

Agenda Item 6 Abandoned Boats

Following a request for the following details, a report was received from EDDC,

- Details of current enforcement and sanction mechanisms.
- Any legislative or regulatory powers available to pursue vessel owners.
- Information on efforts to identify or contact the owner of the abandoned vessel and an analysis of the status of these vessels. Are the abandoned or washed up?
- Proposals for a sustainable, funded process for future management of such cases.

Report from EDDC

All possible actions had already been taken within the current budget and that no further work could be undertaken during this financial year.

A request for £6,000 had been submitted to address the issue in the next budget year. However, the officer noted that this funding could not be confirmed until the budget was approved by the full council in February. It was also highlighted that the issue was not limited to Budleigh, as similar problems had been identified in Exmouth, Sidmouth, and Beer.

The officer explained that the boats did not present a significant safety or environmental risk. Most were too heavy to be easily launched or sunk, and they were not releasing harmful materials. The main concerns were the visual impact and the loss of potential income, as abandoned boats occupied spaces that could otherwise be used by registered vessels paying for storage.

Historically, abandoned boats had been removed and disposed of in landfill. However, government rule changes in 2022–2023 prevented Glass Reinforced Plastic (GRP) from being sent to landfill, requiring specialist disposal instead. The lowest available cost had been identified as approximately £400 per tonne, plus £200 per craft for transport. Devon County Council previously managed the waste element but now only accepts boats that have washed ashore, not those abandoned after storage.

Where an owner could be identified, they would be responsible for disposal costs, which could ultimately be pursued through a debt recovery process. However, many boats had no identifiable or contactable owner, as some were never registered or ownership details had changed.

The council had followed its established procedure for unauthorised boats. Vessels were first marked as unregistered, then after 28 days marked as abandoned. After a further 28 days without contact from an owner, the council gained the right to remove and dispose of them. This stage had been reached for the Budleigh boats, but removal could not proceed due to the lack of budget in the current year.

Alternative solutions had been explored, including offering the boats to the public free of charge and to community groups, but there had been little interest. The officer stated they

remained open to further suggestions and would welcome working with the town council to explore additional options.

It was also noted that not all boats reported as abandoned were necessarily so. During a recent inspection, 12 boats were marked as unregistered; since then, two had been removed and one registered. The council could require registered boats to be seaworthy but could not enforce specific aesthetic standards.

The officer concluded that they hoped this explanation clarified the situation and confirmed their willingness to attend a meeting if considered helpful.

Further actions: The Town Clerk requested confirmation that the budget was (was not) approved in Feb 2026 and has been advised that this was unknown at time of writing as it doesn't have it's own budget line but is instead part of a larger budget. There will not be clarity on this until the new budget year starts.