



# EAST CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

## Mepal Outdoor Centre - background information

### **Overview**

East Cambridgeshire District Council is seeking expressions of interest from individuals, companies or organisations interested in taking on the site of Mepal Outdoor Centre. This document provides information on the process and criteria for their submission and evaluation.

### **Background**

The Centre in broadly current form has been used by community and school groups since the 1980s. Its business position has sometimes been fragile, and it is currently closed following a break-in and fire in December 2016. The site has reverted to the Council as freeholder. It is considered however that a viable business could be developed on the site, with appropriate investment and a robust business model.

### **Site Details**

East Cambridgeshire is a rural district extending from east of Cambridge around Newmarket, northwards to Littleport. The area benefits from good rail links into London, and proximity to Cambridge and the A14 corridor; and the Council is actively pursuing improvements to infrastructure, housing, transportation and economic growth as well as quality of life elements such as leisure provision.

The Centre is located approximately 10 miles west of Ely, on the A142 from Ely to Chatteris. Cambridge and Peterborough are each about 40 minutes away, and Milton Keynes and Norwich about 75 minutes. The nearest mainline rail stations are at Ely (10 miles) - from where Stansted Airport is approximately 50 minutes and London just over an hour – and March (13 miles), providing a link to Peterborough, the Midlands and the East Coast line. There is a reasonably regular bus service connecting the Centre to both Ely and Chatteris.

The site is roughly triangular in layout, and totals approximately 12 hectares (30 acres). It includes:

- Watersports lake (approx. 8 ha / 20 a.) and boathouse
- Student accommodation block (approx 38 beds) plus staff flat
- Activity-hall and indoor climbing wall
- Range of land-areas including a high ropes installation
- Camping area with a small amenity-block
- Extensive parking space

## **Process**

**To ensure that all proposals are treated similarly, expressions of interest must be submitted in the form set out in the template provided (Appendix 1). Additional information and documentation may be provided only as appendices to that submission.**

The Council will evaluate submissions in accordance with the criteria set out in Appendix 3, and the strongest proposals will be carried into a further phase of discussion and development prior to a final decision. Please note however that the Council is under no obligation to finally choose any offer or submission received.

**Please note:** This process is expected to inform the identification of a suitable operational and/or development partner. It is envisaged that the Council will grant the selected partner a commercial lease (contracted out of the security of tenure provisions of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1954) or – in appropriate and exceptional circumstances – the freehold to the site. No works or services are to be commissioned by the Council. The Council therefore considers this opportunity to be a land transaction and outside of the scope of the EU procurement directives, the Public Contracts Regulations and the Concession Contracts Regulations 2016.

## **Potential uses**

Originally formed from gravel workings, the site has been used for outdoor pursuits informally since the 1960s, and more formally since the 1980s. The Council does not wish to be unduly prescriptive about the potential uses of the site, but any proposals should:

- Comply with planning and other regulatory frameworks; the current approved use is considered *sui generis*, so that any development of the site beyond the scope of the existing permissions would require specific planning permission.
- Be demonstrably robust and economically sustainable over an extended period

Those which bring specific and identifiable community benefits, and / or which capitalise so far as possible upon the existing asset and infrastructure, will be of particular interest, but remain subject to the requirements above.

It should be noted that neither leasehold nor freehold interest will carry any mineral rights, as these remain vested in the original title.

## **No Warranty**

The information provided in this document and its appendices are provided for the guidance only of potential developers or partners and will not form part of any lease or other agreement which may be entered into. No representation or warranty is made or given in relation to the condition or suitability of the site or any services or of the information in this document obtained from third party sources. All proposals made will be subject to further detailed negotiations and the Council may decide not to pursue negotiations in relation to any or all of the submissions which it may receive or it may decide to invite other proposals.

The Council will not be liable for any inaccuracy in these particulars or in any other document. The Council will not be responsible for any costs incurred in preparing the submissions, viewing the Centre or in conducting any negotiations with the Council.

## **Confidentiality**

Prospective partners must hold information relating to this process as confidential and limit the dissemination of such information on a need-to-know basis. Prospective partners should therefore not discuss the submissions that they intend to make other than with professional advisers or prospective business partners. Submissions may not be canvassed for acceptance or discussed with the media or any other prospective partner, or member or employee of the Council.

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 give a general right of access to information, including the contents of submissions, held by or on behalf of the Council. The Council will regard the submissions as confidential during the selection process and for a reasonable period after the award. After that period submissions may be subject to disclosure. If prospective partners believe information in their submission should be exempt from Freedom of Information Act disclosure, this should be stated in their submission. Prospective partners should however note that a blanket statement or designation that the whole of a submission should be treated as confidential is not acceptable and will be ineffective. Subject to appeal rights, the Council's decision on the release of information in response to an access request is final.

## **Contact Information**

Any queries regarding this process should be made by email in the first instance, to: [leisure.moc@eastcambs.gov.uk](mailto:leisure.moc@eastcambs.gov.uk)

In the interests of transparency and fairness, answers to such queries may where appropriate be anonymised and circulated to all potential prospective partners.

## **Submissions**

Submissions must be made by 17:00 Monday 4<sup>th</sup> December 2017:

- By email to: [leisure.moc@eastcambs.gov.uk](mailto:leisure.moc@eastcambs.gov.uk)
- By post to: East Cambridgeshire District Council, The Grange, Nutholt Lane, Ely, Cambridgeshire CB7 4EE, clearly marking the envelope: 'Mepal Outdoor Centre, Expression of Interest'

## **Appendices**

1. Submission template document
2. Guidance notes
3. Outline evaluation matrix & process timetable
4. Land Registry record