

Confirmed



Minutes of a Meeting of the **Southwold Harbour Management Committee** held in the Stella Peskett Millennium Hall, on **Thursday, 14 March 2024 at 4:00 PM**

Members of the Committee present:

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

Other Members present:

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

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Toby Hammond.

2 Declarations of Interest

Mr Simon Flunder, Mr Mike Pickles and Mrs Diane Perry-Yates declared pecuniary interests in items 5 and 6. They had all received dispensation from the Monitoring Officer to take part in discussion and vote.

3 Minutes

RESOLVED

The minutes of the meeting held on the 18 January 2024 were agreed as a correct record.

4 Operational Update

The Southwold Caravan and Harbour Manager gave an update on operations in the harbour. Bookings for visitors moorings were continuing to increase, from both

international and local visitors. There were issues with the icemaker in the fisherman's compound, options for replacing this and ensuring the safe operation were being looked at. There had been issues with flooding in the harbour lands and wider marshes. The tenant farmer had cleared the ditches which had helped to alleviate the issue. The sluice had been blocked by some vegetation that had been cleared, and tools were being purchased to keep it clear. More material had been ordered to regrade the harbour road. The team were looking to do some work on the path from the Harbour Inn to the moorings to improve the condition of the path. The path on the Walberswick side was being repaired by Suffolk County Council they had confirmed that work would not be done in the Easter holidays and care would be taken to ensure that the path was open as much as it could be.

On the caravan site the shower block had been refurbished with new showers, new boiler and water system which would ensure a continuous supply of hot water. Road markings and signage had been refreshed across the site and the bins had been moved away from the entrance to improve the approach to the site, planting would be done to improve this area. Those on the waiting list for static caravan plots had been contacted to ensure their details were up to date and to confirm they still wished to be on the waiting list.

On the touring site, hard standing pitches had been raised to help prevent flooding. A canopy with new lighting had been installed over the shower block to improve energy efficiency and lighting. Drainage work appeared to have worked well and kept flooding down on the site over the winter, and it was hoped that this would continue to work well. There was a work plan to thin trees on the site and plant trees which were more suited to wet conditions.

A Harbour Festival was taking place at the end of June to celebrate 75 years of the sailing club and 200 years of the RNLI.

Ms Perry-Yates asked how many people were on the waiting list for static caravan plots. The Southwold Caravan and Harbour Manager confirmed the list was now fifty people, and it was hoped that some plots could be offered in the next year. There were a total of one hundred and forty seven plots, thirty of which were vacant. There would be some movement of caravans when the site was redeveloped and so some spare plots would be needed, and some might be used up to ensure there was adequate space around caravans. The Southwold Caravan and Harbour Manager stated that moving forward with new plot sizes, there would be one hundred and forty plots on the site.

Mr Pickles stated that the slipway needed clearing regularly as it was getting dangerous, there was also an issue with a dangerous post near the slipway. Regarding the Harbour Festival, Mr Pickles asked if some visitors had been offered free moorings. The Southwold Caravan and Harbour Manager stated there had been no request for this.

The Committee received a presentation on the Harbour and Caravan Site Consultation Plan from the Head of Operations.

The Head of Operations summarised the Harbour Vision that had been developed in order to provide a focus and principles for work in the area. The Harbour Management Committee had received a report summarising this at their previous meeting, and the document summarising the vision would be shared in the consultation. The Head of Operations summarised the vision which focussed on four areas. The first area concerned retaining character, and ensuring facilities were up to standard and were safe and sustainable to use. The vision also recognised that the current economic activity in the harbour was important and should be encouraged and supported. Community involvement was central to the harbour and future development. Issues around the environment were also included, ensuring the harbour contributed positively to the local environment and that waste and sewage was properly managed. The overall focus was retaining the existing feeling of the harbour and building on and supporting the current businesses.

The Head of Operations summarised how the static caravan site was currently managed. Static plots were occupied on an annual licence, and whilst many of these had been rolled over yearly for decades, the licence holders could be asked to leave with two months notice. There was also no requirement to renew a licence each year. The site had no running water or electricity to the plots. There were four options for the redevelopment of the caravan site, and the Head of Operations summarised each.

Option one was to continue with the annual licences system. The main disadvantage to this was it did not increase income to allow for any facility improvement of the caravan site.

Option two was to move to a long term lease system, for around fifteen to twenty years. This would provide the both the Council and caravan owners with long term certainty. The cost of rent would be approximately £4,500 to £6,000 per annum, based on similar sites up the coast. This would provide the capital funding to allow for facility improvement, for example running water and electricity to plots. The Head of Operations shared a high level overview of the Heads of Terms that would be included in this lease, which included a maximum age requirement for caravans, the right to facilities, requirements for maintenance and the ability to sublet. These were standard terms for static caravan sites, although there would be more specific consultation on what leases should look like if this option was chosen.

Option three was a long term lease, but with the Council keeping up to 30% of the plots and letting them out on short term lets as holiday properties. This would change the site slightly as it would be a mix of long term lease holders and some short term holiday makers. This would increase footfall and income in the harbour from increased holiday makers in the area.

Option four was for all plots to be turned into short term lets, with no long term leases available. This would produce the highest revenue, and increase the number of holiday makers in the harbour. This would be a big change and would offer no space for current licensees. It would also require investment from the Council.

Councillor Candy asked how many plots would be let out and how much more income would there be under option three. The Head of Operations stated that only basic modelling had been done, and at a conservative estimate this would produce 25% more income than a lease model, although more specific testing on this had to be done. There would need to be investment from the Council to set this up.

The Chair asked if this included a mains sewage connection being provided to all plots. The Head of Operations confirmed that options two, three and four would include the provision of water, sewage and electricity to all plots.

The Chair referred to the possibility of the Council managing caravan sales, and asked if the Council and harbour would receive a percentage of the sale. The Head of Operations confirmed they would. Regarding the age of caravans, the Southwold Caravan and Harbour Manager confirmed that capping caravan age at ten years was generally the standard, but most of them were recycled when they were removed. If this option was chosen, the Council could look at options for balancing this with a minimum maintenance standard rather than an age requirement.

Ms Perry-Yates stated that when redevelopment had been discussed in the past, option one had included the provisions of mains sewage, water and electricity. This had now been removed. Regarding option two, Ms Perry-Yates stated that she thought that the standard lease was for ten years, and by going to a twenty year lease this would force people to move off the site because they could not afford it. Under Option three, leaseholders and holiday makers would mix, which the current caravan owners believed would be disastrous for the site due to the conflict between the two user groups. Option four would completely remove the current community from the site. Ms Perry-Yates stated that the redevelopment plans were focussing on the money that could be produced and ignoring the community that had been built on the site. The Southwold Caravan and Harbour Manager stated that SCOA had raised issues around security of leases on the site, and long term leases provided people with this option. Ms Perry Yates stated that the terms people would be agreeing to needed to be clear in the consultation so that people could provide a full response.

Mr Flunder commented that this would be a big change, and asked if there had been any thought about a transition period for caravan owners regardless of the option that was taken, and could a question on what this transition period would be included in the consultation.

The Head of Operations summarised the timeline for the consultation. The consultation would include questions which would capture where people were from and how they were involved in the harbour (for example business/caravan owners/holiday makers). The consultation would be carried out online and with some in person sessions in the town. The results of this would come back to the Harbour Management Committee. The consultation of the Harbour Revision Order was likely to overlap with this consultation, this would be managed by the Department for Transport. The Head of Operations stated that the setting up of the Harbour Management Committee, and the way it worked, was the result of a consultation. The feedback received as part of that consultation had been taken into account in the way which the HMC worked, and he expected this to happen this time.

Mr Pickles stated that stages were let on recurring leases until people decide to give them up, and asked whether this could be copied on the caravan site. The Head of Operations stated that the caravan site was a commercial operation and the Committee needed to stroke the balance between the caravan site as a community and a commercial operation.

The Chair asked what the difference was between a licence and a long term lease. The Head of Operations stated that a licence allowed people to stay on the land for a short period of time, with the option to remove people at short notice. A lease would give people rights over their plot for a longer period of time.

Mr MacFarlane stated that the redevelopment needed to get going. The Caravan and Campsite was the main revenue stream for the harbour, and what was going to be done with it needed to be sorted out soon so other projects could move forward.

Councillor Candy asked how long term leases were paid, upfront or annually. The Southwold Caravan and Harbour Manager stated that the payment would be annually. Long leases generally cost more due to the security it offered and the extra rights leases gave people. The lease charges would be reviewed every five years.

Councillor Ashton stated that people needed to understand this was examples of things that could be done, rather than things that were going to happen and needed to be opposed. He hoped that responses to the consultation would provide comments which allowed the Committee to find a positive way forward for all harbour users.

The Chair asked that the questions for the consultation would be distributed to users for their information.

The Chair stated that it would not be possible to keep the current system and provide water, electricity and sewage, and people needed to understand this.

Mr MacFarlane stated that there was at least £18million of capital works that needed to be done in the harbour, and this should not be falling on the rate payers of East Suffolk to pay for when there was the potential for a good income from the harbour itself.

The Strategic Director emphasised that whatever the feedback was on the preferred option, there would be more work on how this option worked rather than this being one consultation and done.

Ms Perry-Yates stated that she felt the current consultation was focussed on money only, and all other considerations had been thrown out.

A member of the public asked about the requirements for income under Harbour Orders. Mr Gledhill stated that the Harbour Revision Order contained a clause stating that harbours had to maximise their income.

The Chair thanked people for their input. He reassured the Committee that the consultation would be open, and all would be encouraged to provide feedback.

6 2024 Capital Works Projects Overview

The Committee received report ES/1893 which provided an overview of ongoing and planned capital works projects in the Harbour. The Southwold Harbour and Caravan Site Manager introduced the report and summarised the projects that were currently being worked on which related to the Caravan Site redevelopment, an updated Harbour Masters Office and Visitor Centre, extension of the mains sewer through the harbour, Harbour Road repair, and berthing upgrades for fishing boats and visiting yachts.

Regarding the extension of the mains sewer into the harbour, this would need a lot of exploration to understand the size the of the issue and what the options would be. Options were being looked at for the road to see if this could be maintained year round. It was likely that the cost of improving the berthing would be upwards of £800,000 due to costs for piling.

The Head of Operations confirmed the sums in the report were currently in the capital programme.

Mr Gledhill asked for an update on work on training arm. The Head of Operations stated money for the training arm had been taken out of the budget and external funding was needed. The Committee had asked for additional design work on the training arm, and this was being overseen by Coastal Partnership East. Mr MacFarlane stated there were issues with the North Wall relating to the lack of an interceptor, and this was a compliance issue.

It was by a unanimous vote

RESOLVED

That the Harbour Management Committee:-
Approve additional funding where needed and support the proposed scopes to ensure the successful completion of all projects within their projected timelines

7 Update from the Stakeholder Advisory Group

The Committee received an update from the Stakeholder Advisory Group. Mr Flunder thanked officers for providing more information in their presentation on caravan site options. Mr Flunder stated he would like to see the harbour vision presented to the Town Council before the consultation. Officers confirmed they could present this to the Town Council and to Reydon and Walberswick Parish Councils.

The Advisory Group had discussed the benefits of the work on the training arm, and it was important not to lose sight of these key issues as this was important to the future of the harbour. The importance of the Blyth estuary was also raised.

Mr Flunder stated that the group recognised that things had to move forward, but there were concerns.

8 Work Programme

The Committee noted the forward work programme.

The Head of Operations stated that a report on the Harbour Audit from ABP Mer would also be received at the next meeting.

The Strategic Director confirmed that the working groups would meet to review how they should work going forward.

9 Dates of the next meetings

The dates of the next meetings were noted as 12 June 2024, 11 July 2024, 12 September 2024, 14 November 2024, 9 January 2025, 13 March 2025, 8 May 2025.

The meeting concluded at TBC

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Chair