

EXECUTIVE BRIEFING



OUR HEATH BARN | AN ABRIDGEMENT

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This document presents an abridged version of the 166 page document: ***Our_Heath_Barn_Bid_V2.pdf***

The first section of this briefing document comprises a **four page summary** of the bid document, and the second section of this briefing comprises a **Q&A session** to bring the reader up to date with recent progress.

Our Heath Barn urges the reader to refer to the full 166 page bid if possible. It contains significantly more explanation and background, as well as plans, visuals, financial modelling, risks & mitigations, official letters of support and evidence of the strength of community feeling.

1. THE VISION & CONTEXT

What is Our Heath Barn?

Our Heath Barn is a structured, professionally advised Community Interest Company (CIC) transitioning into a **Charitable Community Benefit Society (CCBS)**. Backed by Co-operatives UK and Plunkett UK, this legal framework establishes a democratic, member-owned infrastructure. It features a statutory asset lock to protect the asset from ever returning to private commercial use.

The organisation's objective is to secure the Community Asset Transfer of Heath Barn—a Grade II listed 16th-century heritage complex—from Hertfordshire County Council (HCC). The proposal introduces a viable **split-use approach**:

- **Community Stewardship:** Converting the historic barns into a permanently public arts, wellbeing, and café hub.
- **Sensitive Residential Conversion:** Partnering with expert heritage developers to convert the farmhouse and east wing upper floor, delivering an immediate financial return to HCC. This is important: the financial element of *this* bid is not the sum total of potential capital receipt for Herts County Council.

Evidenced Community & Social Need

Hemel Hempstead and the wider Dacorum borough exhibit distinct demographic pressures and social deficits that this hub directly targets:

- **An Aging Population:** The over-65 population in Dacorum is projected to rise from 17.4% to 23.3% by 2043. Social isolation in this group increases dementia risk by 27%.
- **Health & Deprivation Disparities:** Central Hemel Hempstead town wards report self-rated good health at 62%, significantly below the 74% national average, highlighting a clear gap in preventative healthcare infrastructure.
- **Youth & Marginalised Groups:** Above-average Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) prevalence and high NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) risk factors exist locally. There is a severe shortage of vocational, creative, and intergenerational spaces.
- **Geographic Void:** Boxmoor remains the only neighbourhood in Hemel Hempstead that lacks a dedicated community centre within its ward boundaries.

Local and County Policy Alignment

The project converts a vacant liability into a strategic delivery asset, directly aligning with statutory council strategies:

- **Dacorum Local Plan to 2041:**
 - *Chapter 4 (Social Value):* Satisfies stringent metrics by demonstrating massive, independent exchequer savings.
 - *Chapter 7 (Historic Environment):* Directly delivers the adaptive, sensitive reuse of an endangered heritage asset.
 - *Chapter 10 (Healthy Communities & Stewardship):* Fulfils explicit policy goals for expanding local community facilities and fostering community-led asset management.
- **Dacorum Borough Council Arts & Culture Strategy:** Mirrors the council's three exact thematic priorities: **Creative Health** (improving wellbeing through creative practice), **Connecting Communities** (facilitating cultural sector collaboration), and **Places and Spaces** (putting culture at the forefront of local regeneration).
- **Health & Social Frameworks:** Operates as a direct, non-clinical destination partner for GP-led social prescribing via the NHS and the *Five Ways to Wellbeing* framework.

2. CORE PROPOSALS

The Six Complementary Uses of the Site

The split-use model structurally isolates the historic barns for dedicated community activation, transforming the complex into a multi-use hub across six clear operational zones:

- **Community Café:** A 40-cover indoor/outdoor hospitality space. It serves as the low-barrier entry point to reduce local loneliness and drive daily footfall.
- **Heritage Events, Gallery & Wedding Venue (West Barn):** A larger premium commercial asset available for exclusive hire. This functions as the primary economic engine of the entire site.
- **Creative Workshops (North Barn):** A mid-sized purpose-built studio infrastructure addressing Hemel Hempstead's acute shortage of creative workspaces. It provides flexible rooms for arts, crafts, singing, and local exhibitions.
- **Therapy & Wellbeing Suite:** Ground-floor clinical treatment rooms plus a dedicated child and family therapeutic space designed to host localised, non-clinical healthcare practitioners.
- **Artist Studios & Residencies:** Affordable workspaces for local creatives, embedded to support public programming, community classes, and regional cultural output.
- **Weekend Markets & Walled Garden:** Activation of the historic courtyard for linked cafe or barn use, intergenerational play, outdoor performances, community horticultural projects, and independent retail markets.

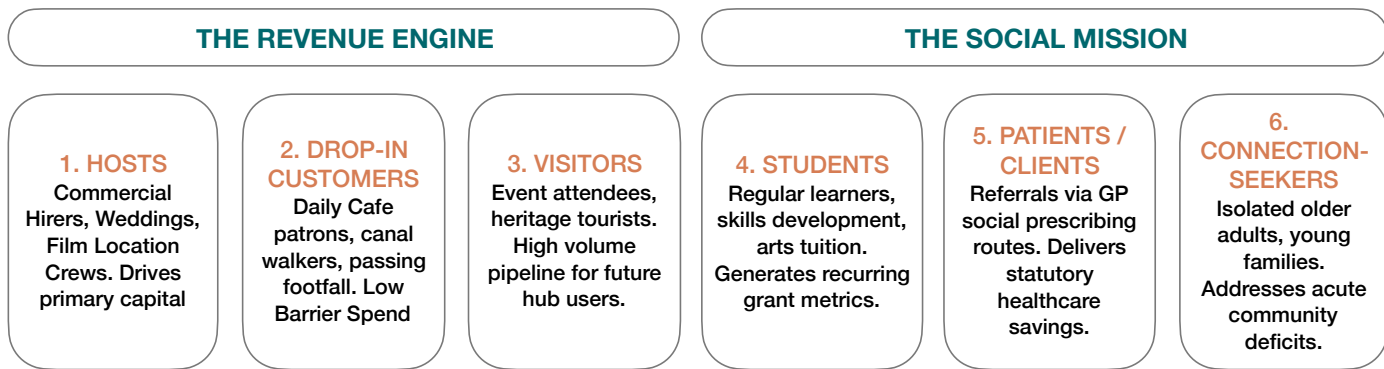
The Three-Pillar Operational Programme

To ensure maximum asset utilisation seven days a week, services are systematically delivered through three reinforcing pillars:

- A. **The Arts Pillar:** Encompasses fine arts, traditional crafts, literary circles, performing arts, and digital media illustration. It creates a robust cultural alternative to standard residential developments.
- B. **The Wellbeing Pillar:** Spans physical movement classes (Yoga/Pilates), mental health counselling, nutritional therapies, nature-led groups, and specialised sessions (Dementia Cafés, SEND groups, Care Leaver support).
- C. **The Rental Pillar:** Captures commercial income via life-milestone celebrations (weddings, anniversaries) and flexible corporate workspace hiring.

Target Audience: The "Visit Mission" Cluster Ecosystem

Rather than operating as a single-use venue, Heath Barn functions as an interdependent commercial and social ecosystem targeting six distinct visitor clusters:



- **Sustainability Loop:** High-margin commercial activity from *Hosts* and *Drop-In Customers* directly cross-subsidises free or heavily discounted services for *Students*, *Patients*, and *Connection-Seekers*.

3. IMPACT AND DELIVERY

Robust Governance & Delivery Team

Our Heath Barn is a professional, values-led entity structured specifically to manage complex, large-scale community assets. The executive board integrates specialists across architecture, heritage conservation, and local governance:

- **Professional Architecture & Project Management:** Led by Hugo Hardy (RIBA/Arb Chartered Architect), who has a proven track record in high-profile, community focussed heritage restorations, including the renovation of Frogmore Paper mill in Apsley and the multi award-winning National Lottery Heritage Funded restoration of Rectory Lane Cemetery in Berkhamsted, both awarded substantial grants from the National Lottery Heritage Fund.
- **Heritage Conservation Specialist Team:** Supported by specialised advisors, including Mark Battram (Heritage Surveyor), Rory Cullen (Heritage Accredited Conservation Professional and former Head of Buildings for the National Trust), Louis Curtis (MSc Timber Building Conservation, IHBC) and Kate Schwarz (Historic England, where she had strategic oversight of the £20.7m NLHF-funded restoration of Shrewsbury Flaxmill Maltings).
- **Institutional Backing:** Formal operational mentorship provided by Co-operatives UK and Plunkett UK, linking the team directly with *Stretford Public Hall*—a successful, directly comparable heritage asset transfer model.

Modelled Social Value

The social impact of the hub has been modelled using the HACT UK Social Value Bank, HM Treasury Green Book valuations, and PSSRU Unit Costs of Health & Social Care.

- **Modelled Social Value:** Generates £2.27 million a year in wellbeing value to individuals and the wider community.
- **Indicative Social Return on Investment Ratio:** Delivers £15.20 of modelled social value for every £1 invested.
- **Cost-Avoidance Proxies:** Attributes approximately £770,000 a year to reduced demand on health, social care, and employment services.
- **Financial Disclaimer:** These figures are modelled proxies drawn from national datasets. They are not cashable savings and have not been validated with Hertfordshire County Council services.
- **Budgetary Clarity:** They must not be read as a direct budgetary return to the Council. We welcome the opportunity to test and revise these assumptions collaboratively with relevant service areas.
- **Long-Term Viability:** National data from Plunkett UK shows community-owned businesses under this model carry a 94% long-term survival rate, against 39% for private SMEs.

High-Level Delivery Timeline & Project Phasing

To protect public funds, the restoration and development programme is divided into a careful, **nine-phase sequencing plan totalling £603,955:**

PHASE 1–2 PRE-DEVELOPMENT & STABILISATION (Months 1–6) → April 2027

- Execute conditional sale agreement and secure formal Landowner Access License.
- Deploy non-invasive structural timber assessments.
- Submit / unlock initial sub-£250k NLHF grant.



PHASE 3–5 PLANNING SUBMISSION & DETAILED INVESTIGATION (Months 7–19) → April 2028

- Seasonal dusk/dawn bat emergence counting.
- Secure explicit HCC landowner signature for planning.
- Navigate the 90-day council planning window.
- Run parallel soil testing and finalise tender packs.
- **Legal Asset Transfer Pre-requisites:** Formal title transfer to the CCBS is conditional upon securing full planning consent and the main NLHF delivery grant award at **Month 17**. HCC retains ownership until both milestones clear, ensuring zero risk to public funds.



PHASE 6–7 PRE-COMMENCEMENT & CORE CAPITAL WORKS (Months 20–31) → May 2029

- Bridge 12-week NLHF assessment window with volunteer clearing days.
- Secure bat license and party wall agreements.
- Mobilise builders for roofing, clearances, stabilisation.
- Execute internal utilities, flooring, and disabled WCs.



PHASE 8–9 FULL HUB FIT-OUT & OPENING (Months 32–35) → August 2029

- Commercial kitchen fit-out and West Barn rigging.
- Deploy volunteer streams for modular assembly.
- **LAUNCH:** SOFT and FULL Openings

4. RESOURCE AND COLLABORATION

Robust Financial Viability & Projections

The operating model has been structured conservatively, utilising detailed forecasting tested via interactive modelling (*Heath Barn Combined v5*) and benchmarked against comparable heritage venues:

- **Operating Year 3:** The hub achieves **100% operational self-sufficiency**, completely eliminating ongoing grant dependency.
- **Operating Year 5 Onwards:** The venue generates a **£152,000 annual operating surplus (indexed)**, which is legally locked to be entirely reinvested back into the maintenance of the historic fabric and community programming.
- **Commercial Headroom:** Revenue projections are backed by proven regional demand for heritage event hire. While comparable local sites (e.g., Headstone Manor Barn) command £5,000–£7,700 per day, Our Heath Barn opens at a highly competitive £3,000 to rapidly build market volume. Additional significant revenue upside exists through period film and TV location filming, leveraging Dacorum's active position in the Hertfordshire screen economy.

The Capital Funding Mix & Tangible Cash Contribution

The financing strategy achieves a secured and pledged total of **£162,000+** for initial match-funding and seed capital, eliminating financial exposure for the Council.

Tangible Commitment: Our Heath Barn formally offers a **fixed cash sum of £77,000** directly to Hertfordshire County Council towards the acquisition of the building and land at the point of transfer.

Concrete Requests from Hertfordshire County Council

To unlock this £2.27m annual social asset and eliminate the ongoing holding costs to the Council (£129,919 incurred between 2019 and 2025), Our Heath Barn requests the following structural cooperation:

1. **Approval for Community Asset Transfer:** Progress towards an agreeable sale under the Community Asset Transfer framework, utilising our split-use model.
2. **Pre-Development & Planning Collaboration:** Endorsement of our conditional timeline, allowing the organisation to secure full planning and major NLHF delivery grants before final asset handovers.
3. **Statutory Permissions Partnership:** Executive backing to progress planning variations aligned with Dacorum Borough Council, ensuring the specialised timber-framed structural integrity of the farmhouse is preserved.
4. **Statutory Funding Leadership:** HCC to be named as primary Lead Applicant with all supporting activity from Our Heath Barn for initial NLHF grant applications: leveraging its position as freeholder to secure funding while minimising financial risk to public funds (per NLHF recent explicit request for a partnership approach).

Immediate Next Steps for Collaborative Engagement

To maintain positive momentum alongside the current Local Government Reorganisation timeline, we propose the following phased roadmap for your consideration:

- **Step 1: Joint Review Interface**
We request a meeting with HCC Estates and Dacorum Council to review our financial model, CCBS rules, and agree a framework to validate our social value proxies.
- **Step 2: Outline Heads of Terms**
We propose drafting a conditional agreement linking formal asset transfer directly to successful major grant milestones under our statutory asset lock.
- **Step 3: Specialist Structural Access**
We request site access for Breakspear Conservation and Hugo Hardy Architects for structural timber assessments. This investigation is a critical funding assurance requirement for the NLHF.

Question	Answer	Bid Ref
How will we compete with bids from property developers?	Quite simply, financially we probably won't. We don't want to be considered alongside other bidders, we want to be considered an alternative. We want to be considered a continuation of community stewardship, a baton change in a relay race, rather than a complete change or an end to the race. Our impressive Social Return on Investment (SROI) is what sets us apart. The local community feels very strongly that Heath Barn belongs to us, should remain with us, for us to share as a community, and hold in trust for the community's future. This has been witnessed time and time again throughout the campaign.	Page 83
What is our funding strategy?	Crowdfunder and CCBS Share purchase scheme leading to: • Cash for purchase • Legal fees • Match-funding for grants or borrowing • Holding / running costs for site • Working capital for early renovation stage invoices in lieu of grant availability We believe this to be the most responsible approach we can take with public funds.	Page 71
Aside from the Heritage Specialists mentioned in the briefing, what other skills are offered by the rest of the team?	The management team of Our Heath Barn consists of nine enthusiastic members, including charity trustees and local councillors, who bring expertise in; • Workshop management • Community engagement & communications • Design & planning • Customer understanding & commerciality • Project management • Business • Finance • Education • Arts • Health, wellbeing & nutrition • Sustainability It's also worth noting that the three directors of the forthcoming CCBS are fundamentally devoted to this project full-time.	Page 53
How far have we got with a Co-operative share scheme set-up?	The CCBS (Charitable Community Benefit Society) set-up is progressing, with the existing CIC (Community Interest Company) being renamed as Our Heath Barn Trading and positioned as a subsidiary for non-charitable trading. Our draft model rules have very recently been finalised in conjunction with Co-op. The CCBS charitable purposes are being designated as two-fold; • The advancement of citizenship or community development • The advancement of the arts, culture, heritage or science	Page 9

Question	Answer	Bid Ref
How close are we to launching the share offer?	We expect to be awarded a Standard Mark for the community share scheme, to convey the highest level of quality and guarantee for the community. We've drafted our share scheme documentation, and started to art-work the literature. A sample page for the fund-raising section is available, but from this it becomes apparent that our messaging is weakened by not having clarity over ownership or bid success. We're ready to go when we have a decision.	Sample available
How confident are we in cementing all the pledges received?	Quite confident. We've been through two separate calls to action for the community now - once in February 2026, and once in May 2026. It transpired that the second call to action exceeded our best projection on our capital cascade chart ("piggin" collection buckets, for those that are familiar with our campaign). The trend continues upwards, and we believe once our share prospectus is launched and the whole project feels more 'real' to the public, we will beat our current projection again.	Page 72
How far have we got with securing grants?	This is obviously difficult until we have confirmation of any potential CAT, but following our Expressions of Interest; National Lottery Heritage Fund have very recently given us their first feedback. Some concern was understandably raised over our newness as a team, and NLHF are suggesting we could alleviate those concerns by: • Making a speedier application for £250k to allow us to demonstrate success with the early stages, prior to applying for a larger grant with our ring-fenced match-funding • Bolster our working partnership with Herts County Council for a smooth transition, with HCC acting as lead applicant (as current owner). Quote from NLHF regional manager - "It falls right into our wheelhouse. It's just about managing risks and starting a track record". Architectural Heritage Fund have responded saying they cannot open dialogue with us until we have ownership, but to get back in touch regarding grant discussions when we do. We have also prepared to engage an experienced grants specialist to aid us with smooth applications, as well as contacting several other smaller grant-givers for future application.	Page 73
How far have we got with securing borrowing, as a backup?	Again, this is obviously difficult until we have confirmation of any potential CAT, but; Architectural Heritage Fund have been more open here, suggesting that this project is perfectly aligned with their lending criteria, subject to business plan scrutiny at a later date. Further meetings are already scheduled to prepare for this.	Page 72
Do we have a plan or partner for the residential split use?	We have some feasibility sketches for possible conversion. Our hope is that through the open marketing of Heath Barn, Herts County Council might have identified a suitable partner.	Page 65

Question	Answer	Bid Ref
What other thoughts have we had for the East Wing?	The Our Heath Barn team are an enthusiastic bunch, and don't stop thinking about potential for the site. Rather cheekily, we've spent some time during the open marketing phase to create a fully costed feasibility model for the whole site which expands the Our Heath Barn offer even further. This is not a principal part of our bid but we like to plant seeds of thought where we can, therefore we request HCC consider this as available. This 8 page supplement is available in V.2 of our bid document.	Page 157
What differentiates Heath Barn from other local rentable community spaces or cafes - what is the USP?	Apart from having a perfect selection of private spaces, choosing Heath Barn means choosing a space with soul. While a typical local hall offers four blank walls and fluorescent lighting, this 500-year-old Grade II listed historic building provides an inspiring, character-filled ecosystem explicitly designed for creativity and restoration. Arts sessions come alive under the rich historic fabric of our dedicated gallery spaces; wellbeing classes find grounding in quiet, professional rooms and outdoor gardens; and celebrations carry a unique magic within our protected courtyard. In fact, research shows that there is a positive, statistically significant relationship between the density of heritage assets near our place of residence and life satisfaction. Crucially, hiring space here isn't just a transactional rental—it is a direct investment into a community-owned, non-profit hub that thrives on connection, culture, and social purpose.	Page 60
How far have we stress-tested our risks and mitigations?	We've spent more time on this aspect since bid submission, and more scenarios are now modelled in version 2 of our bid document.	Page 85
How have we arrived at our timelines?	We've spent some time recently producing a draft project plan (Gantt chart) to determine key dependencies, calculate approximate key dates, and help with cash flow calculation. This is strictly for use in studying feasibility currently, but is available for viewing within version 2 of our bid document.	Page 165