

Beer Parish Council

Consultation on the transfer of assets and potential asset development

This consultation is about informing and gathering opinions and ideas. It has become apparent that although the subject has been discussed in Council over several years there is still misunderstanding about the details, implications and benefits. This document attempts to fill in the gaps to help you make an informed response.

Background

The assets, land and buildings we are considering are: The Jubilee, the toilet block, The Memorial play park, Charlie's Yard, Beach Court car park, the lower section and enclosed area of Beer Head car park and Starre Bank. The Underleys play park is not currently included but may be in the future, subject to further agreement. To clarify, the beach, the major section of Beer Head car park and Central car park are **NOT** included.

All these assets are currently owned by EDDC, as are similar assets in most towns and villages in East Devon. EDDC ownership goes back to local government reorganisation in 1974, prior to this date the assets were predominantly owned by towns or the Rural District Council.

As owners, EDDC undertakes and pays for all maintenance, refurbishment and operational work such as toilet cleaning. Whilst Beer Parish Council (BPC) can request works, EDDC decides what maintenance is required and whether it will be done and whether there should be any major improvements or refurbishment. Any requests to use the land or buildings must be agreed with EDDC who may make a charge for the use. No revenue is returned directly to BPC.

EDDC, like all District and County Councils was, even before Covid, suffering reduced funding from central government - this is only likely to be exacerbated by Covid. **The buildings and land concerned all relate to discretionary services, these are services EDDC likes to provide but does not have a statutory obligation to provide.** These include play parks, gardens and toilets as opposed to street cleaning and rubbish collection.

EDDC has a policy for disposal of assets, however to date it has been used when a town or parish has requested the transfer. Applications are considered but not necessarily agreed. When an asset has become surplus to EDDC requirements and not requested by a town or parish it may be sold. Examples of transfer are, Seaton Town Hall, and the toilet block in Newton Poppleford.

In the past BPC has requested and received assets from EDDC including, Ash Hill play park, the Council store on Clapps Lane, The Meadows car parking area and Townsend coach park. When these assets were transferred BPC successfully took on the cost of management, maintenance and refurbishment. Transfer of Ash Hill play park to BPC ensured that it could remain a play park and not be sold off and over the years the Parish Council has taken advantage of s106 funding to invest in the play facilities. Townsend coach park was in need of re-surfacing and once transferred, BPC was able to get a grant to help with re-surfacing and it now provides an income for the Parish Council. With both Townsend coach park and The Meadows parking bays, BPC was able to change the policy to enable residents on the electoral role to receive priority for the allocation of parking permits.

To be fair, EDDC including the local EDDC staff, have worked well with BPC over the years and where maintenance and minor works have been required these have been carried out. EDDC have not withheld requests to use the land assets for village and/or commercial events and where charges were made these have been reasonable. Whilst the current arrangements have worked well it does not mean they will be continued or cannot be improved for the future through transfer.

EDDC have not undertaken any significant improvement or refurbishment of any of the assets in Beer for many years with the exception of resurfacing Central car park. Both the toilets and the Memorial play park are in dire need of refurbishment, if not complete redevelopment. While it could be argued that over the last few years the possibility of transfer has not made the improvement a priority for EDDC, their poor condition has been known for longer. Capital financing from EDDC for development or improvements of transferred assets is possible through grants

however awards will be dependent on funds available in competition with EDDC own assets and other towns and villages.

EDDC is currently the local authority owner responsible for the assets and being based in Honiton, with District Councillor representation, communication with the District Council is quite effective. This structure cannot be guaranteed into the future as Central Government is once again considering the reorganisation of local government. Just as the Rural District Councils were taken over by the District Councils in 1974, there is a significant possibility District and County Councils will be replaced by Unitary Authorities resulting in bigger constituencies and less local representation with decision making taken further away from the community.

Why the Parish Council is proposing the transfer of assets

Ownership of the land and buildings will give BPC and the residents of Beer direct control over how land and buildings are maintained, used and if appropriate developed.

The public spaces in Beer offer significant potential to develop new public and commercial opportunities. As well as a requirement to retain the character of Beer, there is also a demand from visitors and residents for new and updated recreational opportunities and these will eventually have to be addressed. There are also requests from individuals, businesses and suppliers to provide these new or enhanced opportunities. With ownership of the assets the decision on what happens will be in the hands of the people of Beer not a District or other council.

These opportunities are equally recognised by EDDC and if ownership is not transferred the decision on development or what commercial concessions could be let will be EDDC's. What can't be argued is that there are some valuable opportunities and EDDC or any future council will be looking to increase its income in the future by exploiting its assets.

What are the implications of taking on the assets?

If BPC takes ownership of the assets, it takes control but also takes on the practical and financial responsibility of maintaining them. This will include grass cutting, garden work, fence repair, tree maintenance, walls, steps and pathway maintenance, building maintenance, signage, benches, toilet cleaning, rubbish bins and dog bins, to name a few.

In transferring the assets to BPC, EDDC is under no obligation to take them back should BPC decide it can no longer maintain them. The terms of the transfer allow for the rental, lease or sale of assets providing any financial return is reinvested in the community and the fundamental public access, use, purpose and key services are retained.

Considering the practical issues, the draft agreement with EDDC allows for a phased reduction of EDDC input over 5 years. This means in year 1, EDDC continue all tasks as normal and BPC pay EDDC £30000 to cover all this work. Both the work and the fee will be phased to zero over 5 years. During the phase period BPC will gradually take over all the works allowing BPC to build up capacity and capability through additional staff and/or by setting up local contracts. BPC already does some maintenance of existing assets under contract.

Considering the financial issues, BPC has worked with EDDC to identify the costs associated with asset ownership in Beer. EDDC estimate their current costs to be £55000pa, we believe this can be reduced through efficiencies and community input to £49000 in year 1 reducing to £32000 by year 6 as the £30000 EDDC charge falls away and BPC takes on the works.

To cover costs BPC has negotiated an annual payment from EDDC to BPC, starting at £57500 in year 1 tapering to £13000 in year 8. This sum represents the Beach Court car park income which will continue as the car park will belong to BPC. BPC will need to generate additional income from the assets and it is anticipated that an additional £10000 will be generated from concessions and leases.

All costs are best estimates at this stage. A more complete schedule of estimates is available on the BPC web site. The schedule below shows the basic income and expenditure. It is accepted that there is a predicted deficit from year 6 however this is covered by earlier surpluses. It is anticipated that by year 10 income will exceed estimates if commercial opportunities are able to expand. A second alternative is that, if income remains static the deficit could be covered by an increase in village precept (council tax). Beer has 678 tax paying houses, currently just £30.63 of the total Band D council tax of £1926 goes to BPC. By increasing the parish precept by £10, giving a total band D to £1936, the additional income could cover any deficit.

	year	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	10 year cumulative
Estimated Net income including tapered EDDC payment, leases and car park		£57,500	£51,240	£49,985	£43,834	£40,691	£34,615	£28,547	£24,488	£24,978	£25,478	£ 381,357
Estimated Net costs including EDDC charges to year 5, maintenance and operations with allowance for efficiency savings and community input		£49,000	£44,440	£42,083	£37,328	£34,937	£32,552	£30,383	£30,661	£30,944	£31,233	£ 363,561
Annual surplus/deficit income against estimated costs		£ 8,500	£ 6,800	£ 7,902	£ 6,506	£ 5,754	£ 2,063	-£ 1,836	-£ 6,173	-£ 5,966	-£ 5,755	£ 17,796

What are the potential benefits of asset transfer and ownership?

The fundamental benefit is that Beer will have control of the assets and be able to decide what, if any development, improvement of facilities or offering of trading concessions should go ahead.

Change and development will have supporters and objectors. Everyone appreciates that retaining the character of the village is paramount but well managed change need not damage character, it can enhance it and improve interest and attractiveness for residents and visitors alike.

Through communication and consultation, BPC aims to explore and understand the potential and appetite for change and development in the village. To date many suggestions have been bandied about. This consultation will ask for opinions on suggestions. The suggestions put forward are to stimulate conversation and consideration. To date nothing is set in stone or agreed and we positively want as wide a range of ideas and “off the wall” thinking as possible to come forward through this consultation process.

THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

Consultation is a two-way process - if we ask questions, we need responses or your opinion will not be taken into consideration when we make decisions.

This is an important decision for Beer, the liabilities and benefits are several and complex. Please take the time to read the explanatory notes above before answering the questions in the survey at the end of this document.

CONSULTATION: 14th December 2020, to 18st January 2021, paper and online survey forms will be made available throughout the village.

RESULT AND ACTION TAKEN: The draft consultation report will be available for debate at the February PC meeting with the report being made available after the meeting. The full implication of the consultation will be debated at the March PC meeting and any further or revised actions agreed at that meeting. (NB due to timing the February PC meeting may have to be rescheduled to 9th Feb to allow time to analyse data and prepare the report).

THE SURVEY on-line or on paper has 11 questions and should only take 5 minutes to complete - please return completed paper copies to the post box on the front of the Mariners’ Hall, the post box on the Clapps Lane depot gate or the sealed box in the Post Office by 18 January 2021.

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THIS SURVEY CAN BE COMPLETED ONLINE VIA THE BEER PARISH COUNCIL WEBSITE www.beerparishcouncil.org.uk

HERE IS THE LINK TO THE SURVEY <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/CJ3F2Y9>

COMPLETED PAPER SURVEYS CAN BE RETURNED TO THE POST BOX ON THE FRONT OF THE MARINERS' HALL, THE POST BOX ON THE CLAPPS LANE DEPOT GATE OR THE SEALED BOX IN THE POST OFFICE BY 18 JANUARY 2021.

Beer Parish Council has requested that the assets; The Jubilee, the toilet block, The Memorial play park, Charlie's Yard, Beach Court car park, the lower section and enclosed area of Beer Head car park and Starre Bank, are transferred from EDDC giving ownership and control to BPC - provisional agreed date 1/4/2021.

The questions in the survey are to help form opinions and gather ideas and are **NOT** specific proposals. At this stage we are concentrating on the use of asset transfer land. Through the Coastal Community Team, we would hope to support commercial and sports club proposals.

1. Do you think ownership and control of the assets will benefit the village? **YES** [] **NO** []

2. Do you support the transfer proposal? **YES** [] **NO** []

3. The visitor survey indicated that visitors often went to Lyme Regis or Sidmouth in the evenings as, with the exception of the pubs and restaurants there was little other entertainment in Beer
Would you agree or disagree with this statement? **AGREE** [] **DISAGREE** []

4. Various options for entertainment have been suggested, please indicate with a tick (one or more) which options you would be generally in support of:
 - **Outdoor music on Jubilee** []
 - **Music on the beach** []
 - **Temporary mobile food outlets** []
 - **Open air cinema on beach** []
 - **Open air cinema Beer Head car park** []
 - **Weekend food festivals** []
 - **Mini music festival** []

Other idea (please specify)

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5. The various spaces lend themselves to different opportunities. Over the past few years, a number of suggestions have come forward, please indicate your support and add any of your own suggestions for **THE JUBILEE:**

- **Tiered grass seating on steep bank** []
- **Rebuild fisherman's shelter as an outdoor stage** []
- **Install power supplies for outdoor events** []
- **Year-round, accessible cafe facility
in Self Shelter to be run as a concession** []
- **Levelled picnic area** []
- **Create secret paths through upper area** []

Other idea (please specify)

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6. **THE TOILETS.** The current toilets need refurbishment. Would you support any of the following?
- **Individual toilets accessed from the outside** []
 - **How many?** []
 - **Would you be prepared to pay for use?** []
 - **Use some of the toilet building as a commercial space shop/kiosk** []
 - **Renovate existing on same model** []
- Other idea (please specify)**

7. **MEMORIAL PLAY PARK.** A proposal was developed in 2019 however technical difficulties meant this could not be constructed as planned. Would you support any of the following?
- **Major redevelopment similar to 2019 proposal** []
 - **Basic upgrading of existing equipment** []
- **Other idea (please specify)**

8. **CHARLIE'S YARD.** The proposals to date relate to the rear half, the front half would remain as a public open space. Would you support any of the following?
- **Develop a kitchen cafe facility to run as concession** []
 - **Develop a kitchen cafe facility for short lease pop ups and festivals** []
 - **Have temporary covering over top half for concession pop up use** []
 - **Develop toilet facilities free of charge use** []
 - **Develop toilet facilities chargeable use** []
- Other idea (please specify)**

9. **BEACH COURT CAR PARK.** Would you support any of the following?
- **Create paid for allocated parking for Beach court residents** []
- Other idea (please specify)**

10. **Lower part of BEER HEAD CAR PARK (fenced in level area and triangle of grass below).** Would you support any of the following?
- **Allow paid for un-serviced short-term camper van parking** []
 - **Retain picnic area and benches** []
 - **Create play area with play equipment (e.g. spiders web)** []
- Other idea (please specify)**

11. **STARRE BANK, The Causeway.** This is a steep wooded bank with no commercial value.
- **Encourage environmental and diverse management** []
- Other idea (please specify)**
