

Minutes of the Meeting of the **TOURISM AND ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITTEE** held at the Town Hall on **Monday 26th June 2006** at **10.00 a.m.**

Chairman: -

Councillor Mrs C Gainsborough Swanage Town Council

Present: -

Councillor Mrs C A Bartlett Swanage Town Council

Councillor C R Bright Swanage Town Council

Councillor Mrs J Farrow Swanage Town Council

Councillor Mrs G A Marsh Swanage Town Council

Councillor M W Pratt Swanage Town Council

Councillor Mrs A Turner Swanage Town Council

Mr A Leeson

Town Clerk

Mrs A Holmes

Tourist Information Centre
Manager

Dr M Ayres

Assistant Town Clerk

Ms N Elston

Purbeck Tourism Officer

Mr N Brown

Swanage Railway

Mr R Johnson

Swanage Pier

Mr H Murray

Durlston Country Park

(until 11.20 a.m.)

Mr A Power

Swanage & Purbeck Holiday
Accommodation Association

Rev J Wood

Association of Churches Together
in Swanage

In addition to Committee Members and officers, one member of the public attended the Meeting.

Public Participation Time

i) A question was asked concerning what action the Council was taking to ensure public safety on the newly recharged beach, given the presence of large wooden splinters in the sand. It was noted that the Town Council had not yet officially taken back control of the beach from the contractors, and that a formal complaint had been lodged with Purbeck District Council.

1) Apologies

An apology for his inability to attend the meeting was received from Councillor Hadley.

2) Matters arising from Minutes of the Meeting held on 27th March 2006

It was noted that Item 4) b) of the Purbeck Tourism Officer's report should have been headed 'Dorset Destination Management System', not 'Dorset Destination Management Organisation'.

Further to Minute 6), the representative of the Swanage and Purbeck Holiday Accommodation Association supported the concerns raised over the level of car parking charges in Swanage.

3) **Destination Management Organisation Proposals**

Ms Elston provided a detailed report on the formation of Destination Management Organisations (DMOs), which form part of South West Tourism's 'Towards 2015' tourism strategy. Currently, the tourism industry is co-ordinated by a large number of organisations, partly or wholly funded by local authorities. The aim is to create a more streamlined and cost-effective structure by encouraging these bodies to work more closely under the umbrella of a DMO. These will lead the development of tourism action plans, provide e-tourism services, carry out research, provide information through Tourist Information Centres, and provide advice and support to business.

South West Tourism has undertaken research that highlighted two DMOs as being most beneficial to visitors to Dorset, one for Bournemouth and Poole and another for Dorset. Research undertaken with local tourism businesses showed widespread approval for a move towards a wider Dorset delivery mechanism, with the exception of the provision of Tourist Information Centres. Discussions have recently been held concerning the formation of a steering group to help shape the organisation, which it is hoped will be industry led.

The Town Clerk highlighted the potential impact of a new DMO on the Town Council, including ensuring that the Council's website is compatible with any wider system, and merging holiday guides. It was acknowledged that at present no final decision had been made on the establishment of a DMO, its form, membership or funding.

4) **Tourism Reports**

Ms Elston reported on the following matters:-

a) **Holiday Guide**

Preparation of the 2007 Holiday Guide is underway, incorporating a new design, new images and new editorial. For the second year this will include inspected accommodation only. There will be a print run of approximately 90,000 copies.

b) **Green Tourism Business Scheme**

Dorset and the New Forest Tourism Partnership is encouraging businesses who have expressed an interest to apply for the Green Tourism Business Scheme. Chiltern Lodge at Worth Matravers was the first business in the District to obtain the silver standard.

c) **Purbeck Tourism Strategy**

The District Council is currently in the process of writing a new strategy for tourism in Purbeck, that will run until the formation of a DMO. The Town Council will be consulted on this in due course.

Mrs Holmes reported on the following matters:-

a) **Visitor Numbers**

Overall, visitor numbers to the Tourist Information Centre were higher last year, although footfall in May 2006 was down by 3,000 visitors on the previous year.

b) **Beach Huts**

Although there is some availability for Shore Road beach bungalows prior to 15th July, thereafter they are fully booked until 9th September. The Spa bungalows are also heavily booked during the school holidays.

c) **Tourism Touchscreen**

A Tourism Touchscreen is to be installed in the Tourist Information Centre within the next six to eight weeks. This will enable visitors to access information on accommodation, attractions and where to eat 24 hours a day.

d) **E-mails**

This year was the first year that the Tourist Information Centre has monitored its e-mails, and just under 5,000 were processed.

e) **Beach Management Committee**

The Town Council held its first Beach Management Committee Meeting on 6th June 2006. This has been convened to ensure compliance with new criteria for the 'Blue Flag' award scheme and to encourage the participation of local stakeholders. Subjects discussed included problems with moorings, the position of the 5-knot marker buoys, the lack of signage warning boat users of divers around the pier, litter collection, seaweed around the fishermen's huts and lifeboat slipway, the feeding of seagulls, and launching from the parish slipway.

Councillor Mrs Marsh, Chairman of the Beach Management Committee, provided a brief update of the steps that were being taken to follow up the action points from the meeting.

The representative of the Swanage and Purbeck Holiday Accommodation Association enquired whether it was possible to establish written terms of reference for the Committee.

5) **Reports from Outside Organisations**

a) **Durlston Country Park**

Mr Murray reported that the recent Dawn to Dusk event had been a great success and that the outdoor theatre event held on 25th June had been very well attended. Overall attendance figures were up by 10 per cent on last year and participation in guided walks is increasing. The Country Park has also recently been inspected for a 'Green Flag' award, the equivalent of a 'Blue Flag' for open spaces.

The final edition of the Durlston Management Plan has been published and the Heritage Lottery Fund Bid was submitted at the end of April. A Dry Stone Walling Training Centre is being established as part of the bid. The Park is also in the process of attaining National Nature Reserve Status.

The Tourist Information Centre Manager enquired about the possibility of re-establishing the shuttle bus service to the Country Park that had been a success last year. Mr Murray stated that there were problems of funding and finding volunteers. However, a flat rate had been agreed with local taxi operators.

b) **Association of Churches Together in Swanage**

Revd Wood reported on an art exhibition currently being held in the Parish Church, and that he anticipated this use continuing in the future. He also stated his desire to explore the way that the churches are portrayed in the Holiday Guide.

c) **Swanage & Purbeck Holiday Accommodation Association**

Mr Power noted that work was in progress in merging the different ratings for holiday accommodation.

d) **Swanage Railway**

Mr Brown reported that there had been a slight increase in visitor numbers this year. Most visitors now travelled to Swanage from Norden. With reference to the proposed Wareham link-up, it was noted that the first stage of the new rail franchise would be announced in October. If this was to result in a new franchise holder then discussion on the link would have to start over again.

e) **Swanage Pier**

Mr Johnson recorded that visitor numbers are steadily increasing. Further to concerns expressed over the safety of divers, it was recorded that divers are warned of the dangers of straying outside of the vicinity of the pier. New warning signs have also been purchased. An update was given on the 'gribble worm' and the inability of the steamers to use the pier this year.

6) **Any Other Matters**

i) The representative of the Swanage and Purbeck Holiday Accommodation Association returned to the issue of charges for car parking in Swanage. He reported that many guests had complained about the restrictions on on-street parking and the cost of parking in the car parks, especially at peak season. Concern had also been raised over the apparent increase in traffic wardens during the busiest periods. It was questioned whether the Town Council could explore if car parking charges are deterring visitors to the town.

The Town Clerk stated that a questionnaire had been issued three years ago as part of the Best Value Review of car parks. Car Parking charges are monitored on an ongoing basis as part of the District Auditor's requirement for ongoing review. This question could therefore be put to the next meeting of the Car Parks Best Value Review Working Group and the new Finance and Performance Management Working Group will also examine usage figures for car parks.

The number of excess charge tickets issued was also questioned. The Town Clerk replied that this is monitored and that it is the Town Council's policy to reduce the number of tickets issued. However, the Clerk stated that the County Council's enforcement of on-street parking regulations is a matter of concern. He understood that the traffic wardens did have a greater presence during busier periods because that is when traffic management problems are at their worst.

The representative of the Swanage and Purbeck Holiday Accommodation Association requested information on fines levied by the County Council and the Town Clerk stated that it should be possible to access such information through the regular meetings with County Council officers.

It was noted that the Town Council had been responsive to concerns over car parking, having reduced the period during which the summer season charges are payable. Some car parks had also been made free of charge in the winter. The decision to introduce a peak season charge during July and August in Broad Road Car Park had been taken because spaces were over-subscribed and the Council has a duty to maximise its income under Best Value.

- ii) The representative of the Swanage and Purbeck Holiday Accommodation Association enquired whether there had been an increase in the casual tipping of litter, following the District Council's introduction of a fortnightly collection. He provided anecdotal evidence that household rubbish had been emptied into public bins, and asked whether there was any data on this. The Town Clerk stated that there should be information available, although possibly not at town level. It was also noted that wider powers were now available to local authorities under the Clean Neighbourhoods Act and that the District Council now had an officer dedicated to enforcement. It was suggested that the representative of the Swanage and Purbeck Holiday Accommodation Association put his concerns to the District Council Overview and Scrutiny Group's Clean and Tidy Review.
- iii) Concern was expressed at the number of buoys appearing at the north end of the bay. It was reported that this was outside of the jurisdiction of the Moorings Association and that the agent of the Crown Estates has been alerted to this issue.
- iv) The time of the Tourism and Environmental Committee meetings was discussed, and it was noted that 10 a.m. had been agreed with a previous representative of the Swanage and Purbeck Holiday Accommodation Association as a convenient time for its members. There was some support for moving the meetings forward to 9.30 a.m., in line with other Council Committee meetings, but it was agreed that those not in attendance should be consulted before any decision was made.
- v) The Chairman provided an update on Swanage in Bloom. It was noted that the regional judging would be carried out on 14th July and the Britain in Bloom judging on 9th August.

The meeting closed at 11.45 a.m.
