

Wells Harbour Commissioners (WHC)
Minutes of the Annual Public Harbour Users meeting
Wells Sailing Club
Tuesday 15th May 2018 7.00pm

Meeting opened at 7pm

- Present: Harbour Commissioners, Harbour Staff and members of the general public
- Apologies: Chris Greeves (Larking Gowen), Chris Hardy

- Andy Frary (AF) – Chairman WHC
 - AF opened the meeting and welcomed the public. He stated it was his first year as Chair of WHC and he was honoured to be elected from his fellow Commissioners and thanked the Commissioners and the Executive for the help he has been given in the role.
 - AF advised on the structure of the meeting and then introduced Philip Moy from Larking Gowen to report on the financials

- Philip Moy (PM) – Larking Gowen
 - PM informed the meeting that Larking Gowen are independent advisors to WHC reviewing books and records and produce the annual accounts which have been prepared by WHC's admin team.
 - Larking Gowen do not act as 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. PM confirmed that nothing had been identified for the year ended 31st December 2017 and thanked everyone for their help and cooperation.
 - The full financial statements were presented to and approved by the Commissioners at the end of March and a copy is available for inspection by appointment at the Harbour Office.
 - PM reported that Wells Harbour Commissioners are sound financially.
 - Turnover from a variety of sources was £1.285 million down slightly from previous year of £1.327 million, largely due to a reduction in activity in the Outer Harbour and a corresponding fall in diesel sales.
 - Cost of Sales, those costs directly attributable to income, has fallen slightly for the same reasons from £678k to £674K.
 - Gross income over expenditure of £611K for 2017 compared to £648K in 2016.
 - Overhead expenses being general running costs incurred were £729K a reduction from £742K.
 - 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. Other operating income increased from £298K to £302K.
 - There was a small amount of investment income in the year £2k (£3k last year).
 - The excess of income over expenditure before tax was £186K compared to £207K in 2016.

- The operation of the Commissioners is not exempt from taxation and therefore the tax liability is £36K leaving £150K for investment.
 - The Balance Sheet is a snapshot of assets and liabilities as of 31 Dec 2017
 - Fixed Assets total £1.7 million and represents historic cost less depreciation.
 - Current Assets which are amounts held in the bank, stocks of diesel, and debtors, totalled £1.5 million an increase from £1.3 million in 2016.
 - Creditors which are amounts owed by the Commissioners including taxation was £414K leaving an overall increase in net current assets from £907K in 2016 to £1.065K in 2017. 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 '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 same as previous year £2.7 million.
 - Reserves comprise the accumulated fund £1.4 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 2017 was another good solid year.
 - The Scira investment of £1.9 million is depreciated over time. The total included in the assets has fallen due to depreciation. The total amount included in assets is £585K.
 - There were no previously submitted financial questions to answer and PH thanked the Commissioners for their custom.
- AF thanked PM for his report and attending the meeting and passed over to the Harbour Master Robert Smith.
- Robert Smith (RS)- Harbour Master Report
 - RS stated it was great to see so many members of the public attending the meeting this year as last year there were more Commissioners in attendance than members of the public. The Commissioners were considering whether to continue with an AGM as after advice from the BPA it is no longer necessary, but given the turnout the Commissioners will no doubt continue to hold them in the future.
 - RS reported the Fred Painter had passed away who was a great supporter of the harbour.
 - RS thanked Paula Baldry and Joan Price who had now retired from the board and welcomed the new board members Avril Lill, Denys Hickey and Nick Groom.
 - RS also thanked Andy Frary who was a popular choice in the community as the new Chair.
 - There had been staff changes during the year. Mick Frary and Simon Blakeley had left and been replaced by Tristian Roberts and Andy Potts. Both new staff members are already proving to be great assets to the harbour. RS stated that as a Trust Port surpluses can be used for job creation.
 - Maintaining the depth at the Tug Boat Yard pontoons for all berths is proving a challenge but the Harbour is endeavouring to maintain the depth for the two angling boats.
 - There is a new shed in the storage yard for the Talus and the tractor.
 - A new white diesel tank has been purchased to provide fuel for the tractor, Talus and Port Truck and pickups.

- The Outer Harbour currently has 4 to 5 vessels. This number can reduce to 2 with one on standby in winter months. There has been criticism of the Outer Harbour in the past but it does provide opportunities to Wells and North Norfolk. Scira alone has created 55 jobs in the area.
- The Port is looking to replace our red diesel to a new low emission diesel which provides improved engine performance. WHC would be the first port to have this Shell product as our supplier is currently the only one to have it. Negotiations are currently under way.
- The channel is trying to move to the west side at the Beach bank. Ben Taylors is deflecting water to the beach bank and the Commissioners will try to encourage that path.
- New pontoons will be arriving over the next few months. The old wooden pontoons for the *Frank-T* and the diesel berth will be replaced with new pontoons having columns at the wall to move up and down. The old pontoons will be possibly donated to Brancaster. Another pontoon project will be installed at the East End with two piles taking the pontoon out 5 metres off East Quay. Piling works will be carried out in-house.
- The Commissioners and Executive have looked at ideas on how to improve flood defences for the Harbour Office and even considered looking to relocate to another building, but feel that the current office is the best location being on the quay. A first floor extension was also considered but NNDC planners would prefer a modern extension and the Commissioners felt this would spoil the look of the heritage asset. The decision has therefore been taking to install glass flood panels on top of the existing perimeter wall which was built in 2005 to the 1953 flood level. In 2013 this wall was topped by the surge tide flooding the Harbour Office. Planning permission is being sought to install the panels which ironically required a flood risk assessment. The Commissioners cannot be certain it will work but felt overall this provided the best solution to improve protection to the building.
- The Commissioners are implementing new parking regulations on the quay car park which will use number plate recognition cameras. The system will be operated by an external company who will enforce parking violations through the courts. Users of the car park will have 10 minutes to get a ticket or receive a fine. The system is being introduced as so many people are now flouting the rules and parking without obtaining a ticket. Staff from local businesses are parking on the quay without paying and WHC is a business in its own right. The Commissioners have helped local businesses during their refurbishment works but cannot run a free car park so hope that the new system will encourage people to purchase a day ticket of £4.50.
- The delivery of the slipway hoist has been delayed over many months. RS had recently visited the factory and the hoist is now in the paint workshop. Two extensions to the EMFF grant fund had been applied for and it is hoped that no further extension will be needed. Originally WHC were informed that funding could have been lost if not claimed by the end of March.
- The Talus is not ideal for road use as it causes a lot of vibration and can be heard from a distance. It also causes wear on the tracks and therefore the decision was taken to purchase a low loader trailer to transport it to the beach via the tractor.
- RS and Commissioner Chris Thomson have been reading all the documents associated with the Coastal path and marsh access. Correspondence has been going on between WHC and Natural England (NE) who have provided written assurances that existing access rights will not be affected. However the Commissioners still have concerns that once the Secretary of State has passed the coastal path as law it may be legally binding and access to the marsh will be stopped. The marsh is part of the harbour on High Water springs and therefore WHC have objected to the proposal to withdraw access to the marsh on behalf of local stakeholders who have expressed many concerns. The reason used for withdrawing access was safety concerns north of Stonemill creek, however according to RNLI statistics only one person has been taken off the marsh in two years. Other areas along the coast have worse safety records but stopping access to those areas

has not been proposed. WHC are also objecting to the introduction of a kissing gate at the North point bank as WHC require vehicular access. Only land owners can object, the general public can only make representations which is why WHC have made the objections on behalf of the community.

- The Commissioners are looking at a future flooding policy. Back in the 1800s the Commissioners of the day looked to the future and built the stone quay at the time with only £60 in their bank account which transformed the town and has benefited generations of people and was their legacy. The Commissioners of today wish to produce their own legacy for the future by looking into the town's flood defences. The Environment Agency (EA) have considered many schemes, one being building a wall along the sea front but the Commissioners feel nobody would welcome that idea and that instead the East End bank should be lowered to allow surge tides to flow into slade marsh. This would require a wall to be built south to Warham/Stiffkey road from the north point bank to protect the south side of Wells from flooding. The local farmers would need to be compensated for loss of land, however with tide surges becoming more frequent, WHC feels this is the best approach.
 - The Maltings are installing an art trail. RS produced a piece for the trail which incorporates the town's old mortuary doors which RS saved during demolition works. The doors were refurbished and will be covered in Perspex with words written by RS. The piece along with the others will be judged for a prize of £1,000. If RS wins the prize he will donate it to charity.
 - The Port would still like to introduce a maritime trail at strategic places around the harbour. RS asked for anyone with graphic/art skills/sign writing that would like to help to come forward to assist with the design of the boards. The Port has refurbished one of the old transits in Pinewoods and erected a second as an artistic impression which would have originally been positioned on the beach to guide vessels into the harbour. Vessels would have lined the transits up which were lit by paraffin lights. They can be seen past the end of the beach huts.
 - The Port's bi-annual newsletter *The Haven* is all produced in-house by Louise De Lisle with input from the Commissioners. It was introduced as an original idea from Commissioner Adrian Underwood as the articles that were being sent to *The Quay* for publication were being edited and the Port felt the news was not being delivered as we would have liked. *The Haven* is distributed to all local households and RS felt it was one of the best things the harbour has done in years.
 - RS is currently writing his history and tales of Wells Harbour book which has been spoken about for many years and will be published hopefully in September. There are a couple more chapters to write. Many people have contributed photos and the book has been written from the Port's archives and local tales.
- AF thanked RS for his comprehensive report.
 - Questions and Answer session:

Questions sent in advance

1) Peter Allen (not present)

The new proposed/planning application (officially posted on site yesterday) is for a glass barrier surrounding the office. This will be both unsightly and very expensive. The Harbour Office is a Wells landmark and a listed building. It is strongly linked with our town's heritage for providing many years of life saving by our local RNLI volunteer service. Proposals such as this are subjective but it is vitally important that such inappropriate projects need a more

objective view. Why is it considered necessary to provide further flood defences for the Harbour Office?

Answered by Robert Smith:

The Harbour Office (Old Lifeboat House) operated as a lifeboat house between 1868 and 1880 then was moved to its current position south at the spit. The Harbour Office is an historic building and does need protecting (hence the panels). Doing nothing is not an option. It was badly flooded in the 2013 tidal surge up to 1.7m inside and the Commissioners were informed that it was lucky that the flood water did not enter the building as the pressure of water on the outside structure could have imploded the building and collapsed. The Commissioners feel very strongly that we do need to improve the flood defence perimeter wall which was built to the 1953 flood height but was topped in 2013. The Commissioners have looked at raising the building but this was too expensive and to build on the side of the office was not favoured as NNDC wanted a modern extension which the Commissioners felt was out of character with the building/quay. Alternatives were considered and glass flood panels which people can still see through is the favoured option.

2) Julian Trott (not present)

I read with interest about the parking enforcement rule changes regarding number plate recognition. I can't help but wonder if there was the option to pay for parking by the hour there would be fewer people parking without purchasing a ticket. I feel that whilst £4.50 represents good value if parking for a whole day, it represents poor value if one only needs to park for a much shorter time. Parking in Wells can be very tricky, especially during busy times and I am sure I am not alone in begrudging paying £4.50 to park for an hour. I am obviously aware that both NNDC car parks in Wells offer short term parking but the location of the quayside car park makes it an attractive proposition for convenient short term parking.

Answered by Robert Smith:

If WHC were to offer parking by the hour it would require someone all the time checking the tickets. The Commissioners did look at the best system as so many people were not buying a ticket. Yes the quay is very popular with its vista but many people are parking up to purchase fish and chips and not paying. We do not provide free parking for visitors to the retail food outlets. There are other car parks for short term parking and disabled badge holders can park on the road.

3) Paul Cox (not present)

In the past Wells was a thriving Port with working granaries and maltings and cargo vessels coming and going with coal and sugar beet. The local fishing boats moored off the east end quay where they had whelk houses in which to keep their gear, such as pots, ropes and net. Silting up of the channel made this unfeasible so now they moor in the main quay and not all have whelk houses so now stack everything on the quay making it look very cluttered. This is detrimental to the outlook and view of the marshes, one of the greatest assets of the holiday port we have become. Why don't the fisherman put their gear in their boats ready for when they go to sea?

Answered by Robert Smith:

RS stated this was not the first time this has been raised and many people ask why the Commissioners allow this to happen. The fishing boats could not moor on the main quay years ago as there were coasters that moored at the quay and the fishermen had boiling sheds for their whelks at the east end. Things have changed and fishing boats have got bigger. WHC is a fisheries port and the Commissioners are proud for this to continue. Fishing is a tradition in the town and so the Commissioners support the fishing fleet and have allowed the narrow part of the car park which used to have 20 parking spaces to be used as a fisherman's parking area. There is a verbal agreement that fishermen should not leave their rubbish on the quay but RS feels that the pots add to the character of the quay. So only pots, fishing boxes and anchors are permitted but all rubbish has to be taken away. The sight of this fishing gear is often a tourist attraction with people taking photos. A young 17 year old man has just purchased his own boat and is learning the trade. RS is impressed how the other fishermen have rallied to help him and it is encouraging that young people will continue the trade for the future. AF commented that there were more pots than normal as some fishermen lost gear in the *beast from the east* weather front and are still trying to locate it. The pots cost £2,000 per shank and if the gear cannot be found then the new pots on the quay will be set to replace them. Within the next two weeks those pots will probably go to sea as they will have to write off the old pots. RS stated that if asked them, the fishermen would move the pots but he does not feel it is necessary to ask.

4) Sue Riseborough (not present)

This will be my fourth year as volunteer gilly patrol and I have only been screamed at once during that time, I think that isn't too bad. This year I have again asked Sowerby's Holiday Cottages to display our notice in every one of their Wells holiday cottages as they have kindly done for us before. I have also checked the nets at every shop that sells gillying equipment in Wells and no-one is now selling the nets with the white plastic and springs. One of the shops mentioned that they have started a scheme whereby if the member of public returns the equipment they will give a part refund. Mel Catton has asked for signs to be made (a bit smaller than A3) for each of the shops to display near the nets saying "Please dispose of your gillying/crabbing equipment responsibly" Is this something Wells Harbour can do?

Answered by Robert Smith:

Plastic gillying gear is a massive problem to the harbour. The Commissioners do not wish to stop the pastime but it has become so popular that a huge amount of plastic buckets are sold along with drop nets. In years gone by a piece of string with a whelk on the end would have been used. It is shocking how much plastic is picked up in the creeks and around the harbour. WHC are trying to work with the shops and one shop has stated they would stop selling the drop nets if the other retailers did the same, however we cannot expect that to happen. The answer is to educate the public and ask the public not to buy the drop nets. As the retailers have purchased their stock already for the coming season WHC will ask them to stop stocking them for next year. Sue is a vital asset for educating the public and in her patrol stops and speaks to the public ensuring there is enough water in their buckets and not too many crabs crammed in them and this is to be applauded. Last year the gilly hut hired out over 3,000 buckets which is a start. RS confirmed he would be happy to issue more signs if this would help the problem of plastic disposal.

Questions from the floor

5) Richard Cracknell

Thanked RS for his presentation. Richard stated he was speaking as the former lifeboat secretary, former commissioner of Norfolk Schools association and as a local resident. He stated we already had a very good coast path here to the east and the town did not need another one. The creeks are a good training area for sailing and a lovely place to be and he would hate to see it closed to the public and that young people should have the opportunity to enjoy it as others have done before them.

Answered by Robert Smith:

RS stated that there is no way by law that that NE can stop the harbour authority from allowing stakeholders to sail in the creeks. There is a habitats directive that overrides all other legislation but that is to do with breeding birds. The tides cover the marsh within the harbour on spring tides and birds do not nest there. WHC are still fighting the public closure and feel it is important to keep it open for future generations.

6) Bernie Philpot

Asked if there would be a card facility under the new car park arrangements and if people put deck chairs out who would police that.

Answered by Robert Smith:

One of the current car machines (opposite French's) has a card payment facility and when the new machines are installed there will be an option to pay by card over the phone. Regarding chairs the harbour staff will continue to move people on to the seating area of the quay.

7) Member of the public (unknown)

There is ample evidence nationally that number plate recognition cameras are a shark practice leading to excessive charges and obstructions in the appeals process, what has WHC done to ensure that the company doesn't operate this way?

Answered by Robert Smith:

WHC looked at several companies and also negotiated a reduction in the term of the contract from five years to two years so that if it wasn't working WHC can come out of the contract quickly. There will also be plenty of signage in strategic places so nobody will be able to say that they were not aware of the charges.

8) Paula Baldry

Will WHC still maintain control in terms of closing the car park for events such as the Triathlon?

Answered by Robert Smith:

Yes WHC can nominate days when we can close the car park. Also the car park charges will only start from 8am so the local people who drive onto the quay in the morning to enjoy the view before they go to work can still continue to do so provided they are off the quay by 8am.

9) Joan Price

What about visitors to the Harbour Office on official business?

Answered by Robert Smith:

If on official business, the Harbour Office can take the number plate and avoid a fine being issued. In addition there will be 10mins before a fine will be issued so if just coming in and going out it should not be an issue. People on official business should contact the Harbour Office in advance to give their registration number.

10) Alan Cooper

What about the fishermen?

Answered by Robert Smith:

There is no change in the parking arrangements for the fishermen, they have a permit for one car now and that will continue. Registration numbers will be input into the system to avoid parking fines and they can free flow like the harbour staff. Cameras will be positioned to capture any cars attempting to enter the fishermen's area to avoid buying a ticket.

11) Peter Walsingham

What about travellers, what plans are in place to avoid getting travellers on the quay?

Answered by Robert Smith:

If we are aware there are travellers in the area we lock the gates. Last year travellers entered the quay and the gates were locked, the travellers then got irate as they could not leave, so were told that the gates were always locked at 10pm, even though this is not true. The travellers were incensed that they were locked in, not that others could not get in, so the gates were opened and they left. WHC has considered locking the gates at night but day tickets go to midnight and WHC does not have the staff to come down after midnight to lock the gates. Holkham had an issue with travellers on their land as well, so if any member of the public has any ideas on how to prevent access the Commissioners would be happy to hear them.

12) Simon Lill

There are a lot of unsightly rocks on the west bank, can anything be done about them?

Answered by Robert Smith:

Following the 1978 floods rocks were placed there to underpin the bank and add protection. The rocks have moved and an attempt could be made to try to put them back with a mini digger. The rocks do form part of the sea defence. Old wooden posts from 1800s have also started to appear from the scouring of the west bank, and one stakeholder wanted them removed, however they also provide protection to the bank and are a part of history. Stakeholders need to avoid getting too close to the bank.

13) Martin Kemp

Are there any plans to reinstate the maritime museum?

Answered by Robert Smith:

The Maltings will have maritime exhibits which will have changing themes. There are no plans to have a maritime museum by WHC. The old museum exhibits went initially to Holkham and were then passed over to the Maltings/congregational hall for storing. However squatters at the congregational hall stole and sold off the items of value. The local history group took what they wanted and the Maltings sold off other items of value to raise funds leaving items of little value.

- Andy Frary`
 - Thanked stakeholders for their questions and invited Robert Smith to talk about the Wells Harbour Maritime Trust.
- Robert Smith (RS)- Wells Harbour Maritime Trust (WHMT)
 - WHMT is the Commissioners registered charity and all serving Commissioners are now trustees
 - Kayak safaris are organised each year, initially kayak experiences were organised for the local schools but these are now extended for adults. Of the two this year, one is fully booked for borrowing kayaks and there is only one space left on the other. Natural England like the events as they take the public out in a responsible manner. Some stakeholders do not like them and state WHMT should not be taking people onto the marshes.
 - The existing lifeboat house will be replaced with a new building in a different position. There have been discussions on what will happen to the current building. WHC does have concerns about the removal of the foundations as this could make the spit unstable and the Outer Harbour vulnerable. Certain parties would like the building to remain and Holkham are keen for it to remain also providing opportunities for local groups such as WHMT, Wells Sea Cadets, and Wells Sailing Club to use the building.
 - Traditionally local children were sent on courses via funding from WHMT. With the closure of local sailing schools this is proving problematic. The Trust needs somewhere to run courses and are looking into whether they could run their own school in the summer season.
 - The fund has provided training in the past and one individual who received two courses is now going to work for WHC as part of beach patrol this summer.
 - The Gilly Hut will be run again this year, there have been problems finding people willing to work at the hut hiring out gear but we now have three people, two of which are young adults.

Andy Frary

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

Meeting closed 8.30pm