

# **AMMAN VALLEY TROTTERING CLUB LTD**

## **PROPOSAL FOR CHANGE OF USE – COMMUNITY FACILITIES BUILDING**

### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

#### **1. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSAL**

AVTC Ltd is a community-owned business in existence since 1979 to raise funds to be invested in the communities of Lower Brynaman/Tairgwaith and Gwaun-Cae-Gurwen by means of an annual programme of events at its 25-acre site long-leased from Neath Port Talbot CBC. It became a Company Limited by Guarantee in December 2004 (Company Number 5310934)

We are seeking permission for change of use of our site-based events facility building, so that we can hold additional fund-raising community events and functions within the building between Thursdays and Saturdays throughout the year.

Our current permission allows harness racing-related activities within our facilities building. We would like to extend this permission to a full range of community fund-raising events and activities within the facility.

Currently, events at the track principally occur between April and September, but since COVID, the financial contribution of these events has diminished and there is a clear need to supplement them by beginning a programme of activities and services within the 18m x 15m facilities building. These activities will both help meet community need, attract new visitors and contribute a steady additional income stream to ensure viability of the community business.

The facilities building to which the submission relates is 18m x 15m, is catering kitchen-equipped and has a floor area of 18m x 10m. The external fabric of the building is insulated steel cladding featuring PV panels, has a fully tested and approved range of utilities and equipment (fire, health & safety, environmental health) and can safely hold in excess of 200 persons at any one time. As the attached site plan shows the building is situated well away from the nearest housing and so would, in our view, constitute no additional noise nuisance. Parking on site is plentiful with hard-core access.

If change of use is approved, the events and services would need to be held flexibly to include a community cafe facility initially between Thursday and Saturday throughout the year, with special food provision to OAP groups and other vulnerable residents and catering to family celebrations (largely, but not exclusively, on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays).

To gauge the level of community need, support and for potential issues, we held a short, 6-week pilot period of cafe service earlier in 2023 with assistance from the Food Poverty Fund and the response was excellent. In addition the community cafe facility if approved would also cater to the annual programme of external events at the site and further contribute to financial viability.

The kitchen operation within the facility will provide part-time employment from the community to a cook and kitchen assistant throughout the year and to casual employment for residents during the external event season.

## 2. EXISTING USE

The 25-acre site is a former brownfield, pit-spoil site located adjacent to Morriston Place, Taigwaith. The land has been held by Amman Valley Trotting Club Ltd (AVTC Ltd) since 1979 on a renewable 25-year lease from Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council. The lease was last renewed on 2020.

Since 1979, in order to make the site useable and because of the nature of the spoil, AVTC have engaged in a number of volunteer-led, part- externally-funded major capital schemes to create a community asset from a wasteland. With past permissions of the Authority, these have included:

- -Tree, shrub and wildflower meadow planting
- -The development of a ½ mile championship standard, all-weather harness racing track (one of only 2 in Wales and one of only 3 in the UK) which has brought a regular revenue stream to a hard-pressed community
- -The creation of a children's play garden
- -The operation of a local Circle of Youth (whilst resources permitted)
- -The construction of comprehensive drainage system to the site enabling us to transform it from brown-field to an environmentally-recovered public amenity to be enjoyed by all
- -The construction of an events barn to enable the community and visitors to meet, to socialise, to eat and to enable the community business to go on environmentally improving the site.
- -The provision of a 75-seater stand for outdoor events
- -The construction of a water garden and associated bi-lingual signage to help restore water-based habitat for insects, water plants and small fish
- -The laying of an all-weather footpath into our peripheral woodlands to ensure that these areas can be accessed by all including residents with disability
- -The construction of a community garden to supply our community café
- -The training of a Kickstart placement and of volunteers to gain Food Hygiene accreditation
- Currently the site hosts 12 track-based equine events (excluding training days) run under the aegis of the umbrella body British Harness
- Racing and a long weekend of Dirt-track Motorcycle riding events and an Islandic Horses Event day.

As one of only 3 hard tracks in the UK, the site also caters to grass track events that would otherwise have had to be abandoned during periods of bad weather. During appropriate external events, AVTC also provides on-site medical cover for participants and visitors, approved equine care, site marshalling and environmental cleaning to ensure the site is clean and useable for casual users of this open access community facility e.g. dog walkers, hikers and joggers.

Special events have been the subject of individual event licences which have been annually capped in number and paid for individually. While partially helpful, the existing arrangement has made it difficult for us to fully accommodate demand from groups and individuals for fund- raising and family events as demand arises.

### **3. NEIGHBOUR AND COMMUNITY CONSULTATION**

Prior to developing this project and using the local knowledge of our resident volunteers, we researched the activities of nearby businesses to ensure that our proposed expansion of activity did not directly compete with nearby businesses. In terms of food provision and event staging within the facilities building, we identified the following businesses who might possibly have been impacted by the proposal:

- a) Tairgwaith Club – this will close after Christmas 2023
- b) Tairgwaith Community Hall – has inadequate catering facilities for the level of customer use we forecast
- c) Canolfan Maerdy – the catering facilities are primarily used to service the community crèche on site and seating and hours of operation within the kitchen/café are heavily limited. Currently the business' largest area is devoted to youth club activities. Our proposed hours of operation do not appear to conflict with those of this business
- d) Cwmgors Rugby Club – there is no food provision at this site
- e) Gwaun-Cae-Gurwen Community Hall – catering is not currently provided at this hall
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- g) Y Gegin Rhif Un – located adjacent to the NISA store in Gwaun-Cae-Gurwen, this café has very limited floorspace, limited parking and only very limited seating.

None of the above businesses are currently catering for larger scale community events within their buildings and so are not direct competition for our proposed activity.

### **4. BIODIVERSITY AND GEOLOGICAL CONSERVATION**

As a feature of the original planning permission for the building construction, it was agreed with the Authority that 2 bat boxes would be attached to the eaves of the facilities building. These boxes are in place and intact.