

MINUTES OF FULL MEETING OF WELLS HARBOUR COMMISSIONERS (WHC)

HARBOUR OFFICE

31st January 2023 AT 6:30PM

PRESENT: Mel Catton (MC) – Chair, Bob Ellis (BE), Nick Groom (NG), Denys Hickey (DH), Andy McCallum (AMc), Sally Wynne (SW), Ashley Mullenger (AM), Karen Jones (KJ)

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

1. CHAIRMAN WELCOME

MC thanked all for attending.

2. APOLOGIES

Josh Danziger (JD), Liam Pink (LP)

3. COMMISSIONERS CHANGES

Firstly, MC advised that with the resignation of Kevin, the end of Chris and Brian's 2nd term, 2 new Commissioners are to be appointed namely Karen Jones and Liam Pink. Unfortunately Liam was unable to attend and as such Karen was asked to complete and sign the Wells Harbour Commissioners Oath and Declaration which was duly done and witnessed by the Commissioners. Liam will undertake the same in March's meeting as per the formality required.

Secondly, AM's first term was finished and AM confirmed that she would be willing to undertake a second term, which was duly ratified by the Wells Harbour Commissioners.

4. FINANCIALS

SAC was able to present the 2022 full year management report which were attached and taken as read. SAC highlighted that whilst a profit was made this was solely due to the SCIRA early settlement and as per the report, stripping this settlement out, the Harbour was to make a loss for the year and thus there still remains important work to do for the WHC to return to profit and not rely on the cash balances. The balance is down given in the latter part of 2022 the WHC entered into a large capital expenditure programme of replacing the tractor, additional finger pontoons for the Outer Harbour, the car park barrier equipment and the car park resurfacing.

SAC then requested the WHC turn to the second paper which was an analysis completed to provide the WHC with an understanding of what can be expected in 2023 and what, with a series of strategic assumptions could be required to restore profitability, equivalent to 'Windfarm' years. SAC also explained to the WHC that whilst the projections still show losses, a significant part of that loss is attributed to the depreciation charge which is more of an accounting entry rather than an operating cash deficit – so in practice the losses are less severe on cashflow whilst being a deductible expense which helps with minimising our corporation tax. The figures presented though were comparable to how the performance was measured when the Windfarm vessels used the Harbour. The WHC all agreed that the projections for 2023 would be a good baseline to use as a budget and to what could be used to track against actual performance. SAC agreed that he will measure the financials and highlight variances in the financial reporting done at the WHC bi-monthly meetings throughout 2023.

Turning to the assumptions to achieve a break even strategy, SAC highlighted that the main levers to increase revenue would be increasing the margin on diesel sales, increasing the car park tariff and

obtaining rents on land such as Jordans and the small concession on the car park. From an expenses perspective the major cost line levers would be the dredger and Frank T which do not really attract a revenue to offset their costs from and thus the largest 'discretionary' burdens the WHC has on the expense lines. RS advised the WHC that both areas can be made on a continual assessment and over time, alternatives can be looked at, such as a smaller dredger or finding ways to let the Frank T earn to assist in covering the respective cost of running. RS reminded the WHC though that to rent the Frank T we would have to hire a crew and as such potentially spoil the idea of lessening the expenses running the vessel.

The Commissioners then went on to discuss alternative options for the land at the East End ('Jordans' Land) which originally was planned to house 'pods', however upon further investigation, the return on investment didn't stack up and the feedback from potential users was that the cost to rent would be more than their expectation/budget allows. The WHC then discussed alternatives and whilst there was no clear option, the Commissioners decided to undertake a similar exercise to the concession on the car park where proposals can be made for its use and the Commissioners can assess each proposal on its merits and also whether the WHC can obtain a suitable rent to support the idea/ the WHC accounts. The WHC requested that SAC produce a similar document that was used for the car park land to see if it generated any interest.

5. APPROVE MINUTES

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

6. HARBOUR EXECUTIVE UPDATE

RS asked the WHC to refer to the paper tabled 'Harbour Executive Report' and turning to the first item;

1. KJ had prepared an additional paper which was circulated at the meeting titled 'Project H - Proposed celebrations for the 360th anniversary/ Heritage Harbour year'. KJ then walked the WHC through the presentation and the following decisions were agreed;
 - a. Tide Gauge Project – to look to create an 'AV' pod, by looking at employing the services of Isabella Martin for artistic and technical advice.
 - b. Comms workstream – RS had already written to the Town Council to suggest some signage amendments that could be made as well as a cost share. KJ also undertook to mock up what the signage might look like and also to look at some form of sign audit in/around the harbour.
 - c. Sunrise/sunset seat – RS had requested a quote from a builder to look to rebuild/strengthen the concrete pad/east quay public slipway which would be used as the base for the seat and also to shore up the slipway which is being undermined by tide/current/ wear. Costing for that and also what the envisage end product might look like is still being worked upon.
 - d. Heritage Trail – as per the mail circulating the minutes, SAC had found a potential software company that produce 'app' software which the harbour could utilise for a trail and also leverage the same to support other initiatives either by the WHC or perhaps other events such as the Christmas Tide/ Wells Carnival.
2. Outer Harbour pontoons – RS informed the WHC that delivery of the remaining 4 finger pontoons has arrived and will be soon installed.
3. Favor Parker Land – RS advised that the Residents have engineers looking to commence works in the next 4 weeks or so. They will be needing to use part of the quay motorbike area for their site equipment/ materials which RS has agreed following a meeting on site.

4. Albatros – RS met Bob Richardson who provided 3 reports, namely, a rigging report, survey and notes/comments relating to the various conditions, comments and past exchanges between himself and the WHC. RS advised that the vessel is looking to return on 20/3 @ 17.45. RS advised the WHC that he will forward the survey to Roger Bell for his comment following a discussion with the Commissioners who agreed that we should ask his expertise although nothing is expected to be an issue following the level of extensive works completed. There was also an additional request on whether the historic 'out of water' survey was really necessary every three years given the amount of works just undertaken. The Commissioners believed that given the restoration had only just been completed, extending that term to 5 years and then also an initial 3 year period 'walk through' survey is conducted in situ. RS also advised that there is no bar/alcohol requirement, the main offer will be a B&B using the 4 double berths and the 1 single berth. Additionally they would also have a food offer running from midday to 7pm. RS affirmed that was how the description by Bob Richardson was provided. RS then confirmed, as advised previously, that the grey/black water tanks would hold 6000 litres and the current plan was to have a pump out by a different firm who undertook it previously and that he expects to require a pump out approximately every 6 weeks. The tanks/vessel is fitted with charcoal/ odour diffusers but there remains no mention of the odourless pump out solution. The final part of the offering in time will be to look at weddings/music events etc which would be agreed under license, whereby the Albatros would submit a request for each event for the Commissioners to opine upon as to its suitability. There was a question as to whether they could park on the quayside car park which RS confirmed there wasn't and that if they do use the car park, they can only stay for the day and not overnight as per the car park terms and conditions. SAC advised that such a clause exists already in the license agreement. Given the passage of time, SAC requested DH review the license as it currently stands to ensure it remains fit for purpose.
5. Sailing Club – RS met with Chris and Tim Gibbs who emailed the Harbour expressing concerns regarding the berm opposite the harbour office that was reinforced to prevent the 'marsh channel' reopening and thus creating 2 channels down to the quay. The concern primarily related to ensuring that the effective narrowing of the harbour is forcing all boats down a very narrow channel and that they believe it will be almost impossible to get round unassisted if the breeze is from the North or South and thus have significant consequences for sailing at Wells. RS reminded the WHC that the straightening of the channel made it simpler for all and efforts to keep it clear was being made so as to provide as great an access tidal window as can be achieved which is very important for the fisherman. RS also advised that measuring the depths at Shipwrights and the sailing club area of the creek confirmed that the depths were such that by the time the berm becomes an issue, the level of water at shipwrights/ sailing club would probably mean they would be too late anyhow. The result though was that RS undertook to the sailing club if the concerns turned out to prove the effect would be as detrimental as they have advised, the WHC would look again and review to see if the height of the berm could be reduced accordingly.

7. COMMISSIONER UPDATES

No Commissioners had updates or further comments.

8. AOB

SAC circulated a proposal following the posting the expression of interest to use the car park space. SAC reminded the commissioners that the document posted on line gave a closing date of 20th Feb so there is still time to receive others which were expected. WHC noted the interest and agreed to wait until we have the other ideas to hand so we can compare options.


SAC raised that the WHC as WHMT trustees had received a letter from Neil Thompson Boats seeking donations towards running further trips aboard the Excelsior. A copy of the letter was tabled at the meeting. The WHC felt that given we are now running a program of trips for the school to take a whole year to Whitlingham lakes, it was felt that this was already a good level of support to the school. As such the WHC requested SAC as Treasurer to respond accordingly.

MC suggested at the next Christmas Tide meeting a WHC liaison should attend given the growth of the event and that it is predominantly around the Harbour area. The next meeting is March 21st where WHC should be represented.

9. Staff Matters

SAC reminded the WHC it was the annual staff review period and that last time Kevin, Sally and Mel attended a meeting with RS/SAC to run through the options. SAC suggested the repeat the same process which seemed to work well and other than Kevin resigning from the WHC perhaps SW/MC would suffice. SW/MC agreed and SAC confirmed that he will produce a paper for their consideration and plan a meeting ahead of the WHC in March.

Meeting was then closed @ 20.45

Approved........

Mel Catton

Date 11/14/23