

Minutes of a Meeting of the **TOURISM AND LOCAL ECONOMY COMMITTEE** held at The Grand Hotel, Burlington Road, Swanage on **WEDNESDAY 22nd NOVEMBER 2023** at **2.15 p.m.**

Chairman: -

Councillor C Tomes

Swanage Town Council

Present: -

Councillor T Foster

Swanage Town Council

Councillor C Finch

Swanage Town Council

Councillor C Moreton

Swanage Town Council

Councillor M Whitwam

Swanage Town Council

Outside Representatives: -

Ms L Bish

Grand Hotel (Swanage Chamber of Trade)

Ms K Black

Durlston Country Park

Ms T Churcher

National Trust

Mr P Sykes

Swanage Railway

Also Present: -

Dr M Ayres

Town Clerk

Mrs K Court

Administration Officer

Mrs E Evans

Democratic Services Officer

Mr C Milmer

Visitor Services and Business Development Manager

Mrs J Moulder

Business Development Support Officer

Ms G Percival

Assets and Compliance Manager

Ms S Tattersall

Visitor Services Assistant Manager

There were four members of the public present at the meeting.

Public Participation Time

The following matters were raised during Public Participation Time:-

- In respect of the Minutes of the Meeting of the Tourism and Local Economy Committee held on 5th July 2023, it was highlighted that under agenda item No. 9) (Potential commercial opportunities on Town Council land – To consider process for inviting expressions of interest for 2024) - the date noted within the timescale column stated that the next committee meeting was being held on 15th November 2023, as opposed to 22nd November 2023.
- Regarding Agenda item No. 7), queries were raised about the £40.00 administration fee and £50.00 maintenance fee. Comments were also made that the Private Sites annual fee should not be increased to £495.00.
- In respect of Agenda item No. 8 (b), a question was asked about the type of contract assigned to the Seafront Advisors e.g. Variable hours/zero hours contracts.

The Chairman welcomed members of Accessible Swanage group to the meeting and noted that they would provide an update under Agenda item No.8.

1) **Apologies**

Apologies for their inability to attend the Meeting were received from Councillor Bonfield, Mr R. Marsh (Swanage Fisherman's Association) and Mr M Norris (Swanage Museum). It was noted that Ms H Lagden, Visit Dorset, would no longer attend meetings of the committee but Visit Dorset representatives would maintain regular contact with the Visitor Services and Business Development Manager (VSBDM).

2) **Declarations of Interest**

Members were invited to declare their interests and consider any requests for Grants of Dispensations in accordance with Section 9 and Appendix B of the Council's Code of Conduct.

Agenda Item No. 8 a) - Councillor Tomes declared a pecuniary interest under the Code of Conduct by reason of being a private beach hut user.

3) **Matters arising from the Minutes of the Meeting of the Tourism & Local Economy Committee held on 5th July 2023**

In response to a query raised during public participation time regarding Minute No.9, it was explained that, since the meeting held in July, the date of the next meeting of the Tourism and Local Economy Committee had subsequently been rescheduled to 22nd November, which accounted for the different date in the Minutes. It was reported that additional time would be required to review the expressions of interest received and that the Property Panel would meet early December so that recommendations regarding these could be presented to the Extraordinary Meeting of the Council, being held on 18th December 2023.

4) **Matters arising from the Meeting of the Coastal Change and Beach Management Advisory Committee held on 1st November 2023**

An update had been circulated prior to the meeting and there were no matters raised.

5) **Tourism Marketing**

a) **Visit Swanage website – Update**

Further to Minute No. 5 (a) of the meeting of the Tourism & Local Economy Committee held on 5th July 2023, the Visitor Services and Business Development Manager (VSBDM) reported that a soft launch of the website was expected within a few weeks, and it was anticipated that the website would go 'live' on 23rd January 2024. It was noted that businesses in Swanage would be offered a free listing, and existing Visit Dorset members an enhanced listing to encourage business engagement with the new website. An open evening for Town Councillors and business owners to view the new site would be organised and further information provided in due course.

6) **Accessibility Working Party – Update**

Further to Minute No. 8) of the Tourism and Local Economy Committee meeting held on 5th July 2023, it was noted that the Accessible Swanage Group would be supported by the Town Council in its first year. It was acknowledged that the group had already provided invaluable input into projects such as the Green Seafront and Station Approach improvements.

A representative from the group explained that the group were working positively with businesses across Swanage to raise awareness, and had suggested improvements to ensure businesses were as accessible as possible. A suggestion had been made for the provision of quiet spaces and calm areas throughout the town, or in business premises, which could be of benefit to those sensitive to crowds and noise. It was noted that Accessible Swanage had established a Facebook page, which had attracted more interest in the aims and objectives of the group.

The Chairman thanked the group for its input and looked forward to working closely with the group to address accessibility issues.

7) **Beach Huts – To consider an allocation procedure for charity beach huts**

Further to Minute No. 11) of the meeting of the Tourism and Local Economy Committee held on 22nd March 2023, consideration was given to a briefing paper prepared by the VSBDM, which set out the procedures, and the financial implications to the Town Council, associated with the free use of beach huts by charities. It was noted that for the 2024-25 season two beach huts had been reserved for charity use, one on the upper level, and one on the lower level. The commercial cost of the beach huts for 2024-25 would be £1,769 (upper level) and £2,809 (lower level), a total of £4,578 (exc. VAT).

A query was raised around the accessibility of the beach huts, and in response it was confirmed that beach huts on the lower level had doors able to accommodate the width of wheelchairs. A further question was asked as to whether ‘not for profit’ organisations would be able to apply for the use of a hut.

A discussion ensued around the inclusion of ‘not for profit’ organisations within the application process. It was acknowledged that the community benefited from these organisations and Members were therefore minded to authorise this type of organisation to be included for the use of a charity beach hut.

Therefore, it was proposed by Councillor Finch, seconded by the Chairman and **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:**

That authority be provided to the Visitor Services and Business Development Manager to release the charity beach hut application form, to include ‘not for profit’ organisations, and allocate charity beach huts as set out in the briefing paper, subject to further deliberation at a meeting of the Beach Hut Working Party.

8) **Budget Setting 2024-25**

a) One-off budgets

Consideration was given to a briefing paper, prepared by the VSBDM, which set out the one-off revenue expenditure items as shown in the table below:

	Budget Proposal	£	Notes
1.	Storage facility for market equipment in Main Beach Car Park	£2,000	As detailed in Market report.
2.	TIC garden improvements including provision of ‘sail’ shade	£5,000	This will enhance the offer to customers and help mitigate the risks associated with putting up the gazebo outside the TIC each day.
3.	TIC replacement noticeboard	£2,500	The current TIC noticeboards, which are guaranteed for 5 years are now at least 7 years old. The marine environment is challenging, and they now let quite a bit of moisture in which damages the posters inside. The budget is for two replacement boards.
4.	Beach Safety Noticeboards	£3,000	There are three sets of boards along the seafront. While these were replaced in 2019 the refurbishment of the posts has not proven to be as effective as hoped and the posts have deteriorated significantly. Therefore, a budget is requested to replace the bottom of the three sets of posts.
5.	Laptop for TIC admin	£900	Laptop for TIC staff to use to work from home as required in support of administration duties.
6.	New Parasols for beach huts	£1,500	The parasols are rented out each year to beach hut customers and generally have a two-year payback period. The ones procured in 2018 are starting to reach the end of their life.

7.	RNLI Lifeguards	£3,378	See below
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It was noted that item No. 4) had subsequently been removed from the list, as the Beach Safety Noticeboards had not deteriorated as anticipated, and the Town Council's in-house maintenance team had rectified the posts.

Therefore, it was proposed by Councillor Finch, seconded by Councillor Foster and **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:**

That the one-off budget items, as outlined in the table above, No's 1, 2, 3, 5 and 6, only be approved.

Members considered No.7), the increase in costs of £3,378, to the provision of RNLI Lifeguards on Swanage Beach. An option had been considered to reduce the service with the cost differences outlined in the table below:

Service	Description	2023-24	2024-25	Diff to 2023-24
Current Lifeguard Service	Everyday from 25 th May to 8 th September	£29,064	£32,422	£3,378
Reduced Lifeguard Service	Weekends and holidays from 25 th May to 1 st September	-	£25,530	-£3,534

A discussion ensued around the potential risk to life should the service be reduced and it was therefore proposed by Councillor Finch, seconded by Councillor Whitwam and

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:

That the Town Council approves the budget for the RNLI Lifeguard service for 2024-25.

Further to his declaration under Minute No. 2) Councillor Tomes left the room during consideration of the following item. In the absence of the Committee Chairman, it was agreed that Councillor Foster would assume the Chair during consideration of the item.

Consideration was given to section 2.1 of the briefing paper, which outlined the contributions to the seafront made by the Private Site beach huts, and the suggested increase was set out in the table below:

	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
No. of huts	56	56	56
Fee	£405.00	£425.00	£495.00
Less VAT	£68	£71	£83
Less Rates	£129	£149	£174
Net Fee	£208	£206	£238
Less Maintenance	£50	£166	£50
Less Administration	£40	£40	£40
Contribution per hut	£118	-£1	£148
Total Contribution	£6,616	-£35	£8,281
Change in Contribution on 2022-23		-6,651	1,666
% diff - fee		4.94%	16.47%
RPI		13.40%	8.90%

It was noted that the 56 private site beach hut charges supported the Council's costs in the running and maintenance of the beach. A contribution of around £6,616 in 2022-23 was made after VAT, business rates, maintenance of the staging and administration.

It was noted that due to the November storm damage to the staging, the forecast for 2023-24 would see a loss to the Council, and consideration of future storm damage needed to be considered.

It was noted that the huts were liable for business rates and the Council has been advised that an increase from £7,235.50 in 2022-23 to £11,850 in 2026-27, with proportionate increases each year. It was advised that the rates bill was currently being challenged, however a significant reduction was not anticipated. It was noted that the administration charge of £40.00 covered the administration of 56 agreements and postage costs.

Consideration was given to the retention of the same contribution to the seafront for 2024-25 as received in 2022-23, £460 for each hut, or the inclusion of the inflationary impact (over 20%), a fee of £495 was suggested (16.5% increase).

It was proposed by Councillor Foster and seconded by Councillor Moreton:

That the Town Council includes the inflationary impact in the fees for the Private Beach Huts and approves the fee of £495.00 in the budget for 2024-25.

Upon being put to the Meeting THREE Members voted IN FAVOUR of the Proposition and there was ONE ABSTENTION, whereupon the Proposition was declared CARRIED.

It was noted that licensees would be communicated with prior to the final agreement of fees.

Councillor Tomes re-entered the meeting.

b) Staffing for the Visitor Services Team

Further to Minute No. 3) of the Personnel Committee meeting held on 13th October 2023, consideration was given to a briefing paper, prepared by the VSBDM, which outlined the staffing options for the Swanage Information Centre as shown in the table below:

	Option	Increase on 23-24	% Change	Change in FTE
1.	Optimal service delivery, improved frontline service and website support	£20,920	10.5%	0.16
2.	Middle option, additional winter staffing for website support	£17,540	8.8%	0.06
3.	Scaled back option, no extension to winter opening and less website support	£14,880	7.5%	-0.04

A discussion ensued around the benefit to residents and visitors should option 1 be agreed and it was therefore proposed by Councillor Moreton, seconded by Councillor Whitwam and **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:**

That Option 1, for the staffing of the Swanage Information Centre, as set out in the briefing paper, be included in the draft budgets for further consideration by the Finance & Governance Committee as part of budget setting process for 2024/25.

A brief discussion ensued around the staffing requirements in other areas such as Seafront Advisors, Market staff, Boat Park and Beach Gardens, and the increased use of Beach Gardens during October, was noted.

It was therefore proposed by Councillor Moreton, seconded by Councillor Whitwam and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:

That the proposed amendments to staff budgets, set out in section 3 of the briefing note, be included in the draft budgets for further consideration by the Finance & Governance Committee as part of budget setting for 2024/25 and that approval for Beach Gardens Sports Park to open during October, subject to an increase in income to cover any additional staff costs, be approved.

c) Fees and Charges

Consideration was given to the proposed Scale of Fees and charges for 2024-25. It was noted that the Car Parks working had met to discuss changes to the car parks section which included a change to the free overnight parking hours, a 5% increase and a change in the length of bays attracting a higher rate. The Accessible Swanage representatives noted that the vehicles adapted to take wheelchairs were often over 4.8 metres in length and therefore it was noted that further discussion with the group would be undertaken prior to adoption.

Further to discussion it was proposed by Councillor Foster, seconded by Councillor Moreton and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:

That the Scale of Fees and charges be included in the draft budgets for further consideration by the Finance & Governance Committee as part of budget setting for 2024/25.

It was FURTHER RESOLVED:

That a review of campervan usage in Town Council car parks be reviewed by the Car Parks working party during 2024.

9) **D-Day commemorative weekend 2024 – Update**

The VSBDM reported that the Royal Signals Regiment would perform the Liberty of Swanage on 8th June 2024 and this would coincide with a 40 year army link to Swanage. Further information would be provided to the next meeting of this committee in March 2024.

10) **Swanage Friday Market – Update and proposed changes to terms and conditions and fees and charges for 2024-25**

Consideration was given to a briefing paper prepared by the VSBDM, which reviewed the progress of the Friday Market over 2023 and contained proposals for 2024-25. It was noted that the current pricing structure often caused confusion and therefore it was proposed that a simpler fee structure be developed.

It was proposed by Councillor Foster, seconded by Councillor Whitwam and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:

That the proposed changes in the terms and conditions for the Friday Market as found in Appendix 1, and the revised fees for the Friday Market as found in Appendix 2 be approved. Furthermore, that delegated authority be provided to the Visitor Services and Business Development

Manager to discount fees, where appropriate, for catering facilities at the market to maximise the potential of obtaining such traders.

11) Events – 2024 event calendar and proposed changes to event parking allocation

Further to Minute No. 122 (d) of the Council Meeting held on 30th October 2023, the new events for 2024, as approved at that meeting were noted as follows: Coastal Barbarians Rowing Regatta, Swanage Army Link and D-Day Parade, Studland Swim Run, Swanaloolu Festival, Wareham Town Band and Jurassic Coast Macmillan Mighty Hike.

Members considered the parking arrangements for events held at Prince Albert Gardens, as outlined in the briefing paper, noting that currently permits for the use of the small parking area in Broad Road had caused some issues as the area was primarily designated as disabled parking. It was therefore proposed that six permits be issued for use within Broad Road car park and should the disabled area be required by an event organiser delegated authority be provided to the VSBDM, in consultation with the Events working party to consider the request.

It was proposed by Councillor Bonfield, seconded by Councillor Whitwam and **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:-**

That the proposed parking arrangements, with regards events using Prince Albert Gardens, be considered by the Finance and Governance Committee.

12) Visitor Services & Business Development Manager Report

The VSBDM provided an update which included:

- Beach Hut bookings during October had been the busiest yet.
- The Boat Park had been quieter than usual due to the weather with launches down 10% on the previous year.
- The Boat Park had seen an increase in storage bookings and was currently full.

13) Parish and Town Council Tourism Meeting on 15th March 2023 – Update

It was reported that the meeting held in March 2023, with neighbouring parishes and local organisations with an interest in tourism had been successful and a meeting would be arranged for March 2024.

14) Items of information and matters for forthcoming agendas including updates from outside representatives

Outside representatives provided the following updates:

- **Durlston Country Park** – Visitor numbers had remained reasonable despite the wet weather with lots of events held at the Castle. The new car park machines had suffered some teething issues but were up and running now. The Seventh Wave café had been granted a long term lease and would be open over winter.
Sheps Hollow - The steps at Sheps Hollow were no longer attached to the cliffside and would be closed for 6 months whilst the longer term future of this area was considered by Dorset Council and other agencies.
- **Swanage Railway** – It was noted that the £2.00 bus fare had impacted the Swanage to Wareham trial and the financial viability of running the trial next year was being investigated. ‘Save our Railway’ campaign was being launched and the Railway were encouraged to share the page to enable other organisations to share the link.
- **National Trust** – Climate change was having an impact on Corfe castle, and a three year conservation programme was planned, at a cost of £2 million. The third year would see full scaffolding on the castle.

Studland had seen several beach huts washed away during the recent storm and due to SSSI status it would be unlikely that additional space could be allocated for this purpose.

A Studland Masterplan, which would include cross boundary infrastructure such as transport was being planned for near future consultation.

- **Grand Hotel (Chamber of Trade)** – It was reported that further work had been undertaken in the area of signage and the data collected from Dorchester and Weymouth would be collated and an update brought to a future meeting. Thanks was provided to the Town Council for spreading the Christmas lights more evenly throughout the town.

a) Commercial Opportunities – Update

The VSBDM reported that the deadline for Expression of Interest had passed and the Town Council's Property Panel would review the applications next week.

b) Green Seafront Consultation – Update

The Green Seafront consultation had now closed and the Town Council would review the results prior to budget setting 2024-25.

15) Date of next meeting

It was noted that the next meeting would be held on Wednesday 20th March 2024 at 2.15p.m. at The Grand Hotel, Burlington Road, Swanage.

The Chairman thanked everyone present for their attendance.

The meeting closed at 4.15 p.m.
