

Wells Harbour Commissioners (WHC)
Minutes of the Annual Public Meeting
Wells Sailing Club
Tuesday 10th May 2022 7.00pm

Meeting opened at 7pm

- Present: Harbour Commissioners, Harbour Staff, Mark Hewitson (Larking Gowen) and members of the general public
- Apologies: Chris Thomson, Ashley Mullenger, Andy McCallum
- Mel Catton (MC) – Chairman WHC
 - MC opened the meeting and welcomed the public.
 - MC highlighted that over the last 2 years the WHC have faced some significant challenges and would like to thank Robert and his team who have seen us through and dealt with the difficulties very well.
 - MC also thanks the Commissioners for their support at a time when some difficult decisions have had to be made.
 - The loss of the windfarm will have an impact especially to revenue streams but with plans already underway and more to come, was confident these will minimise the impact.
 - It was also very pleasing to provide and support the local community and other organisations in the town with their events including the WHMT which Robert will talk about later in the meeting.
 - Next year will be the 360th anniversary and MC was looking forward too sharing the plans including being recognised as a 'Heritage Harbour' which Robert will expand upon later in the meeting also.
 - MC advised on the structure of the meeting and then introduced Mark Hewitson from Larking Gowen to report on the financials.
- Mark Hewitson (MWH) – Larking Gowen
 - MWH advised the meeting that Larking Gowen have been the independent advisors to WHC for many years advising on taxation matters, reviewing books and records and preparing the annual accounts prepared by WHC's admin team.
 - Larking Gowen do not act as statutory auditors but provide an independent review of the financials and prepare financial statements and corporation tax returns and highlight any significant errors and omissions to the Commissioners. MWH confirmed that nothing had been identified for the year ended 31 December 2021 and thanked WHC's admin team for their help and cooperation.
 - The full financial statements were presented to and approved by the Commissioners at the end of March 2022 and a copy is available for inspection by appointment at the Harbour Office. MWH then presented a precis of the full financial statements to the meeting and reported that Wells Harbour Commissioners are sound financially.

- Income statement
- Turnover from a variety of sources was £1.379 million up from previous year of £1.236 million, largely due to an increase in diesel sales.
- Cost of Sales, those costs directly attributable to income, has increased for the same reasons from £576k to £644k.
- Gross income over expenditure of £734k for 2021 compared to £660K in 2020.
- Overhead expenses being general running costs incurred were £738k a decrease from £759k.
- Other operating income increased from £238k to £284k. Other operating income is made up of two elements: One is an accounting adjustment where grant funding previously received for capital projects is released to the income and expenditure account over a number of years to match the depreciation cost of those assets as they are slowly written off for accounting purposes. The second is under an agreement whereby an amount is actually received from Scira to underwrite the costs of the Outer Harbour to ensure that it does not adversely affect the operation of WHC. Returns are subject to an independent review by Larking Gowen.
- There was a small amount of investment income in the year £147 (£2k last year).
- The excess of income over expenditure before tax was £281k compared to £141k in 2020.
- The operation of the Commissioners is not exempt from taxation and therefore the corporation tax liability is £69k leaving £212k for investment.
- Balance Sheet
- The Balance Sheet is a snapshot of assets and liabilities as of 31 Dec 2021.
- Fixed Assets total £1.4 million and represents historic cost less depreciation.
- Current Assets which are amounts held in the bank, stocks of diesel, and debtors, totalled £1.8 million an increase from £1.5 million in 2020.
- Creditors which are amounts owed by the Commissioners including taxation was £206k leaving an overall increase in net current assets from £1,370k in 2020 to £1,639k in 2021. Net current assets are a measure of the liquidity of the Commissioners and shows that the financial state is very strong and healthy.
- Provisions is an accounting adjustment for 'deferred tax' and reflects additional tax that would be payable in the unlikely event of all the plant and machinery being sold for the amount shown within fixed assets.
- Net Assets after provisions are £2.9 million up from £2.8 million.
- Reserves comprise the accumulated fund of £2 million which is the surplus accumulated excess of income over expenditure for use by the Commissioners. Other grant and capital reserves come from external sources and relates to monies received for capital works which are written off over time at the same rate as the asset.
- Overall 2021 was another solid year.
- Conclusion
- There were no previously submitted financial questions to answer and MWH thanked the Commissioners for their custom.

- Robert Smith (RS)- Harbour Master Report
 - RS wished to thank Andy Frary – our previous Chairman and Mel Catton, our incumbent Chairman along with the Commissioners for all their support.
 - RS wished to express having Simon on board is working very well and thank him for the contribution he is making to help run the harbour.
 - RS also wanted to acknowledge the passing of David Cox – a Commissioner and of course long standing coxswain for the RNLI. RS found David to be the most modest, kind gentleman and always looked upon him for sound advice. The WHC had also lost other Commissioners who had passed away and our thoughts and wishes stay with their friends and family – Joan Price, Tony Pannell, Gary Anthony, Campbell MacCallum.
 - RS explained as a trust port WHC are committed to reinvesting any profits back into the port **“the business”** for the future and benefit of all users. RS reminded all those present that the Harbour belongs to the community and not the Commissioners, whose role is actually oversee that the harbour is being run properly by the Executive and in reality, RS role is to run the harbour on behalf of the community.
 - The channel currently has settled as of late and the need to dredge has lessened in more recent times. With the absence of the windfarm vessels the WHC had cut back although the dredger will be kept on in case the need arises to dredge when/where needed. There is though some differences as the WHC no longer is dredging under license from the MMO and uses the harbour powers (under the revision order) instead. Originally the license route was chosen as a way to support and demonstrate when operating the windfarms the dredging would have no detriment to the environment and now having proved this to be the case and also to save costs, the licensing could expire and in agreement with the MMO, use the Harbour powers instead.
 - With the windfarm operations leaving the harbour, the WHC has taken its time to decide how the Outer Harbour would be used. RS announced that a ‘pilot’ will be run to install three 11m finger pontoons running east to west attached to the current pontoons to develop a marina style facility which if successful will be expanded further along the current pontoons to house more leisure vessels which we have already seen plenty of interest from local boat owners.
 - The number of visiting vessels continue to increase and with the windfarm leaving, like the harbour had with the ships leaving in the 90’s, the main earner for the harbour will be leisure and tourism once more. The demand for moorings remains very high as does running moorings down the east end – so it is frustrating that some of those moorings are not actively used but continue to be taken up and thus disadvantaging people who would use them.
 - The Albatros will return and the WHC has invested in a new gantry which will make boarding the vessel much safer than the original ‘gang plank’ that used to be used. At the time the vessel was sold, the WHC had imposed revised procedures and operations in how the Albatros needed to operate and these were carried over to the new owners. In the main they were introduced to mitigate the anti-social behaviour the harbour had experienced but also to help manage the issues entailed by having such a big vessel operating in the harbour.
 - RS also wanted to make clear that there were discussions regarding a barge called the Cabby coming to Wells however that plan was abandoned and whilst there was talk of another, that has also fallen away and will not be coming to Wells either.
 - The car park at the quay has been operating under an ANPR system for some time and whilst in the main it has proved a very successful and flexible way to operate the car park, the issuance of Parking Charge Notices has put a reputational image on the harbour that the Commissioners wanted to change. As such, a barrier system will be introduced which effectively controls the number of cars on the car park at any one time (the barrier wont lift if the car park is full) and the

exit barrier will stay closed until payment has been made. The WHC believe this is the most sensible solution that can be achieved and whilst barriers will not be attractive, it is the compromise that has to be made to offset the issues the ANPR system we have now.

- In RS mind the fishing fleet is vital to Wells not only as part of the Towns heritage but also it is a tourist attraction in itself. As such the WHC wish to support the fisherman wherever possible and it is good to see 2 or 3 new boats joining the fleet with younger owners.
 - The Lobster hatchery is now in its second year and for RS it is one of the most exciting projects the WHC has undertaken. The fisherman wholeheartedly support the initiative to the extent that they paid 50% for the equipment and also provide the berried hens. SAC then explained the procedure undertaken at the hatchery and advised that last years learning will allow the WHC this year to attempt to 'harvest' more hens and thus hopefully have greater numbers of small lobsters than can be returned to the sea.
 - In addition to the channel and buoys at Wells, the port also looks after the channel and buoys at Burnham Overy for no charge. Burnham Overy Trust pay for equipment but the port provides manpower as a gesture of goodwill.
 - The new boat hoist is working well and has helped the fishing fleet and other harbour users. Boats can now be lifted at Wells which would otherwise have to be taken to Fosdyke or Great Yarmouth. This avoids travel costs and gives opportunities locally to service the vessels.
 - The port boatyard has in the past had many abandoned yachts from owners who can no longer afford to keep the vessels and pay storage. The port has gone through a lengthy process to remove them and nearly a dozen boats have now gone and thus created more space for more boats over the winter period.
 - A spare pontoon has been used to build an artificial nesting site for little terns a few years ago. In 2013 nests were washed away and the berm at the Outer Harbour is now populated by Gulls who predate the eggs/chicks. The raft has been placed on Bob Hall Sands and continues to be successful in rearing terns.
 - The port commissioned Royal Haskoning to look into the feasibility of ideas to provide flood protection for the town. In the past, the port strategy document had not mentioned the commissioner's strategy to flooding and following the 2013 floods many local residents approached the port with what could be done. RH carried out a feasibility study with modelling however the conclusion was that there was limited solution other than flood panelling like those that surround the harbour office. RS pointed out that it was not the WHCs intention to use the feasibility report other than to inform/educate themselves and should there be any action taken it would be for the Government/councils to enable/action rather than the Commissioners.
 - Next year will be the 360th anniversary of the WHC and the WHC intends to mark the anniversary with a few ideas – one of which is being designated a 'Heritage Harbour' which recognises the importance the harbour plays in the community. The status is something to be proud to achieve and is a recognised designation across Europe . To date RS has engaged with numerous people/ organisations as it is a collaboration for the town to help celebrate its heritage. The ideas include using the tide gauge hut as a 'sound pod', creating a trail that relates to the harbour/maritime connections and restoring the posts at shipwrights and perhaps re-instating the turning post(s).
- Questions and Answer session:
 - Questions sent in advance
 - 1) From: John Mitchell (present)

Can the Harbour please look at the possibility of renovating the steps down to the moorings in Tugboat Yard, East Quay, particularly the most easterly set? These are becoming quite dangerous and are an accident waiting to happen.

RS stated that an inspection was made, and that repairs will be undertaken accordingly. There was some idea to look at installing metal replacements but for now the repairs will be made using concrete.

Questions from the floor

1) From; John Mitchell

Once the new lifeboat station is complete what are the plans for the old one?

RS, from his personal viewpoint, was that it would be a shame if it did come down. The land belongs to Holkham and the WHC has no say in what happens. As RS understood Holkham have not yet made a final decision but essentially, and endorsed by Mr Peter Rainsford (present), Chair for Wells RNLI, there is only allowance in the agreement for 1 lifeboat station. PR pointed out that maintenance alone of the old station is approximately £70k p.a, it does flood on substantial high tides and in all likelihood it will be taken down but the slab will remain.

2) From; Nigel Ely

Are there any updates on the seaweed farm?

RS advised that talks were still ongoing and that the application for a license has been applied for but no outcome as of yet. From a WHC perspective, they would be supportive if it did go ahead albeit there is recognition that there are negative views for it to proceed and does have potential impacts on the Fisherman to which the WHC will be cognisant of. Andy Frary raised that the seaweed farm at Blakeney had been approved albeit as RS informed it is of a much smaller scale than the one planned to be run out of Wells.

3) From; Andy Frary

Following the purchase of 'Jordans land' by the WHC, given my role as Chair at the time, assurances were made to the owner(s) regarding access although the area is now fenced in?

RS assured Andy Frary that he has spoken to one of the previous owners and remained in contact with them and that the current situation was that they remain ok with it. Plans on how to use the land are still ideas – such as 'pods' or storage although the latter is limited by its tight access so probably only able to use as storage if the boats were on trailers rather than being hoisted.

4) From; Paula Baldry

I think it would have been helpful to advertise the AGM more and put up a notice in the Town Council noticeboard as well as more people would have likely attended had they had known.

RS advised that the AGM was posted on the social media sites/website as well as in the Quay magazine which goes to every household in Wells. Notice was also made at the harbour office but acknowledged that in future a notice can be made in the Town Council noticeboard as well. RS also advised tha 'The Haven' will go back into production again now COVID seems to have settled down which will also go to every household as before.

- Robert Smith (RS)- Wells Harbour Maritime Trust (WHMT)
 - WHMT is the Commissioners registered charity and all serving Commissioners are now trustees.
 - Initially the charity was established to encourage young people to sail. In recent times there has been a lack of applicants, so it now has widened its remit.
 - Kayak safaris are held to promote the trust which are very popular.
 - The trust has also approached Whitlingham Lake and this month year 7 pupils from APHS attend to undertake various water related activities such as paddle boarding, raft building, sailing etc.
 - The triathlon is being held on 19th June. All the money made from the Triathlon goes into the Trust.

Mel Catton

- Thanked all those who had attended, the Sailing Club for allowing WHC to hold their AGM on their premises, Mark Hewitson from Larking Gowen for his financial report, Robert Smith for his report and fielding questions and Simon Cooper and Sally Retchless for giving up their evening to organise the meeting.

Meeting closed 8.20pm