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## **Time to decide on the future of Clare Castle Country Park**

**Public Meeting on Tuesday 29 January 2013**

**At 7pm in Clare Town Hall**

**Chaired by Cllr Keith Haisman, Chair, Clare Town Council  
with Suffolk County Council represented by Cllr Judy Terry**

Clare Town Council (CTC) has always stated we would bring to a Public Meeting any proposal agreed in principle with Suffolk County Council (SCC) for the transfer of ownership of the Park to CTC. This is intended to ensure the widest possible discussion of all the issues surrounding the Park before entering into any final agreement.

CTC has now received a financial proposal from SCC and has held discussions with St Edmundsbury Borough Council (SEBC) concerning the management of the green spaces and the car park. At its meeting on 17 January 2013 the Town Council discussed the proposition in detail and agreed to recommend to a Public Meeting that we pursue the transfer of ownership of the Park to Clare Town Council. The proposed arrangement with SCC will be presented for discussion at the Public Meeting, and the outline is as follows:

### **The Buildings**

The CTC plans for the buildings remain as per the July 2012 Business Plan submitted to SCC and presented at the Town Meeting on 1 May 2012. They are as follows:

- The station master's house will be re-instated at one end to its original structure (i.e. on two floors but separated from the old ticket office etc.). It will have an entrance from the garden, with the stairs, leading to the first floor, being reinstated. The plan for the Ticket Office, waiting room and office is that they become a History and Education Centre, although we propose an interim use for the office while plans for the Centre are worked on.
- Clare Park Centre, currently used as a Visitor Centre and for various meetings, would be hired out to local groups (e.g. scouts, youth club, art groups). As this building is to be used substantially as a community facility for our young people, Clare Town Council has agreed that, once the building has been brought into an acceptable state of repair, Clare Town Council will assume responsibility for subsequent building maintenance.
- The waiting room on the platform opposite the house would become studios for artists to rent. The artists would be able to display and sell their work that would be an added attraction for visitors to the Park.
- The toilet block will be retained and remain available for public use.

In particular the house and to a lesser extent the Park Centre and Waiting Room require a significant amount of work to bring them into a state of repair that meets health and safety regulations and which will enable



them to be used to generate revenue.

Following detailed negotiations, SCC has made a best and final offer to CTC which will enable CTC to commission the necessary works. SCC will also pay all legal and professional fees relating the transfer of ownership. The financial settlement proposed relates favourably to the original Savills' estimate on which we have reported previously. SCC has agreed to undertake a range of works before transfer of the site and the financial sum proposed covers works that we are advised are necessary and includes a number of provisional sums. It is CTC's view that, with prudent management, this sum will enable the buildings to be brought into a state of repair for use as per the Business Plan and to generate the planned revenues.

This offer from SCC is however subject to the condition that both parties use best effort to complete the transfer of ownership by 31 March 2013.

### **Management of the Green Spaces and the Car Park**

The current service agreement between SEBC and SCC allows SEBC to retain all income from the car park as payment for the maintenance of the green spaces and trees. There is a detailed schedule of work and service levels with which SEBC must comply.

Discussions have been held with SEBC and they have indicated that they are prepared to continue the contract on the current terms and conditions. CTC believes it sensible to continue with this contract for at least one year as this would enable the new Country Park Trustees to concentrate on the building works.

SCC will retain responsibility for the maintenance of the bridges in the Park and all the Rights of Way routes.

### **Ownership and Management of the Park**

The Land and Buildings will be transferred into the ownership of Clare Town Council as Custodian Trustee. There will be a suitable restrictive covenant that ensures the Park will be kept as a green space for the benefit of Clare residents and visitors in perpetuity.

A charitable company limited by guarantee will be formed to manage the Park as set out in the Vision. Clare Town Council will enter into a long-term management agreement with this company that will give the Trustees the powers to run the park independently of Clare Town Council.

The Memorandum and Articles of Association of this company will set out the vision and powers of the company, how the Trustees are appointed/removed, and how they will report on their activities to the people of Clare. Since the Vision will be enshrined in the Memorandum and Articles of the company, changes will not only have to conform to legal requirements but will need the approval of the Charity Commission.

Initial trustees to oversee the transfer of the Park and the setting up of the trust will be Geoffrey Bray, John Knight, Derek Blake and Keith Haisman who have been members of the Working Group negotiating with SCC and reporting to CTC. They will stand down no later than 6 months after the transfer of ownership of the Park and up to 8 trustees will be nominated and elected to take over the running of the Park Trust.

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Should parishioners wish to see the full detail of the Business Plan, please contact Claire Ebeling, Town Clerk on 01787 277559 or by email at [clerk@clare-uk.com](mailto:clerk@clare-uk.com)

If you are unable to attend the Public Meeting but wish to submit comments to us you may do so in writing to Claire Ebeling, Town Clerk, Clare Town Council, The Old School, Callis Street, Clare, CO10 8PX. Alternatively you may write directly to our dedicated email address at [Clarecountrypark@hotmail.com](mailto:Clarecountrypark@hotmail.com)

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