

Minutes of the Meeting of the **TOURISM AND ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITTEE** held at the Town Hall, Swanage on **MONDAY, 30th SEPTEMBER, 2002** at **10.00 a.m.**

PRESENT:-

Councillor Mrs C. Gainsborough JP - Chairman

Councillor Mrs C. Bartlett

Councillor Mrs J. Farrow

Councillor A. H. Miller - Town Mayor

Councillor J. Roscoe

Miss K. Black

Mrs. L . Fegan

Mr. C. Ferguson

Mr. R. Stimpson

Durlston Country Park

Swanage & Purbeck Holiday

Accommodation Association

Independent Hoteliers

Purbeck Tourism

1. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for their inability to attend the Meeting were received from Mrs. R. Nicholson, and Mr. G. Willey.

The Chairman introduced and welcomed Mrs Cherry Bartlett as a newly elected Member of the Town Council.

2. **MINUTES OF MEETING HELD – 1st JULY 2002**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 1st July 2002 were noted as approved.

3. **MATTERS ARISING FROM MINUTES OF MEETING HELD – 1st JULY 2002**

Arising from Minute No. 1, Councillor Roscoe requested that it be noted that, as he was present at the meeting, his name be deleted from those recorded as offering their apologies.

4. **WORLD HERITAGE**

The Clerk reported on the public meeting held on 16th September 2002 and summarised the issues raised as part of the presentation given by himself and Mr M. Turnbull on behalf of the Council's World Heritage Coast Partnership Working Group.

The main points included the challenge of managing increased numbers of visitors and capitalising on the new status, whilst maintaining the unique characteristics of the town.

The opportunities for implementing sustainable tourism through the introduction of an integrated transport policy, utilising the rail links to the national network, encouraging park and ride schemes, coaches, improving sea transport through use of the Swanage Pier were all highlighted.

The potential for the developing a working quarry concept as major educational interpretation and tourist attraction was highlighted. This could provide an opportunity for disabled access and all-year round interpretation of the rock forms, only normally accessible by sea. A further concept of quarrying for fossils, with stone as the by-product, was also proposed for consideration.

A general discussion ensued regarding the needs of the disabled and the formation

of pathways routes recently adopted at the Durlston Country Park, for use by specially adapted vehicles.

It was noted that the Council is seeking public feedback on all of the issues.

5. **MARKET PROPOSALS**

The Clerk reported on the Council's recent decision to invite two local reputable and established market operators to submit proposals for introducing a market, starting Easter 2003 for a period of twelve months, in Main Beach Car Park.

The Town Mayor highlighted the main findings of the Council's working party in anticipating an increase in visitor numbers, particularly out of season. It was also noted that, during the summer season, existing visitors were more likely to stay in Swanage rather than leaving to visit neighbouring market towns.

6. **FESTIVE LIGHTS**

The Town Mayor reported that pledges totalling over £16,500 had so far been made in response to the "Switch on Swanage" campaign started by Councillor Suttle, former Town Mayor, in association with the Lions Club of Swanage.

In addition to the Town Council's £4,000 general commitment, Mrs Fegan highlighted the involvement of her Association in giving £7,500 towards decorating the seafront area. It was also noted that the licensees and other establishments in the Lower High Street had purchased their own festive lighting following a separate appeal.

With the formation of Festive Lights Committee and the progress made to date, it was anticipated that there would be a proper display in the Town for Christmas 2002 and for its continued use throughout the year thereafter.

7. **TOURISM REPORT**

In the absence of Mrs. R. Nicholson, Tourism and Countryside Officer of Purbeck District Council, the Town Clerk presented a written report to the Meeting, detailing the following matters:-

(a)

Review of the Season

Improvement in occupancy levels had been recorded despite a poor start, due to weather in March and April. The continued loss of bed space was causing major concern. The loss of twelve establishments in the last two years equating to 112 rooms, 240 bed spaces and the loss of 1,700 visitors and many more potential visitors being turned away.

(b) **2003 Marketing Campaign**

The campaign was set to focus on low impact tourist i.e. high spend out of season visitors. The last-minute trade was expected to continue and the main advertising campaign was set to run between January and March 2003.

(c) **Holiday Guide 2003**

Revisions to the guide will include an emphasis on special interest groups, exploring the area without use of cars, and be split into credited and non-accredited sections for the first time.

(d)

Internet Site

Research had shown tourism to be the most popularly used section of the site. This section would be expanded further and developed in conjunction with the Town Council.

(e)

Tourism Seminar

Details of a potential subsidised training and business development proposals, provided by the Dorset and New Forest Partnership, were outlined. It was proposed that a joint tourism seminar be held to update small businesses on the impact of the Disability Discrimination Act.

(f)

Southern Tourist Board Merger

Details of the merger and confirmation of appointments of key figures were provided. Further details of the proposed structure, with creation of sub-regions were also outlined.

(g)

Right to Roam Legislation

A Countryside Agency's consultation exercise, including draft maps of proposed areas to be opened up for public access were currently being displayed at the District Council offices.

Feedback was requested in respect of areas within Swanage prior to the deadline of 3rd December 2002 with details of the public forum taking place at 2pm on 12th November 2002 at the Furzebrook village hall.

A detailed discussion ensued regarding the continued loss of accommodation property. The Tourism and Countryside Officer requested consideration of a proposal to attend planning board meetings to make representations at every opportunity in which existing accommodation premises were affected. It was noted that the situation was the product of the combined factors of high residential property prices and the changes in national planning policy, relaxing car space allocation requirements.

It was AGREED:-

That attendance at planning board meetings would serve no useful purpose.

A general debate followed, concerning the potential change in tourism trends, following the award of World Heritage status. Mrs Fegan stated that the Association fully supported the targeting of high quality tourism and stressed the importance of ensuring that the "product" offered should include shops and restaurateurs providing services as part of an extended season.

The creation of regional boards as part of the merger of Southern and South-Eastern Tourist Boards, was welcomed.

It was proposed by the Town Mayor, seconded by Councillor Roscoe and UNANIMOUSLY AGREED:-

To recommend that the Town Council maintain membership of the newly formed the Southern and South-Eastern Tourist Board.

8. **REPORTS FROM OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS**

(a)

Mr. R. Stimpson reported, on behalf of Purbeck Tourism that the "Where to Eat Guide" is to be produced again in 2003. The 2002 advertising campaign was not deemed to have been very effective.

The Purbeck Tourism AGM was noted as being scheduled to held on Monday 4th November 2002 at 2.00pm at the Harman's Cross village hall. The principle

speaker was announced as being Mr Malcolm Ball, Chairman of South-west Tourist Board.

- (b) Mr Ferguson reported on behalf of the Independent Hoteliers, that his members had recorded a good season following a poor start. The traffic congestion problems were highlighted and briefly discussed.

It was noted that a change to the National Trust's policy increasing mooring charges had had an adverse effect.

- (c) Mrs Fegan, representative for the Swanage & Purbeck Holiday Accommodation Association, highlighted the shortage of ground floor rooms available to provide access for disabled persons. Mrs Fegan commented that the litter situation was much improved, compared to previous years.

Concern was expressed regarding the lack public toilets in the town, after 8pm. It was suggested that a sign, giving directions to the alternative locations in Shore Road and at the Railway Station, be erected.

In response to a request to increase the winter opening hours at the Tourist Information Centre, the Clerk reported that the Council would consider the additional opening, particularly on Saturdays.

- (d) Miss Black reported that Durlston Country Park had been very busy, with a significant increase in the number of family visits. An influx in the use of the visitor centre was attributed to the school SAT exams and Purbeck Bird Week, held in September. A tramper buggy, for free use by the disabled, was now available. Details of the Wildlife for All Project were also given. This included proposals to create an easy access area and a new hide, attached to the Visitor Centre.

9. GENERAL

- (a) Mrs Fegan suggested that a World Heritage display area be created at the Tourist Information Centre.

- (b) The Chairman welcomed the appointment of Miss Alison Stockley as the newly appointed Tourist Information Centre Manager.

- (c) The Town Mayor offered congratulations to Mrs Gainsborough and the members of the Swanage in Bloom Committee on behalf of the Committee for becoming the first ever winners of the Small Coastal Resort Category in the Southern England in Bloom competition.

The meeting concluded at 11.55 am.
