

Committee/Meeting: King George's Fields Charity Board	28th January 2015	Classification Unrestricted	Report No:
Report of: Corporate Director Communities Localities and Culture Originating officer: Stephen Murray, Nicol Ruchti		Title: Grant Landlords consent for construction of a teaching POD to Stepney City Farm Wards Affected: Stepney Green	

1. **SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This report seeks the Board's approval for a request from the lessee, Stepney City Farm (SCF) of the Stepney City Farm, Stepney Way, seeking Landlord's consent as required under their lease terms in order to construct an 'Eco Pod' for training and learning purposes. An 'Eco Pod' is a permanent structure constructed of recycled materials where possible and comprises a planted green roof and timber clad walls. Please refer to **Appendix 1** for Eco Pod design.
- 1.2 This report was considered by the Board at the extraordinary meeting of the 17th September 2014 and the request rejected at this time for reasons outlined in the minutes of that meeting. This then is a request to reconsider that decision after a brief presentation by the lessee to the Board.

2. **DECISIONS REQUIRED**

That the King George's Fields Charity Board:

- 2.1 Note the contents of this report.
- 2.2 Give its approval for the lessee to construct an 'Eco Pod' of approximately 48sqm (11.0m x 4.8m).

3. **REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS**

- 3.1 Under the terms of the lease granted to SCF the tenant is required to seek Landlord's consent in order to make changes to or construct any new structures within their boundary. SCF has submitted a large funding application to Big Lottery for their volunteer programme. In order to secure the funding, landlord permission is required to allow construction of the learning and training Eco Pod.

4. **ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 4.1 In order to accommodate the increased volumes of staff there is an urgent need for a purpose built facility over and above the existing, sub-standard accommodation on site.

5. **BACKGROUND**

- 5.1 SCF is a volunteer-led organisation with volunteering and community engagement being the focus of operations and activities. SCF currently accommodates 11 staff and over 50 regular volunteers. The volunteer programme has doubled (23 volunteers recorded in April 2012 increasing to 51 recorded in April 2013). The programme is inclusive of those not in education, employment or training (NEETs) and long term unemployed are able to join. There are roles in animal care, gardening, crafts and the cafe, as well as specialist internships. There are different streams of volunteering depending on the level of support required, and flexibility about what people can participate in.
- 5.2 Following a period of growth, including the establishment of a locally-sourced food cafe and farmers' market, SCF have identified the urgent need to provide a separate, dedicated, safe and inspiring space for training and learning about city farming, horticultural and animal husbandry skills.
- 5.3 The current accommodation comprises one small activity room which is used as a flexible space for meetings, office space, volunteer break out space and school groups. Feedback from users is that the quality of the space is poor and the conflicting users mean that groups have to be turned away and equally when in use the volunteers have nowhere to have their break indoors in the wet and cold weather. The space itself is not conducive to learning being partly a storage space, a thoroughfare between the office and cafe and an under-equipped place for volunteer breaks.
- 5.4 There is potential for regular courses at the weekend for adults, which SCG is planning to offer when they have a suitable space. It is envisaged that the new Eco space would also be used for skill share sessions and group activities.
- 5.5 An area within the perimeter boundary of the SCF has been identified that could accommodate a small Eco Pod. Please refer to **Appendix 1** for site layout.
- 5.6 Planning Permission has been granted to construct the Eco Pod under application PA/14/00249. Approval was provided 2nd April 2014. Please refer to **Appendix 2** Planning Approval: Decision Notice.
- 5.7 Under the terms of their lease SCF are required to obtain Landlords consent in order to construct the Eco Pod Building.

- 5.8. The Board should note that in granting SCF permission to construct the Eco Pod would not result in a net loss of public open space as the proposed building is ancillary to the use and function of the site as public open space.

6. FINANCE COMMENTS

- 6.1 The report sets out a further request by Stepney City Farm to construct an ‘Eco Pod’ for which planning approval has been granted. The board rejected a previous request in September 2014. There are no specific financial implications emanating from this report for the Kings Georges Fields Board. Stepney City Farm will be responsible for the construction, and a funding application has been submitted to the Big Lottery. The approval of the funding is subject to the Landlord permission being secured.

7. LEGAL COMMENTS

- 7.1 The lease to Stepney City Farm provides that the tenant shall not make any additions or erect any building without the prior written consent of the landlord. If consent is to be granted for the construction of the Pod it should stipulate that such work is carried out in accordance with the requisite planning and building regulations consents and to the reasonable satisfaction of the landlord.

8. ONE TOWER HAMLETS CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1 SCF is a well-used community resource and a free-to-access, natural environment in which people can interact with animals, plants and each other. As stated in paragraph 5.1 of this report, the volunteer base has doubled over 2012 – 2013 but is now restricted due to the lack of facilities. SCF plays a major role in bringing communities and residents from different backgrounds and ages together, thereby enhancing the opportunity for community cohesion.

9. SUSTAINABLE ACTION FOR A GREENER ENVIRONMENT

- 9.1 The Eco Pods are constructed of recyclable products where possible. Once constructed, they provide a more appropriate base for teaching the community about sustainable farming, animal husbandry and environmentally friendly practices. SCF continue to demonstrate the Council’s commitment to renewable energy and environmental considerations.

10. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There are no significant risks to the Council associated with this proposal. Granting SCF permission to construct the Eco Pod would not result in a net loss of public open space as the proposed building is ancillary to the use and function of the site as public open space. However the risk to SCF is that it may lose the opportunity of obtaining funding to improve the facilities within the farm should the Council not consent to this request

11. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

11.1 The vibrant presence of the SCF in this area provides an interesting and exciting opportunity for the community to learn and take part in semi-rural activities within an inner city Borough.

12. EFFICIENCY STATEMENT

12.1 There are no relevant efficiency issues arising in the context of the board's decision.

13 APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Eco Pod and Site Layout

Appendix 2 – Planning Approval: Decision Notice

Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012

LIST OF “BACKGROUND PAPERS” USED IN THE PREPARATION OF THIS REPORT

Brief description of “Background Paper”

None