visitors? If the numbers of campsite users are significant it would be a shame to restrict the use from this group of people. Perhaps the Council could charge them a commercial rate to cover the costs of opening the site and clearing up after them?</p>
9	<p>I am writing to voice concern over the approved proposal to adopt Option D for what was the Chantry Wood Campsite.</p> <p>Financial sustainability is at the heart of this decision. I do not think anyone would argue that funds are needed to refurbish the property.</p> <p>The Chantry Wood Campsite was established for the benefit of the general public and the decision to pursue Option D could result in a negative and disproportionate impact in the community.</p> <p>While forest schools often engage disadvantaged communities, they remain privately funded and the vast majority of the students come from middle or upper income households.</p> <p>Prior to its closure, the campsite fees were nominal therefore a wonderful outdoor experience like camping was available to everyone. Leasing the land would effectively restrict use of the property to those who could afford it.</p>
10	<p>I understand that the Chantry Wood Campsite is to be closed to the general public and instead leased to a private forest school without proper public consultation. Please could you look into this and use this email to further support the need for a local consultation. We have enjoyed many years of camping at the site with our children in large groups. As we live in Guildford we are proud to host such a fantastic site for our friends.</p> <p>The forest school will use the site from 8am-6pm daily and the overnight and week end element will be lost. Will walkers be allowed through in the day?</p> <p>We understand that the main issue is that the campsite is loss making and this is largely due to the fact it is only £4 to rent for a whole week end. Surely a price review and increase based on the current arrangements is what is required rather than leasing out to a private forest school?</p> <p>What we are asking for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Council to be more thoughtful about this decision in order to ensure the site can benefit the widest possible range of users. - The only way to achieve this is to open up a formal consultation.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Allow enough time and share enough information to allow proper scrutiny of the proposals. - Commit to publishing the full range of responses received. - We ask the Council to act in a way that brings people with it, and trusts in the merit of its own proposals to convince stakeholders. - We also ask that the Council stop publicly saying that “the campsite isn’t used much” in order to smooth over opposition, given that Council documents show the opposite. <p>We understand and support the Council’s intention to ensure value for money. However, the Council has underestimated the value the campsite provides at the moment, underestimated how they could maximise the site, and overestimated the increased money that the new proposals will bring.</p> <p>What’s wrong with the proposal to close the campsite?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It’s removing public access to an asset which is given exclusively to one private concern for their profit. - The Council have been at pains to say that “public access will be maintained” but this is simply not true. Public access currently means that the public can camp there, picnic at the fire pits and light fires there. This will no longer be allowed, at any time 24/7 (even though the forest school is only weekdays 8am-6pm). Significant value to the public is lost. - The users will be restricted to a small number of pre-schoolers whose parents can afford private childcare. - Ironically, the pre-schoolers will not be camping at all (they go home at 6pm). So thousands of current users will be prevented from camping, so that a small number of hypothetical future users may exercise their privilege to notcamp. - Because the lease will be granted to just one company, any other forest schools who wish to use the campsite will be not be allowed to do so. <p>Recent article https://www.getsurrey.co.uk/news/surrey-news/chantry-wood-neighbours-say-campsite-15857052</p>
11	<p>I have just found out that our local council has decided to close down the Chantry Wood camp-site. I think this decision is terrible. I have certainly not seen any public consultation advertised. Surely the local council is the employ of the local taxpayers and we should have a say on such an important issue?</p> <p>This site is a stop-over for people doing the long-distance North Downs and Pilgrims Way routes; it is used by the Scouts and DoE students, and many local children have celebrated birthday parties there under the stars sitting around a camp-fire.</p> <p>Surely it cannot cost that much to continue running this site for local people.</p> <p>I certainly do not want this site handed over to a private concern who might want to commercialise this beautiful site, right next to amazing Chantries blue-bells.</p> <p>I want the council decision overturned, and I am sure you are going to get many emails from other local residents demanding the same.</p>
12	<p>I’ve been sent this by a George Abbot parent. Please explain why the campsite is being closed? Dear Guildford friends,</p> <p>See this web-site: https://savechantrycampsite.home.blog/</p> <p>Our council has decided to close down our local Chantry Wood camp-site, without consulting with us. The council rejected formal consultation with local stakeholders because they deemed it likely to create ‘resistance’ amongst local users (that’s you and me). Lead Councillor on the issue, [...] has even been quoted saying ‘consulting would be too difficult’.</p> <p>Yes. We agree that running a democracy like a local council can be difficult, but we presume he’s not about to suggest scrapping elections to the council for the same reason.</p> <p>Guildford Borough Council wants to give away the lease to a private company, but they will</p>

	<p>still be paying the maintenance costs. That means you and me are paying for a site we can no longer use. Please write to our local councillors with your reason why you would like this decision overturned.</p>
13	<p>I am a local resident, I live in [...] Merrow. It has been brought to my attention that there are plans to change the use of the Chantries Campsite and that it will no longer be available for the general public to use as a campsite.</p> <p>My family and I have been making good use of the campsite for a number of years and were very much looking forward to using it in the future. I think that it would be a TERRIBLE decision to prevent us from doing this! The site is unique in the Guildford area in offering exclusive booking for a secluded site with the addition of fabulous fire pits. The site is currently offering unrivalled opportunities to local families with children to experience the wonderful Surrey countryside at low cost. I do not believe that handing the site to a company to run a commercial "forest school" would be in the best interests of local people.</p> <p>PLEASE, PLEASE, PLEASE do not go ahead with your plans!!!!</p>
14	<p>I would like to register my concerns over the decision to close Chantry Woods campsite to the general public. I understand there was no public consultation over this matter even though the campsite was set up 50 years ago by the Scouts and has been run and paid for out of tax payers money over those years.</p> <p>I understand a Forest School will have sole use of the site, I am not against Forest Schools at all and have worked in a local Primary School for years where I set up an outside learning space with an allotment, wildlife area and small animal enclosure. But why should this public space be handed over to what will be a relatively small group of young people and excluded from many more. Why can't the area be used by both ? This seems to be a lazy option for the council to take and yet another example of the council trying to do something under the radar with public space that is funded by the taxpayer.</p> <p>In the past I have camped up on this site with my family and a recently disabled friend who due to access at the site was able to enjoy the outdoors with her friends and family.</p> <p>It seems inconceivable to me that this space will not be accessed by the general public anymore and handed over to a private company for them to effectively make money out of a public space.</p> <p>I look forward to your response.</p>
15	<p>I would like to register my concerns over the decision to close Chantry Woods campsite to the general public. I understand there was no public consultation over this matter even though the campsite was set up 50 years ago by the Scouts and has been run and paid for out of tax payers money over those years.</p> <p>I understand a Forest School will have sole use of the site, I am not against Forest Schools at all and have worked in a local Primary School for years where I set up an outside learning space with an allotment, wildlife area and small animal enclosure. But why should this public space be handed over to what will be a relatively small group of young people and excluded from many more. Why can't the area be used by both ? This seems to be a lazy option for the council to take and yet another example of the council trying to do something under the radar with public space that is funded by the taxpayer.</p> <p>In the past I have camped up on this site with my family, with other families and also taken a group of disadvantaged children while I worked in a children's home in Woking.</p> <p>It seems inconceivable to me that this space will not be accessed by the general public</p>

	<p>anymore and handed over to a private company for them to effectively make money out of a public space.</p> <p>I look forward to your response.</p>
16	<p>I am a resident living with a young family in Merrow and I am really disappointed to have recently received an email telling me that I was unable to book the campsite in the beautiful chantry woods this year for a group of families with similarly young children as a result of a decision taken by the Council. It is not clear as to why this decision has been taken and I think it is really sad as I was really looking forward to using the woods as a great way to introduce my children + friends children to the wonderful experience of getting close to nature by camping in the site.</p> <p>It sounds like very limited consultation has taken place. Could you please voice my concerns + I would really appreciate a better explanation as to why this has occurred? I would welcome the opportunity to discuss this in person (phone number below).</p>
17	<p>I have just learned that the council proposes to close the chantry Woods campsite in the near future.</p> <p>Given the continuing reduction in facilities for recreation as a result of financial pressures, it seems a great shame that this facility, which I imagine does not cost much to maintain, is to be withdrawn.</p> <p>The council claims to have given the matter careful consideration but I am unaware of any public consultation that has taken place. In addition to expressing my concern over the proposed action, I would be grateful if you could ascertain what form the consultation took, who responded, and an indication of the results (i.e. approximate numbers in favour and against).</p> <p>I look forward to hearing from you.</p> <p>PS I believe that this is a public facility, created over 50 years ago by the Scouts, and provided for use by local people and others ever since. If this is, indeed, the case, I would like to be reassured that the council is legally empowered to withdraw this facility.</p>
18	<p>Thank you for your very prompt reply and for the information you supplied.</p> <p>Out of interest you might care to note that I was not included in the public consultation.</p> <p>Having watched the video of the relevant executive meeting, I have to admit to feeling rather more relaxed about the situation than I was previously and am disinclined to pursue matters further.</p> <p>But – as was mentioned more than once in the discussion – I think the council did not handle the matter very well. There should have been greater provision for public involvement/consultation; this would have avoided the needless opprobrium that the matter generated.</p> <p>Thank you for your help.</p>