

# Country park deal is sealed

BY STEVE BARTON  
steve.barton@haverhillecho.com  
@SteveEcho

After more than four years of negotiations between Suffolk County Council (SCC) and Clare Town Council (CTC) a deal has been finalised and the ownership of Clare Castle Country Park transferred into local ownership.

While the town council will hold the freehold to the park, day-to-day management has been passed to the Clare Castle Country Park Trust. A charitable trust, it will manage the whole park including the Scheduled Ancient Monument, the green spaces, the buildings, the playground and the car park.

“I believe that we have achieved the very best deal”

At the heart of the discussions has always been the size of the dowry, which SCC would pay to CTC for them to take on the renovations to the grade II listed station buildings and start on the much-needed upgrade to maintenance of the 33-acre park.

The final agreed sum of £321,500 will allow the building renovation works to get underway in May.

Plans are also on course to submit a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a seven-figure sum which will bring significant improvements to the park in the years to come.

CTC chairman, Paul Bishop, said: “After four years of negotiations I believe that we have achieved the very best possible deal for Clare.

“At times it seemed like we were in a David and Goliath struggle but we had an excellent negotiating team and full support from all councillors to achieve this tremendous outcome for our parishioners.

“The upside of having

CONTRIBUTED PICTURE



TRANSFER DEAL Clare Town Councillor Keith Haisman holds documentation for the park after the transfer

taken so long to conclude a deal is that we know just about everything there is to know about the park and this puts the Trustees in a great position to make the Park a

fabulous destination for local families and visitors to Clare. “Clare is a key service centre and local control of the park will help to protect the unique nature of the town

by encouraging tourism and business and keep Clare’s place in the list as one of the best places to live in the UK.” To read more on this go to [www.haverhillecho.co.uk](http://www.haverhillecho.co.uk).

## Timeline of country park’s transfer

October 2010: Suffolk County Council (SCC) announced plans to devolve its responsibility for running the park.

February 2012: SCC held a period of public consultation over the future of the park, including a public meeting at Clare Town Hall.

July 10, 2012: Clare Town (then parish) Council submitted a business plan to the county council for its bid take over the ownership and management of the park.

December 2012: SCC made its first financial offer to the town council for the park’s transfer.

June 2014: Clare Town Council (CTC) held its own period of public consultation to find out what residents wanted to do with the park and establish how it could be run in the future.

August 27, 2014: After 21 months of SCC and CTC going back and forth with different offers SCC made its very final offer to Clare Town Council for the transfer. March 26, 2015: The transfer of the park was completed

# Park in safe hands after four-year takeover battle

Town council celebrates as legal transfer reaches conclusion

BY JESSICA BELL

jessica.bell@press.co.uk  
@sfjessbell

**Clare Castle Country Park is finally in the hands of local people after four years of negotiations between the town and county councils.**

After much discussion between both parties Suffolk County Council has agreed to pay Clare Town Council £321,500, which will pay for renovations to the Grade II listed former station buildings and a start on the much-needed upgrade to maintenance of the 33-acre park.

Town council chairman, Paul Bishop, said after the long and intricate negotiations the board of trustees was in a great position to make the park the best it could be.

"After four years of negotiations I believe that we have achieved the very best possible deal for Clare," he said.

"At times it seemed like we were in a David and Goliath struggle, but we had an excellent negotiating team and full support from all councillors to achieve this tremendous outcome for our parishioners."

Mr Bishop said a thriving country park will maintain Clare's reputation as one of the best places to live in the UK.

"Clare is a key service centre and local control of the country park will help to protect the unique nature of the town by encouraging tourism and business," he added.

The town council will hold the freehold of the park with

Clare Castle Country Park Trust taking on the day-to-day management of the park including the scheduled ancient monument, green spaces, buildings, playground and car park.

Chairman of the trustees, Geoffrey Bray, said they were delighted to see the legal transfer of the park reach a conclusion. "Without changing the park's peaceful and tranquil nature we plan to make it a far more interesting attraction for the town," he said.

A county council spokesman said the local authority believes it has made a fair and significant financial contribution.

He said: "We are pleased to support the people of Clare in taking on this wonderful community asset."



**SUCCESS:** Clare town councillor Keith Haisman in the park in 2012.

## Park to become town attraction

### DEBUT EVENT

The first major event to be held in the Park will be the celebration of Clare's involvement in Magna Carta. Events will begin with a heritage walk from Clare to Castle Hedingham on April 25 and culminate in a procession for schoolchildren through Clare followed by a medieval fair in the Country Park on June 13.

### FUNDING BID

Plans are under way to submit a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a seven-figure sum which will bring significant improvements to the Park in the years to come. The renovation to the former station building is scheduled to begin in May.