

# Heritage Impact Assessment

**Proposal:** Stationing of a temporary café during restoration work to The Leas Lift Funicular Railway, for a temporary 2-year period. Café to be housed in a temporary container with serving hatch and small outdoor seating area.

**Site Address:** Land to north of The Coastal Park car park, Lower Sandgate Road, Folkestone, CT20 2DR

## Introduction

This Heritage Impact Assessment supports the submission of a planning application for the stationing of a temporary Lift Café and small outdoor seating area at the eastern entrance to the Lower Leas Coastal Park. The café would be located on vacant land just to the north of the Coastal Park car park and to the northeast of a recently installed public toilet and changing places facility.

The grade II\* Leas Lift Funicular Railway is soon to undergo essential restoration works with plans of reopening to the public in 2025, which will greatly enhance the immediate area and wider town. The Lift Café will need to close temporarily during the restoration works. Since it opened The Lift Café has helped to raise funds for the restoration of the grade II\* Funicular Railway and has proved very popular with locals and tourists, as well as employing local people.

To ensure the café facility is retained during the restoration works The Folkestone Leas Lift Charity would like to station a temporary café a short distance to the west of the existing site on the edge of the Coastal Park car park.

The Lift Café would be housed in a temporary container during the restoration works to the Leas Lift Funicular Railway and Lift Café, which are expected to take approximately 18 – 24 months.

## Site Location

The application site relates to a small, grassed area of the Lower Leas Coastal Park located next to the Coastal Park car park. There are no trees or plants on the site. The café would be located at the eastern entrance to the Coastal Park, just to the northeast of the recently installed public toilets and changing places facility. The public footpath runs directly to the north of the application site. The Lift Café and Funicular Railway is a grade II\* heritage asset

and is located approx. 75m to the east of the site. The site is located within Folkestone Old Town / Bayle Conservation Area and an Area of Archaeological Potential.



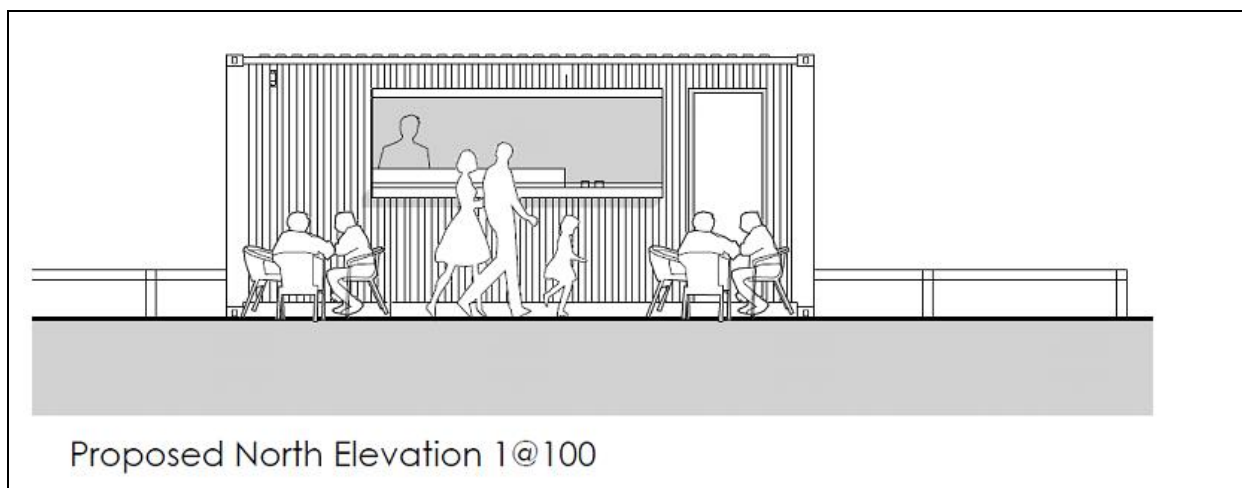
Red star indicates approx. location of temporary café. Blue star indicates location of new toilets

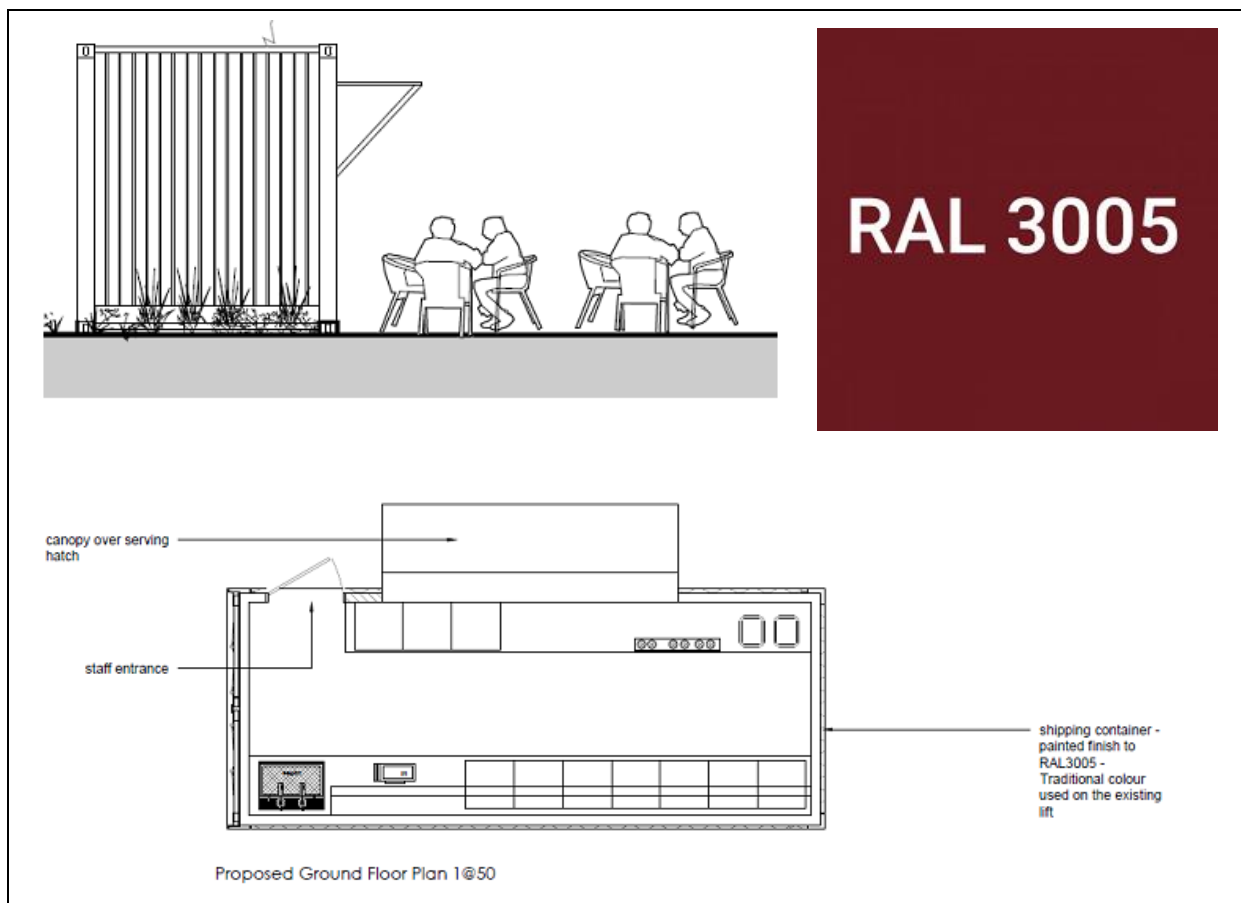
## Proposal

A single shipping container is proposed to accommodate the temporary café during restoration works to the Leas Lift.

The container would measure approximately 2.7m high with a footprint of 6m x 2.5m and would have a small seating area outside the front, to the north of the café.

The café would have a serving hatch and staff entrance door on the front / north elevation. The public would not be permitted inside the temporary café and would utilise the serving hatch only.





The temporary container café would be painted a RAL 3005, a deep wine red, to reflect the colours and history of Leas Lift Funicular Railway and Lift Café.

The temporary café would not appear out of context with the recently installed toilet building located just to the north of the site and would in fact compliment these new facilities creating an enhanced public entrance into the Lower Leas Coastal Park. The proposed café and recently installed changing places building would also help to screen and form a buffer between the carpark and landscaped gardens within Coastal Park, which in our view would enhance the public appreciation from within the park and would enhance the approach into the Coastal Park.

The proposal, including the small outdoor seating area, would not result in any obstruction to pedestrian footpaths running through the Coastal Park and these routes would remain free from any obstructions. In addition, there would be ample space at the front and adjacent to café to ensure customers waiting to be served would not cause an obstruction to the adjacent pedestrian routes running through the Coastal Park.

The temporary café and seating area would not impact any trees or planting within the Coastal Park and the grass would be reinstated after the container is removed at the end of the temporary period.

## Historic Designations



Folkestone Old Town Conservation Area, which includes the Lower Leas Coastal Park



KCC Historic Parks and Gardens. NB this designation relates to the Upper Leas (and zigzag path) and not the Lower Leas Coastal Park



Grade II\* Leas Lift in relation to the application site

The Leas Lift, The Leas, Folkestone – Historic England Listing:

*Overview: A cliff lift comprising waiting rooms, pump room, track, cars, brake houses, boundary railings and lift machinery. The cliff lift was constructed in 1885 for the Folkestone Lift Company by Messrs Waygood and Co. The waiting rooms were designed in a Domestic Revival style by the architect Reginald Pope and the builder was John Newman. The pump room was added in 1890 in similar style, at the same time as a second lift, which was removed in 1985. Grade II\* - first listed 27-Apr-1989.*



Full Historic England Listing available here: [The Leas Lift, including waiting rooms, pump room, lower station tanks, track, cars, wheel houses, tank room, upper station tunnel and railings, Folkestone - 1061185 | Historic England](#)

## **Planning Policy & Supporting Documents**

The Council has a duty to have special regard to the desirability of preserving a listed building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses (Section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990) (hereafter referred to as The Act).

Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 Act requires that LPAs pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a conservation area.

## National Planning Policy Framework

The requirements of The Act are reinforced by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which at Chapter 16, sets the national agenda for 'Conserving and enhancing the historic environment'. This, in particular, requires the significance of any heritage asset to be identified and assessed that may be affected by a proposal (including by development affecting the setting of a heritage asset) and for this to inform future change in order to avoid or minimise conflict between the heritage asset's conservation and the proposal.

## Folkestone and Hythe Core Strategy (2022)

- Policy CSD4 (Green Infrastructure)
- Policy CSD6 (Central Folkestone Strategy)

## Folkestone and Hythe Places and Policies Local Plan (2020)

- Policy HB1 (Design)
- Policy E3 (Tourism)
- Policy NE1 (Natural Environment)
- Policy NE3 (Protecting Landscapes & Countryside)
- Policy HE1 (Heritage Assets)
- Policy HE2 (Archaeology)
- Policy HE4 (Folkestone Historic Gardens)

## Folkestone Old Town Conservation Area Appraisal – Character Area 4 (relevant extracts)

*The southern edge [of the CA], along the seafront, avoids the modern megalith of the Hotel Burstin and the beachfront fairground on its westward path, taking in the Cliffside pleasure gardens which rise towards The Leas above.*

*The Leas Lift, just above the pier, was built by the Folkestone Lift Company in 1885, on the water- balance principle, and was such a success that a second pair of lifts was opened in 1890 immediately to the east. The 1890 lift closed in 1966 (the West Leas or Metropole lift had closed in 1940) but the original lifts survive, second in seniority only to those at Saltburn.*

*Close to the foot of the lift was a camera obscura – always a popular late- Victorian concept, although it seems curious that it should be erected at the foot of the cliff where the view would have been surely impaired. There was another camera obscura on the other side of the boating house, which itself was the venue for a major rowing regatta held every year.*

The (Upper) Leas is reference in the CAA and is a designated historic parkland and garden, including views from and along the Leas. However, the Lower Leas Coastal Park does not specifically feature in the CAA other than reference to the southern boundary of the CA, as set out above.

## **Folkestone & Hythe Heritage Strategy - Appendix 1: Theme 3a Seaside Leisure & Tourism – Folkestone & Sandgate as Seaside Resorts**

This section of the Strategy assesses the character of the area including the Lower Leas and assesses the overall heritage significance of the area and suggested opportunities as set out below:

### Lower Leas

*The Lower Leas was created following a major landslip in the late eighteenth century which resulted in a strip of land forming between the beach and the Leas cliffs. In 1828 the Earl of Radnor built a toll road along this coastal strip to link Sandgate to the harbour at Folkestone. The area was further developed by the Radnor Estate in the second half of the nineteenth century when gardens were established along the Lower Sandgate Road, with a series of paths set out, including winding paths up the cliffs themselves linking the Leas and the Leas Shelter with the Undercliff area. Lifts (see below) were added at the end of the nineteenth century to aid visitors. In 1913 the Leas Cliff area was leased to the Folkestone Corporation to be used as a public park, with tearooms, shelters and woodland walks. In 1921 the 'zig-zag' path was built, complete with a 'false' Pulhamite cliff face, arch and grotto. In the 1950s the park contained a small zoo and miniature railway and in 1973 the old toll road closed to traffic. From 2000 onwards the park has been extensively refurbished and improved with new hard and soft landscaping.*

*Since the extensive regeneration scheme carried out by the District Council on the park from 2000, the Lower Leas Coastal Park has developed into an award-winning space for recreation, wildlife, landscaping and enjoyment of the coast. For example, the park has won the Green Flag Award every year since 2007. The undercliff area has also developed a unique microclimate that supports unusual wildlife for the UK such as migrating birds and insects. A number of events are held at the park throughout the summer that includes concerts, drama performances and children's workshops. The park has been split into 3 broad recreational zones; the wild zone, the fun zone and the formal zone. The wild zone runs from the western entrance to the toll house and is informally managed for wildlife and recreation. The fun zone comprises the central area of the park and contains the largest children's play area in the south east. The warden's hut is also located here as well as an amphitheatre, toilet blocks, storytelling area and the zigzag path. The zig-zag path that is linked by the Pulhamite features built in 1921 is a Grade II Listed Building. The formal zone was opened in 2006 and is designed to reflect the original spirit of the park. It sports formal planting and landscaping with an emphasis on the horticultural excellence of the park that is was known for historically. The District Council continues to plan future developments to the park to further enhance this space.*

### Statement of Significance

*A number of the heritage assets relating to this theme are still very much a part of the tourism and leisure offering at Folkestone and Sandgate. They are important evidence of a rich past and are now playing valuable roles in the 22 | Page regeneration of Folkestone and its seafront area. Each continues to constitute a significant part of Folkestone's identity as a popular and much loved seaside resort over many years and are also testament to its adaptability and resilience in the face of decline. Overall they are a valuable collection of heritage assets and should be considered as constituting **moderate to considerable significance**.*

### Opportunities

*There are opportunities to enhance those that have survived such as the Leas Lift ... and so it is important to enhance and incorporate the heritage assets that have survived here into the redevelopment of the Folkestone seafront. It is also an important opportunity to create better cohesion between distinct areas of Folkestone such as the Leas and Folkestone Old Town and create a richer and more accessible tourism and leisure offering.*

*Redeveloping the Folkestone seafront will also create opportunities to regenerate an area that has been in decline and large parts have remained featureless for some time waiting for development, such as the site of the Folkestone Rotunda Amusement Park and old swimming pool. This could attract new and wider audiences and revitalise this part of Folkestone. It may also have important opportunities for the local economy and attract new local businesses as well as residents.*

## **Heritage & Archaeological Assessment**

The site and Lower Leas Coastal Park are located within the Old Town Conservation Area and the Leas Lift is a grade II\* listed building located approximately 75m to the east of the site. The Lower Leas Coastal Park is not a designated heritage asset but is mentioned in the adopted Local Plan under the pre-text to policy HE4 as a valuable park which is in excellent condition and continues to be integral to the identity of the district.

The site clearly has significant landscape and heritage interest, and policy requires proposals to preserve or enhance the designated heritage assets. Any development within the Coastal Park should preserve the landscape character of the park and where possible make a positive contribution to the character of the area, which could include the enhancement of public facilities within the park, such as the proposed cafe.

The proposed container/cafe would be a modest scale and size, but nonetheless may be considered to negatively impact on the appearance and character of the Conservation Area. However, there would be no loss of landscaping or removal of trees from within the park due

to the modest size of the container and proposed location adjacent the car park, on a small area of grass.

In addition, the temporary cafe would be viewed within the context and adjacent to the recently installed changing places building and would complement and enhance the public facilities at this end of the Coastal Park. The proposed cafe, together with the new toilets, would also help to screen the adjacent car park from within the Lower Leas Coastal Park, which in our view would lead to some visual enhancement of the setting and would enhance public views from within the Coastal Park.

Whilst the proposal would result in some visual impact to the historic landscape setting, the degree of harm would be very minor, and the proposed café / container is only required for a temporary period whilst the Leas Lift is undergoing essential renovation works. In addition, the proposals would provide public economic and social benefits during the restoration of the Leas Lift, which on balance, are considered to outweigh any very minor visual impact that may be caused, in accordance with the requirements of the NPPF.

The proposal would positively impact the local economy through employment and tourism by expanding and enhancing the existing facilities provided within the Coastal Park. Importantly, the temporary café would help facilitate the repair and restoration works to the Leas Lift, which is on Historic England at Risk Register. This matter should be afforded a significant degree of weight in the determination of this application, and we believe the temporary cafe should therefore be viewed positively as the proposal would aid the vital restoration works to a key historic landmark in Folkestone.

The temporary stationing of a container on the site would not require significant grounds works and therefore would not result in any negative archaeology impacts.

## **Conclusion**

The cafe would result some minor visual impact to the landscaped character of the Lower Leas Coastal Park and Conservation Area. However, the degree of visual harm would be very minor, and would only be for a temporary period whilst the Leas Lift is undergoing essential renovation works. In addition, the proposals would provide clear public economic and social benefits during the restoration of the Leas Lift, which are considered to outweigh any very minor visual impact that may be caused.