

Frequently Asked Questions - Updated 12-12-2021

Question	Response
1 Why is Somermead being sold?	The sale of Somermead has been triggered by the discovery, in May 2020, of extensive rot in the floor of the lodge, and subsequent investigations which have suggested that repair might cost in the region of £150,000. But we were aware before COVID occurred that there was a decline in the use of Somermead by members from both Counties, with less than 15% of all units using the lodge when it was fully functional during 2017 - 2019. Hence the vast majority of our members are receiving no benefit from Somermead, yet the two counties have an ongoing financial and support commitment, including maintaining significant reserves, to keep the site fully operational and meeting regulatory standards.
2 What does the sale of Somermead mean to me and my girls?	The sale of Somermead will enable funds to be used to support all the girls and young women in our counties today, and in the future, to share in residential and adventurous experiences.
3 We have used Somermead a lot. What are the benefits of the sale to my unit?	The sale of Somermead will enable funds to be used to provide a wider range of residential challenge and adventure experiences.
4 What alternative facilities are available?	Within our counties we already hold information on alternative residential and activity sites for units, districts and divisions to use. We will work with our advisers to further enhance these details to help unit members to choose locations that provide the experiences that they are looking for, both within our counties and beyond. Examples of locally available indoor and outdoor residential facilities, many with accessibility features, include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Briarlands Activity Centre, Girlguiding Bristol and South Gloucestershire - Foxlease Activity Centre, Girlguiding - Huish Woods Campsite, Scout Camp Site, Taunton - Deer Park Activity Centre, Girlguiding Gloucestershire - The Campbell Room, YMCA, Over Stowey - Woodhouse Park Activity Centre, Almondsbury - Pixies Holt and Dartmoor Training Centre, Babcock LDP - Chelwood Scout campsite, near Pensford - Bishops Lydeard Scout Camp Site - Glenny Wood, Scout Camp Site, Portishead
5 Was any attempt made to save Somermead?	Usage of the site had been falling in the years prior to the pandemic. In the light of this, and following discovery of the problem with the lodge, careful consideration was given to attempting to raise sufficient funds to enable it to be repaired, together with improvement of the site to make it more attractive to potential users. However it was decided we would direct our efforts to the significant task of re-energising local units and growing guiding to benefit even more girls following the pandemic.
6 Why has more effort not been made to save the site?	The Trustees of both counties have a duty to ensure that members funds are spent wisely and unfortunately, a significant decline in member usage from both counties, combined with the high repair costs of the lodge, and the ongoing financial and support commitments for the site, means that retaining the site is no longer in the best interests of the majority of our members. Selling the site will release money that has been invested over time, along with money that is being held against these risks, and enable funds to be used to support all the girls and young women in our counties today, and in the future, to share in residential and adventurous experiences. Repairing the lodge, even with generous grants and donations, and continuing to own and operate the site prevents us from doing this.
7 Who made the decision to sell?	Somermead lodge and campsite is jointly owned at a county level by Somerset and Somerset North. The County Executive Committees, as Trustees of the counties, have the responsibility to make difficult decisions for the benefit of the majority of their members. The decision to sell Somermead has been based on separate discussions in the two committees over a period of many months, when a range of factors including site usage, facilities and fund raising were considered.

8	How will Somermead be replaced?	The proceeds of the sale will enable greater use of a diverse range of more local outdoor activities and facilities across the two counties. Somermead will not itself be replaced, but both counties will support units to access other facilities locally and beyond.
9	Was there any consultation with leaders and members before the decision was taken?	The County Executive Committees, as Trustees of the counties, have the responsibility to make difficult decisions for the benefit of the majority of their members. In particular, all Division Commissioners are members of the Executive Committee and represent the interests of their local areas in that forum. The decision to sell Somermead has been based on discussions over a period of many months, when a range of factors including site usage, facilities and fund raising were considered, together with the results of a survey across all leaders in the two counties, carried out in April 2021.
10	Why can't the site be run without the lodge?	Consideration has been given to either demolishing the lodge, or simply leaving it out of use (pending perhaps a better time for fundraising), whilst continuing to run the site as a greenfield campsite. However, budgetary forecasts indicated that the site would fail to break even on this basis, given the usage required to match its costs. The site would hence be a drain on the two counties' finances, as well as requiring their holding significant financial reserves against risks associated with the site. In addition, the site itself requires further investment to bring it up to current standards and address the expectations of today's girls and leaders.
11	What happens to bookings for next year?	These have been cancelled and deposits are being refunded
12	Why were we not told before that you were planning to sell the site?	As part of the due diligence process, it was agreed that advice should be sought to understand the likely market value and any factors relevant to a potential sale, to enable the Trustees to decide how best to proceed. Subsequent discussions were treated as confidential because of their commercial sensitivity. The decision to sell was taken by the Trustees, representing their divisions, having received professional advice, and in the knowledge of recent site usage, the current state of the lodge and other facilities at the site, the appetite both for fundraising and donation, together with the results of a survey across all leaders in the two counties, carried out in April 2021.
13	Have any other Girlguiding sites been sold recently or is it just Somermead that is being lost	Other guiding sites have been sold recently, including Netherurd (house and campsites) in Scotland, and London and SE Region have recently relinquished long-term leases on two campsites. Sales typically reflect: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the continual evolution of Guiding in its quest to remain relevant to the girls of the day - the relatively high cost, both in money and volunteer time, needed to run (and ensure continuing regulatory compliance of) a smaller green-field site - today's members' expectations of sites with greater levels of activity and adventure - the changing needs of leaders who are today generally more time-constrained than in years gone by and favour sites offering ready-made activities
14	Will we be told how much money was raised from the sale and what is going to happen with it?	Yes, this information will be available and will be shown in our annual accounts in due course. It will be up to the Executive Committees of both counties to discuss and decide how the money should be used.
15	Why wasn't a partnership with an external organisation such as Mendip Outdoor Pursuits used to save the site	No scenario could be envisaged which would be acceptable to the Trustees without complete sale to a potential 'partner'. Sale by auction would be required for full transparency and realisation of maximum value, and this would need to be in a completely open market for the same reasons. It could not therefore be constrained to one or several potential 'partners'. <p>Selling the site will release money that has been invested over time, along with money that is being held against these risks, and enable funds to be used to support all the girls and young women in our counties today, and in the future, to share in residential and adventurous experiences. Repairing the lodge, even with generous grants and donations, and continuing to own and operate the site prevents us from doing this.</p>
16	What is happening to the precious items at the site?	We are contacting people who have donated specific items and are working with them to rehome them as they request.
17	Can I see the auction in progress?	<u>The auction is online and can be viewed by anyone by following this link.</u> <u>https://www.cooperandtanner.co.uk/property/101148033159/bs28/somermead-centre-and-campsite/land</u>

18	Was there a meeting on Friday 10th December to discuss Somermead?	<p>On Sunday 5th December the County Commissioners were invited to attend a meeting with a group of Girlguiding Somerset members who have been in regular communications with the Commissioners since 18th October.</p> <p>Details of this meeting (including login details) were then shared widely on social media and elsewhere, however the meeting could not proceed due to failure to comply with Girlguiding requirements for meetings where under 18's are invited.</p> <p>A separate meeting was then hosted by the County Commissioners on Friday 10th December, and attendance was restricted to Girlguiding members from the units involved in the ongoing discussions.</p> <p>The questions raised, and responses, are detailed below.</p>
19	Was the surveyors report, suggesting the figure of £150,000 to repair the lodge, a completely independent report with no links, personally or professionally, to any guiding members? And was this report followed by three quotes for the repair? If not why not?	<p>A completely independent report was obtained which detailed the issues with the lodge, and the necessary remedial works, but did not provide a budgetary estimate for the work.</p> <p>A budget of the costs to repair was compiled by a volunteer using his professional capabilities as a Quantity Surveyor. He is known to some members of the committees through Guiding, but is not resident in either County and has no vested interest in the site or any future works.</p> <p>Three quotes were not obtained at this time as a specification of works and bill of quantities would need to be prepared in order to obtain comparable quotes. At the time this was not deemed necessary, especially as it would have involved significant time and money, and the budget provided sufficient information for the decisions to be taken</p>
20	Why was there no indication when the survey monkey went out that Somermead might be sold? Why choose this method of gathering leaders views, where there was no opportunity to add comments and we were in the middle of a pandemic with many leaders struggling with many other issues?	<p>The Somermead Management Committee designed the survey to understand the membership's views and appetite for future use of the Somermead site.</p> <p>The discussions about selling the site had not taken place when the survey was commissioned.</p> <p>The survey was also raising awareness of the site and what it offered.</p> <p>The survey took place in April/May 2021 at a time when the UK Government was moving the country forward through the roadmap out of lockdown. Approximately 50% of units responded.</p>

21	<p>If, as stated, the use of Somermead was in decline in 2017, 18 and 19 why was £75,000 spent on the new toilet block? And if the use of Somermead was in decline why wasn't the site being promoted both in county and beyond?</p>	<p>The need to substantially upgrade the toilet and shower facilities for the campsites was identified prior to 2015. It was agreed that this work should go ahead and in 2015 plans were prepared and planning permission obtained.</p> <p>In late 2016 questions around the design of proposed new toilet and shower block were raised on safeguarding grounds, and also the cost and approach to delivering of the new build. in 2017 this led to a redesign of the building and fixed price quote for £60k to complete the new build, with the counties providing £30k of funding.</p> <p>During the build process, changes were implemented which resulted in a 15% cost overrun. Work was not completed to schedule and the 2018 camping season was missed.</p> <p>Whilst more could always have been done, information about the site was available on the website, and the site was discussed during County Exec Meetings. The County Residential Advisers were also aware of the site and able to promote locally. It was also used on occasions by the two counties for training delivery.</p> <p>The site was also promoted during 2020/2021 for family camping; and a local leader offered to host weekends at the site to support leaders who needed to gain the relevant qualifications to camp (no-one took up the offer). Sample programmes of activities were also shared.</p>
22	<p>When calculating the percentage of units using Somermead, did you take into account those units who never go on residential, those who used Somermead more than once in a year and those who joined with other units? Somermead has also been used by 'out of county' units, other youth groups and schools, why didn't you consider the wider picture?</p>	<p>The information used to calculate the percentages was provided by the Booking Secretary. The percentage has been expressed as the number of individual units using the site over total number of current units.</p> <p>We have not measured this in terms of frequency and capacity, but as a proportion of the total number of units using the site and this is a key factor in the decision making.</p> <p>The types of residential leaders can offer to girls depends on many factors and will vary overtime and it would be wrong to assume a unit that has recently not been on a residential won't do so in future.</p> <p>In the period 2017 - 2019 (pre-COVID) we had 8 units book into the site from outside Girlguiding Somerset/Girlguiding Somerset North.</p> <p>During the period 2017 - 2019 (pre-COVID) approximately 10% of the revenue was received from non-Girlguiding users.</p>
23	<p>If, in selling Somermead publicly, you are after maximum monies why is there no uplift clause included in the terms of sale so that the two counties would benefit further if the site is developed for housing or other development?</p>	<p>There is no uplift clause because the two agents consulted independently advised that an uplift clause would be detrimental to the sale price and a barrier to some purchasers.</p>
24	<p>Why did the CCs announce the decision to sell in late October, with an auction date set for December?</p>	<p>The decision to sell was communicated to the membership in an appropriate manner at the earliest opportunity. The timescales for sale have been agreed following advice from the independent agent.</p> <p>The Trustees were happy to proceed with the sale to avoid any ongoing and unnecessary expenditure (for example insurance costs) linked to retaining the site.</p>

25	Will the decision to sell Somermead have an impact on local Guiding when looking for future donations?	<p>Almost all monies that have been donated to Somermead for various different projects have been spent in accordance with the plans set out at the time. One donation remained unspent when the decision to sell was made and has since been returned. The sale of the site will release any residual value from the site that can be reinvested in Girlguiding Somerset and Girlguiding Somerset North initiatives.</p> <p>It is considered highly unlikely that local groups will be impacted in their fundraising efforts due to the sale of Somermead.</p>
26	How will the money from the sale be distributed? How will the two counties ensure that the money is available for ALL members not just the majority, as stated. The money from the sale will eventually run out, what prospect is there for residential for future young people that are reasonably close to home?	<p>The money from the sale, along with any residual funds once all bills have been paid will be split 50:50 between the two counties. The Executives from both counties will then independently decide on how the money is used for the benefit of all members.</p> <p>Both counties are committed to providing ongoing support for leaders to help them find alternative locations that meet their needs for residential. In the first instance units should contact the residential advisers for support, and in time lists of some alternative venues will be made available.</p> <p>The counties also have grant schemes available to support individual girls or volunteers who need financial assistance to attend residential.</p>
27	Did the CCs contact anyone, in or out of Guiding, about fundraising? Why was fundraising not considered?	<p>Following discovery of the problem with the lodge, careful consideration by the Executives was given to attempting to raise sufficient funds to enable the lodge to be repaired, together with extra funds for improvement of the site to make it more attractive to potential users.</p> <p>The Trustees are aware of the significant fundraising efforts that have taken place in the past. Raising money for any project is difficult, especially in the current climate - and whilst it could be done, it would require years of effort from volunteers who will mostly be doing this on top of their other volunteering commitments. The fundraising effort would need to reflect the impact of rising project costs too.</p> <p>Therefore it was decided we would direct our efforts to the significant task of re-building local units and growing guiding to ensure Girlguiding continues to be here to benefit girls following the pandemic. (Our membership across the two counties had reduced by approximately 30% <u>during the pandemic</u>. We are <u>recovering</u>, slowly).</p>
28	Moving forwards, how will local voices, especially girls voices, be heard?	<p>The structure of Girlguiding ensures that the issues and concerns of local units are represented by the Commissioners (team leaders) at every level.</p> <p>However, more needs to be done to hear the voices of the girls during the decision making process, and this has been demonstrated by Girlguiding when they have developed specific Unit Meeting Activities to request feedback.</p> <p>In Somerset, we have just appointed a Girls Voice volunteer who will be working closely with units across the County to hear what young people would like us to provide at a County level.</p>