

Unconfirmed



Minutes of a Meeting of the **Southwold Harbour Management Committee** held in the Stella Peskett Millennium Hall, on **Wednesday, 12 June 2024** at **1:30 PM**

Members of the Committee present:

Councillor Paul Ashton, Councillor David Beavan, Councillor Jan Candy, Mr David Gledhill, Mr Alistair MacFarlane, Mr John Ogden, Ms Diane Perry-Yates, Councillor Lee Reeves

Officers present: Kate Blakemore (Strategic Director). Kerry Blair (Head of Operations), Alli Stone (Democratic Services Officer)

Others present: Andrew Blois (Vice Chair, Stakeholder Advisory Group)

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for Absence were received from Cllr Toby Hammond, Mike Pickles and James Milnes (Harbour and Caravan Site Manager)

2 Declarations of Interest

Ms Perry Yates declared a pecuniary interest in item 6. She had received dispensation from the Monitoring Officer to take part in discussion.

3 Minutes

RESOLVED

The minutes of the meeting held on the 14 March 2024 were agreed as a correct record.

4 Term of Office of Co-opted Member John Ogden

The Committee received report ES/1989, the purpose of which was to re-elect John Ogden to the Committee for a further three year term.

The Democratic Services Officer stated that members of the Committee may be appointed for a second term, subject to agreement of the Chair and the co-opted

member. Mr Ogden had confirmed he would like to remain for a second term, and Councillor Beavan had also agreed to this.

On the proposal of Councillor Candy, seconded by Councillor Reeves it was

RESOLVED

That it be recommended to the Leader of the Council that John Ogden be Co-opted for a further 3 year Term of Office onto the Southwold Harbour Management Committee, starting on the 1 July 2024.

5 Operational Update

The Head of Operations gave an update on the harbour operation. General recurring issues on the road surface, flooding and operation of sluices were ongoing. Options for resolving these in the long term were being looked at.

Work was taking place on the North Dock Wall to see how a system to divert fuel spillages could be installed, along with options for an improved system for fuelling vessels. This work would depend on the condition on the ground underneath the wall and the Assets Team were investigating this.

Coastal Partnership East were leading on work to the South Training Arm and they would be asked to bring an update on this to the Harbour Management Committee.

The Vice Chair of the Advisory Group raised issues with the icemaker in the fisherman's compound, and general issues of proper management in the fisherman's compound. The Head of Operations stated that a new ice machine would be purchased, but there were issues with people breaking into this area. Management of the whole compound needed to be looked at to ensure any new equipment was not immediately broken. It was hoped that the fishermen could form a small association which would be licenced to manage this area. The Head of Operations confirmed he would bring a report on the management of this area to the next meeting.

6 PMSC Harbour Audit of Southwold Harbour -Findings and Preliminary Steps Towards Action Plan Development

The Committee received report ES/1995 which related to findings from the Port Marine Safety Code (PMSC) Harbour audit conducted on 23 January 2024 and preliminary steps towards the development of an action plan.

The Head of Operations stated that the audit had been carried out by ABP Mer, the designated person, and it was the first full audit of the harbour completed since the creation of the Harbour Management Committee. When ABP Mer had first been appointed as designated person an informal audit had been carried out which had identified approximately thirty three areas of non-compliance. There were now two areas of non-compliance. The Head of Operations noted that as harbours had to achieved 100% to pass this meant the harbour was still non-compliant. There needed to be a clear programme of work to address this.

The Head of Operations stated that the two areas of non-compliance related to training and incident reporting. Regarding training, the Deputy Harbour Master held the Harbour Master Qualification but the Harbour Master had not. ABP Mer felt that the Harbour Master did have the necessary skills and training even if he had not done this particular course, and that evidencing this would cover this action.

Regarding reporting and recording of accidents, this was done manually and was not automatically fed into the Council's incident report system. The Council system did not meet all of the requirements of the PMSC for recording marine incidents and the health and safety team were looking at how these requirements could be met.

The Chair thanked officers and the harbour staff for their work.

Mr Ogden asked what action would be taken on the amber areas, which were not areas of non-compliance but were areas where improvements were recommended. The Head of Operations stated he would discuss this with the compliance working group.

The Vice Chair of the Advisory Group stated that most of the businesses in the harbour had their own inspections and reports they had to complete to be compliant and safe, and asked if any of these could be fed into the harbour reports. Mr MacFarlane stated that most of these would not be applicable to the PMSC audit as it did not relate to activities that the harbour carried out. It was good practice for the harbour authority to have sight of documentation for businesses in the harbour, but that they did not need to carry out inspections or add any additional work.

Mr Gledhill stated that a great deal of progress had been made in a comparatively short time, and congratulated staff on their work.

Councillor Reeves asked who carried investigation of accidents. The Head of Operations stated this would depend on where the incident was, but usually it would be the harbour master.

Councillor Candy asked why the harbour was not compliant with the harbour master qualification. The Head of Operations stated that the full harbour master qualification was quite lengthy, and it was not felt to be a good use of time for the harbour master at this stage in his career. It was felt by ABP Mer that his knowledge could be sufficiently evidenced against the national standards and this would satisfy this requirement. Mr Gledhill stated that this was a national issue with smaller harbours as the majority of the course would not apply to a harbour the size of Southwold.

By a unanimous vote it was

RESOLVED

That the Harbour Management Committee endorse the ongoing development of the action plan, which is designed to address the areas highlighted by the audit, with a particular focus on enhancing risk management and improving the training and qualifications of staff.

7 Harbour Vision and Static Site Revitalisation

The Committee received report ES/1993 which related to the revitalisation of Southwold Harbour and Caravan site.

The Head of Operations summarised the report. All received responses had been included as appendices for the Committee. The majority of responses had been received online through the survey, but some had also been received in the form of letters and other written responses.

A total of 276 people had responded online, 60% of these were caravan owners, the rest were a mix of business owners and harbour users. The Head of Operations summarised the common themes that had been raised in the face to face feedback sessions:

- Concerns about flooding
- Concerns about length of leases and terms and conditions
- Need for more detail on caravan site terms in future discussions
- Need for clarity on what level of investment the harbour needed
- Need for more detail in the vision
- Desire for environmental and sustainable practises
- How amenities and infrastructure could be improved whilst keeping the feel of the harbour

The Head of Operations summarised the response to the four options that had been set out for the caravan park. Option one was the most popular with just over 30% of respondents supporting this. The other options had slightly less support, with just under 30% supporting option two, around 25% supporting option three and only around 15% supporting option four.

The Head of Operations stated that based on feedback, there was clear support for sub-letting and more flexible leases, but there were concerns around flood risk and any requirements around the buying and age of caravans. The current terms and conditions stated that caravans should be no older than ten years but this was not adhered to. There had been suggestions from users that a higher age might be acceptable, or whether there could be a check on caravans to ensure they were safe. Written responses received outside of the survey had a strong focus on the need to maintain the community on the caravan site.

The Head of Operations summarised the recommendations in the report. The first was that the vision was finalised an updated based on feedback from the consultation. The second was that in depth discussions are had with caravan owners on heads of terms, and then all caravan owners be transitioned from an annual licence to a long term lease. The third recommendations was that a business plan is drawn up to fully explore how the Council could retain and operate thirty plots. The fourth recommendation was that co-design workshops, facilitated by an external company, be held so the Council and key stakeholders to discuss what the caravan site should look like. The last two recommendations were that a comprehensive programme plan be developed and a

question and answer document written to provide clarity on key issues and provide a timeline.

The Chair asked what would happen if someone wanted to give up a longer lease part way through the term. The Head of Operations stated this did happen with beach huts, typically the Council would facilitate the sale of part of a lease at the owners request.

Mr Ogden expressed concern that not many businesses had responded. The Vice Chair of the Advisory Group agreed and stated that this was perhaps because the vision was more 'woolly' and there was not much for people to respond to. Once this was worked up it might be that there was more feedback.

Ms Perry-Yates stated that she felt the consultation lacked clarity. Not everyone who responded did respond to the question on their preferred option. Options two, three and four had been combined but as number four was a very different option this could not be grouped in.

Ms Perry-Yates asked why leases were being suggested not licences. The Head of Operations stated that annual licences gave no certainty to people beyond the year and there was not significant security of tenure to allow caravan owners to make any long term decisions. A longer term lease would not commit people to a lease for this length of time, and they could be sold. The driving factor for going to leases was to provide people with security.

Ms Perry-Yates stated that a lot of people would not be able to make a decision until heads of terms were available as this would often contain the detail.

The Vice Chair of the Advisory Group stated that the caravan industry did use long term licencing as a standard and this might be more appropriate, as leases were more complicated and expensive for people. The Head of Operations stated that this could be considered, there did need to be a move to a long term agreement with caravan owners.

The Strategic Director stated that the next step had to be an understanding of what the changes would be from the existing licence, for example length of term, ability to sublet or requirements for caravan age and condition. At the end of this process this might be that leases were used, or it might be long term licences.

Councillor Ashton stated that the consultation had been non-specific to allow people to provide all the feedback they wanted to. He agreed that it was premature for this report to decide on one arrangement of lease and licence. He asked that the second recommendation be changed so that it did not refer to just a lease.

Mr MacFarlane agreed and asked that the council access the standard long term licence for caravans and use this as a basis for discussions.

The Chair asked if anyone in the public gallery had a question on this subject.

A member of the public asked if payment would be for the whole lease up front. The Head of Operations stated that they would be paid annually. If sold people would be buying the right to have the plot for the balance of the term.

A member of the public asked whether there would be a cost to the leaseholder if they had to give up a lease before the end of its term. The Head of Operations stated that there would be an administrative charge, this would need to be worked through. In the case of the Council's beach huts, this was often a percentage of the sale. The right to assign a lease to a family member could be included as a term, this was done with beach huts.

A member of the public asked that if 60% of owners wished to stay as they are, should they not be engaged individually. The Head of Operations confirmed that 60% of total survey respondents were caravan owners, of these 30% wanted option one.

A member of the public asked why was there a recommendation for transfer to leasehold when the committee had not be certain on this. The Chair confirmed that this was now being discussed.

The Chair invited the Committee to debate the recommendations.

On the proposal of Councillor Ashton, seconded by Councillor Candy and by a unanimous vote it was

RESOLVED

That recommendation two be changed to state "Bring an option for long term tenure to the next meeting"

Councillor Candy asked who would do the detailed business case on this. The Head of Operations stated that an external firm would do this as the Asset Management team did not have these specific skills. Councillor Candy asked how this would include feedback on environment and community, and it was important that any firm understood this.

Mr MacFarlane stated that a firm had done some work on options for the caravan site who had local links with Southwold, so there were specialists with this knowledge. The Head of Operation stated that this is why co-design workshops were also included, so that the design was not just done by an external company but that people who were invested in the design would be involved.

Councillor Ashton thanked officers for their work, and everyone who responded to the consultation. The next step was to work with people to work up more detail.

Mr Gledhill stated that it had taken a very long time to get to this point, and he hoped that this could be sped up. The slow process was both difficult for caravan owners and it meant that the Harbour Management Committee was failing in its responsibility to maximise income from the caravan site.

The Head of Operations confirmed that a programme plan would be brought to the next HMC and information on who would be doing each piece of work, and a timeline for work.

A member of the public stated that the whole harbour should be looked at together and there needed to be a clear objective for the whole area so decisions could trickle down from this. A member of the public also agreed that this uncertainty was not helpful for people on the site.

The Head of Operations confirmed that the Council had not and would not engage with any companies that would come and run the site, and this had not been discussed for a number of years.

The Strategic Director summarised what a co-design workshop would include. There would be a series of workshops, the first would be ideas, then the second with some worked up ideas, then the last to develop some principals for the site. These workshops would include caravan owners. The Chair stated that these were worth doing, but it would take some time.

A member of the public asked if there was an option to upgrade the site but keep things as they are. The Chair stated this had not been included as any upgrade would have to be paid for.

On the proposal of Councillor Ashton, seconded by Councillor Candy and by a unanimous vote it was

That the Harbour Management Committee:

1. Review and Finalise Vision and Strategy

Task the HMC Task and Finish Committee with reviewing and finalising the updated vision, priorities and strategic plan reflecting all of the feedback received from this consultation regarding the wider harbour vision.

2. Bring an option for long term tenure to the next meeting

3. Commission a Business Case for Council-Operated Plots

Commission a detailed business case to explore retaining 30 plots for council-operated year-round rental accommodation, considering various accommodation types to enhance revenue and diversify usage.

4. Facilitate Co-Design Workshops

Conduct co-design workshops facilitated with key stakeholders help shape the future site layout to best accommodate and integrate the proposed new system, managed rental plots, wider amenities, and environment.

5. Develop a Programme Plan

Prepare a comprehensive programme plan if recommendations 1-4 are accepted for proposal at the next HMC meeting in July, and to support a report to be considered by the Council's Cabinet later in year.

6. Develop a Comprehensive Q&A Document

Support the creation of a comprehensive Questions & Answers (Q&A) document. This document should address the broader issues and common queries that have arisen throughout the consultation process with stakeholders.

8 Revisions to the Harbour Management Committee Working Groups

The Committee received report ES/1990 which related to changes to the Committee working groups.

The Head of Operations summarised the report. Four groups had been set up by the Committee in 2021. It was now proposed to change the configuration of these groups due to changes in the overall management of the harbour and the way it was integrated with other departments of the Council and Coastal Partnership East. It was proposed to continue with the Compliance Working Group to ensure the HMC fulfilled its statutory obligations. The Caravan Site Working Group would also continue with a focus on facilitating better communication between the Harbour Management Committee and caravan owners and site users.

The Head of Operations stated that in place of the other two working groups on the working harbour and investment plan, a task and finish group would also be set up to focus on the strategic plan for the harbour. This document would focus on what the purpose of the harbour was, and a business plan on how this would be achieved.

Councillor Candy asked if local businesses could be included in any of these working groups. The Head of Operations stated it would be most appropriate for someone from the business community to sit on the task and finish group regarding the harbour business plan, and the Stakeholder Advisory Group would be asked to nominate someone for this.

By a unanimous vote it was

RESOLVED

That the Harbour Management Committee notes revisions to the number and remit of working groups of the Southwold HMC

9 Update from the Stakeholder Advisory Group

The Vice Chair of the Stakeholder Advisory Group stated that a number of responses on the Harbour Revision Order had been received, and these would be collated into a single response from the Advisory Group.

The Vice Chair of the Stakeholder Advisory Group raised the issue of licence and lease arrangements in the harbour which were confusing for users. There was a need to standardise and streamline this so that people had security of their leases and clarity to enable them to invest for the long term.

The meeting concluded at 15.07

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Chair