

Minutes of a Meeting of the **BEACH MANAGEMENT
ADVISORY COMMITTEE** held at the Town Hall, Swanage,
on **WEDNESDAY 8th FEBRUARY 2023** at **2.15 p.m.**

In Attendance: Councillor M Bonfield – Chairman
Councillor C Tomes

Ms B Betts – Environmental Advice Manager, Dorset Council
Mr B Compton – Ocean Bay Watersports
Mr E Fox – RNLI Lifeguard Supervisor
Mr R Lloyd – Land and Wave
Mr P Loudoun – Seaweed Removal Contractor
Mr S MacMillan Pratt - Swanage NCI
Mr A Mears – Wessex Water
Mr P Palmer - Pierhead Watersports
Mr G Richardson - RNLI
Mr D Roper – Swanage and District Angling Club

Councillor T Foster
Councillor C Moreton
Councillor M Whitwam
Dr M Ayres – Town Clerk
Mrs E Evans – Democratic Services Officer
Mr C Milmer – Visitor Services & Business Development Manager
Mrs G Percival – Assets and Compliance Manager

There were eight members of the public and two members of the local press present at the meeting. In addition, six pupils and two teachers from St Mary's Catholic Primary school were in attendance.

Public Participation Time

The following matters were raised:-

- **Sea swimming in Swanage Bay**– It was stated that sea swimming had increased dramatically over the past two years. It was reported that the closure of the southern section of Shore Road over the winter period was useful in providing a safer environment and it was hoped the trial closure would become permanent. A query was raised as to whether the showers situated outside the public conveniences in Shore Road could be made available to use all year round and it was noted that the area on the pavement around the showers had become very slippery where the anti-slip paint had deteriorated. In response it was stated that these items would be discussed under Agenda item No.7). An independent swimming coach noted the benefits of sea swimming on mental health, wellbeing and physical health. Members of BMAC were invited to attend a talk by Dr Mark Harper, to be held at the Mowlem Theatre in June, where the benefits would be explored in further detail. A query was raised around the designated bathing zones and whether the area could be extended in size or two separate zones put in place.

- **St Mary's Catholic Primary School, questions from pupils –**
 - Shore Road closure** – It was queried whether the southern section of Shore Road would remain closed on a permanent basis. In response it was stated that the closure was a trial undertaken by Dorset Council and that if the road closure became permanent it may be part of a larger scheme to improve the seafront area. There would be an opportunity for people to contribute through public consultation.
 - RNLI Lifeguards** – A question was raised regarding the length of time the lifeguards were in operation on Swanage Beach. In response it was stated that the lifeguards operated during the busier times of the year. It was noted that the lifeguards had a station on the beach and managed not only danger at sea but also administered first aid and assisted with beach safety.
 - Beach activities** – It was queried why beach sports such as volleyball or bowls were not played on Swanage beach. In response it was stated that Swanage had a relatively small area in which to play and that during the busiest time in the summer there could be more than 3,000 people on the beach.
 - Dogs on the beach** – A question was asked as to why dogs were not allowed on the beach in the summer. In response it was noted that as part of the Blue Flag award scheme dogs were not permitted on the beach to keep the beach cleaner and free from dog mess. It was noted that there were other areas available to walk dogs including Monkey Beach and North Beach.
 - North Beach** – A query was raised around the erosion at North beach and cliff stability and whether anything could be done to prevent further rock falls. In response it was stated that this area is the responsibility of private landowners, although informal advice and guidance was provided by a team of specialists who worked under Dorset Council. It was noted that erosion was a natural process and would continue to occur.
 - Seafront Improvements** – A question was asked regarding the designs for the next phase of seafront improvements. In response it was stated that the public were encouraged to participate in forthcoming consultation events to express what they would like to see. It was noted that councillors would consider the plans and costs before a decision was made.
- The chairman thanked all the pupils for their input and praised the children for their confidence in speaking publicly. The pupils were encouraged to draw pictures of what they would like to see on the seafront and beach and a follow up meeting would be arranged for the chairman and Visitor Services and Business Development Manager to visit the school and view their work.

1) **Apologies**

Apologies for their inability to attend the meeting were received from Councillor C Finch, Mr I Brown (Coastguard Station Officer), Mr J Deare (North Beach Representative), Mr T Greasty (Designated Bathing Zone Representative), Mr R Marsh (Stone Quay Representative), Mr M Penny (Dorset Council), Mr H Potter (Swanage Pier Trust), Mr D Turnbull (Swanage Lifeboat), and Mr C Wiggins (Beach Concessions Representative).

2) **To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the Meeting of the Beach Management Advisory Committee held on 19th October 2022**

Proposed by Councillor Bonfield and AGREED:-

That the Minutes of the Beach Management Advisory Committee Meeting held on 19th October 2022 be approved as a correct record.

3) **To note the approved Terms of Reference and Representation of Outside Bodies**

The Draft Terms of Reference, circulated prior to the meeting, were noted. It was suggested that sea swimmers be included on the list of outside representatives. In response it was noted that if the local swimmers formed a group or organisation then this could be considered.

4) **Swanage Seafront Masterplan – update**

An update was provided by the Visitor Services and Business Development Manager (VSBDM) which included the following points:

- Over one thousand responses to the survey had been received.
- Various engagement events and activities had been held.
- The engagement stage had been completed and Dorset Coast Forum were putting together a draft strategy.
- The strategy would be subject to further public engagement later in the year.

5) **Blue Flag award**

The VSBDM provided information regarding the Blue Flag award, which included:

- Swanage was one of the first locations to be awarded the Blue Flag in 1987, one of 12 beaches.
- The Blue Flag application was submitted at the end December 2022 and it is hoped that Swanage beach will be awarded the Blue Flag once again in 2023.
- The application requires the following to be submitted:
 - a land and water based risk assessment;
 - evidence of accurate information provided to beach users;
 - emergency protocols (lost children, etc.);
 - excellent water quality as tested weekly by the Environment Agency in the previous year;
 - a standard operating procedure for the beach;
 - various other commitments around litter picking, dogs, facilities etc.
- The application for the award is paid for by Swanage Town Council.

Members and representatives were encouraged to contact the VSBDM for copies of any documents.

6) **Seafront events**

Further to the Events list 2023, circulated prior to the meeting, it was noted that over the past few months some interesting events had been held, which included:

- Candles on the Beach – Lewis Manning.
- Boxing Day Dip – thanks to #Willdoes for organising the event.
- Two running events – one event attracted 700 runners, supported by family and friends and last weekend the event attracted 400 runners.

During 2023 some new events would be held:

- 15th July – A new swim race from Monkey Beach to Burlington Chine and back organised by a local wild swimming company. The swimming company are considering a wild swimming festival for 2024.
- 30th September – Swanage Supervets Rowing Regatta – not a new event, however, held on a new date and will be hosting the ‘CPGA Championship’, a national event.

7) **Sea swimming - increase in year round activity**

The VSBDM reported that there had been an unprecedented increase in numbers of people swimming in the sea over last two years which posed both opportunities and risks.

The increase in year-round sea swimming had created a vibrant seafront in the winter, and the road closure had helped to increase safety and encourage use. It was anticipated that the proposed Seafront Masterplan would include elements to support this activity, particularly as the Dorset Coast Forum survey responses had shown support for year-round swimming.

The VSBDM responded to questions raised which included whether consideration could be given to the installation of a webcam, to enable swimmers to view the sea prior to visiting the beach. In response it was noted that the installation and use of a webcam posed some concern regarding GDPR, furthermore, Swanage Coastwatch and RNLI had webcams installed at their locations which could be accessed by the public.

In response to the query raised during public participation time regarding the slippery area around the showers, it was noted that Dorset Council had initially completed the works and would need to be contacted in the first instance. In response to the request for an extension to the shower operating times it was noted that the pipes were prone to freezing over winter and it was suggested that this item be referred to the Tourism and Local Economy Committee to discuss further.

A query was raised around water pollution warnings, and in response it was stated that the Town Council receives water quality data from the Environment Agency daily between 1st May and 30th September, via an email at 9.00 a.m. with advisory signs placed outside the Swanage Information Centre by 10.30 a.m. Attention was drawn to the fact that there could be different data available via a widely-used swimmers app and that published by Wessex Water. It was noted that Wessex Water would provide information regarding overflow usage, and should Members wish to receive that information they could contact the representative with their email address. In addition, the Wessex Water representative offered to provide a workshop for a group of sea swimmers to further explain the sewerage system in Swanage, which was welcomed.

8) **RNLI Lifeguards – service provision for the 2023 season**

The VSBDM provided some information regarding the RNLI Lifeguard provision in Swanage which included:

- Lifeguards are part-funded by the Town Council and will cost £29,000 for the period end of May to early September.
- The cost increased by 14% over the last year in line with inflation.
- The Town Council funds approximately 40% of the cost of the service with the remainder paid for by the RNLI.
- The Town Council has been advised that over the next few years the RNLI anticipated an increase to the contribution made by the Town Council, or consideration would be needed to offer a reduced service.

At 3.10 p.m. the Chairman invoked standing order No.1 p. to suspend the meeting so as to allow the members of public present to address the Advisory Committee, and respond to questions regarding/relevant to Agenda item 8).

During this time queries were raised around extending the lifeguard season. In response, it was stated that there would be financial constraints to lengthening the time of lifeguard provision on Swanage beach which currently ran from 27th May until 10th September. The RNLI Lifeguard representative explained that part of their role was beach safety assessment as well as water safety and added that informative talks

regarding open water swimming safety and workshops regarding beach safety were available.

9) **Planned seafront repairs**

The Assets and Compliance Manager reported on the following planned seafront repairs:

- Environment Agency – temporary flood defence barriers to be removed 29th March 2023 for 3 days. The barrier at the top of the parish slipway would remain in place.
- Repairs to Stone Quay, Parish Slipway and Main Beach slipway would be undertaken 17th April 2023 and anticipated to take 3 weeks.

It was noted that the works would be advertised through social media to ensure members of the public were made aware.

10) **Update from the Visitor Services and Business Development Manager**

The VSBDM provided an update which included:

- **B Scan Unit** – it was reported that a B scan unit, a low-level laser which records information about the beach profile shape and elevation, had been installed near the Mowlem at the end of January. The data collected will be used to provide detailed information about wave overtopping and inform potential flood defence schemes.
- **Beach Huts** – it was noted that the beach huts were nearly full for the summer period. The new beach hut booking system had worked well and had provided an easier method to book online which had led to an increase in bookings.
- **Boat Park** – Officers anticipated a large uptake this year. Major improvements had been made which included:
 - new permanent member of staff to oversee the boat park;
 - water points to be installed at key locations;
 - a dedicated boat park customer telephone number;
 - a range of safety improvements.
- **Staffing** – Currently recruiting staff for the roles of Seafront Advisor and within the Swanage Information Centre along with a Boat Park Attendant.

11) **Updates from representatives/organisations**

- **Swanage NCI** – a query was raised regarding the 5-knot buoy installation and the position of the buoys. In response, it was noted that the buoy installation and period of time they were deployed was a licenced activity under the MMO. It was agreed that a letter should be sent highlighting the importance of the 5-knot buoys.
- **Wessex Water** – an information sheet had been circulated regarding the storm overflow plan for 2025 and the future, following DEFRA's storm overflow reduction plan. Proposals to produce near-real time storm overflow discharge data and information regarding the discharge data from 2022. It was noted that the length of time of a discharge did not influence it being recorded.
- **Swanage and District Angling Club** – The Angling Club awards ceremony had taken place this year with the Town Mayor presenting the awards.
- **Land and Wave** – now employed 24 instructors and 6 undertaking lifeguard training. Land and Wave operating in Swanage, Portland, Poole and Bournemouth.
- **Ocean Bay Watersports** – Jet ski hire was quieter than the previous year.

- **Bay Safety Patrol** – it was reported that updated speed control legislation would soon come into force enabling action to be taken against jet skis as well as boats that exceeded 5 knots within the controlled zone.
- **Pierhead Watersports** – business as usual.
- **Sailing Club** – it was reported that a sea defence wall had been installed and various national events would be held in Swanage.
- **RNLI Lifeguards** – Currently undertaking recruitment for two roles. Lifeguard provision will commence on Swanage beach from 27th May 2023.
- **RNLI** – it was noted that due to changes in Studland Bay moorings, boats were anchoring in Swanage Bay which displaced an area historically used by water skiers. It was noted that some boat users would anchor inconsiderately. It was suggested that this be referred to the Tourism and Local Economy Committee or to the Swanage and Studland Bay Water safety meetings.
- **Swanage Seafront Masterplan** – further public engagement would take place following the completion of the draft seafront strategy document, anticipated to be publicly available in June/July.

12) Items of information and matters for forthcoming agendas

The following items were noted for a future agenda.

- a) Swanage Town Centre Flood Defences
It was noted that the work was ongoing.
- b) Strengthening Enforcement of the Dangerous Use of Recreational and Personal Watercraft - Consultation Update

The information was noted, and it was reported that the work of the Swanage and Studland Bay Water safety group had been recognised at a national level.

13) Date of next meeting

The next meeting would be held on Wednesday 21st June 2023 at 2.15 p.m.

The meeting closed at 3.55 p.m.
