

Confirmed



Minutes of a Meeting of the **Southwold Harbour Management Committee** held in the Stella Peskett Millennium Hall, on **Thursday, 09 November 2023 at 4:00 PM**

Members of the Committee present:

Councillor David Beavan, Councillor Jan Candy, Mr Simon Flunder, Mr David Gledhill, Mr John Ogden, Ms Diane Perry-Yates, Mr Mike Pickles, Councillor Lee Reeves

Other Members present:

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

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Paul Ashton and Councillor Toby Hammond.

2 Declarations of Interest

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

3 Minutes

By unanimous agreement it was

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting held on 14 September 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

4 Fee Structure at Southwold Harbour and Southwold Caravan & Campsite

The Committee received report **ES/1724** which summarised the fees and charges for the caravan site and harbour for 2024 and 2025.

The Head of Operations introduced the report. Every year the Council was required to review fees and charges across its estate. The Council had suffered like all businesses from an increase in inflation and had been hit through staffing and materials costs which had hit the harbour. The approach to reviewing the fees and charges had been to apply a rate of 6.7%, which was the rate of inflation for the Consumer Price Index in September 2023. This had applied across the board to fees and charges. The Council also considered similar sites to benchmark the fees and charges. The Head of Operations recognised that this rise did follow on from high inflation in 2022 which was passed on in the 23/24 fees and charges. This would be challenging for businesses, but if the Council was going to make investments, then some of these costs needed to be offset.

The Chair invited questions.

Ms Perry-Yates asked that the percentage fees and charges were increased by be reduced. She had been contacted by a caravan owner who had decided that they could no longer justify the expense of their caravan especially considering the uncertainty on the site. An overall rise of 6.7% following on from the 10% increase the previous year was very hard for people to accept. There were other avenues of income that could be investigated, including filling some of the empty plots on the site. The current owners should not be covering the loss of income from the Councils decision to leave these plots empty. Ms Perry-Yates felt that it would be a welcome gesture this year with so much uncertainty on the site to have a smaller increase, and this would go a long way to keep people on side. It was better to have people on the site than having to resell and readvertise pitches.

Mr Flunder stated that the concerns in the caravan site were also reflected in the wider harbour. Businesses had not done as well this year as in the previous years, and morale was low. There needed to be some recognition that things were tough and some support from the Council to businesses. Businesses supported the Committee and were moving on from past issues, and needed some support in return. Mr Flunder added that the rate structure for visiting vessels was not fair in comparison to the rest of the area and so many people were put off from coming to Southwold. The structure needed to be reviewed in addition to the fees themselves.

Councillor Candy asked what other avenues there were to find extra income. Ms Perry-Yates stated that some of the empty pitches could be filled. The waiting list should also be refreshed to see if the people on the waiting list were still wanting to apply for a pitch. Ms Perry-Yates added that many people felt that service had been poor on the site this year, with equipment and services not working, and many people on the static caravan site felt that they were the poor relatives on the site and most of the work and money went to the campsite side.

Mr Pickles stated that Southwold Harbour was more expensive than some of the most well known marinas on the coast. Southwold had no facilities and it was not worth the cost to moor here. Visitors did talk to each other and if the site was not up to scratch

people would not visit. It was getting harder and harder to persuade people to come to Southwold if the moorings were expensive and there were no facilities.

Mr Gledhill asked how much costs have increased in the last year. Many ports increased costs by a percentage of CPI as costs did not often increase in line with CPI year on year.

The Head of Operations stated there had been some salary increases for some of the lower paid staff on the site, but he could not say what the overall increase in costs were.

The Caravan and Harbour Manager stated that the way fees and charges were structured had been this way for a long time and this structure could be reviewed.

Mr Flunder felt that a smaller increase needed to be considered as this would have less of an impact on businesses where there was currently very low morale. Lower fees would also prompt more people to visit the harbour.

Mr Gledhill stated that there was a waiting list for the caravan site, and so was the price that much of a deterrent. The Head of Operations stated that prices would increase as the site developed and it was clear that Southwold Caravan Site and the Harbour needed to be benchmarked against other sites on the east coasts to understand where they should be sitting compared to others. It was difficult to make an arbitrary decision about a few percentage points when this information was not there.

Ms Perry-Yates stated that the uncertainty on the site and work that needed to be done needed to be taken into account, and a lower increase considered.

The Chair stated that he agreed that there was low morale and that work did need to get going and that a good will gesture was necessary. He added that in addition to this a timeline for works needed to be given to stakeholders so they had some more certainty of what was being done.

Mr Gledhill stated that in light of the questions raised about alternative fee structures and requests for information on the cost increase for the year, this decision should be deferred until the next meeting.

The Strategic Director stated that the next meeting would not be until January and would not work with the timeline for the budget setting process. The Democratic Services Officer confirmed that this could be revised over email as Cabinet was ultimately the body that set the fees and charges.

Councillor Candy asked if the waiting list could be reviewed to see if extra caravans could be bought onto the site. The Head of Operations stated he would review this with the team to see how this was done and how many vacant pitches were needed for the redevelopment. This could be reviewed with the timeline for the redevelopment.

Mr Flunder stated there needed to be recognition that the issues in the harbour were not always the result of the leaseholder or caravan site owners but of poor management on the site.

Mr Ogden stated that the charges on the site were very complicated in comparison to other harbours and marinas, and this needed to be reviewed.

It was by a majority vote

RESOLVED

That this decision be deferred and the Committee make their recommendation to Cabinet when information on the cost increases had been made available.

RESOLVED

That having commented upon the proposed annual schedule of charges and dues for the Harbour 2024/25 and the proposed fees and charges for the Caravan Site 2024/25, attached at Appendix A, these be recommended to Cabinet for approval.

5 Update from the Committee's Working Groups

The Democratic Services Officer confirmed that working groups would meet before Christmas and that a work programme for the work groups would be set up.

Councillor Reeves stated he had been disappointed with the compliance working group and there had been a lack of information from officers, and a lack of understanding of where information was being reported to.

The Head of Operations stated it had been difficult to get people to do work, and that he would ensure that the right officers were supporting the right working group.

6 Update from the Stakeholder Advisory Group

Mr Flunder updated the meeting on the most recent meeting of the Stakeholder Advisory Group. The group had an open meeting to discuss the fees and charges. They felt there was very little visibility of the projects that were going forward. The group also raised concerns on sewage which could impact the blue flag status of the beach. As had already been discussed, morale was low in the harbour, and the Committee needed to be clear on the timeline for work to provide some certainty to businesses and users.

Next year was the 200th anniversary of the RNLI and the 75th anniversary of the sailing club, and there was an aim to hold a fete in the harbour to celebrate this.

The Strategic Director stated that there were discussions ongoing about sewerage in the harbour and on the coast, but it was not within the gift of the Council to do anything about this. Anglian Water had stated that they would be confirming in real

time when sewage was discharged and water would be tested. The issue of offshore cable runs across East Suffolk was regularly being discussed by members and officers across the Council and there were concerns about the disconnected nature of the various cable routes. Concerns were being raised and the Council was lobbying on this with others.

The Harbour Revision Order had been submitted, no further information was forthcoming on when this would be dealt with.

7 Work Programme

The Committee considered its work programme. The Chair asked that longer term projects be included to help give an understanding of the timescales involved.

8 Dates of the next meetings

The dates of the next meetings were noted as 11 January 2024, 14 March 2024 and 9 May 2024.

9 Exempt/Confidential Items

By a unanimous vote it was

RESOLVED

That under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

10 Exempt minutes

- Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

The meeting concluded at 17:10

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Chair