

## Education Futures Trust

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# Strategic Implementation Plan: The Firs

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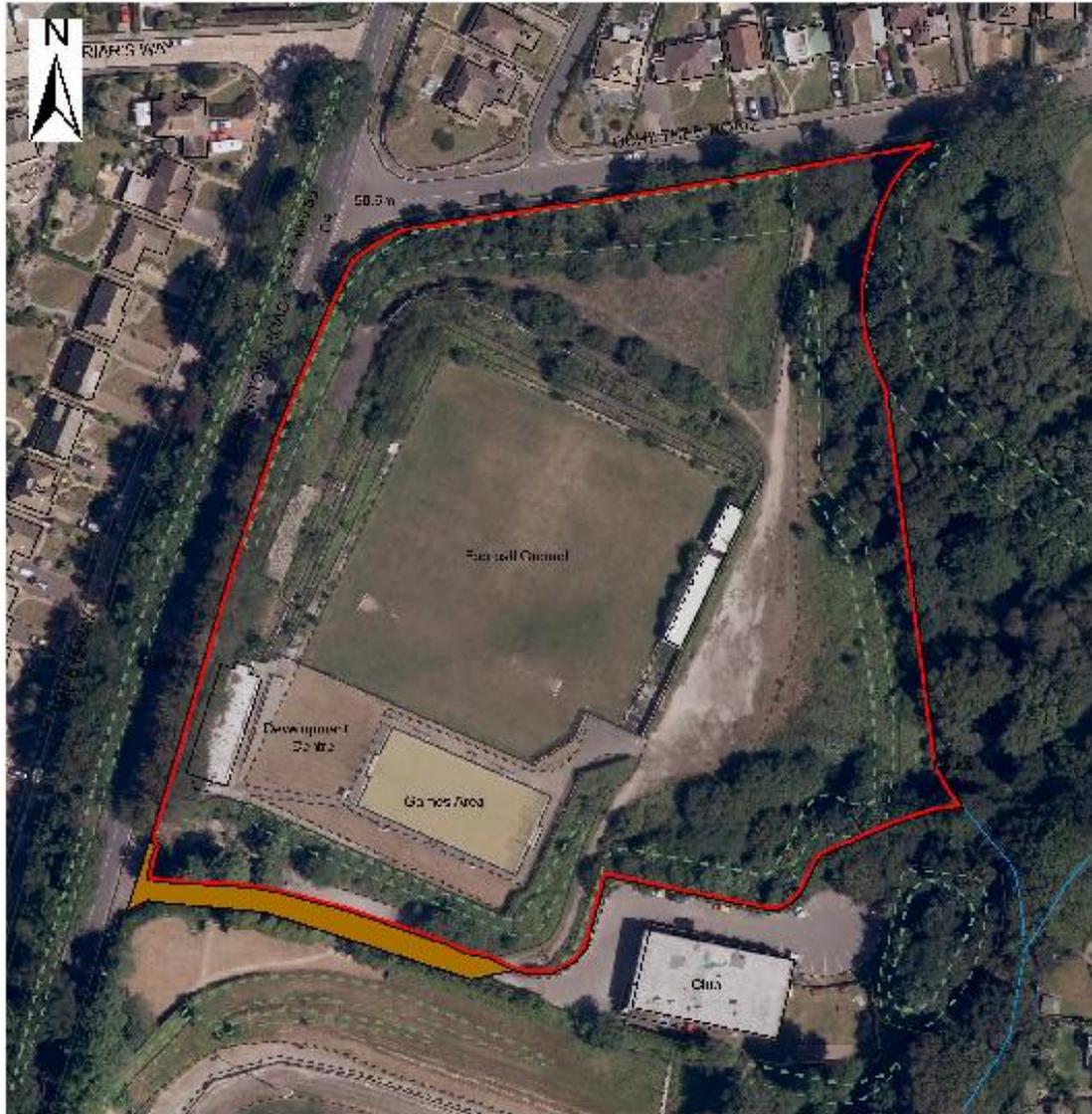
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Charity Number: 1146171  
Company Number: 7852922

**Our children. Our families. Our community.**

Registered Charity Number: 1146171 Company Number: 7852922  
Patron: Baroness Stedman Scott OBE



The Hirs  
Elphinstone Road  
Hastings



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# Strategic Plan

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## 1. Purpose

The purpose of this document is to present the trustees' strategic overview of The Firs development, and to provide guidance for the whole life of the project.

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## 2. Strategic Outline

### 2.1. Purpose

This document provides the trustees' strategic overview of The Firs development.

The primary aim of the development at The Firs is to establish a sustainable future for the charity to ensure the ongoing delivery of appropriate services for the most vulnerable local residents. The development will increase the charity's reach through the regeneration of the site, to those requiring support, particularly those living in poverty and disadvantage thus enhancing the economic and social well-being of local people.

During 2019, the development will deliver a 100% increase in the numbers accessing the site, with an ongoing 10% increase annually during the following 10 year period until 2030.

EFT's Income from the site will be established during 2019 for the first time, with the baseline of Hastings Borough Council's income tripled in the year. For the following 2 years, the income generation will be doubled, with an ongoing 10% increase annually thereafter until 2030.

This development will provide Hastings Borough Council with a unique offer for residents and businesses through an improved physical resource that will deliver sporting, environmental, educational, cultural and leisure opportunities, in addition to delivering a potential income stream for the Charity. Along with the prospect of improved health and wellbeing for local people, The Firs will enhance volunteering and employment opportunities in the town.

### 2.2. Background

In 2017, through the presentation of a business plan to Hastings Borough Council, Education Futures Trust (EFT) was successful in its bid to transform the semi-derelict, underused brownfield site at The Firs, Elphinstone Road, into a therapeutic, outdoor learning facility (see Appendix 1). This plan, and subsequent documents, will build on the original submission.

With the support of local residents, community members, council members and officers, negotiations over the lease were finalised at the end of 2018. Pro-bono support from The Cranfield Trust, A4 Architects and Mayer Brown International LLP enabled the vision to be transformed into reality, ready to be taken forward in 2019.

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The charity's intention to develop a unique identity for the facilities will provide sustainability for the organisation through the creation of stable income streams. With a mix of sporting facilities, play areas, community spaces, woodland and quiet places, this phased development will educate and inspire local people and visitors.

The EFT will utilise existing structures and green spaces: preserving and enhancing both the natural environment and the man-made developments, taking account of the needs of local people and the EFT's mission.

### **2.3. Policy Statement**

EFT intends to develop a physical resource that will be made available to local communities, whilst serving the economic and delivery needs of the charity. Combined with an area for community use, which will contribute to the well-being of borough residents and enable improved life chances for the most vulnerable, The Firs will offer an enclosed multi-purpose central area that will offer a safe place for the charity's specialist provision, as well as celebrations and events.

Through the lease, the charity will need to provide the public with access to the multi-games area that it is obliged to maintain, whilst also allowing overflow parking for the local football club on identified areas. Additionally, it is the intention of the charity to allow 24/7 access to parts of the site for the public, including areas that are identified for play and recreation.

Service users, volunteers and staff will benefit from access to additional facilities and fenced off areas, including those in the centre of the site. Safety and security will be paramount when developing these spaces as many will be available to the most vulnerable, including children under 5. Maintenance of appropriate insurance, including £10 million public liability, will be fundamental to the charity upholding its responsibility to service users.

Community groups, businesses and educational establishments will be encouraged to take advantage of the site as part of the drive to generate income for the maintenance of the site and the charity's activities, whilst individuals will be encouraged to use the public areas, such as the multi-games area, green gym and the play facilities, at times when they are not booked by groups.

It is anticipated that the development of the site will take place over a period of 10 years. The flexible design of the phases ensures that it will be possible to be responsive to funding opportunities and the changing needs of the charity and local people, whilst ensuring that delivery of activities can continue throughout the period.

### **2.4. Governance**

The charity has a well-developed, strong board of trustees (see Appendix 2) who hold a range of strategic roles. The trustees hold monthly board meetings and they hold overall responsibility for The Firs development. Trustees will retain oversight of the project development through reports to the monthly board meetings. This document will provide the basis for the development, and will be supplemented

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with an operations plan, a risk assessment and project initiation plans.

The development has been divided into phases and no phase will commence without sign off from the board of trustees.

Operational oversight will sit with the Chief Executive, who will delegate responsibilities to appropriate managers, staff and volunteers.

A 50 year lease has been negotiated with Hastings Borough Council, with a break clause after 25 years. Plans submitted to Hastings Borough Council with the lease will form the basis of any development on the site: any major deviation from the submitted plans will be presented to the council in advance of work.

Planning permission will be sought for the development of the site and all plans will conform to relevant legislation.

Following the processes listed in the Delegated Powers documentation, contracts will be drawn up for work involving external providers,

Insurance cover of £10 million public, employers and product liability, has been extended to cover the whole site and will be regularly reviewed.

The appointment of an Estates/Facilities Manager will ensure that the project moves forward, remains focused and delivers timely outcomes. Linked to the strategic and operational plans, project initiation documents will provide structure for all phases and themes and provide clarity to trustees as well as staff and volunteers working on the project.

## **2.5. Assumptions**

The plan is written based on the following assumptions:

- the lease will be agreed and signed early in 2019;
- board support will be forthcoming;
- planning permission is obtained;
- Hastings Borough Council's support for the Trust continues, including approval of necessary amendments;
- Hastings Borough Council have accepted responsibility for consequences of historic use of the land;
- funding is identified and available;
- staffing levels are adequate;
- support from the local community continues;
- demand for use of the facilities increases;
- the site retains the capacity for development.

## **2.6. Drivers**

The key driver for the charity is to identify a sustainable method to deliver flexible services to the residents of Hastings. The need for a dedicated, safe space has become crucial for the work with the most vulnerable service users. The Firs, as a

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unique facility for the borough, will provide a sustainable future for the charity by introducing new income streams, additional space and enhanced profile.

Additional drivers:

- delivering an educational service for local schools and other educational establishments leading to an increase in educational services;
- local residents and community desire to protect, enhance and access the green and recreational spaces;
- Hastings Borough Council's need to make best use of the site and provide recreational facilities for residents;
- support from the borough council to enable the charity to provide services to the most vulnerable residents;
- desire by all involved to develop a unique resource for the south-east;
- increased annual usage of The Firs in the first 5 years of ownership from the baseline of January 2019:
  - 10% increase in education services;
  - community use established in year 1, with a subsequent 10% increase;
  - additional sports introduced to the site e.g. baseball, hockey and stool ball;
  - sport use increased by 5%;
  - volunteer input increased by 55 in years 1 and 2 and then maintained thereafter;
  - organised activities increased by 5% in year 1 and 10% thereafter.

## **2.7. Exit strategy**

The lease has been negotiated for a period of 50 years. The charity has to return the land to a similar or better state than it is on handover, and a detailed photographic record has been created to accompany the lease. The land is vandalised and in a poor state of repair, so the liability to the Trust has been minimised. Prior to the end of the lease, negotiations will be required to decide on the future of the facilities.

Should the charity experience difficulties, or cease to exist, the lease will be forfeited and foreclosed with the land returning to the council. Liability for damage will sit with the Trust. As the office sits within the lease the charity, if still in existence, would no longer have occupation of the building and would need to renegotiate a lease or vacate the space.

## **2.8. Financial Statement**

Education Futures Trust board of trustees will be responsible for signing off the phases of development. This will enable funding to be identified and as such is not dependent upon funding being available at the time of signing. It is not necessary for one phase to be completed before another is started, but due diligence will be

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required to ensure that progress remains manageable and timely.

The total cost of the work to complete the whole project is estimated at £1.5 million, but the project is designed so that progress can be halted or paused at the end of any phase. Trustees will retain oversight and formal permission to commit spend to any new phase will be required. Materials such as the strategic and operational plans, alongside detailed project implementation documents will inform decision making. This will protect the charity and ensure that sufficient resource is available to progress to a new stage.

A range of funding methods will be sought to avoid reliance upon one source; providing additional protection for the charity, whilst helping to deliver change for different stakeholders and users.

## **2.9. Income Generation**

The development of The Firs will provide the Trust with a range of income streams. These will be developed over the phases, but where trustees feel that the requirements to increase income becomes paramount, then these areas of development will be prioritised. Anticipated new areas of income include:

- room hire;
- exclusive use of the multi-games area;
- café revenue;
- hire of sports facilities/spaces;
- nursery;
- events;
- residential;
- educational visits;
- business team days;
- weddings.

Funding will be sought from a variety of sources covering the key elements of community, environment, education and sport. Ahead of the lease, successful bids have been made to:

- Lund Trust
- Community Safety
- Active Access for Growth
- Postcode Lottery.

We will continue to build on the pro-bono support from businesses such as:

- A4 Architects
- Mayer Brown International LLP
- The Cranfield Trust

whilst augmenting the support received from local businesses and partners such as:

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- Hastings Direct
- B & Q
- The Darvell Community.

In the spirit of the principles behind the development, which is to embed the resource within the local community, we will involve volunteers, service users and residents at all stages from development to delivery. They will shape the design and services, whilst their skills will be advanced and enriched as they contribute to bringing about the change. This will reduce costs; particularly in the early stages when there will be a need to show progress in order to demonstrate intent.

Once underway, we believe that developing a therapeutic outdoor learning centre at The Firs will unite the local community and deliver a drive for change in this deprived neighbourhood and across the whole of Hastings.

Signed:



Allison Baines,  
Chair of Trustees,  
Education Futures Trust.

Date: February 2019

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# Appendix 1: The Firs: a therapeutic outdoor learning centre

## The Firs - Concept Master Plan



1. Rain garden and decking at London Wetland Centre



2. Rain garden retention basin



3. Willow and Dogwood planted for winter colour. Can be used for basket making and sculpture.



4. Bespoke terraced camping cabins. Roof area with potential for solar PV



5. Single Point Swing



6. Timber play climbing forest



7. Pump for water play in nursery garden.



### The Firs - Education Futures Trust

- Sustainability is at the heart of this proposal and feeds into all the learning that takes place on the site. High quality landscaping and facilities will attract corporate clients for hire at weekends so providing an additional income stream.
- Rainwater is collected off all roofs and drained via a mix of channels and planted swales to a new wetland area combined with retention basin. Rainwater storage is integrated into all new buildings for use in garden areas.
- Old football pitch becomes a 'village green' with new cafe and training kitchen. Circular route around the site allows for running, riding trikes and scooters and connects all areas of the site.
- Cafe roof has potential for solar panels as do the camping pods.
- Existing 'woodland walk' extends into orchard area.
- Fire pit and barbecue space.
- Playspace and play route could potentially be made with the children and users of the site. Imaginative bespoke play offers something different from the standard play equipment.



Water routes across the site. All water leads to south east corner where a retention basin combined with wetland is created.



Planted rain water swale and wetland including willow, dogwood and hazel for coppicing and crafts. Informal play route across swale.



Raised beds for vegetable growing.



Existing tiered concrete adapted with decks and planters to make play space.



Picnic tables under crab apple trees.



Rainwater storage.



Internal circulation routes.



Public circulation routes.



Boundary fences - all to be metal mesh.



Baseball back stop fence - height 6 M.



Lighting column.

Education Futures Trust, The Firs  
Concept Master Plan 1:500 @ A2  
4844(1)1100D Date:16.11.2018



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## Appendix 2: Trustees

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Allison Baines (Chair), Retired headteacher

Geoff Burt, Department for Work and Pensions

Kevin Sinfield, A4 Architects

Kim Forward, Hastings Borough Councillor

Martin Yeandle, Education student

Ruth Ashenden, Pension adviser and teacher

Simon Hubbard, Director of Operational Services, Hastings Borough Council

Steve Manwaring, Director, Hastings Voluntary Action

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