

Wells Harbour Commissioners (WHC)
Minutes of the Annual Public Meeting
Wells Sailing Club
Tuesday 16th May 2023 7.00pm

Meeting opened at 7pm

- Present: Harbour Commissioners, Harbour Staff, Mark Hewitson (Larking Gowen) and members of the general public
- Apologies: Ashley Mullenger, Andy McCallum, Josh Danziger, Denys Hickey, Bob Ellis
- Mel Catton (MC) – Chairman WHC
 - MC opened the meeting and welcomed the public.
 - MC highlighted that over the last 2 years the WHC have had to make the decision to reduce staff numbers in light of the windfarm leaving the harbour and changes to operations also.
 - Despite these challenges MC would like to thank Robert and his team, past and present, who have seen us through and dealt with the difficulties very well.
 - MC also thanked the Commissioners for their support at a time when some difficult decisions have had to be made.
 - This year marks the 360th anniversary of the formation of the Commissioners and MC was pleased to advise plans are well underway to highlight and celebrate this through the course of the season. The recognition for Wells as a ‘Heritage Harbour’ was officially unveiled and signs have been put up. Robert will expand upon later in the meeting also.
 - The Trust was especially active last year and will be so again this year.
 - Whilst Wells still enjoys having its own fishing fleet, like any other business they have faced challenges, but we wish them continued success for the future.
 - Finally, MC wanted to express his pleasure being Chairman, and thanked all for their support and looked forward to the future and to ensure the continued success and benefit to all of the Harbours stakeholders.
- 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 2022 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 2023 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 £637k down from £1.379 million in the previous year, largely due to the loss of the SCIRA contract.
- Cost of Sales, those costs directly attributable to income, have decreased for the same reasons from £645k to £414k albeit £111k was spent on car park / quay maintenance in 2022.
- Gross income over expenditure was £222k compared to £734k for 2021.
- Overhead expenses being general running costs incurred were £576k a decrease from £738k in 2021.
- Other operating income increased from £285k to £403k. 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 £522 compared to £147 in 2021.
- The excess of income over expenditure before tax was £50k compared to £281k in 2021.
- The operation of the Commissioners is not exempt from taxation and therefore the corporation tax credit of £15k for 2022 compares to a liability of £69k for 2021.
- The excess of income over expenditure leaves £65k for investment compared to £212k in 2021.

- Balance Sheet

- The Balance Sheet is a snapshot of assets and liabilities as of 31 Dec 2022.
- Fixed Assets total £1.45 million and represents historic cost less depreciation.
- Current Assets which are amounts held in the bank, stocks of diesel, and debtors including taxation, totalled £1.67 million a decrease from £1.85 million in 2021.
- Creditors which are amounts owed by the Commissioners including taxation for the comparative period was £77k compared to £206k for 2021 leaving an overall decrease in net current assets from £1,639k in 2021 to £1,597k in 2022.
- 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 just under £2,983k up from £2,969k in 2021.
- Reserves comprise the accumulated fund of £2.1 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 2022 was another solid year albeit with the key challenges The Commissioners face with the loss of the SCIRA contract income.

- 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 Mel Catton, our Chairman along with the Commissioners for all their support.
 - We have seen Chris Thomson and Brian Riches finish their second term each and hence no longer Commissioners. They along with Kevin Theobald and Andy McCullum have also resigned due to work commitments. Replacing them, RS welcomed Karen Jones and Liam Pink who both joined this year.
 - 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 harbour limits are where the WHC has responsibility to manage and this is shared in part with Holkham who we work well with. By way of example, the recent sailing boat that capsized on route to Wells was stuck out beyond Bob Halls Sands – as a statutory harbour, it would be up to the Commissioners to remove the hazard and hopefully without the cost burden which in this case was mostly covered by the owner. The alternative route would have been ultimately even more expensive for the owner by using official channels to remove the wreck under legislation but fortunately this was not required.
 - The WHC no longer dredges under MMO license 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. An assent from Natural England is in place, so survey such as the Eel Grass continues to be monitored at substantial cost to the Commissioners.
 - The Navigation channel is maintained by the Commissioners and audited by Trinity House yearly both physically going out to the buoys and also in the office to ensure our records are accurate.
 - 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 Outer Harbour has had 10 finger pontoons added which has provided shoreside pontoons for 20 berths which are fully taken up. There remains a commercial area still for the occasional survey vessel that still comes into Wells.
 - The number of visiting vessels continue to be popular – in 2022 327 vessels visited and compared to previous years is the highest since 2018.
 - Moorings for boats continue to be in demand especially in sluice creek and the East Quay.
 - 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. Once the contract is signed, permission to return can be granted.
 - As Mel mentioned earlier, Heritage Harbour status has been awarded and the road signs have been added to the town signs as you enter the town to show this. To celebrate this and the 360th anniversary there are a number of initiatives underway - There will be a heritage trial ‘app’ which

people can use via their smart phone to learn about different points of interest, The Tide Gauge hut is currently being converted into a sound pod which members of the public can enjoy and banners/flags will be raised around the quay.

- The 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 remains busy and well occupied although having allowed some non-resident fishing vessels to use the yard, this proved too much hassle and problematic so we will not be allowing non-local vessels to use the yard anymore.
 - The Commissioners have agreed for 2 concessions on the car park – the first is a bubble tea kiosk which started in May and the second is a young persons enterprise called 2 lemons which is run by young adults to allow them to learn on how to run and operate a business. The concept is very worthwhile and hence why the Commissioners have agreed.
 - The tern barge is now populated by Gulls/Terns and has been placed on Bob Hall Sands and continues to be successful in rearing terns.
 - The hatchery is now in its third 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.
- Questions and Answer session:

Questions sent in advance

1) From: Pam Frary (present)

Robert read out the note sent to the Commissioners regarding allowing the shellfish stall to reserve the space next to the stall as per previous years.

RS stated that this was discussed previously at the last Commissioners meeting but will raise it again on behalf of Pam. The issue though remains that having the barrier system means the Commissioners can't guarantee access to the car park when it is full and so even if all the other challenges could be resolved, it remains the case that the space could not be used if Pam was to leave the car park to restock and then unable to re-enter.

MC added they continue to talk the car park company to overcome some of the challenges and should there come a way, they would be able to discuss this again.

There were no Questions from the floor

- 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 now used Whitlingham Lakes so that each year pupils from APHS year 7 attend to undertake various water related activities such as paddle boarding, raft building, sailing etc.

- The triathlon is being held on 17th September. 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