

Wells Harbour Commissioners (WHC)
Minutes of the Annual Public Meeting
Wells Sailing Club
Tuesday 14th May 2024 6.30pm

Meeting opened at 6.30pm

- Present: Harbour Commissioners, Harbour Staff, John Cunningham (Larking Gowen) and members of the general public
- Apologies: Karen Jones.
- **Mel Catton (MC) – Chairman WHC**
 - MC opened the meeting and welcomed the public.
 - MC highlighted that over the last 3 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 this through and dealt with the difficulties very well.
 - Simon has stood down as Harbour Administrator and we appreciate his wealth of knowledge and matters that he has assisted us with and laying down foundations for further succession.
 - MC also thanked the Commissioners for their support and that their contributions are vitally important for operations of the harbour to allow us to move forward. We have had some member changes and have recently welcomed Richard Whitelock, Simon Walsingham and Daniel Money to the board of commissioners
 - Finally, MC expressed his pleasure being Chairman, and thanked all for their support and is looking forward to the future.
- **John Cunningham (JC) – Larking Gowen**
 - JC advised that Larking Gowen have been the independent advisors to WHC for many years advising on taxation matters, reviewing books, 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. JC confirmed that nothing had been identified for the year ended 31 December 2023 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 2024 and a copy is available for inspection by appointment at the Harbour Office. JC then presented a precis of the full financial statements to the meeting and reported that Wells Harbour Commissioners are sound financially.
- **Income statement**
 - Turnover is down due to the end of the Scira income, clearly that is what was expected for which we have planned for.
 - There was a strong increase of 20% relating to Harbour dues, berths, and visiting vessels.
 - Diesel sales are down but again this is also linked to the loss of Scira.

- Car Park Revenue is up by £12,000
- Investment income is also up due to the bank base rate.
- **Expenditure Statement**
- The total cost of wages and salaries in 2023 was £218,000 which represents 38% of the overall costs compared to £253,000 the previous year.
- Depreciation was £124,000 in 2023 and £136,000 in 2022. The general writing down of the fixed assets of the organisation, insurances are consistent being £31,000 (2023), £32,000 (2022).
- Rates have increased by £5,000 since 2022.
- The most significant cost areas represent 73.5% of the total costs of the year, where same those same headings in 2022 represented 81%.
- There is a deficit at the year-end of £96,000 (2023), compared to a surplus of £50,000 in 2022, however £124,000 of the deficit is recognised as depreciation. Therefore, it has been a positive result for the year based on the activities.
- There is no formal cashflow statement in the accounts, but in terms of cash flow we turn the loss for the year into a surplus if we ignore depreciation. The prior year surplus £49,000 but if we excluded Scira from that year would have been a deficit of £198,000.
- If we compare like for like and ignore the Scira element there's been quite a significant improvement in several areas.
- At the year end, cash in the bank £1.36m compared to £1.55m December 2022, the downward movement includes £166,000 which was spent on fixed assets during the year.
- There were no previously submitted financial questions to answer, and JC thanked the Commissioners for their custom.
- **Robert Smith (RS)- Harbour Master Report**
- RS thanked everyone for attending, and also Mel Catton our commissioners along with the for all their support.
- Compared to the number of residents in Wells and how few have attended this evening it must be a positive sign that people approve with what WHC have been doing.
- The harbour is the hub of the town and thank you to those that have come along this evening.
- This year we haven't got someone here that regularly attended the AGMs, and that is Peter Terrington, sadly due to his recent passing. Despite our differences he was a good adversary for me, he would make me look at things from a different perspective and often made us think 'are we doing the right thing'. In all honesty he will be greatly missed. I used to enjoy his approach and how he would hold me to account, he always did what he felt was good for Wells.
A very worthy man who will be missed.
- Fred Whittaker left the harbour team in March 2024; Fred was made redundant which was a very difficult decision to make. He has been here many years and has been very loyal. Tristian has become Assistant Harbour Master, and we also welcome Tania Goodliffe who has joined us as Harbour Administrator. Tania has fitted in seamlessly, a really great addition to our harbour and what we are doing.
- *West Cardinal* – We intend on lifting it up early in the summer. The West Cardinal is worth £19-20,000 so it's important that we keep that on station once for the importance of it and how much it would cost to replace.
- The harbour must run as a business to continue providing new and existing services and facilities.
- *Yellow Buoy Mark* – has been moved inside the bar to 160degrees due to a sand spit north of number 1, this has been moved to ensure no one runs aground early in the tide.

- Trinity House still conducts an annual audit checking all markers and related paperwork. Last year we passed the audit with no identified improvements. Regular routine checks are conducted by the Harbour team throughout the year.
- *Burnham Overy Harbour Trust (BOHT)*- The Wells harbour team have previously maintained and secured BOHT buoys on their behalf free of charge. In early 2024 BOHT agreed that WHC would no longer provide this service, but upon reflection BOHT changed and further to Holkham becoming involved WHC reconsidered their decision and with the agreement from BOHT the service will continue and be charged accordingly. **Please be aware that the starboard buoys have been removed and only the port side remain.**
- *The channel* – We no longer dredge the channel under the MMO licence as previously done when the windfarm was present. This has been fine. Due to the licence costs and loss of the windfarm WHC can no longer undertake the large area previously covered so the dredging is only done for the spits and small areas requiring maintenance using the harbour powers (under the revision order) instead and regulated by Natural England. We try to encourage the channel to go where it needs to go, but the tide dredges the channel far quicker than we can. We will keep the dredger for when we do get certain problems.
- *Outer Harbour* – From the outer harbour to the quay the channel has been returned to the west side, this makes entry to the harbour easier for vessels and will also protect the marsh from erosion.
- *Pontoons* – This is where we do ‘some’ dredging to maintain a minimum depth of 1.6m in preparation for the deeper draft visiting vessels.
- *Moorings*- They continue to be stable with a gentle changeover of rentals
- *Fishing fleet* – Up by a couple of fishing boats and the harbour has no further spaces available.
- *Albatros* – We were hoping that the owner would be in attendance this evening. The Albatros is back and remains commercially unused. The reasons for this are absolutely nothing to do WHC or the Harbour Master. Regardless of the rumours around Wells WHC are not involved in the delay of it being open. Everything that has been asked for has been done. The owner has made us aware that they’d like to personally enjoy it prior to becoming a high-end b&b. We are unaware of when it’ll be open and support their future intentions.
- *Tugboat Yard* – It remains a busy part of the harbour for the private charters and day trippers. The town pontoons are for visiting vessels only.
- *East End Running Moorings*- They remain in high demand due to their location.
- *Additional Pontoons* – WHC are looking into the feasibility of adding more pontoons from far slipway and running to the East with a leading walkway.
- *Boat Yard* – Huge asset to our fishing and leisure crafts. Visiting vessels will not be permitted to use the yard, this is to reduce the number of abandoned vessels. Vessels that are abandoned will be charged £25.00 per week following a formal notice and timeframe for removal.
- WHC has recently purchased the piece of land that lies south of the existing boat yard after years of leasing.
- *Jordans Land* – WHC purchased Jordans Land a couple of years ago to the west of the green store. Our previous plans were to make use of the land through the WHMT but since our contract ended with the windfarm, we had to think how we can generate some income to maintain the facilities we offer around the harbour so after much thought we have agreed to rent the piece of land to a local business for 2024/2025 to be used as a seasonal pop-up seafood café.
- *Shipwrights* – We are looking to locally rent out the small piece of land we own that is adjacent to Shipwrights as a parking space/seating area.
- *Lobster Hatchery* – WHC and the Fisherman’s Association made an equal donation to purchase the hatchery equipment in 2021. Thereafter WHC have continued to pay for the ongoing costs of replacement items, labour, food, utilities and all other general expenses costing approximately

£21,000 per year. We have always run it through WHC but as of February 2024 the hatchery will be run and administrated by WHMT. Funding has been difficult to support this valuable scheme and with the fisherman being unable to provide any further funding to support the project since it began 2021, we are thinking of other revenue opportunities to ensure that the hatchery can continue its quest to increase the numbers of lobsters along the North Norfolk coastline by rearing baby lobsters at the hatchery. The aim is to work towards putting back what the fisherman are taking out. Our equipment allows us to return to sea approximately 900 stage 5 baby lobsters from 6-8 hens (female lobsters). In the wild only 1 baby lobster will survive out of 20,000 eggs being laid per lobster. So, what we are doing is giving them a better chance and its all about conservation.

- *Diesel barge* – We may put a diesel barge in place of the small diesel pontoon to provide an additional 12,000L of fuel, fuel demand has increased due to the fishing vessels becoming larger.
- *Car Park* – We have a new barrier system which works a lot better and is less interruption for the harbour team than the previous systems. There has been speculation about the carpark charges in the evenings, we would like to say that its clearly stated on the entry sign that parking after 6pm is £1.00.
- *Concessions* – We continue to have Frary's and Bubble Tea which has worked well, and the Crab Hut also remains in place. The only concession that will not be returning this year is the 2 Lemons which was run by young adults whilst also learning the ethics of business. We are currently looking into opportunities for 2025 which wouldn't necessarily compromise other quay businesses.
- *Tidal Guage* – Originally re-developed to use as a sound pod, experience room. We are still considering how it will be managed and operated. Worst case scenario we could always rent it out as an office space.
- *Oyster Heaven Project* – Reinstating oysters back in the harbour, along the fleets drain and under the main quay pontoons. We are trialling this project until formally committing long term.
- *Tern Barge* – Is a big success with the fledglings seen taking off this year, we put the barge in place to offer a safe environment for the Terns away from European seagulls, tides and other predators. Natural England were originally concerned about the damage the barge is doing to the land/grass, but we have continued to provide and maintain the barge as a safe haven.
- *Holkham Forestry* – There's a possibility that Holkham are considering removing some trees on East Hills, WHC are making no further comment until Holkham discloses their plans officially.
- *Wells Paddle Sports* – New business being launched near our boat yard, that will be teaching all forms of paddle sports and offering kayak safaris around the marshes.
- *D-Day 80th Commemoration* – The Royal British Legion are holding a ceremonial event on the 6th June along the quay inviting all the local emergency services and clubs. The beacon will be lit at 9.15pm if the weather permits and the fish and chips shops will also be taking part in the national Fish & Chip D-Day supper.
- *Seaweed Farm* – The London seaweed initiative have not pursued their project. The North Norfolk seaweed farm is going ahead off Blakeney, and the Harbour have been helping them lay their buoys and a lot of their tackle going forward. The first lines will be laid in the next couple of months.
- *Question - A member of the public asked if the seaweed farm will be operating from the quay* – WHC Response – We do not know at this stage, but the small seaweed farm run out of Morston is asking if they can run out of Wells due to logistic problems. We haven't confirmed these details yet. But the North Norfolk seaweed farm is happening.

No further questions asked.

- **Wells Harbour Maritime Trust**

- Was set up by the commissioners initially to help and encourage children and young adults to get out on the water. We have paid for the APHS school trips to Whitlingham due to the legislation becoming tighter it's difficult for us to offer these activities within the harbour. The school and its students have benefited from the water activities over the years which has also been funded through the pure sales of Roberts books.
- The hatchery now comes under the charity's constitution focusing on education and conservation. There has been an increased level of interest in the scheme and Wells should be proud considering how few hatcheries there are around the UK. The success of the hatchery is down to the staff and the generosity of volunteers that help with feeding. We would certainly welcome more volunteers to help during the weekends and bank holidays.
- Triathlon- Last year was its final year, this was a difficult decision to make and mainly due to the reduction in harbour staff and lack of volunteers.
- All proceeds of Roberts books and donations received from his talks continue to be a revenue source for the WHMT.
- The Hornsea 3 windfarm have shown an interest in the hatchery and would like to support the project and have suggested that WHMT apply for funding through their online community grant scheme.

Closing Questions

Question 1

- Carpark Flooding- What flood resilience is in place to stop cars being flooded and causing an environmental hazard?
- Gates are closed and signs put in place warning of any tidal surges due. Unfortunately, we were only informed of a 'possible' surge from a larger harbour (not the authorities) and this is when we reacted immediately but unfortunately for one vehicle it was too late. It is with regret that we are not authorised to move other people's property in the event of a flood. We have identified that it may be useful to have a sign stating tide times and including any surge warnings.

Question 2

- Can the harbour put up no entry signs on the exit point of the car park exit as people seem to be trying to enter an exit point? There should be some signs in place, if they have been moved then WHC will investigate replacing them.

Mel Catton

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

Meeting closed 7.25pm