

## Why aren't you in Cliff Field Gardens this year?

A beautiful spot perched above the town. Many people have asked why we are not there again this year. On a social media poll, it turned into quite a discussion and I was surprised at how opinion was so divided over the merits of each location. Surpassing public opinion however, was the matter of finance. Here's the story:

In 2021 Seaton Eats Boutique tried out a new location, in part because we needed much more space to allow for social distancing to safely resurrect our businesses. It would also allow us to have a few more traders, including those with trailer set ups, which would alleviate some of the queueing time for customers and allow my business to grow in line with demand.

At the time this Town Council asset did not have a hire policy or fee structure because it was rarely used for anything other than council run events. During the autumn and winter of 2021 (after we had 4 events there) the town council reviewed their policies with the intention to monetise its assets. They published the new draft policy in January 2022.

The terms of hire include the obligation for hirers to provide toilets. The cost of 1x standard and 1x disabled facility, along with the commercial rate hire fee for the garden, amounts to a minimum of about £450 per event.

While the council were developing this policy a restrictive covenant came to light that is a legally binding document on the land. This covenant has some clauses in it that restrict certain activities, one of those prohibiting the sale of alcohol.

The business model for Seaton Eats Boutique requires the income from the bar sales along with the pitch fee income from traders to enable it to be a financially sustainable event. Even with the bar income I simply don't earn enough money to cover the cost of the hire fee and terms. I attended the meeting in February to explain this and you can read the minutes of this meeting [here](#). The policy was adopted without amendment at the meeting.

Therefore, I had a decision to make: could Seaton Eats Boutique continue in Seaton in another venue, or was this the end of the events altogether? Well, I was reluctant to lose all that I had invested since 2015 and having exhausted other options, decided on balance that returning to our previous location of Jubilee Gardens, a site owned by East Devon District Council, was the most viable option.

I have created a simple table outlining the main arguments for and against each site. This is a distillation of all the ideas I have heard across social media and in the many conversations I've had with people.

	Cliff Field Gardens	Jubilee Gardens
<b>For</b>	great for children to run around	direct views of the sea
	plenty of space to queue	no complaints about dogs policy
	easy for traders to access, trailers allowed	amphitheatre offers lots of seating
	Fantastic views	in the town, creating a buzzy atmosphere
		customers can access other food outlets in town
		car parking near by
		cash machines near by

	Cliff Field Gardens	Jubilee Gardens
		no cost of portaloos
		people with limited mobility find this venue easier to access
<b>against</b>	unaffordable pitch fee	chess tables a nuisance
	terms of portaloos hire a high risk to my business	limited access for traders (narrow ramps) so pool of traders much smaller
	very exposed to weather, especially wind	no flexibility for trader numbers - sloping ground, fixed furniture etc
	no alcohol sales allowed	children can't run around safely at the venue
	no dogs allowed	congested queues
	Difficult for limited mobility people to access	Limitation on number of traders - events will have limited capacity
	few tables, spaced out benches	
	takes people away from the town and other food outlets	

I love that people feel so invested in my business. This is because it has brought so much positivity to the town. It is also because people know me as a part of the community and understand that I started these events driven by a desire to bring people together to share great food.

I have come to understand that there are many more positives that ripple out from these events but at the end of the day I am running an enterprise that has to be sustainable. We receive no public funding and pay commercial rates for services, and there are only a certain number of overheads any business can bear. The decision to move back to Jubilee Gardens was made because my traders and I wanted to keep the events alive in Seaton.