

Tendring District Council Beach Hut Strategy Revisited

A.10 APPENDIX A

Contents

1.0 Executive Summary

- Objectives**
- Mission**
- Keys to Success**

2.0 Policies of the Beach Hut Service

- Income**
- Customer Service**
- Security**
- Standard of Maintenance & Appearance**
- Charging Structure**
- Investment & Reinvestment**
- Provision of Beach Huts & Alternative Provision**

3.0 Service Plan

- Short Term – 0 to 24 months**
- Medium Term - 24 months to 3 years**
- Longer Term - 3 years +**

4.0 Summary

5.0 Strategies & Actions

- Income Potential**
- Alternative Provision**
- Current & Future Tariff Structure**
- Optimising Usage & Satisfying Demand**
- Improvement to Quality & Standards**
- Security**
- Improving the Efficiency & Effectiveness of Beach Hut**
- Administration**
- Consultation**

1.0 Executive Summary

Tendring District Council adopted its Beach Hut Strategy in 2013 to provide the approach to its management of the service in subsequent years.

In the summer of 2022, the Council carried out a consultation exercise with stakeholders on a range of issues which it was minded to review. Further to a Cabinet decision, an additional consultation process was undertaken over six weeks in late 2022 and early 2023. As such, amendments/updates to this strategy are based on proposals which were set out for consultation and informed by the responses received.

As the points set out and raised in the 2022 and 2022/3 consultations were materially consistent with the 2013 strategy, this revisited document is to be adopted as the revisited strategy.

Along the Tendring coast there are currently 3,057 beach huts directly under the operation and management of Tendring District Council (this has increased from 3,039, as reported in the original strategy) with others on private land or land under the control of Town Councils.

Beach huts are an important and significant feature of Tendring life. Through imagery, beach huts are prominent in the advertising and promotion of Tendring as a tourist destination. Beach huts not only offer a popular recreational activity including encouraging use of the seaside for local people, they also bring in families and visitors from outside the District. The current ownership of beach Huts in Tendring is divided 60 percent locally owned and 40 percent owned by non-residents. This figure varies from location to location with Walton-on-the-Naze attracting the greatest proportion of outside ownership.

The market for beach hut sales is private and largely unregulated. Tendring District Council beach hut sites are currently only offered on the basis of a rolling site licence paid for annually. Despite hut owners having no interest in the land, beach huts can change hands for significant sums. Through this strategy, the Council is providing greater security for the value of the assets placed on Council land. The Council's revenue funds additional improvements and on-going management of the Beach Hut Service.

Over a considerable period of time, some beach hut users have adapted their huts, so they no longer conform to the approved specification. Issues around the appearance of beach huts, unauthorised extensions/verandas and safety features of the huts themselves remain an important area of concern.

Demand for beach huts remains high despite the current national economic challenges. In 2013 huts were listed in the strategy as changing hands for between £5,000 and £30,000. In 2022 however, the higher end has increased to up to £80,000

The introduction of further beach huts and the potential to sell or lease to meet the demand remains a key part of this revised strategy.

The development of new lease arrangement as outlined in this document will regulate these concerns. In addition, commercial leases will ensure a market for rentals will exist successfully through a regulated service offering high quality provision to visitors and residents.

This Council strategy aims to regulate hut rentals to comply with both the letter and the spirit of beach hut conditions.

Providing beach hut sites and the necessary agreements impose obligations and expense to the Council which offsets much of the revenue received. Maintenance of slopes and footpaths and coastal/cliff erosion where most beach huts are located are examples of this.

Beach huts are present in all coastal areas of the District and licence holders are represented by well organised local Beach Hut Associations in the following locations:

Brightlingsea Beach Hut Association

Clacton and Holland Beach Hut Association

Frinton Beach Hut Association

Harwich and Dovercourt Beach Hut Association

Walton Beach Hut Association

Mission

To create a framework for service provision which will ensure the continued popularity of Beach Huts in Tendring and to put the objectives of the strategy into action.

Objectives

The objectives for the Beach Huts service at Tendring District Council are to provide a regulated, customer focused, efficient, quality service, increasing security and opportunities to enable:

- **Improved seafront assets and infrastructure**
- **Increased awareness of local seafront issues**
- **Support for tourism and economic development strategies of the Council**

Keys to Success

Keys to success include:

1. **Maintain the popularity and use of beach huts in Tendring**
2. **Improved infrastructure supporting existing and future beach hut provision**
3. **The presentation of future business planning for beach hut development**
4. **Improved appearance of beach huts and beach hut sites**

- 5. Improved consistency of beach hut standards**
- 6. Ensure beach huts contribute positively to the local economy**
- 7. Providing security of tenure whilst ensuring beach hut customers conform to conditions of their agreement**

2.0 Policies in Support of Mission, Objectives and Keys to Success

Income

To generate sufficient income to meet operating costs, to support future maintenance requirements and to enable investment for developing opportunities for further beach hut provision in line with inward investment and the Council's approved tourism strategy.

There are a number of sites across the District where additional beach huts can be located, subject to a future business plan. The potential for income will depend upon:

- The Council's financial position and wider economic forecasts
- The cost of building and location of new beach huts which vary dependent upon location – some areas can be “in filled”, others require new supporting infrastructure such as bearers
- The level of income potential from beach huts – this varies from area to area
- Whether beach huts are marketed and rented directly from the Council

NEW BEACH HUTS

What is the issue?

There is consistent demand for new huts across the district, given the rising price of huts. Additional finance will be required to ensure licence conditions are adhered to and an improved digital service for customers is offered. Any remaining income would be used for seafront improvements.

What will the Council do?

The Council will prepare feasibility studies to build new beach huts around the District, which will be accessible through a lease. The number of new huts will depend on the space available in appropriate seafront locations and the demand for new huts from local people. Any additional income raised will be used to support additional investment into seafronts and any additional resources required to ensure lease conditions are adhered to. The decision on additional huts will be subject to a business case, should be self-funding and approved through a Cabinet Member decision by the Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Tourism.

Using an assessment of individual beach hut sites available and potential larger areas for development, it is possible to demonstrate where additional income can be achieved by the Council to set against requirements for increased expenditure.

The cost of constructing a beach hut to TDC standards is subject to securing the best contractor in accordance with The Council's procurement and financial procedure rules.

The potential return on investment in any beach hut location will be dependent upon the demand for beach huts and the open market value in specific locations.

MONITORING OF BEACH HUT CONDITIONS & COMPLAINT MANAGEMENT

What is the issue?

There are currently no dedicated resources to monitor Beach Hut conditions, including rentals and adaptations. Additional staffing capacity would be required if ongoing monitoring of conditions was to be carried out.

What will the Council do?

The Council is considering additional staffing resources to ensure conditions are adhered to and taking appropriate and proportional enforcement action where necessary. This could be funded through the Beach Hut development programme referred to above and subject to a process of approval. The viability of any increase in staffing would be decided through the Council's budgeting process at an appropriate time.

Customer Service

AN IMPROVED DIGITAL SERVICE FOR BEACH HUT USERS

What is the issue?

A greater digitalisation of the Beach Hut service is likely to improve customer contact, efficiency and extend the services available. It is also likely to reduce the environmental impact of the service, with less paper required. This could incorporate standard forms and submission of regular customer contact through digital means.

What will the Council do?

The Council will consider installing new software to improve services to beach hut users and allow them to complete processes online. This would also be used to gather and record appropriate information about conditions, including which huts are able to rent and to ensure complaints are easier to report and manage. This could be funded through a Beach Hut Development Programme and would be subject to a process of approval. The Council is minded to ensure there are sufficient staffing resources in place to continue offering direct contact with a member of staff, where this is required.

Security

All beach hut areas should offer a safe environment for the public and for users to enjoy with confidence and safety.

To promote and support Beach Hut Associations with regard to security issues by seeking to

- Install deployable CCTV cameras on a temporary basis where this is practically possible, through the Council's process and CCTV policy process. This will be dependent on the needs and demands of a particular location, compared with issues experienced in other areas of the District. Cameras will only be deployed through the processes set out in the Council's CCTV Policy
- Improve patrol options by joint working with Council staff and beach hut volunteers
- Longer term work with crime reduction partners on crime and anti-social behaviour on seafronts

Standard of Maintenance & Appearance

All beach hut areas to maintain a standard of infrastructure and appearance designed to support priorities for tourism and inward investment. This will include sound structures and agreed additional features, surface layouts and boundaries as well as general attractiveness of appearance including a palette of suggested colours.

The standards will apply to the surrounding area also to satisfy users and owners they are receiving a quality service.

All sites to be kept clean with appropriate number of litter bins in place.

Improvements to the quality and standard of beach huts are issues that have not always been treated as a high priority. Whilst essential repairs have been made to existing beach hut areas to supporting bearers, retaining walls and sub soil, these have not always been undertaken as part of a planned programme, or in relation to an overall business plan and in many areas the pace of improvement has not kept up with the aspiration of users.

Through the production of a new design specification, the Council will agree a new direction and actions in respect of the overall appearance of beach huts in Tendring. Despite an aspiration in the original strategy, dilapidated huts and unauthorised structures are still addressed individually but not part of an overall plan designed to improve enhancement to the appearance of beach hut locations and individual beach huts. In order to address this in a systematic fashion, the Council will work with stakeholders to complete a new design specification following adoption of this strategy.

Finally, the Council will move towards a new palette of approved colours for Beach Huts to improve vibrancy of sea front locations. Subject to a technical review and further consultation, a revised specification could also cover such issues as standardisation of Beach Hut roofs, modern cladding (subject to research and meeting British Design and Safety Standards) and products which reduce beach huts' carbon footprint.

Following the pre-consultation, it is considered best practice to embed the revised specification into Beach Hut Agreements. As such, it is now suggested that licences are phased out over 2022/2023 and are replaced by leases from 1 April 2024. The exact timing of this roll out will be determined at a future date. This will include the obligations for beach hut design, as set out following completion of the revised specification. Leases will also provide those with beach huts on Council land with additional security which they do not currently have with a licence agreement. It should be noted however that the annual cost of a lease will be higher than that of a licence fee, to reflect that greater security of tenure and market values. This will be subject to a separate valuation process. Those with leases will

be able to sell them to a private buyer, as long as their beach hut is fully compliant. The lease will be assignable to a new owner and the originator will need to apply to the Council for consent to assure the hut is compliant.

This improvement will decrease the chances of similar issues with adaptations occurring in future due to the clarity of obligation through the new leases.

RENTING OF BEACH HUTS

What is the issue?

The existing licence conditions include the following clauses, which do not allow for beach hut rentals to take place:

- 'Not to use nor permit the use of the Hut or the Site for any trade profession or business.' and
- 'The rights given in Clause 2 may only be exercised by him and his immediate family and guests'

In addition, if Council assets are being used for commercial reasons, the Council has an obligation to seek both best value and ensure there is a transparent process for providing appropriate permissions.

What will the Council do?

The Council will issue commercial agreements for those wishing to rent out Beach Huts for more than 10 days per year. It is important and appropriate to regulate the market for rentals. Commercial agreements will be issued to those requesting them, based on a criteria. This will cover key points such as accessibility and safety of huts, to ensure commercial agreement holders are able to provide a high quality service to renters. The commercial lease will consider the key points set out in the Council's Tourism Strategy. With the move from licences to leases any new commercial agreements will be issued through a lease. This will be in advance of the wider roll out in April 2024.

Beach hut agreements will be limited to one per household, to ensure as many local residents as possible are able to access them. The Council is considering whether a 'buffer' period can be implemented, to ensure anyone wishing to buy a new beach hut (e.g. for reasons of accessibility) are able to do so, with a grace period to be determined to sell their existing hut.

New terms and conditions will be provided to existing licence holders, to set out that beach hut users without commercial leases will not be able to rent out huts for more than 10 days per year. Changes will also include arrangements for vehicular access onto promenades.

THE CURRENT BEACH HUT SPECIFICATION

BEACH HUT ADAPTATIONS

What is the issue?

Over the years some huts breach the current specifications due to adaptations that have taken place that fall outside of the stated plot dimensions for example the addition of patios, balconies, decking areas. In these instances the current site licence does not cover those

adaptations. Further to this, some of these adaptations could be considered unsafe and inappropriate for their location.

What will the Council do?

Following a review of the specification (referred to below), the Council will work towards the priority to maintain public spaces to a high standard, by working with owners for the removal of those adaptations which fall outside of the revised specification.

Depending on the outcome of a review of the Beach Hut specification, the Council may consider a new set of fees and charges for any adaptations which are deemed appropriate.

BEACH HUT SPECIFICATION

What is the issue?

The Council will work with partners to update the current beach hut design specification and make appropriate changes. This will consider issues such as new brighter colour schemes and visual and design guidance for beach hut users, including environmental considerations.

What will the Council do?

The Council will work through a review of the current specification and consider adding new products, such as modern cladding which do not currently meet the specification. This can also consider how beach huts could support the Council's carbon neutral agenda. Following adoption of this strategy, the Council will commission this work and involve representatives of each Beach Hut Association as part of the consultation process.

A wider review of the specification will be undertaken following the Beach Hut Strategy's approval, which will require more time to develop the detail and technical drawings required. This will require consultation with the Beach Hut Associations. The revised specification will be embedded into beach hut agreements through the implementation of leases from April 2024.

Charging Structure

All beach huts to have a tariff structure that is transparent and reflects local conditions. Any changes to be agreed by the relevant Portfolio Holder(s) through the fees and charges approval process, prior to implementation.

The process for setting charges for commercial leases will be set at double that of the published mainstream lease fees.

The move from licences to leases and the additional security that will afford, will result in an increase in annual fees and charges.

The fee for issuing a new beach hut agreement following a sale, will also be reviewed on an annual basis.

Consultation

This review of the original Beach Hut Strategy has been conducted following an open consultation exercise with stakeholders. Regular and ongoing consultation is to be undertaken with:

- (i) Beach Hut Associations, all hut owners / users
- (ii) Representatives of the local community
- (iii) Portfolio Holder(s) and Cabinet

Consideration has been given to the responses from stakeholders to the proposals in this strategy in its production. The outcome is summarised in the strategy appendices.

Investment

A plan of scheduled investment into the District's seafronts at beach hut locations will be devised and presented for approval through the Council's decision making process to maintain agreed standards. This plan will consider how seafronts are currently maintained and put forward proposals for how assets can be sustainably financed in the future. This is to include maintenance of cliff slopes and the significant investments which have taken place.

Provision of Beach Huts & Alternative Provision

Consideration will be given to the style of any new Beach Huts developed when proposals are fashioned and considered for approval. The original strategy considered alternative styles of huts and set out options for overnight accommodation on seafronts. Any proposals developed will recognise the impact on local communities and consideration of local issues and in particular tourism and inward investment strategies for the District. As such, the Beach Hut development programme will put forward options which are considered appropriate for the location and ones which fit into the parameters of this revised strategy.

The original strategy included the following:

"There are beach hut type facilities across the world and in recent times many new ideas for camping and seafronts have been developed. These include, amongst other things alternatives to the traditional beach hut provision with beach huts that offer different designs and opportunities that attract a range of different users. Any business plan should incorporate ideas or provision for exploring alternative options."

Going forward, alternative options will only be considered in the context and spirit of this revised strategy.

3.0 Service Plan for the Beach Hut Service

An objective of any strategy in relation to beach huts is to maintain good standards and ensure policies and conditions are adhered to. This will improve the quality of the seafront offer for beach hut users, residents and visitors to the District.

It is proposed to develop the existing Beach Hut database to a new improved digital platform in order to:

- **Ensure that owners maintain beach huts to an acceptable standard.**
- **To identify and address known maintenance requirements of existing sites.**
- **To highlight additional income opportunities designed to support beach hut policies as well as to contribute towards improvements and maintenance of the districts coastline.**

The Service Plan: Short Term – 0 to 24 months

1. **Implement changes from the revised Beach Hut Strategy, as set out below:**
 - a. **Implement short term changes for standard licences for Beach Huts in April, to set out conditions relating to rentals and vehicular access to promenades;**
 - b. **Implement new commercial leases following expressions of interest, against a set of criteria;**
 - c. **Work with Beach Hut owners and stakeholders to develop a revised specification;**
 - d. **Evaluate which Beach Huts have balconies and verandas which do not conform to the specification. Work with those beach hut users to make suitable amendments or removal where appropriate;**
 - e. **Replace licence agreements with leases from 1 April 2024**
2. **Complete review of potential areas for new beach huts both individually and on a larger scale.**

3. Devise business case for Beach Hut development programme for a future decision, including a costed plan for investment into additional resources and seafront improvements.
4. Review financing of seafronts and consider costed proposals for sustainable investment in the long term, to aspire towards public maintaining public assets to a high standard.
5. Subject to funding, consider purchasing additional deployable CCTV Cameras for seafront locations. This will be considered through the business planning process referred to in this strategy.
6. Continue with District Wide Beach Hut Associations meeting a minimum of twice per year.

Medium Term - 24 months to 3 years

1. Evaluate short term goals
2. Evaluate the outcomes of commercial leases
3. Continue Beach Hut development plan subject to the need and demand and a standalone business plan being approved.
 - Review the need for additional security at beach hut locations
 - improve appearance of beach huts generally
 - continually monitor, evaluate and address unauthorised structures

Longer Term - 3 years +

1. Review Beach Hut Strategy and report back to Cabinet

5.0 Actions in Support of Policies

Income Potential to offset future investments

There are a number of sites across the District where additional beach huts can be located. The potential for income will depend upon:

- **The cost of building and siting new beach huts which vary dependant upon location – some areas can be “in filled”, others require new supporting infrastructure such as bearers (which obviously incur additional up front and long term costs).**
- **The level of financial return received from beach huts – varies from area to area**

Current and Future Charging Structure

Charges will continue to be set annually in consultation with the Portfolio Holder, so as to consider the local climate for Beach Huts. The fees and charges set will reflect the cost of the service in the short, medium and long term. This will also include charging for leases and commercial leases.

Following publication of the revised Beach Hut specification, consideration could be given to additional fees and charges for approved adaptations, where appropriate.

Optimising Usage & Satisfying Demand

Examination of existing fees and charges will assist towards achieving objectives and key targets.

At present the demand for beach huts in the District remains high. All fees are paid annually and few, if any, owners default.

The private market for beach huts and beach hut sales remains buoyant, but turnover and sales are subject to changes in the beach hut market. However, no slow-down in sales is currently evident in Tendring.

There is also a clear demand from local residents for “affordable” access to Beach Huts and opportunities exist to stimulate demand from both inside and outside the District.

Marketing of beach huts – web marketing and marketing from more traditional sources has been extremely limited in the past. Active marketing represents an opportunity within the future business plan to increase demand and revenue possibilities.

Improvement to Quality & Standards

Improvements to the quality and standard of beach huts are an issues that have become more and more apparent, since the original strategy. A programme of replacing supporting structures at the Leas (Frinton on Sea) has been undertaken in recent years. Any future investment in structures will work towards high quality support for beach huts and importantly, safety.

As set out earlier in this strategy, there is an urgent need to address unauthorised beach hut structures in some areas of the District. This is for safety.

The proposed revised and improved design specification will provide the framework for improved aesthetics of Beach Huts. This will also ensure huts are more vibrant and visually impactful, through a move towards brighter colours.

Security

The reduction of crime, the fear of crime and reducing anti-social behaviour is a key Council and wider community priority.

Web based information and other literature will contain advice on crime prevention and the seafront service in partnership with the police and other Council services will continue to promote partnership enforcement and prevention initiatives relating to crime and anti-social behaviour.

The new design specification will consider how to support beach hut users in 'designing out crime.' Additional advice can be obtained by the Police and other crime prevention agencies.

The introduction of deployable CCTV cameras can also be considered through the Council's current stock and its approach set out in the CCTV policy.

Consultation

At present the Council receives feedback by means of regular meetings with local Beach Hut Associations and other stakeholders. A representative attends the Annual General Meetings of the Beach Hut Associations wherever possible.

Since 2019, regular meetings of the District Wide Beach Hut Association have taken place, by means of an "umbrella" group to cover issues relevant to all areas of the District. It has been typical for a service representative to arrange subsequent meetings with individual associations to discuss more localised issues. It is intended to continue this process. As referred to in this strategy, the Council also consulted widely on the proposals outlined in this strategy.

Improving the Efficiency & Effectiveness of Beach Hut Administration

Many of the proposals contained in both the original and reviewed strategy, will impact on the method of delivery of the beach hut administration and the strategy recognises that resources may need to reflect increased work or to ensure the completion of action plans.

As previously mentioned, IT systems and processes will be reviewed to improve the customer journey and to make contact with the service more effective. Any cost and additional resources required will be considered through a separate decision.

The broader issues in relation to delivering the business plan and to meet policy objectives within this strategy will require good partnership working both between Council services and with outside partners and stakeholders. Good partnership and effective administration of the service will deliver the objectives of this Strategy and help the service to achieve its mission to work towards the continued popularity of beach huts in Tendring.

Prior to the development of this strategy, an open consultation was undertaken to seek the views of all stakeholders. A summary of the outcome is included in the appendices.

Tendring
District Council