

## **MINUTES OF FULL MEETING OF WELLS HARBOUR COMMISSIONERS (WHC) HELD AT THE HAROUR OFFICE ON 17<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2019 AT 6:30PM**

**PRESENT:** Andy Frary (AF) – Chair, Chris Thomson (CT), Mel Catton (MC), Alan Bushell (AB), Brian Riches (BR), Avril Lill (AL), Kevin Theobald (KT), Nick Groom (NG)

**EXECUTIVE MEMBERS:** Robert Smith (RS) Harbour Master, Simon Cooper (SAC) Harbour Administrator

**1. APOLOGIES** – Brian Ellis (BE) and Denys Hickey (DH)

### **2. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING**

Minutes of the last full meeting of 28<sup>th</sup> May 2019 were agreed and signed as a true record of that meeting.

**3. CHAIRMAN** – Andy Frary

#### **Chairman's Report**

- Bikes on the Quay

AF raised that we should look again at installing more bike racks. This was supported by all present and RS suggested that we maybe try & landscape the land behind the office and create an area there. The area is due to be looked at in any case as part of the flood defence and therefore consideration can be incorporated as that area is reviewed.

**4. FINANCIAL UPDATE** – Simon Cooper

- Preliminary results for the first 5 months of the year were circulated and presented at the meeting. SAC advised that he recognised the time passed between this reporting and today's date but was uncomfortable presenting any figures he would not be satisfied are accurate. Having been in the role for 7 weeks there was a considerable backlog going back to beginning of June which required manual input and reconciliation which SAC was undertaking albeit slowly as he is learning how to do this on the job. SAC was hopeful to have matters up to speed and to date by end of September which then will be checked for error by Larkin Gowen, given there are still areas of uncertainty on how the reconciliation is undertaken, but this review will enable those areas to be identified and rectified well in advance of year end and avoid any surprises.
- As at the end of May surplus had increased to £85k which is circa £3k improvement on last year. Both diesel and car park revenue had increased, as had other revenue which included book sales and donations for the horse.
- Wages remain static albeit with the summer months there was an increase in cost with beach patrol and the gilly hut being manned through the summer, which is reflected in payroll account balance at the end of August.
- Bank account funds as at the end of August remain healthy and SAC confirmed that the safeguarding funds, sinking funds and working capital reserves are all intact allowing for a "project" surplus of circa £760k.

## 5. HARBOUR MASTERS REPORT – Robert Smith

- RS assured the WHC that despite hearing questions over his personal thoughts on his future he ensured commissioners that he fully intended to continue until retirement in circa 8 years time.
- NG did raise the suggestion of ensuring we had a suitable succession plan in place. RS did advise the commissioners that in time they will need to think about a successor for the Harbour Master role and in the interim felt satisfied that the current team were completely adaptable to cover any unforeseen voids should the unlikely event occur.
- **Hayes & Storr** – despite Hayes & Storr being the Commissioners’ lawyers for as long as anyone can remember, the service has deteriorated. Miranda Marshall, the partner, was engaged and a meeting was held to communicate our dissatisfaction in the level of service and it was promised they would review and ensure there would be improvement. Subsequently it was still felt that we were not receiving that improvement and despite reengaging there was no uptake by them which leads us to presume they are not interested. Therefore, with the help of CT, we have engaged with another firm called Fraser Dawbarns, who we will supply small pieces of work as and when they arise to ensure we are comfortable they can provide a better service before we commit fully to them. Hayes & Storr do have a few legacy items to deal with such as the Holkham contract but once complete any new instructions will be directed to Fraser Dawbarns.
- **Sailing Club Land** – again this is still proceeding. The sailing club have been contacted, we understand the solicitors are near completing on what they need to do also.
- **Seaweed Farm Update** – the consultation process was open for August and now closed. We provided access to the licence and associated information at the Harbour Office for the entire month albeit no one did review or ask us for any information. There still remains concern amongst the fishermen, although from a WHC point of view we continue to maintain a watching brief as matters progress.
- **MMO Surveys** – the MMO have now agreed that annual surveys of eel grass will now only be made 5 years which is an excellent result considering the cost associated with each survey and that given they have surveyed for the last 10 years with no detrimental impact.
- **Future Flooding & Prevention** - There is a meeting on 22<sup>nd</sup> October at 10am which RS will attend regarding flooding and prevention strategies. The last meeting was fascinating and RS encouraged that anyone who would like to attend would find it very useful where they demonstrate how science has a part to play in modelling outcomes of flooding and prevention measures which are all relevant to the Wells town. RS then advised he had received a letter from the town council on the same subject expressing concern about the activities WHC are taking in this regard. Clearly there is a misunderstanding at the council as any work done on future flooding and prevention within Wells harbour that has been undertaken by the WHC is purely to devise a strategy and to be better informed as to options and alternatives. There was never any impression that WHC would put any strategy into practice despite what the council seem to think. This has been reiterated although it was agreed by WHC we would construct a public statement as to our intentions and actions so as to be very clear to the council and anyone else. SAC took an action for SAC/RS/CT to draft a public statement that can be issued to allay any fears there might be in the community. **Action SAC/RS/CT**
- **Flood Barriers & Protection of Harbour Office** – RS advised that this had now been completed. The glass panels were installed above the wall and at the back of the office old flood boards have been installed too. RS did think that we would still need to build a wall between these flood boards and the existing wall to fully protect the office and given the earlier comments

about bike racks it was decided we would look at that whole area to landscape at the same time as building more flood defence.

- **Trinity House Inspection** – Trinity House visited Wells and Burnham Overy and RS was pleased to inform commissioners that we had received a clean bill of health from them. RS then advised that no 1 buoy in Wells was off station as it was damaged badly last week. The extent of the damage did look as though we would have to replace the buoy costing £14.5k, however on further investigation and working with Anvil Engineering it looks as though we can repair the buoy as well as strengthen it at a cost of c£2.5K instead.
- **Quay Side Railings** – The materials have now arrived and will be installed along the quayside up to the Frank T berth in October. There is a need to decide whether there are 2 gates installed for the Albatros.
- **Pontoons at Tugboat Yard** – There is ongoing public nuisance in this area of trying to keep people off it. RS proposed that a gate be installed to deter them further which was agreed by all WHC. **Action RS**
- **Pontoons at the Skredge** – RS advised that we should look at floating pontoons in the harbour at Skredge which would provide more capacity for boats be it commercial or local boats. The area is in a nice lee and out of the way and would draw considerable interest. AF pointed out there would be some exposure to the NE winds albeit that could be mitigated and still be acceptable still. RS advised that increasing the number of pontoons would be attractive and popular with local sailors, so we should consider other areas of the harbour also where this might work. RS asked the commissioners to think of any further ideas for the next meeting.
- **New Pier East End** – Artist impressions for the new pier at East End had been received but did not really contain the necessary detail to give further insight as to whether this is feasible and therefore investigation continues.
- **Business Plan Harbour Shuttle Quayside to Beach** – we have received a business plan from a local who has intentions of setting up a landing craft shuttle which will go from the quayside to the beach as well as providing ancillary services as and when required. Whilst ultimately this would be an operational decision in the normal course of events, RS was keen to obtain the views and thoughts of the WHC.

NG/CT both declared an interest given that they run Wells Harbour Tours. Subsequently an extensive debate was held. RS explained he would support any outcome the WHC came to but was fearful of being accused of nepotism and wanted to avoid setting precedents that would be at a later date cause of more conflict and confusion. Overall the mood of the Commissioners was that whilst we should be seen to be supporting locals and their initiatives, this particular service has elements of duplication to existing services in an area where out of the height of the summer season there is little sustainable business. RS was reminded that assurances were provided in the setting up of the current business given the amount of commitment and investment made when it was set up. Overall the sentiment was this was not a supportable venture however NG was keen to ensure, the local, would be supported as much as we possibly could and he would be happy to help him if a way could be found. RS was asked to therefore communicate to reject the application to run the Harbour Shuttle. **Action RS**

- Sponsorship of the Xmas Tree – this was endorsed and agreed by all.
- Norfolk Monopoly Board – WHC were approached by Norfolk Hospice to provide sponsorship for a place on the North Norfolk Monopoly Board for Wells Harbour at a cost of £500. RS advised that he had declined the offer however the developers of the Monopoly Board have

included us regardless, therefore as a gesture of goodwill RS has asked the commissioners to support a donation of £250 which was agreed.

## **6. WORKING PARTY/COMMISSIONER REPORTS**

### **Estates - Chris Thomson**

- CT wanted to raise the question of swimmers in the harbour which is increasing and that we should now have a policy as to what is allowable in the harbour. The issue was not locals taking a dip on a hot day, but increasing numbers of swimmers training in the Harbour on a regular basis. It was agreed that we should only allow swimming from the main slipway and swim east. There should be no swimming from the pontoons and that all swimmers should have the recognisable marker upon them at all times. We should though be conscious that should future triathlons be organised there would be opportunity at certain times we would allow swimmers to swim the course. RS took an action to publicise a Harbour Master Direction. **Action RS**

### **Environment – Avril Lill**

- AL advised the next AOAB meeting would be the 20<sup>th</sup> November. Light pollution in the harbour is already a consideration made given that excessively bright lights are a hazard and a glare for boats and therefore we already have a natural consideration for keeping light pollution to a minimum. KT advised that he is trying to speak to the estate agents given the bright advertising lights in the windows are excessively too bright and that they should look for an alternative solution. AL advised that she will send round information regarding the AONB meeting.
- Gilly Poster – It was agreed that the gilly poster will be put on to the quays for the October half term. The sites will be on the railings along the quay and at Tugboat yard. MC made a point that a representative from the crabbing drop net supplier are looking at producing a smaller drop net in diameter in order that it will sit within the diameter of the bucket which should incentivise people to take both the bucket and net with them. **Action SAC**

### **Vessels & Plants – Alan Bushell**

- The new William T is an ex RNLI rib that has now gone into service since the new outboards were fitted. It is already proving to be a very valuable asset to the port. AB commented that the beach patrol services have now finished for the season but did perform well throughout the summer.
- Kari H – the hull inspection took place and got a clean bill of health. Two issues were raised regarding the spud leg and that the man overboard drill had not been undertaken recently.
- Frank T – MCA approval received.
- For the other vessels and plant there is nothing further to report and no issues were outstanding.

## **7. Any Other Business**

- North Norfolk Triathlon - MC wanted to record that all the Commissioners pass on their thanks for an excellent effort made by all involved. On the back of the success AF wondered whether or not there was any thoughts about having another Harbour Day.
- MC advised there was a traffic meeting to be held on 22<sup>nd</sup> October regarding the quay roads and concerns around the parking at Tugboat Yard. MC advised the roundabout is about to be installed – expected completion by beginning of next year

- MC advised the Xmas lights would be installed on 8<sup>th</sup> November and that all confirmed for the Xmas tree to go on the Quay once again.
- NG asked for confirmation if the outer harbour electricity bill had been sorted and a refund received. RS confirmed this to be the case.
- NG queried whether or not if there were any boats left for scrap or sold. RS advised that 3 had been bought for a nominal amount and had left the yard.
- At the next meeting we will consider options for the cash balances held as to whether we should be seeking to buy property or other options. RS asked SAC to provide some options given his background in Asset Management/ Banking. **Action SAC**
- NG suggested that an extension of the Cox's slipway would allow the hoist to be used. RS did confirm that if tracks were installed the hoist would be able to extend further into the Harbour and thus increase its use. Therefore consideration should be made to include within the strategy document.
- RS advised that 'Crossing the Bar' has nearly sold out and therefore should WHC look at a reprint. WHC agreed that a reprint of a further 2,000 books at a cost of c£6k should be ordered.

**8. WHMT matters**

- Janice Whittaker is now in place and has already started to make good progress in establishing more events and wider publicity as to what WHMT does.
- JW report on current activity will be circulated after the meeting for the WHC to read and provide any comments.
- RS advised that the next tranche of funding was now available and asked the WHC to think about where we can support. WHC agreed that St Nicolas Church would be approved as previously agreed but we needed to consider others.

**9. Staff Matters**

- Confidential staff matters were discussed.

Meeting closed 21.30pm

Approved.....

Chairman Andy Frary

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Date