

# MINUTES OF FULL MEETING OF WELLS HARBOUR COMMISSIONERS (WHC) HELD AT THE MALTINGS

8<sup>th</sup> December 2020 AT 6:30PM

**PRESENT:** Andy Frary (AF) – Chair, Ashely Mullenger (AM), Brian Riches (BR), Mel Catton (MC), Denys Hickey (DH), Josh Danziger (JD), Nick Groom (NG), Chris Thomson (CT)(joined @19.45), Kevin Theobald (KT)

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

## 1. CHAIRMAN WELCOME

AF welcomed all to the meeting and thanked them for attending.

AF requested that before we started on the first agenda item, he wanted to ensure that following the acquisition of the Land on East Quay, that we ensure that we recognise the wishes the vendors had, to allow them to have a seating area there and have a plaque erected in memory of their father (words to be agreed with the vendors). SAC confirmed that there was no formal agreement in the conveyance but we were aware that we had agreed to have a bench on the land and once we had decided how the land was going to be used that the plaque can be organised accordingly.

### 1.1 Commissioner changes

AF advised the WHC that as well as himself coming to the end of his term, there are others with whom we need to review as their term is coming up for expiry also.

BE would have completed his 2<sup>nd</sup> term at year end and whilst normally this would be the usual time for Commissioners to step down, there is a proposal to which BE is agreeable to, approve an extension into a 3<sup>rd</sup> term. Within the governance structure this is allowable in exceptional circumstances which AF went on to advise that given five Commissioners had changed in the last and current year, the challenges in the wider environment (e.g COVID) and potential changes with the SCIRA contract, it is thought it to be prudent to agree this extension. On this basis NG proposed, seconded by BR and all were in favour.

AL 1<sup>st</sup> term was also up at the end of year and due to business commitments decided not to offer herself for re-election and wished to stand down. AF thanked AL for her contribution and said Avri's keenness and enthusiasm, buzzing around the harbour looking after the WHC interests will be missed by the Committee but perfectly understood that other commitments needed to take priority. The WHC all concurred with AF and it was a pity AL was feeling unwell and therefore unable to attend as we would have liked to thank her in person.

NG 1<sup>st</sup> term would come to an end. NG confirmed he would like to stand for re-election. As such KT proposed, seconded by BR and as a majority the WHC voted in favour of re-election.

DH 1<sup>st</sup> term would also come to an end. DH confirmed he would like to stand for re-election. As such MC proposed, seconded by AM and all were in favour.

AF then brought to the WHCs attention that with himself and AL resigning there is an opportunity to appoint 2 more Commissioners and that previously, interest had been shown from candidates that would be appropriate to appoint. SAC said that whilst it would be usual to advertise again for the positions, we have in the past appointed Commissioners that had shown an interest and there is recognition in the port management guide that Trust ports that are in relatively low population areas with limited pools should actively identify candidates. To that end and given how well the candidates

are known WHC should look to appoint Andy McCallum and Sally Wynne in January. SAC took an action to complete the formalities.

## **2. APOLOGIES**

Bob Ellis (BE), Avril Lill (AL)

## **3. APPROVE MINUTES**

The Commissioners confirmed that they were happy for AF to sign the minutes from the last meeting.

## **4. HARBOUR UPDATE**

SAC then went on to run through the written update that formed part of the agenda item 4 adding;

4.1 Financial update; Since the last meeting we had seen an improved performance, mainly down to the car park becoming busier than ever following the relaxation of lockdown in Aug/Sept. SAC also confirmed that on an early review of November month end WHC will have matched last years performance which is mainly down to the cost control measures.

4.2 Sailing Club land; The Council have now confirmed that they are in a position to proceed however they have now raised that the land in question is up for a debate on whether it will be re-classified as 'Open Space' land. A copy of what that means was circulated prior to the meeting. SAC confirmed that whilst it had not been decided, assuming it was, he can only comment that it would likely mean there would be further constraints. SAC suggested to the WHC that whilst it might constrain us further, it didn't seem to impact its current use. Further investigations will take place prior to committing formally.

CCTV; installation is just about complete and will be an added benefit towards improving the security around the harbour.

Lobster Hatchery; SAC clarified that we were in receipt of a letter from the Fisherman's Association confirming they would match the funding towards building the hatchery and that they were supportive in assisting also. SAC plans to engage with the fisherman to work through the lobster tank set up currently used by the fisherman and to validate if that would be fit for purpose for holding berried lobsters and for larvae to hatch. If so, it will be a saving on using the Hatchery consultant's kit. DH asked if there was any further consideration of making it a tourist attraction which RS responded that it is in the plan still but until we start and plan the layout it would then be the time to look to see how we can generate revenue to pay for itself. NG then suggested it might be worth visiting another hatchery. SAC mentioned that AM had been to Padstow and had a look but we could look at another – the closest being in Bridlington which was more of a research centre although originally it was built to attract tourists and be a 'feature' there. NG questioned whether we knew why it hadn't worked out that way which SAC responded that it was a funding issue and their project was on a much larger scale (especially financially). RS went on to say that it was never intended to make a profit as its existence was more about education and supporting a sustainable fishery. RS commented that for a long time this was one of the most exciting projects underway, the Harbour has done for a long time and was looking forward to it coming to life.

Car Park; SAC advised WHC that having agreed a revised contract with the car park company there were still outstanding remedial actions to improve the performance of the car park operation. Whilst COVID has not obviously helped the feedback on what they are doing suggests it isn't a quick fix and, in some respects, we are piloting new ways they will be working. As such SAC had investigated alternative solutions as to how we could operate the car park, including a barrier system not unlike what is used at Sandringham.

4.3 Annual Tariff review; The paper was taken as read. The proposal to move the visiting vessels onto a simplified basis of £1 per ft per night was agreed by all. The analysis regarding the car park identified that resurfacing works will mean we will be incurring significant costs. As such and given the all day tariff has not changed in many years the WHC agreed that the daily rate should be increased from £4.50 to £5 which in comparison to the other car parks still remain cheap – especially in the summer months when other car parks charge considerably more. There was then some debate as to the laying up fees for Private and Commercial vessels. The Private vessel laying up for fee vessels that remain out of the water and in the yard for more than 12 months was agreed. By vessels remaining in the yard in the summer it creates inconvenience as that is when the maintenance of the yard is undertaken and it hinders efficiencies. Secondly, the yard was never intended to become a boat store so it is expected by introducing this fee, it will discourage vessel owners leaving it in there. Introducing the commercial vessel fee of £25 per week after 2 weeks was also agreed. NG queried why this charge could not apply to all vessel. RS said that we would need to go away and think about that in more detail and undertook to revert in due course. With regards to Commercial Fisherman, there was a lengthy debate about the best way to approach the matter given over the years the WHC had subsidised the tariffs in order to protect the fleet and by looking to increase their contribution it was important that it was handled appropriately. SAC agreed to analyse the costings in more detail and if possible a comparison to other ports but ultimately it was decided we write to them individually explaining the position and then meet them in order to explain the rationale in more detail.

SAC then asked for the WHC to review the proposed dates for next years meetings and to raise any difficulties so that we can look to ensure we have good attendance whenever possible.

## **5. COMMISSIONERS UPDATE**

Updates / comments were received from the commissioners as follows;

AM mentioned there was still a desire to develop the maritime trail although was aware that others were undertaking something similar following an introduction from Janice Whittaker. SAC agreed to follow up with Janice when next in the office to see if she had heard anything else. RS stated that we don't have to do a collaborative trail, the WHC can do their own. CT raised that it would also be good to tie in whatever is done with the Maltings heritage display as it has large reference to the ships and trade that came into Wells.

JD commented that he had seen the exchanges forwarded to himself by RS regarding the Coastal Futures program. RS informed the WHC that it had moved on once again and the Coastal Future program will meet again which RS will attend. RS continued to add that regardless of the Coastal Futures, WHC should continue to press on with looking at Wells itself and what if anything can be done to mitigate rising sea levels and tidal surges. A meeting with Holkham is also due in order that we can understand the work they have done with Royal Haskoning.

On a related point there was then a discussion regarding the historic exchanges the WHC had held with an opposing Town resident. SAC agreed to share the report that was produced post factum to help those Commissioners who were not present at that time for them to have a better understanding of events.

MC advised that the strategy paper was not produced this year given the circumstances it was not really appropriate but would be looked at with RS/SAC in the new year. MC wanted to then thank the Harbour team for keeping the harbour running in what has been a tumultuous year and for RS devising the Lobster tree idea that has been a huge success. Lastly MC was looking forward on taking on the Chairman role but knew he had big shoes to fill given the excellent work AF had done as a Commissioner and latterly as Chairman. MC felt that AF had given him so much support over the years to which MC was very grateful of.

DH had nothing to report but concurred with MC on thanking AF too.

KT advised that the Mecal reports had been completed for the Keri H and Frank T – both of which had 2 defects to resolve which were minor and in hand. RS raised that it would be good to discuss with KT in the new year about looking to replace the tractor which has become too unreliable.

NG had nothing to report.

BR acknowledged that the channel straightening had improved tidal access to the Town harbour and that was pleasing the Fisherman especially who had asked for these works to be carried out as a matter of urgency.

#### **6. WHMT**

SAC advised that there was nothing to report and was just a standing agenda item.

#### **7. AOB**

A discussion was held about leases that are active.

#### **8. Staff Matters**

RS wanted to seek the WHC views on personal development for the team. One of the team has approached RS exploring the possibility of the WHC funding a course to obtain their excavators license. So as a live example, has the WHC have appetite to provide the team with such funding in order to broaden their skills/ development. NG wondered if by providing this, it would backfire on us as they could gain employment elsewhere having had us pay for their development. AF suggested, like other companies do, that we should just ensure that the individual is aware that they would be liable to repay a percentage of the costs of such training in the event they left the employment of the WHC. All were in favour of providing this sort of development to the team on this basis.

Meeting was then closed @ 20.45

Approved.....

Mel Catton

Date 26/1/21.....