

DAME KELLY SIGNS UP TO BEACHLEY PROJECT

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A GROUP of old soldiers who learnt their trades at Beachley are working with Olympic double medallist Dame Kell Holmes on a project aimed at transforming the help given to service personnel as they return to 'Civvy Street'.

The Beachley Old Boys' Association (BOBA) said it wanted to specifically work with the Dame Kelly Holmes Trust because of her back-ground as a soldier.

BOBA, whose world-wide membership is made up of men who attended the Army Apprentices' College at Beachley, were in negotiations with the trust and other organisations for three years before going public about the partnership.



• BOBA chairman Chris Ricketts (third left) at the association's heritage centre at Beachley.

The plan is to develop a centre of excellence to help armed forces' personnel with the transition to life after service and would be based at the current barracks which are scheduled to close by 2027.

The trust would bring the expertise gained through its More than Medals programme which helps athletes transition to life after sport.

Trust chief executive Ben Hilton said: "We will be one of several delivery partners operating at Beachley.

"Our work on transition from one dedicated lifestyle to a new future is encapsulated by our own athlete transition programme 'More than Medals'.

"We'll use our understanding and learnings from this to support veterans making their own transition to a different, new lifestyle.

"Our focus will be three-fold: on children and families of armed forces veterans, young veterans (up to age 25), and on older veterans themselves transitioning at the end of their career. The Trust also recognises the similarities between a veteran's transition to civilian life, whatever their age when they leave the armed forces and an athlete's transition from competitive sport. "Our programmes and training will not only support them, but also have positive impacts on their family and the wider community."

BOBA chairman Chris Ricketts, who lives in Tut-shill, said: "The trust has made a beneficial impact on thousands of young lives through its mentoring programmes and has supported over 400 athletes in their transition to a life beyond sport. Colonel Dame Kelly Holmes brings particular

insights to military culture that the Defence Select Committee acknowledges is often a dimension missing from other service providers who interact with Armed Forces Veterans.

"Alongside other delivery partners in the Beachley project we are confident the trust will make a major contribution to the success of the project."

Mr Ricketts said the facility would be available for anyone who had served in any branch of the armed forces.

He said that no timescale had been put on it because it is not currently known when Beachley Barracks will be closed.

"There can be no timescale set because the battalion (1 Rifles) is still resident and there are no plans for the battalion to be moved imminently.

"There is a lot of work to do."

Among the tasks will be to persuade the government to transfer the site to a new organisation which would run the project but Mr Ricketts said the project would not seek any money from the taxpayer.

"It is the reuse of the public estate the idea is to encapsulate everything that is there at the moment."

"The organisation would re-skill and retrain people, provide education and facilities for psychiatric damage.

"It will be used by any veteran and the organisations that support them by sending them here and allowing them to develop.

"It will be for all veterans who are having trouble with the transition from the armed forces to civilian life - that's army, air force and navy.

"We purposely targeted the Dame Kelly Holmes Trust because their aims and ethos are much the same as ours.

"They have been very successful in helping young people in terms of transition from elite athletics and the transition from service life is not always straightforward.

"Dame Kelly was only a successful athlete, she was also a serving soldier and is honorary colonel of the Royal Armoured Corps.

"As we move to setting this up, the idea is they will bring their existing partners to support both organisations.

"BOBA is a small organisation and unless you have a connection with the apprentices college you probably won't have heard of us."

Thousands of teenagers passed through the college in the 70 years before it closed in 1994, learning a range of skills.

"We are putting more building blocks in place and working with more organisations to establish this foundation.

"We did provide a detailed business plan and our work is based on the Armed Forces Covenant."