

Unconfirmed



Minutes of a Meeting of the **Southwold Harbour Management Committee** held in the Stella Peskett Millennium Hall, on **Thursday, 18 January 2024 at 3:00 PM**

Members of the Committee present:

Councillor Paul Ashton, Councillor David Beavan, Councillor Jan Candy, Mr Simon Flunder, Mr John Ogden, Ms Diane Perry-Yates, Councillor Lee Reeves

Officers present: Kate Blakemore (Strategic Director), Kerry Blair (Head of Operations), James Milnes (Southwold Caravan / Harbour Manager), Alli Stone (Democratic Services Officer)

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Mike Pickles, David Gledhill and Cllr Toby Hammond.

2 Declarations of Interest

Mr Simon Flunder and Ms Diane Perry Yates declared a Disclosable Pecuniary interest in items six and seven of the agenda. The Chair confirmed they had received dispensation from the Monitoring Officer to stay and vote on this item.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on the 9th November 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

4 Operational Update

The Southwold Caravan and Harbour Manager gave an update on operations in the harbour. There had been around seven hundred visitors this year and overseas visitors were increasing with a significant number of bookings from the Netherlands.

There had been flooding on the marshes over the last few months and the sluices at the west end had been checked to ensure they were working. Issues with drainage were being discussed although this was complicated by the number of people who had responsibilities in this area. There may be an issue with a blockage further into the marshes which was also being checked to see what impact it had. Sewage management

was an ongoing issue, solutions were being looked at and work needed to be done understand the scale of the issue.

The last remaining fire damage had been cleared and area was ready to be redeveloped. A fire gap had been left and it was being watched to ensure it was maintained.

Winter works had been carried out on the caravan and campsite. One caravan had been lost due to high winds but this would be replaced by the owners. Work was ongoing to pull together improvements, including upgrading the boiler and improving the look of the site ready for the new season. It was hoped that this would be completed by the start of the new season, but any delays would be communicated.

A member of the public asked whether there was any reason why the sluice could not open on a normal tide rather than the 0.6m it currently opens at. The Southwold Caravan and Harbour Manager confirmed that he had been looking into this, he believed the current height was due to sea level rise and he was looking at options for valves or other works to aid drainage. Some of the flooding on the road was not due to the sluice but to blockages in other areas, and the Town Council was discussing options with the tenant farmer to clear this in the short term. The Chair confirmed the sluice did not close fully, and options for pumping were being looked at to help drainage in the longer term across the wider area.

5 Southwold Harbour Vision

The Committee received report ES/1823 which gave an overview of the potential vision for Southwold Harbour over a 10-year period to 2035. The Head of Operations introduced the report and stated that this had been produced following continued feedback from the Committee and the Stakeholder Advisory Group about the need for some context for development, especially in the long term. The Head of Operations asked the Committee to feedback on whether they felt this was right and reflected what people in Southwold wanted the Harbour to be.

The Southwold Harbour, Caravan and Campsite Manager gave a presentation outlining the proposed vision. There was a need to tie the heritage of the Harbour to its future to ensure a good legacy was left for the next generation of users and visitors. The Harbour also needed to be economically robust by 2035.

The Southwold Harbour, Caravan and Campsite Manager summarised the key areas of the vision. First there was a need to enhance facilities with a respect for the heritage and the historic identity of the Harbour. There was a need to refurbish the Harbour Masters Office to provide facilities for visitors, as well as installing new pontoons and berths, introducing mains sewage, advancing work on the South Training Arm. Any work needed to enhance the current structures and facilities would need to be in-keeping with the area. The Harbour also needed to be enhanced so that all visitors could enjoy it. Pathways needed to be accessible and easily navigable, with facilities that were easy to use, ensuring signage and information was clear.

There was also a need to strengthen the revenue streams in the Harbour to ensure sustainable growth. Diversity in income streams would also ensure the Harbour was resilient to market shifts. Operations processes in the Harbour would be streamlined to ensure they were as efficient as possible and investment would be planned to provide long term benefits to all users.

Community spirit needed to be fostered between the Harbour and other areas of the town. This would include developing the tourism offer which celebrated the Harbour and holding events which complemented those in the town. The Harbour would support local business growth and provide a place to encourage local entrepreneurs alongside successful existing businesses.

Key to achieving this vision would be an engaged stakeholder community, including the Harbour Management Committee and the Stakeholder Advisory Group, but also the wider town and the local community so that the Committee could make the best informed decisions. Decision making would be as transparent as possible and with all stakeholders receiving accurate information.

The Southwold Harbour, Caravan and Campsite Manager stated that work would be phased, with each stage of implementation having clear objectives and outcomes. Work would be scheduled to ensure that the Harbour would be operational at all times. Regulatory standards had to be rigorously adhered to and would be central to operations to ensure that the Harbour was safe and sustainable. There was also a need to ensure the protection of the natural environment, and enhancement of the habitats around the Harbour.

The Southwold Harbour, Caravan and Campsite Manager stated he was also looking at how Southwold Harbour could become a Heritage Harbour, which would enable Southwold to access additional funding and support to enhance facilities and the tourism offer. This plan would drive Southwold Harbour into the future with everyone involved in the process.

The Chair stated that there would be a consultation on this, which would be open for a few months so that everyone had the opportunity to provide feedback.

Councillor Candy asked whether the plans for facilities improvements included showers and laundry. The Southwold Harbour, Caravan and Campsite Manager confirmed this is what they would like to do but this was complicated by the lack of sewage/dirty water management. Once the sewage issues had been scoped then this would be easier to plan.

The Southwold Harbour, Caravan and Campsite Manager confirmed that there was some budget for improvements in the capital budget. This had been split into £150,000 for pontoons, £300,000 for general harbour works and £1.5million for the caravan site. Even though budget had been allocated the improvements would need to be fully scoped and approved.

Ms Perry-Yates how much of the budget was reliant on income from the caravan and campsite. The Southwold Harbour, Caravan and Campsite Manager stated that the caravan and campsite was there to provide income to the harbour. It currently

generated the majority of the harbour income and would be key to creating additional income for the future. The Head of Operations added that that the harbour had to be self sustaining. The Medium Term Financial Strategy as it currently stood showed a small loss and then modest profits for the following years. There would need to be some decisions made about priorities for work and how to increase income. All decisions had to recognise that the operation at the moment barely broke even, and if works had to be done in the harbour then income had to be generated to fund this. There was capital funding for some work such as moorings, what work was done beyond this would depend on the outcome of the consultation.

Mr Flunder asked who was considered to be part of the community for the consultation, and that it should be open to Reydon as well as Southwold, and people in the surrounding areas who worked in the harbour. The Chair confirmed that consultation would include neighbouring parishes.

Councillor Ashton stated that there could be more awareness of the harbour among local visitors, and a consultation could help promote the existence of the harbour.

Mr Flunder stated there was a need for clear priorities and a timescale to help people understand what was being proposed. The Southwold Harbour, Caravan and Campsite Manager stated he did not want to prioritise works and pre-empt consultation. The Chair agreed that consultation on what people wanted from the harbour should be done first, then the detail of how this was brought about should be considered.

The Chair stated that additional work was also needed to advance the project for the South Training Arm to provide a detailed design which would include full detail of the effects of openings in the structure. This would then enable funding opportunities to be looked at. The Head of Operation stated that money was in the budget to do this, and agreed that a detailed design was needed to answer how the structure should look.

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

RESOLVED

That having reviewed the report and background document at Appendix A consideration is given to supporting the concept of the Harbour 2035 vision and developing a broad stakeholder consultation.

6 Draft Budget 2024/2025

The Committee received report **ES/1821**, which presented the the draft Budget for 2024/25 for recommendation to the Cabinet.

The Head of Operations introduced the report and summarised the sections which were included in the budget. Income for the next few years was calculated based on the current situation, not based on any changes that might happen which would boost income. Staff costs had increased, this was due to investment in new staff, the provision of additional capacity through the asset management team to enable

projects to be delivered, and inflation in wages. The capital programme contained £2million for investment, the bulk of which was allocated to the caravan and campsite. The end of the year situation was better than forecast, and this was due to the prudent way in which the Council forecasted. This may happen again in following years, but at present the budget showed a loss for 24/25 and then a small profit in the following years. This would be reforecast in September to take into account any changes.

Councillor Candy stated that employee expenses seem to be going down for 24/25, and asked why this was. The Head of Operations stated he did not have details of what this line included and that he would discuss with finance to provide an answer.

Ms Perry-Yates stated that the budget was flatlining apart from staffing and recharges, and asked what the reason was for this. The Head of Operations stated that everything was based on the current situation. At the point at which projects started, or new leases were signed this could be taken into account. Ms Perry-Yates noted that if spaces on the caravan site had been filled this would be a much better situation, with £75,000 extra income. The Head of Operations stated that the decision not to fill plots was based on the need for space for future redevelopment, but the vacant period was much longer than expected. This was a shorter term loss with the view to longer term increase in income, although the shorter term had been longer than hoped.

Mr Ogden stated that touring income seemed quite conservative when compared to actual income. The Head of Operations stated that there was a metric for calculating this income, and it was based on an average of a period of years rather than just the previous year.

Councillor Ashton stated that there were costs for increased staff, and costs for the plans the Harbour had. Councillor Ashton noted that most people were used to accounts looking at the most likely scenario rather than a pessimistic scenario shown in local authority accounts, and people needed to be mindful of this when considering the accounts and budget.

It was by a unanimous vote,

RESOLVED

That having reviewed and commented upon the draft 2024/25 Budget for the Harbour Account (Appendix B), The Southwold Harbour Management Committee recommended it to Cabinet.

7 Quarter 3 Budget Monitoring Report 2023/24

The Committee received report ES/1822 which provided the the quarter 3 (Q3) overview of financial performance against approved budgets for 2023/24.

The Head of Operations summarised the report. Both Harbour and Caravan and Campsite were significantly ahead of budget, at a total income of £675,000 as opposed to the £601,000 which was forecasted. This had been offset by higher than expected

inflation and staff costs which had increased expenses. It was expected that by year end there would be a £2,000 deficit variance against budget.

It was by a unanimous vote,

RESOLVED

That having reviewed the Q3 Budget Monitoring Report 2023/24, the Committee report this to Cabinet.

8 Southwold Static Caravan Site Redevelopment

The Southwold Harbour, Caravan and Campsite Manager gave a presentation outlining the Southwold Static Caravan Site redevelopment project, and the options which would be explored in consultation.

The Caravan and Campsite was the heart of the eastern end of the Harbour and had been created to provide an opportunity to feed income into the Harbour to generate funds for its upkeep. There was now an opportunity to develop the site and ensure it could continue to welcome visitors and provide for the Harbour's future.

The Caravan and Campsite was an asset that needed to be looked after. Any changes needed to take into account the communities around the site, both in the present and the future. Decisions needed to be made based on the best interests of the Harbour as a whole, to ensure the best long-term decisions were made.

The Southwold Harbour, Caravan and Campsite Manager summarised the four operational models for the redevelopment. The first was a full leasing model, with all plots being let out on a long term lease. The second was a flexible leasing model, with a mix of long and short term leases. The third was mixed leasing and renting where certain plots would be leased and others offered for rent, this would also allow all leasers able to put their sites up for rent. The last was a renting model where all plots would be available for short term lease. Generally the first model was simpler with lower income, the last was more complicated to administer but with more income. Financial and operational costings of all four needed to be properly set out and this would form part of the consultation for the wider harbour vision.

The Southwold Harbour, Caravan and Campsite Manager stated that he was committed to making this successful. The team wanted to support the history of the site, support the current community and enable the users of the future. The fiscal impact of any decision on the wider operation did also need to be taken into account as the caravan and campsite was the main provider income to the harbour. There was a need to balance innovation and tradition and consider alternative options for income.

While this consultation was happening there were infrastructure improvements that would be made on the caravan and campsite regardless of what the final outcome and decision might be.

The Head of Operations stated that this was different to discussions that had previously taken place, which had assumed the current model would be maintained with minor increases in rent and improvements to facilities. The Committee was now being asked whether other models might be better, especially in light of budgetary considerations. The Head of Operations asked the Committee to consider what constraints should be.

Ms Perry Yates stated that Southwold Caravan Owners Association had no involvement in the four models mentioned, and whether these would be suitable or acceptable to current owners. This is not what they had been led to believe would happen. The Head of Operations stated that the Rural Solutions report had contained mention of a fifteen year licence, and this is what was meant by a lease. Ms Perry Yates stated that the consultation was not broad, it was one model with four slight changes, and until that point the assumption had been that the changes of the site would involve the current occupants.

The Chair stated that the point of the consultation was to enable people to provide their feedback, and SCOA members submit whatever feedback they wished.

The Southwold Harbour, Caravan and Campsite Manager stated that his understanding was that the site was there to support the harbour. If the consultation response was that things stayed as they were, the income would not be there sustain the Harbour. All options had to be considered, including all plots being turned over to a rental basis, even if this was unlikely.

Councillor Ashton stated that even if this was unpalatable, it should still be an option to ensure the consultation was truly wide open and would consider everything.

Mr Ogden asked what the time frame was for consultation and how this impacted the budget. The Head of Operations stated that the current budget of £1.5million was based on delivering option one in this plan. All options were based on roughly the same layout, the only thing that changed would be the tenure of the leases which would not be impact the capital budget but would impact operations.

Mr Flunder asked if the recommendations in the Rural Solutions report were being implemented. The Head of Operations confirmed that the budget had been costed on the back of this report, but no there was no agreement or action that this would be done. Some smaller projects on the site would be completed regardless of the wider redevelopment plan to ensure the site was safe and useable.

The Strategic Director confirmed that a fully scoped out consultation would be received by the Committee at their next meeting. A report would also be received on the smaller projects on the campsite to ensure people understood the difference between the smaller works and the full redevelopment.

Councillor Candy asked if the option of leasing the whole site to an external provider had been considered. The Head of Operations stated this had been discussed in the past and would not be considered now.

9 Harbour Revision Order Update

The Head of Operations gave an update on the progress of the Harbour Revision Order (HRO).

The Harbour Revision Order had been submitted in September 2022. A large number of HROs had been submitted at the same time which had slowed down the process. The consultation for the Southwold HRO was expected to start in February.

The principals of the original 1933 act had been kept, including ringfencing of funds. The HRO did include new sections which would give the harbour master more powers to deal with issues that occurred in the Harbour. The HRO would not pass unless all stakeholders were broadly supportive.

10 Update from the Stakeholder Advisory Group

Simon Flunder, Chairperson of the Advisory Group summarised the discussion at the groups last meeting.

The group had been positive about the vision and had asked for priorities and timescale for this work, and a clear plan for how the consultations would work. They stated that there was a need to involve all parties in all discussions to ensure good communication and trust between everyone involved.

There had been some disappointment around the budget and feeling that this was too conservative and not clear on where funds would go, and whether costs were realistic.

The group had also raised ongoing issues around sewage and flooding.

11 Update on the Committee's Working Groups

The working groups had not met since the previous meeting.

12 Date of the next meeting

The date of the next meeting was noted as as 14 March 2024 at 4pm.

The meeting concluded at 4:49 PM

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Chair