

The Community, Leisure and Recreation Committee  
Thame Town Council



12 July 2016

Dear Council Members,

I write to seek for your support in establishing a 'Shed' in Thame, enclose some supporting literature and ask that the matter be discussed by the committee.

Since moving to Thame in 2009 I have been impressed by the opportunities available to its community. There is a great deal on offer and many residents are involved in stimulating activity which gives them a purpose in life, well into their retirement years. As members of this committee I am sure you don't need me to list what exists.

However, unless I am mistaken or unaware, there is a gap in provision, particularly for the older person who does not want cerebral activity but would find pleasure in pursuing practical activities in the companionship of others. This was made clear to me on a recent stay in Australia where a neighbour of my son invited me to visit his 'Shed.'

Disused buildings on the site of a former school have been adapted by the community and turned into workshops equipped with donated machinery and tools. Grants have been obtained to run the premises with the government realising that funding energy costs is cost effective in that members of society who previously had come to the end of their practical working life, could occupy themselves usefully and not become a burden on the state quite so quickly.

Some of those I met, who either lived alone or had lost their partners, now had somewhere to go where they could meet others, continue to use their skills or simply meet together for conversation and companionship.

I was impressed with what I saw and since returning home I have spoken to a number of friends across the country who agree the need exists. I have explored the website of UK Men's Shed Association and enclose some material with this letter.

Aylesbury, High Wycombe and Bicester already have 'Sheds' and I would like to be involved in establishing one in Thame. I therefore write, both to seek your support and advice, but in particular to identify a suitable base. I have attached examples of premises used elsewhere.

Yours sincerely

Mike Ashford

Four enclosures:

1. Why are sheds needed?
2. Research that supports Sheds.
3. Premises.
4. Example Shed leaflet from Broadstairs, Kent

### **Why are Sheds needed?**

This movement began in Australia when men realised the value of coming together around practical tasks on a regular basis, particularly if they had a designated place or workshop where tools and work in progress could be stored. This appeals to men both living alone or with partners and at all ages although the vast majority of 'shedders' are at or beyond retirement date. This transitional period not only brings a loss of a work role but also of identity, status, workmates, income and even a sense of purpose. Men can find themselves disengaged from their community if the pub or sports is not their thing. The generality of community activities on offer do not appeal to men and as they expect to meet their own needs then some level of social isolation can also occur.

Men who have their own shed have often developed their skills and interests there but in a larger facility, with better or more equipment, with skills you can develop with others and jobs you can do for the community a Men's Shed offers something new. Choosing what you want to do, whether that is working on your own project or drinking tea with others but with minimal demands can be exactly what many men need.

There are now more than 950 Sheds in Australia, 200 in Ireland and others in New Zealand, Canada and Denmark with interest being expressed from many other countries. Research worldwide points in particular to the health and well-being benefits of men coming together.

### **Sheds in the UK**

The Shed concept was first realised in England by Age Concern Cheshire at Hartford in 2009, about the same time as the first Shed in Ireland. Four more staffed Sheds followed before the first Community Men's Shed was formed in London in 2011. These user-led Sheds now form the vast majority of the (almost) 300 Sheds open in the UK, with nearly 100 more in planning.

Sheds vary from full-time projects in substantial premises to groups meeting in village halls and community centres for only a few hours a week. Some Sheds are in villages, most are in small towns but considering their populations there are relatively few in large cities. Most Sheds have been started by their users with local support, donations of tools and premises being given, borrowed and used often in exchange for repair work. About 18% of Sheds in England have been started by Age UK affiliates.

Shed Development Workers are now being employed to support this growth by organisations including Men's Sheds Cymru, the Scottish Men's Sheds Association, the Northern Men's Sheds Network (N.I.), the Royal Voluntary Service, Age Scotland, and local authorities such as Kent County Council and West Sussex Public Health Department.

## Research that support Sheds

Steve Iliffe, Professor of Primary Care for Older People offers the following summary: 'Participation in meaningful activity is one of the five determinants of health and well-being in later life, according to the Age Concern & Mental Health Foundation Report, *"Promoting mental health and well-being in later life"*, published in 2006. The other four are: discrimination, relationships, physical health and poverty. Participation in meaningful activity has three components: staying active, having a sense of purpose and avoiding social isolation. The evidence that the first two components have a positive effect on health and well-being in later life can be found in two literature reviews at [www.mhill.org.uk](http://www.mhill.org.uk).

Having a social role and social activities was the second most common attribute of a good quality of life reported in the National Statistics Office Omnibus Survey (2001) of people aged 65 and over, higher than having good health (4<sup>th</sup>) and having no financial worries (7<sup>th</sup>). (*Adding quality to quantity: older people's views on quality of life and its enhancement* Age Concern 2003). However, the same survey showed that 93% of respondents had plenty to do.

Social isolation is particularly important because it is associated with present and future physical ill health, increased mortality and worse mental health. Social isolation means objectively measurable lack of social contacts, and is different from loneliness, the subjective experience of social isolation. This is an under-researched topic. There are few well-designed studies of interventions to reduce social isolation, but those that have been carried out suggest that group activity is more effective than individual alternatives, like 'befriending'. The evidence for this is summarised in the report *Promoting Health & Wellbeing in Later Life*, by the Scottish Collaboration for Public Health Research & Policy in 2010 ([www.SCPHRP.ac.uk](http://www.SCPHRP.ac.uk))

Steve Iliffe, FRCGP FRCP Professor of Primary Care for Older People, UCL Royal Free Campus, Rowland Hill St., London NW3 2PF (October 2011)

Detailed sources include Age Concern England's 'Working with Older Men' 2006 – Sandy Ruxton. The 'Grouchy Old Men' report (Mental Health Foundation 2010). The Men's Health Forum [www.menshealthforum.org.uk](http://www.menshealthforum.org.uk) has data on the health inequalities faced by older men. Local health statistics will also be helpful. Age UK will be releasing a report on the Men-in-Sheds Programme by Lancaster University on July 26<sup>th</sup> 2012. More detail on available information is needed.

## Premises

*"The Shed lifted my life. Finding the Shed came at a good time, I was low".  
Brian.*

**This section shows what premises solutions various Sheds have found.**

### **1. Minimal premises**

The Holywood MS (Men's Shed) started three years ago and is focused around doing cleaning and repairing jobs in the public spaces around the town. After a while they got a lockable cupboard in a public space to store their tools and materials and only recently got a larger one.

### **2. Loaned by members/friends**

The Shed in Douglas (Isle of Man) started in a double garage.

The Carmel and Holywell Woodworking Club, which is a Shed in all but name, started in the founder's garage until it built up enough members and sales to feel confident in hiring a publicly-owned premises 1.5 days p.w. 12 years later it has some 50 members and is remarkable for operating without having had a public or trust grant.

### **3. Using hard-to-let shop premises**

Local authorities may prefer to have empty shops used rather than detract from the environment. Stratford on Avon MS started by sharing a local Sea Cadets hut but this proved difficult to manage. They then moved to a disused local shop that the local authority had given for temporary use to an arts organisation. It had no electricity but a lot of natural light on the first floor.

### **4. Finding an under-used space.**

Housing Associations can be large property owners with a whole range of buildings e.g. disused garage blocks and a social remit.

Shettleston MS was immediately offered a potential building by its local housing association along with the support of a community development worker.

Faringdon has made a start by using the woodwork room of a local college of an evening.

### **5. Using redundant premises where the owners take a benevolent approach.**

Collingham MS has found a local builder who is willing to let them use a spare building.

Sansaw MS has been granted the use of a farm building which had become too small to house today's larger machinery.

#### **6. Using temporarily redundant buildings where the managers/owners seek formal, free but temporary use of their premises**

They may be empty for a range of reasons such as planning blight, lack of liquidity, changes in management etc. When buildings are sold for adaptation for example it can take 18 months before planning permission is granted. The owners will normally be paying 100% Business Rates but charities get 80% mandatory rate relief and other organisations may qualify too. The building's security may also be a motivation for the owner. Healthy Planet is a not-for-profit agency that identifies building owners and then looks for groups with charitable objectives who need the space. The arrangement can save the owners a lot of money. The places are held on temporary licenses but as they are rent-free it is a way of getting the group stated and focused. <https://beta.healthyplanet.org/get-involved/sustainable-community/healthy-spaces>

MakeitWorkshop in Southport has had a large modern shop premises through Healthy Planet for over 18 months.

#### **9. Using premises by 'paying in kind' or other reciprocal arrangement**

Gosport MS got use of two large casements in the walls of Fort Brockhurst, a truly massive structure. The owners, English Heritage, anticipated more benefits to accrue than the Shed could offer and Gosport is now looking elsewhere.

The Repair Shed, Hemel Hempstead has the use of part of a building on a site occupied by a horticultural social enterprise in exchange for occasional work. This arrangement recently needed some discussion as, like flat-sharing, it's the little differences in expectation that can begin to undermine it.

The local history museum in Louth (N.I.) offered a space to the Shed in exchange for help maintaining the exhibits. This provided the Sheddens with a rich vein of activity and learning.

Brixham is now housed in a charity shop interested in getting some of its incoming goods fixed.

#### **10. Public authorities can have property that they do not wish to part with but do not have the funds to enable it to be let**

Extensive leases can be gained in exchange for repair/maintenance.

Broadstairs Town Shed has a rent-free lease whilst it does up a long-empty building owned by the local council.

Maldon CVS obtained a redundant mortuary from local authority which also helped fund its restoration.

#### **11. Adapting a vehicle**

Thanet Men's Shed are planning a mobile Shed in order to reach smaller communities and also to promote the Shed concept. This will be a trailer that looks

like a Shed. A van with a range of equipment is a way that some tradesmen work and that idea could be adapted.

### **12. Building one**

Eastleigh is starting by demolishing a dilapidated shed in the large back garden of a widow's house and building a new one. They are getting a tenancy.

Brentwood has built a Shed in the grounds of a church.

### **13. Hiring**

With hiring the whole cost of the usage is rolled into an hourly/daily charge. This means there will be no additional bills e.g. utility, maintenance, safety checks etc. This can help with budgeting and you only pay for the hours you use. It can mean restricted usage, and almost certainly you will need to clear up afterwards for others to use the room. However it is available, can make for a quick start, if affordable it can last indefinitely, and it does not require taking on onerous responsibilities. If booking blocks of time seek a reduced hourly rate as most bookings are for short periods.

Cockermouth MIS (Men in Sheds) started by hiring a room in a community centre one afternoon a week but as it became more popular the local Age UK Board rented a workshop. The aim is that the Sheddors would cover the rent from sales of donated and refurbished goods and so far it is working!

Macmerry MS hires a community hall and storage cupboard and uses an outside space in good weather.

Camden Town Shed hires a Community Centre room two days p. w. and pays by the quarter. An initial rent-free period was negotiated on the basis that it was raising the profile of the Centre by bringing in a group of people targeted by the local authority who funded it. The Centre subsequently found it could not let the room and granted full use without any alteration to the charge.

Southbourne MS operates out of an old village school cloakroom courtesy of Age Concern which leases the property from the County Council. It has taken six months for the men to put the building in a state where it could be used. This has been made possible by a donation of £1000 from Age Concern'

Eltham MiS began by hiring a room 16'x 12' in a community centre in which 6 people could work. It opened 6 days p.w. and grew to having 40+ members before moving.

### **14. Premises provided within an organisation's current space.**

The Ecology Centre at Kinghorn, Fife, formed a Shed group around the idea of repairing/reusing tools and offered the group a space.

The Tool Shed in Skelmersdale is part of Total Reuse CIC, a large social enterprise in premises funded from its earnings.

### **15. Renting at commercial rates**

Age UK and its affiliates have opened several Sheds in units on industrial estates having first raised the funds and hired staff. Before owners let property they need to

assure themselves that any tenant can honour the terms of the tenancy agreement. In these cases they had an established organization to deal with. New independent Shed groups may face problems in assuring owners. Getting an established organization to be a guarantor is one way forward but be sure you are happy with the conditions. Having one or more 'public' or professional figures on your board/management committee can also help, particularly in smaller communities.

Milton Keynes MIS rents a 4000 sq ft industrial unit

Leeds MS (Groundwork) rents a 1000 sq ft workshop with funds from Leeds City Council

Community Impact Bucks started a Shed off in an arts centre but then helped it rent an industrial unit.



The Men's Shed movement started in Australia in 1999, and there are now over 1000 sheds in Australia. Sheds are safe, friendly and inclusive places to share skills and informal learning, of dual pursuits and community projects. There are now over 200 sheds in the UK, all independent, but all sharing the same ethos.

Broadstairs Town Shed  
 established in May 2014, following a successful community vote in the People's Millions. Through predominantly for men, our shed is for the community. We are a member of the UK Men's Shed Association.



No prior woodworking knowledge is needed as our volunteer Shedheads, who run our workshops, have a huge amount of experience and skills which they love to share.



A typical day in the Shed involves lots of making and restoring – birdboxes, castles, bows, tables – lots of tea, lots of laughter and the occasional biscuit or two! Shed made items make great gifts and can be bought at open days, and local craft fairs. We are also happy to take commissions for bespoke items.



21 foot Viking Ship built for Ramsgate Festival

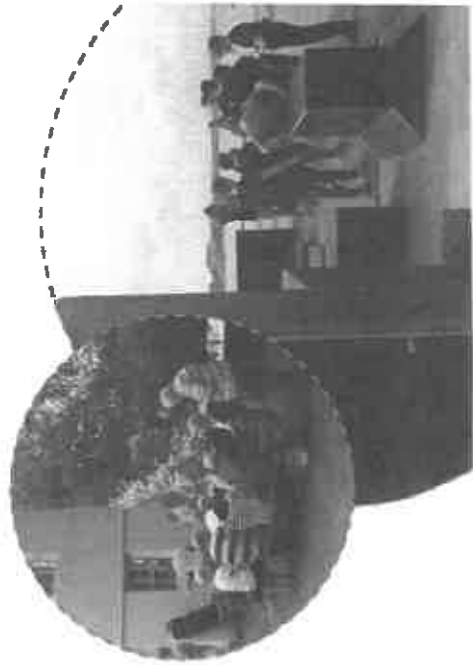


"A great place to make friends not colleagues"

"Thoroughly enjoyable"

"I feel useful again"

"The shed lifted my life. I was very low and finding it came just in time"





## THE SHED NOW HAS TWO LOCATIONS...

### LITTLE SHED:

Broadstairs Town Shed, Pierremont Park  
Broadstairs, CT10 1JX



### BIG SHED:

3 Oakwood Industrial Estate, Dana Valley  
Road, St Peter's, Kent, England, CT10 3JL



Both Sheds are easily accessible via  
The Thanet Loop



The Shed is:  
work in  
grass, and  
re hoping  
open in  
y 2016.

## INTERESTED?

New members, volunteers and offers  
of financial or in-kind support are  
always warmly welcomed

For all enquiries contact:

Claire Shelton, (Project Co-ordinator)

☎ 07597349290

✉ [claire@broadstairsdownshed.org.uk](mailto:claire@broadstairsdownshed.org.uk)

Our website has lots more info and videos:  
[broadstairsdownshed.org.uk](http://broadstairsdownshed.org.uk)

Find us on social media:

Facebook.com/broadstairsdownshed

Twitter.com/broadietownshed

We are the proud winners

of the Thanet Gazette

Reader's Heart of the

Community Award!

**Gazette**

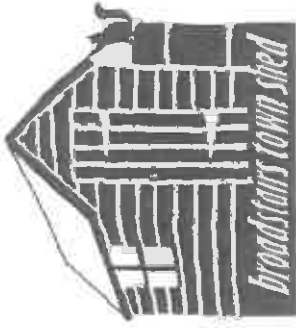
Heart of the Community  
*Celebrating Local Life*



**BROADSTAIRS**  
TOWN SHED

The Shed is a project by:

Brochure design kindly donated by [sarahrickman.co.uk](http://sarahrickman.co.uk)



Our aim is to improve the  
quality of life for all people in the  
Broadstairs area, especially  
older men, by providing a place  
where they can meet together,  
learn new skills, make and mend  
things all in a spirit of friendship,  
compassion and tolerance.

OPEN:

Tuesday 11am - 4pm

Wednesday and Thursday 10-4pm

[broadstairsdownshed.org.uk](http://broadstairsdownshed.org.uk)

07597 349 290

A Project from Broadstairs Town Team