

## **Petition - EBC must give Defiant Sports compensation, an alternative site and hold a public meeting re Fort Fun**

To: Councillor Stephen Holt

Sign to demand Eastbourne council provide compensation and alternative accommodation for Defiant Sports and that they hold a public meeting so that we the people of Eastbourne can ask the relevant councillors and officers why they have acted in such a manner and provide transparency over their future intentions for the site.

### **Why is this important?**

Defiant Sports are a Community Interest Company that provides fully inclusive access to a variety of sports regardless of ability or disability. They are a much loved and invaluable local service provider for many disabled and disadvantaged individuals, families and communities. This vital service is now under threat due to council actions. Those responsible need to be held to account and the people of Eastbourne need transparency over what is happening with the Fort Fun site and why the whole matter has been handled so appallingly via a public meeting.

Just before Christmas 2023 Defiant Sports were told by Eastbourne Council that they would have to vacate the Fort Fun Site (a previously derelict amusement park located on Eastbourne Seafront). Yet just 12 months earlier the council had highly praised their plans for the site (which had the potential to make Eastbourne an attractive equal opportunities resort for disabled people) when they announced they were to be awarded a joint 5 year lease, along with Wingrove House.

The group achieved this after a long and arduous bidding process where various local charities, not for profits and small enterprises had been encouraged to apply for the opportunity to develop the site and to submit plans of intent. The bidding process and criteria were unclear, the process was dragged out with deadlines moved and decisions continually delayed, some bidders only finding via Facebook that their bid would be rejected as they had asked for a long term lease and then discovered that the council only intended to award a short term 5 year lease.

During the bidding process there was much disquiet on social media as to why the council was not looking for a major funder and questions were asked as to why only a short term lease was being offered. Councillor Robert Smart made it clear to some seafront groups this was because there was a chance that in the future the Eden Project might be interested in the site. This has been reinforced by his statement to the press this last week and in discussion with two constituents in a Meads conservative councillor surgery.

When Council leader, David Tutt made the announcement that Defiant Sports would have the site, shortly before the local elections, he spoke glowingly about the plans they had put forward.

Loretta and her team immediately started ploughing a load of resources and manpower into realising their vision for the site. The council failed to fulfil its duty to provide access to water or electricity or any planning permissions necessary for them to make any real headway despite frequent requests and the fact that these

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were based on the submission which had led to the council awarding them the lease in the first place. Without these permissions Defiant Sports could not apply for the grants which they had made clear to the council were necessary to realise their ambitions. Their hands were tied. Despite this they made a huge visible impact on the site, clearing much of the external structures, dismantling equipment and having much of the site waste, in the area allocated to them, removed. Amidst this process the council suddenly decided to change the area Defiant Sports had been allocated but in the ensuing months failed to define how they were going to do this - again leaving Defiant Sports unable to move forward. However much of the site had been visibly cleared by them. This was in stark contrast to Wingrove House, with whom they shared the site.

Wingrove House had been awarded part of the site 6 months earlier than Defiant Sports with the, now retired, Councillors Burton and Tutt promising that their part of the site would be open by September 2022. Yet 18 months on and Wingrove House have not opened any part of their section of the site. However, despite all of this, the council have inexplicably announced that they are now awarding sole use of the site to Wingrove House and Defiant Sports are being forced to vacate it.

Having focussed so much time and energy on this project - which it now appears the council had absolutely no intention of letting them realise - the group find themselves in financial difficulties and having to drastically reduce the services it offers.

This abysmal near destruction of a small worthy community group that provides such a unique and necessary service to many local families, individuals and communities is reprehensible. The council need to be held to account for the total mismanagement of this process, reparation needs to be made to Defiant Sports and an alternative venue urgently found for them. Explanations also have to be given as to why Wingrove House now has sole use of the site and why does the site seem to be being reserved just in case the Eden Project want it in the vague future with no open, national tendering process.

Please sign and demand the council:

- compensate Defiant Sports for all the work they have done on the site over the last 12 months (estimated at £75k)
- find them suitable alternative accommodation as a matter of urgency so they can restore some of their programme and support the disabled and disadvantaged in our community.
- Request the council hold a public meeting with all the relevant councillors and officers there so we, the people of Eastbourne, can get some transparency over what the council's rationale was, what their intentions are, what it is that the Eden Project might have in mind, and open details over the results of the Eden Project feasibility study on which the council have spent £150k.

Signed by 1,938 people