

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Asset Management Forum held online via zoom app on 17 June 2024

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 9.35 am and ended at 11.35 am

1 Notes from the previous meeting held on 4 March 2024

The notes from the previous meeting were agreed.

2 Declarations of interest

Cllr Hookway; Affects NRI Member of Exmouth Town Council: Minute 3 Place and Prosperity Team update

Cllr Barlow; Affects NRI Member of Sidmouth Town Council: Minute 3 Place and Prosperity Team update

Cllr Davey; Affects NRI Member of Exmouth Town Council: Minute 3 Place and Prosperity Team update

Cllr Heath; Affects NRI Member of Beer Parish Council: Minute 2 Community Asset transfer proposal

Cllr Hayward; Affects NRI Employee of Axminster Town Council: Minute 3 Place and Prosperity Team update and Minute 5 Property and FM Team update

3 Public speaking

None.

4 Matters of urgency

None.

5 Confidential/exempt item(s)

None.

6 Community Asset Transfer Proposal - Land at Jubilee Gardens, Jubilee hardstanding (including playpark) and Beach Court Car Park, Beer

An expression of interest had been submitted by Beer Parish Council to acquire land at Jubilee Gardens, Jubilee hardstanding and Beach Court car park.

Consultation was now underway with senior management, the local Ward member, the Asset Management Forum, and others as appropriate.

The Forum was presented with the expression of interest with a request for their comments as part of the consultation which would assist in informing the recommendation to Portfolio Holder.

The Assistant Director for Streetscene provided the Forum with the history of maintenance of the Gardens. Negotiations had been ongoing for some time over the wider Beer Parish asset transfer pilot. The maintenance level had been reduced since 2009 due to budget restraints, but had been carried out as scheduled and to the specified requirement. The proposal by the Parish Council aspired for an enhanced level of maintenance. Concerns still to resolve included:

- Plan need to be in place for biodiversity and bat roosts;
- Health and safety, and risk management, for any works taking place on the bank and cliff edge;
- Consider the cost of maintaining the retaining wall and cliff slope areas, rather than excluding from the red line transfer. These have higher maintenance costs;
- £15,000 annual “saving” for Streetscene maintenance contract was not a tangible saving, in that those staff were still employed and would have to be deployed elsewhere. Whilst there was demand in other parts of the district, the saving to the District Council was minimal;
- An SLA would need to be in place between the Events Team of EDDC and Beer Parish Council in order to manage the bookings, administration and the health and safety requirements for events at the Jubilee and associated areas such as Charlie’s Yard.

Councillor John Health gave a provisional view from the Parish Council, with comments on their outcomes as follows:

- Beach Court car park would transfer to BPC and continue to be managed by EDDC, with BPC paying costs, they would be responsible for boundaries, repairs and white lining – estimated £1200 income to BPC;
- If gardens transfer, assets must be in serviceable condition, and any H&S issues are dealt with prior to transfer or the clear cost identified to the BPC which has not been quantified yet;
- Cliff excluded from transfer;
- Opening up of gardens – renew and maintenance of fence and railings falls to BPC;
- EDDC owns the beach, being a considerable income generator for the authority from the concessions there;
- Does not feel that the cliff area would deteriorate further at this stage.

The Assistant Director – Place, Asset and Commercialisation outlined to the Forum:

- The financial and operational risks for the area in question, because of the coastal location and cliff. Whilst Jubilee Gardens is owned by EDDC, it was in the gift of EDDC to close sections of the Gardens area off if there was a risk to the public, such as a risk of cliff fall. If transferred there would need to be agreement around this and the two authorities would need to work together to undertake this;
- The condition of assets at time of transfer would be based on what was a reasonable to both parties.

Discussion on the expression of interest included:

- Consider if a lease option would work for both parties to establish a phased transfer and that the right decision had been made before the transfer of land and responsibilities was legally binding into perpetuity; whilst this goes against the asset transfer policy, the Ward Member agreed that the Parish may consider such an option if put forward;
- Any work on the site in the event of an asset transfer, if by either volunteers or employed staff, would still be subject to both risk assessments and health and safety measures to protect both those undertaking work and the public;
- Explore other Streetscene demands to redeploy staff if the maintenance of the area does transfer to the Parish Council;
- Phasing the transfer of the areas allows time to gradually redeploy to other needed areas;
- Care with any transfer that the District Council are not left with considerable liabilities in future years for cliff area;

The Forum was in agreement that there was sufficient discussion and information available for the process to proceed to next stage, in particular to consider a full business case for the proposal.

RESOLVED:

1. That AMF notes the report and offers its thoughts on the application at the meeting, as part of the consultation process.
2. That AMF notes that following completion of this consultation, that in accordance with the Procedure, Officers will make a recommendation to the Portfolio Holder for Economy and Assets on whether the applicant should be invited to submit a business case for one or more sites.
3. That AMF notes that should the recommendation be that this application does not progress to the Business Case stage, officers will contact the Parish Council to discuss their proposals and identify whether there is scope for a collaborative approach to achieve some of their objectives set out in the EOI.

7 Place and Prosperity Team update

The Assistant Director – Place, Asset and Commercialisation presented the team update, which covered updates on:

- Depots review
- Public toilets, Esplanade and Drill Hall, Sidmouth
- UKSPF Feasibility Study
- Seaton and Axminster Employment sites
- Seaton Moridunum

The Interim Director for Place spoke to the Forum about the rationale for the delivery of small business units, making reference to the challenge of market failure. On paper, as a profit making exercise, the small business units would fail because of the cost of maintaining the units against the realistic rent level that a small business could afford. However the Council was taking a more holistic approach in supporting the social and economic needs of the area; therefore some assets would not bring profit but be of huge benefit in supplying local jobs.

Questions and comments from Members included:

- Lease land to local business to develop their own units to progress the delivery of units at a faster pace;
- Feasibility Study useful for making difficult decisions based on evidence;
- It was confirmed that ongoing maintenance for the two public toilets in Sidmouth, subject to planning permission going through, would be provided by Rockfish;
- Emphasising the importance of the Camperdown Depot site due to its location to serve the marine economy.

The Forum noted the report.

8 Estates Team update

The Estates team update covered:

- Turnover and occupancy;
- Review of concession provision at Steamer Steps, Budleigh Salterton following storm damage to the existing hut. The team are working with the current tenant to provide a solution that can tolerate seasonal storms;
- Terms now agreed for site at Durham Way, Honiton;
- 2 units at Riverside Workshops, Seaton being prepared for bringing to the market.

Questions and comments from Members included:

- Progress on the review on office accommodation at Blackdown House and Exmouth Town Hall, in line with the Business Centre. In response, the Forum were advised that the accommodation strategy was due before the Executive Leadership Team in the following months. The use of the Business Centre had only been a temporary measure for meeting space demands, and was intended to revert back to its intended use as office space for small businesses; how the office facilities were used at BDH and ETC were currently being reviewed;
- In response to a question about the concession at Budleigh Salterton referenced in the report, the Forum were informed that the lease of the beach to EDDC extended far wider than the hut that had been storm damaged. It was re-iterated that the team were working with the existing tenant to provide a solution. Demand was high for the concession in that location.

The Forum noted the report.

9 **Property and FM Team update**

The Forum were presented with an update report from the Property and FM Team, covering work completed and planned for the period November 2023 to May 2024.

Questions and comments from Members included:

- Increases in costs for toilets included for the replacement of outdated wash and dry units, replacing them with separate units in order to keep the toilets open. Whilst new builds for many toilets was scheduled, repairs and replacements still had to be made to keep the facilities open and hence high costs in recent times;
- In response to the grant application for Sidmouth Pool (as indeed other pool sites) decarbonisation consultancy works, it was confirmed that if the application was successful, the budget allocated for the same work would not be used;
- Discussions were continuing on a solution to resolve the appetite for two additional toilet cubicles in the Ham West area with Sidmouth Town Council;
- Explanation of gutter work at the Ocean, Exmouth.

The Chair thanked the team for their continued work. The Forum noted the report.

Attendance List

Councillors present:

T Olive

P Hayward (Chair)

S Hawkins

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

I Barlow

R Collins

O Davey

J Heath

R Jefferies

N Hookway

Officers in attendance:

Tim Child, Assistant Director Place, Assets & Commercialisation

Andrew Hancock, Assistant Director StreetScene

Rob Harrison, Senior Estates Surveyor
Debbie Meakin, Democratic Services Officer
Gerry Mills, Project Manager Place & Prosperity (Exmouth)
Jorge Pineda-Langford, Principal Building Surveyor, Property & FM
Andrew Wood, Director of Place (interim)

Councillor apologies:
P Arnott
G Jung

Chair

Date: