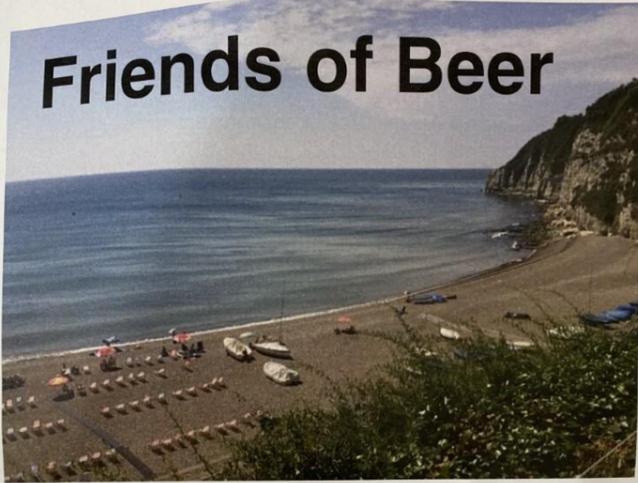


Friends of Beer



TRANSFER OF ASSETS?

Things they don't want you to know

What follows are facts all in the Public Domain supported by evidence not opinions.

Friends of Beer or FOB for short is a growing group of Beer Residents alarmed by the Parish Council's intent to sign up to the biggest financial commitment in our history, without identifying the costs to the Village.

Until now, the PC has decided not to engage with or acknowledge this leaflet due to the fact it was sent anonymously and was considered by the PC and many others as nothing more than a personal and libellous attack, particularly on our Chairman. As a Council, and because three individuals have now stepped forward as being behind the FOB leaflet in an email to the PC, we feel we should collectively correct the inaccuracies and omissions and firmly denounce the abusive and libellous comments made throughout. The PC does not and will not condone such behaviour and would ask that the FOB print a public retraction, particularly in relation to the personal attack on our Chairman who has the support of the full Council in relation to this attack and many, many others throughout the village.

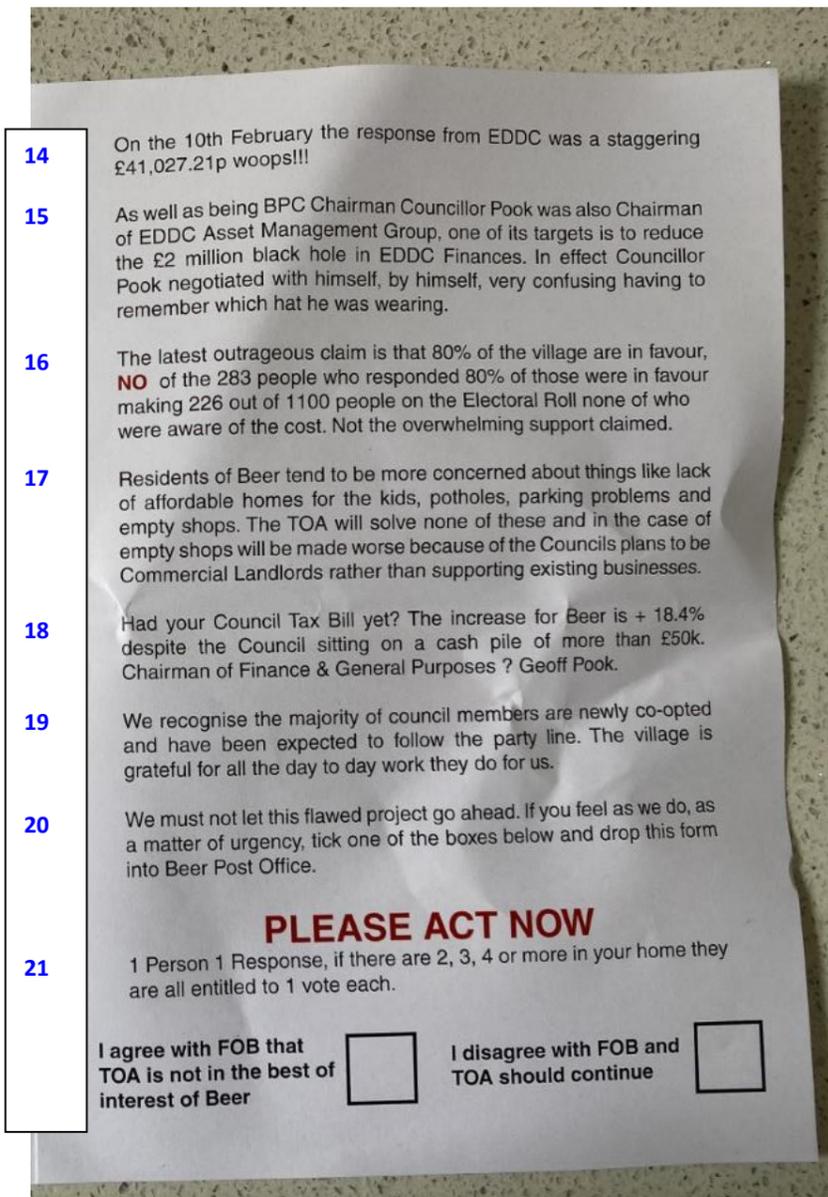
There is nothing we do not want anyone to know – in fact the Parish Council has been trying to actively engage with the village in relation to the Asset Transfer for a number of years now, we dedicated our Annual Parish Meeting in April 2018 entirely to the Asset Transfer and invited a guest speaker from EDDC. This was widely publicised in all the usual ways.

We have identified the costs (those we have been permitted to by EDDC as they are their costs) at every step in our public meetings.

HEADLINES

- 1 • EDDC want to get rid of the financial burden of running toilets.
- 2 • Transfer of Assets Project depends entirely on Beer taking over the toilet block, source EDDC
- 3 • Official audited costs for the toilets was £41,027.21p last financial year, source EDDC
- 4 • The Contract is FOREVER, source EDDC
- 5 • Beer will be taking on significant risk, source EDDC
- 6 • EDDC will save £300,000 in ten years, source EDDC
- 7 • In less than 25 years Beer will payout over £1million just to run the toilets, source £40K x 25
- 8 • The project is driven by one man who wears 2 hats Chair of BPC and Chairman of EDDC Asset Management Group, source BPC & EDDC
- 9 • Since February Council Meeting 30% of Beer Parish Council members have resigned so far over this issue, source BPC
- 10 • Due diligence requires an examination of financial records **before entering into a proposed transaction**. This was not done - why? Source I.O.D.
- 11 We all make buying decisions but always ask "how much is it" except Beer Parish Council (for BPC read Geoff Pook)
- 12 The Council website states that negotiations have been going on for 5 years it's amazing that in all that time the Chairman never thought or never bothered to find out the cost of the toilets or any estimated costs of the proposed developments only choosing to highlight the giveaways. We are constantly reminded that if something looks too good to be true then it probably is!
- 13 It took a Beer resident to ask a simple question by email under The Freedom Information Act 2000 to BPC & EDDC. How much does it cost to run the toilets? The answer from BPC on 5th February was "we don't know" despite on the 2nd February Councillor Pook presented a spreadsheet claiming the costs were £15K. Only one of these statements can be true so one must be a lie.

1. Only EDDC can comment as to the accuracy of this statement, though it is the understanding of the PC that EDDC is NOT looking to get rid of the cost of toilets, but that they will be looking to identify new ways of funding and operating toilet services, which may include transfer to towns and parishes, or in some cases – closures.
2. INCORRECT – the toilets are one asset amongst a number of others, each of which have a cost and an income opportunity. The whole package of assets has to balance cost and income opportunity for both EDDC and BPC.
3. This statement is accurate. The EDDC cost in the region of £41k has always been known and included in BPC's financial modelling.
4. Misleading statement – the proposal is for the transfer of the title to BPC and EDDC "is under no obligation to take them back", though the proposal does not state that this is impossible.
5. INCORRECT – the EDDC cabinet report states that the Parish Council is taking a "not insignificant risk", however this is based on current council costs whereas the BPC model shows significant savings and income opportunities, resulting in a net income over the first 10 years. EDDC also states that the PC will have the opportunity to develop new income streams
6. Misleading statement – the EDDC report does show a saving to EDDC over 10 years of £300k, however the FOB leaflet omits to say that over the same 10 year period, EDDC will be paying BPC £313,000 in cash payments, plus assets with a market value of £315,000.
7. INCORRECT – the breakdown of EDDC costs (relating to the toilets) identifies various costs that BPC will not be liable for, such as transport costs, 50% of the premises charge and labour at the reduced hourly rate. The cost to BPC will therefore be in the region of £20k per annum, as stated throughout the process.
8. INCORRECT – the project has been driven by the PC but led by Cllr Pook, with the backing of the full council to progress to this stage, and the support of the majority of Councillors to complete the asset transfer. Cllr Pook acts in the best interests of the BPC first and foremost when representing the PC at EDDC. Any suggestion to the contrary is considered libellous.
9. INCORRECT – at the time of publication, two members of the PC had resigned due to the fact they were not in favour of the asset transfer, this equates to 18%. Since the publication, a further resignation has been received but this Councillor has made it very clear it was for personal reasons, and nothing to do with the asset transfer, which she was in support of. *(to highlight how inaccurate the statement was – even if this third person had resigned due to the asset transfer, that would still only be 27%)*
10. INCORRECT – Due diligence was carried out. The proposal has been under consideration for at least 5 years where costs and works have been assessed many times by assessing work input, contractor input, and by comparing with EDDC input and costs. The finance models have been assessed by EDDC property and StreetScene staff who consider them viable. Significant examination of costs has been carried out.
11. INCORRECT – as above, BPC have looked at the costs repeatedly over the last 5 years or more. The statement "(for BPC read Geoff Pook)" is considered, and will be treated, as libellous.
12. INCORRECT – again, the Chairman of the PC (which has not been Cllr Pook for the entirety of the last 5 years or more that this proposal has been discussed and progressed) has put considerable time and effort into identifying, scrutinizing and highlighting ALL costs relating to the asset transfer to the PC. The suggestion in this statement that Cllr Pook has acted unprofessionally is false and the PC considers this libellous and offensive and will treat it as such.
13. INCORRECT – an FOI request was submitted by a Beer Resident (and the same Beer Resident who has now stepped forward as one of three founding members of the FOB) to both EDDC and BPC asking: "Have all BPC Councillors been made aware of the **audited** costs of running the toilets on Jubilee Gardens? Date and minute number". The response of BPC on 5 February 2021 was not "we don't know" but: "*There are no **audited** costs available for the running of the toilets on the Jubilee. At the Parish Council meeting in July 2019, Council considered a report and a draft budget for the asset transfer which included the estimate of income and expenditure based on commercial rates, information on current Parish Council input and historic EDDC records. The draft budget included consolidated figures for the following assets: Jubilee, toilets, Memorial play park, South side Beer Head car park, Beach Court car park, Charlie's yard and Starre Bank. See minute below (minutes available on Parish Council website): Minute ref 9/07/2019/20*" followed by an excerpt of said minutes. The fact that the FOB have so flagrantly misled people with their quote in this statement is astonishing given their hypocritical accusations. To further clarify the BPC response, the key part of the question was what the **audited** costs were – these had not previously been made available by EDDC until the point at which they themselves responded to the FOI they received from the same Beer resident and FOB founding member. The spreadsheet presented by Cllr Pook on 2 February 2021 did not claim that the **audited** costs were currently £15k, this was what the PC estimated the toilets would cost the PC, taking into consideration the various costs that the PC will not be liable for; see point 7 above. Therefore, the statement the FOB say must be a lie is in fact their own.



14. Correct – this was the cost quoted by EDDC on 10 February 2021.
15. Cllr Pook has been Chair of the Parish Council since May 2018 (prior to which, and at the point the Asset Transfer proposal was first initiated, it was Martin Richards). Cllr Pook was Chair of the EDDC Asset Management Forum during the civic year 2018-19 and then during 2019-20 until August 2020 when there was a change in administration (again, not for the entirety of the Asset Transfer proposal). He has never been anything other than transparent as to his various roles and positions. We cannot comment on the target of this group. Cllr Pook did not negotiate with himself, nor by himself. He was the Chair of an EDDC forum which collectively debated the merits or otherwise of the Beer Asset Transfer proposal. He has always advocated (and continues to) for the best possible outcome for the PC, and did so with the full support of the BPC (regardless of individual views as to whether the asset transfer should proceed, he progressed conversations with the full backing of the PC). We consider this a malicious and libellous statement towards Cllr Pook and one we will not tolerate.
16. The PC has not claimed that 80% of the village is in favour of the Asset Transfer, we were clear that 78% of respondents were in favour. A properly formulated and independently managed survey with 283 responses showed 78% of those responses (223 people) supported the asset transfer. As in any poll, only those responding can be counted. In response to the FOB's claim that "...226 out of 1100 people on the Electoral Roll none of whom were aware of the cost.", we strongly contest this as various costs were detailed within our consultation document which was circulated to all residents. In addition to this, many Councillors have had a number of more in-depth conversations with residents where asked for further information in relation to the Asset Transfer.
17. The PC works on all of the topics mentioned and the asset transfer will not impact on its work in relation to these issues. The asset transfer will directly benefit the village in enabling it to increase and support tourism and commercial activity that all support the general sustainability and vitality of the village. Additionally – the PC would like to point out that it is thanks to Cllr Pook (and others) that the Beer Community Land Trust was formed, which has been responsible for 7 affordable homes being built and allocated to local families. None of this would have happened without the commitment and hard work of Cllr Pook (and many others) and his personal dedication to providing affordable housing for local residents.
18. The reference to the council tax increase is misleading – the precept for Beer has increased by 18.4%, but not the entire council tax figure. This equates to £5.65 for the year for a Band D property. This is not related to the Asset Transfer but a general increase in costs – the majority of which is due to the additional hours required of the Clerk, which have not been increased in a number of years now whilst the workload has due to increased legislation and bureaucracy. This increase in precept was proposed by the F&GP Committee (see website for members) and approved by the full council, as are all decisions.
19. INCORRECT – of the 11 Council members (at the time of publication), 3 were newly co-opted, this does not equate to a majority. There is no "party line" and no member of the council has been expected nor encouraged to support anything that they do not agree with, much to the contrary. The PC actively encourage challenge and debate and we all offer a different opinion, and are in touch with different members of the electorate and want to best represent what we believe, through active engagement with them, is their opinion also. We are a democracy and there is no bullying or manipulation WITHIN the PC. The PC considers this statement to be libellous against the entire Council, and will treat it as such.
20. The leaflet claims to be factual and not opinion based, so we would therefore ask the FOB for evidence to support the statement that the asset transfer is a "flawed project". As set out above, the PC claim that in fact this statement is supported by falsehoods and prejudiced, libellous comments.
21. Speaking of flawed projects, the PC do not believe this to have been an accurate "survey" given it was possible to mark as many yes/no responses as desired on any one form, and there was no way of evidencing how many responses each home was entitled to and therefore was open to fraudulent replies. There was also no final submission date.

In summary, this leaflet contains multiple omissions and errors that conceal the true situations set out in the BPC survey. There are also a number of unsubstantiated claims and personal insults that appear to be included with the intention of enflaming and prejudicing the views of other residents.