



CLARE CASTLE
COUNTRY PARK

Clare Castle Country Park (CCCP) Newsletter – May 2014

Transfer of the Park

On 23rd April we had an initial meeting with Suffolk County Council at which they outlined what their financial offer might include. During this meeting, when no firm offer was made, we expressed our concerns that it did not look as though their proposals were likely to be sufficient to cover the expenditure we would need to incur in the short-term. On 20th May we had a further meeting at which they indicated what their final offer might be; they will put this in writing by the end of the month. The Trustees-elect will review this offer, and all the financial implications (both short and long-term), on 10th June and will make a recommendation to the Town Council based on their conclusions.

In the current situation it would be unwise to release details of the negotiations. (Anyone who has been involved in delicate negotiations will know that releasing details too early can make it more difficult for the terms to be improved). However, you can rest assured that

1. We have been, and are, exploring a range of alternatives that will result in what we believe will be the best outcome for Clare.
2. Before any decision is made there will be a consultation process during which the details of the deal, the Town Council's recommendations will be made public, and a public meeting will be held before a final decision is made by the Town Council.

At the meeting with Suffolk CC on 10th June it was agreed we should aim for the above to be completed by the end of July.

Why should we take on the Park?

The case for taking on such a substantial, and ongoing responsibility, I believe is as follows:

- In recent years we have seen what happens to the Park when a local authority has to cut costs.
- Having the Park under local control is surely better than it being in the hands of a bureaucracy; a bureaucracy subject to political and other pressures, with structures and a management that often changes, and who can never have the same feelings for the Park as those who live here.

- With the aid of volunteers we would be in control of what is done in the Park and could improve it significantly, without changing its basic nature and tranquillity.

What will Suffolk County Council do if the Park is not transferred?

Suffolk CC have indicated they would seek far greater revenue from the car park, possibly sell or lease the buildings on a commercial basis to the highest bidder to generate capital or income, and managing the Park with a reduced green maintenance specification. Surveys Suffolk CC have carried out make it clear that the general public puts financial expenditure on country parks near the bottom of their list of priorities. This is unlikely to be ignored by County Councillors.

Volunteers

Volunteers are critical to our plans. If you haven't 'signed up' already, and would be willing to help should the Park be transferred to the Town Council, please complete the 'volunteers' form. Volunteers can help in many different ways and we will not pressurise people to spend more time than they can make available, nor ask them to do things they would be reluctant to do. (If you can't lay your hands on the 'volunteers form' circulated to all households a few weeks ago please contact me).

New Cut

Getting approval for the new structure, in order to provide the long-term solution that we all want, is currently going through the regulatory and planning processes. The submission to the Environment Agency was made in March and they have 12 weeks to complete their consultation procedures. The planning application to St Edmundsbury was submitted some time ago but before they will grant planning approval a 'bio-diversity report' has to be prepared by qualified consultants. The consultants visited the site on 20th May and the initial results indicated that there is nothing that worries them. On receipt of their report, the Planning Department of St Edmundsbury will then have 8 weeks to do their own 'consultations'. There is no reason to believe that all the necessary approvals will not be forthcoming but it does mean that it probably will not be until August before the two-day construction can be carried out. During the time of the construction (a few days) the New Cut will be at a low level but at other times during the summer the aim is to keep the river full.

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