

**Minutes of a meeting of the Barmouth Harbour Consultative Committee
held on 6 October 2009 at the Council Chamber, Area Office, Barmouth**

PRESENT:

Councillors Tom Ellis (Chair of Development Scrutiny Committee), Trevor Roberts, Gethin G. Williams, Eryl Jones-Williams, (Gwynedd Council), Councillors Peter Bunce (Barmouth Town Council), Julian Kirkham (Arthog Community Council), Mr K. J. Probert (RNLI), Mrs. Wendy Ponsford (Barmouth Harbour and Estuary Users), Mr Denis Howell (Meirioneth Yacht Club).

Officers

Mr Barry Davies	-	Maritime and Country Parks Officer
Mr Ken Fitzpatrick	-	Maritime Officer - Harbours
Mr Huw Davies	-	Group Engineer
Mr Glyn Jones	-	Harbour Master
Mrs Glynda O'Brien	-	Committee Officer

Apologies: Councillor W. Roy Owen (Portfolio Leader Lifelong Learning), Councillor Aeron Williams (Barmouth Town Council).

1. **ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN**

Resolved: To re-elect Councillor Trevor Roberts as Chair of this committee for 2009/10.

2. **ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN**

Resolved: To re-elect Mr K John Probert as Vice-chair of this Committee for 2009/10.

3. **DECLARATION OF PERSONAL CONNECTION**

Councillor Trevor Roberts stated that he was a lifetime member of Barmouth Yacht Club although there was no specific item to discuss the Yacht Club on the agenda.

4. **MINUTES**

Submitted: Minutes of a meeting of the Barmouth Harbour Consultative Committee that was held on 25 February 2009.

Resolved: To accept and approve the minutes as a true record.

5. **THE MARITIME OFFICER'S REPORT**

Submitted: The report of the Maritime Officer, Mr Barry Davies, on activities in Barmouth Harbour with specific reference to the following:

- (i) Navigation
- (ii) Ferry Service
- (iii) Events
- (iv) Budgets

Reported: (a) By the Maritime and Country Parks Officer:

(i) That this last year had commenced well as regards to the weather, however, August was very disappointing and this had an impact on the number of boats and visitors to the harbour. Consequently, this had an impact on the harbour's budgets and it was highly unlikely that it would be possible to regain income over the winter months.

(ii) It was pleasing to note that the majority of the **navigational aids** had remained on station and conformed with the inspection requirements of Trinity House. However, concern was expressed regarding the perch aid that was tilting approximately 30° landwards. It was acknowledged that it required further work by experts and other options would be considered in future such as placing a buoy in the channel. Money had been earmarked in an alternative source for this. It would be necessary to invest approximately £2,000 for maintenance work on the navigational aids and this would be undertaken during the winter. The importance of having the assistance of a contractor to bring the buoys ashore and to re-station the buoys once the maintenance work had been completed by harbour staff was noted. The experience of mariners regarding the sites of the buoys was appreciated and their input would be very acceptable.

In response to a comment made by a member regarding stationing a warning buoy on the site of the 'Perch' buoy, in light of the fact that there were rocks in this area, the Maritime Officer stated that it was more than likely that Trinity House would suggest a port buoy. However, he gave an undertaking to discuss this further with the engineers bearing in mind the installation risk etc.

It was noted that the maintenance costs of navigational aids and moorings in the harbour were comparatively high and to make savings anchors would be used in order to safeguard the yellow buoys on site rather than use concrete blocks. These buoys would be used in order to zone the beaches up from Cae'r Ddaniel, Sunny Sands etc.

(iii) Three Owner's licences had been issued and eight Boatman's licences for a **ferry service** between Barmouth and Penrhyn Point. It was emphasised how important this service was for the town of Barmouth and for the Fairbourne narrow gauge railway. The Maritime Unit discussed the need to reconcile the requirements of the Owner's Licence together with the condition, type and number of safety equipment that were required to be carried on board the ferry. Members were referred to a copy of the pleasure boat licence under the Public Health Act 1875 to 1907 together with a list of the required equipment that were necessary for the owners to carry on board the boat. The revised licence would state clearly the number of people that could be transported on board the boat. Attention was also drawn to a paragraph to be included regarding the definition of favourable weather for sailing

and that it was the skipper of the boat who would decide if they could sail or not and this was not the responsibility of the Harbour Master. The requirements of the act did not note what qualification was suitable for sailing the ferry. The Maritime Officer asked for the members' views regarding the wording of the licence and the list of equipment that needed to be carried on board the ferry.

The following points were highlighted by individual members:

(a) That it was necessary to note the exact number of people that could be transported on board the ferry.

(b) Concern was expressed regarding the suggestion that it was the decision of the boat's skipper to sail or otherwise if the weather was inclement and several members of the Consultative Committee felt that it should be the Harbour Master who had responsibility over the final decision. This was agreed and the Maritime and Country Parks Officer would inform the individuals that apply for a pleasure boat licence that the Harbour Master or any senior officer within the Harbour service would have the final say if the ferry could sail or not in unfavourable weather. The Maritime and Country Parks Officer stressed the need to be very careful when changing the rules and especially changing rules stating that it would be the responsibility of the Harbour Master to decide if a boat sails or not. Members were reminded that the Harbour Master was not on duty seven days a week and that he was on duty between 09.00 and 17.00 and even during these hours he could be out of the area undertaking another duty. The decision to sail or not could not be limited to Council officers. The recommendation of the Maritime and Country Parks Officer was that the decision should be made by the ferry skipper.

(c) Additional concern was expressed by a member regarding the qualification level of the Council's Boatman's Licence. As a regular user of the Harbour estuary Cllr. Julian Kirkham had from time to time witnessed events that stemmed from substandard and dangerous practices when sailing the ferry when there were passengers on board. He went on to list a number of incidents he had witnessed and that were in his opinion a danger to passengers on board a ferry and also other Harbour users and the report by Cllr Julian Kirkham was as follows:

- “during the Three Peaks Yacht Race a particular operator struck no fewer than three competing yachts;
- Total misuse of engine control – going from full ahead to full reverse in one movement resulting in the loss of the propeller which then rendered the vessel dead in the water at the mercy of the tide. Ferry then hit a moored boat belonging to a mooring holder
- Driving the vessel hard up the beach at Penrhyn Point to allow passengers to disembark, loading up with new passengers and then they all have to stand up and rock the vessel in full astern to free the vessel from the beach
- Operators not aware of the Rule of the Road
- Operators leaving the “boarding iron” in place whilst crossing the harbour which could be a danger to other harbour users
- One operator dropped a person who wanted to swim in the harbour, right in front of a vessel trying to pick up its mooring

- Ferry boats travelling with passengers on one side thus causing the vessel to heel over unnecessarily. This was increased by two vessels having ‘cudys’ attached increasing the top hamper. The Council Surveyor should give instruction for these to be removed as they are only bolted through the deck.
- Lack of professionalism and poor and dangerous boat handling

Councillor Kirkham was of the view that the RYA Power Boat Level 2 was not the correct practical qualification for someone wishing to operate a small passenger vessel in Barmouth Harbour in Category C waters. It was not a professional qualification.

“The RYA Level 2 Certificate was designed specifically to qualify users of planning craft as safety boats in sailing club training fleets. Laying race marks for maritime racing events, etc. Holding a certificate of competency as a member of RNLI Inshore Lifeboat Crew is not applicable either.

In Councillor Kirkham’s opinion, the applicable qualification was the Maritime and Coastguard Agency Boat Masters Certificate which applied to displacement vessels, and the Barmouth ferries fitted into that category e.g. small passenger carrying vessels carrying up to 12 passengers for hire and reward.

Applicants for this Certificate submit themselves to an oral and practical examination aboard the vessel they operate, in the area which they hope to operate in, and assessments are carried out by MCA Inspectors. Holders of RYA Yacht Master (Power) with full Commercial Endorsement could be an exception. If successful in gaining the certificate, candidates had to keep a record of their work on board the vessel they operate and submit themselves for revalidation after 5 years. There were three levels of the Boat Master’s Licence so there was room for candidates to improve their boat handling and navigational knowledge and increase their qualifications.”

Councillor Kirkham proposed that this Consultative Committee recommended that the Maritime Officer looks in depth into the MCA Boat Master’s Licence as the required qualification for a Gwynedd Council Boatman’s Licence for ferry operators working in Barmouth Harbour and accepts and implements its requirements.

It was envisaged that a fee of £170 would be payable for the above qualification, however, one member hastened to add that the level 2 qualification cost was approximately £120.

Several accomplished mariners agreed with the above recommendation and the Maritime and County Parks Officer promised to investigate the implications further with the intention of presenting a report on the results to the next meeting of this Consultative Committee on 16 March 2010 for further consideration. It would be necessary to inform ferry operators of the proposal to upgrade the level of qualification in order that they were aware beforehand if a recommendation was to be made. It was emphasised that ferry owners would have to be notified of the discussion in order to ensure that there was a sufficient period to submit an application for a Coastguard’s Licence if this was the committee’s resolution in 2010.

(d) In the context of **events** the opportunity was taken to thank the Three Peaks Race Committee for the successful arrangements during the competition when 34 boats competed in the race this year. We look forward to continuing to cooperate with them again in 2010 and ensure that the preparatory work has been completed beforehand, namely, that all the moorings are ready at least seven days before the competing boats arrive in Barmouth. The need for improved arrangements between harbour staff and the moorings contractor was stressed in order to respond to any problems when the Harbour Master is not available.

Disappointment was noted that it had not been possible to submit an application for the International Blue Flag for 2009 due to the unfavourable quality of bathing water. However, it was trusted that an application could be submitted for 2010 dependent on confirmation from the Environment Agency that the water quality forecasts were promising.

(dd) Members were referred to the **harbour statistic tables** and it was noted that 892 Personal Watercraft had registered with the Council in 2009 with 1169 powerboats. Attention was drawn to moorings statistics together with a comparison of boat statistics in each harbour, names of boats in Barmouth harbour and the total length and draught of boats.

A member made a comment that he had visited Pwllheli harbour recently and was amazed at all the activities held there and the economic benefit to the town that derived from staging international events. It was asked how Barmouth and Aberdyfi could benefit from these opportunities. In response, one member stated that it was difficult to attract events to Barmouth due to the condition of the harbour especially the lack of dredging.

The Chairman reported that the Yacht Clubs in Pwllheli and Porthmadog were proactive and had a powerful role in the arrangements of such activities. Whilst accepting that they had better resources it was envisaged that Barmouth Yacht Club could be in the same situation in the future bearing in mind the enthusiasm, effort of members and the progress made thus far to improve facilities.

(e) The Maritime Officer guided members through the harbour budgets and drew members' attention to the fact that the income target for the current financial year was £53,230 and up to the end of August this year the total income received was £33,187 i.e. £20,042 short of the target. It was anticipated that there would be no substantial addition to the income between October and March 2010.

Regarding harbour staff, members were reminded that the staffing levels in the harbour had increased since local government reorganisation in 1996. The need to protect the resources already available was emphasised. Following the resignation of the Harbour Master to another post, a successor would not be appointed now, however, it was hoped to appoint at the commencement of next year. This entailed that it would be necessary for the unit to be proactive, working in accordance with a work programme and to prioritise work. There was no intention to cut the staffing budget, however, the need for a harbour assistant would have to be justified. In response, and the following point had been raised several times in the past, that the Maritime Service should benefit from the income received from parking fees and on

the promenade (especially bearing in mind that the promenade was the responsibility of the Maritime Service). It was strongly suggested that this matter should be raised once again with the relevant officers.

Resolved: (a) To accept and note the contents of the Maritime and County Parks Officer's report and thank the harbour staff for their work.

(b) To request that the Maritime and Country Parks Officer:

- (i) further investigates the implications of upgrading the Council's Boatman's Licence to the MCA Boat Master's Licence Level 2 as a recognised qualification for ferry operators in Barmouth Harbour with the intention of submitting a report on the results to the next meeting of this Consultative Committee on 16 March 2010 for further consideration.**
- (ii) To contact Mr Dafydd Williams, Chief Engineer, Transportation and Street Care Unit, Highways and Municipal Unit to convey the Consultative Committee's wish to discuss the possibility of the Highways and Municipal Unit transferring a percentage of parking receipts for the Barmouth promenade to the Maritime Service bearing in mind that this service had responsibility for the promenade.**

6. MATTERS TO BE CONSIDERED AT THE REQUEST OF THE CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE MEMBERS

The following issues were considered that had not been discussed during this meeting and the officer gave his response:-

- (1) Improvement to the Bathhouse area including sand disposal from the promenade and surrounding area.

The Maritime and Country Parks Officer explained that the situation was difficult and he acknowledged that the sand was currently being pushed over the wall and the hope was that it would be cleared as part of the annual process of sand disposal during spring. The Maritime and Country Parks Officer was of the view that the problem would alleviate once the sand dunes in front of the breakwater had developed.

Several members disagreed with the Maritime Officer regarding this and that the sand dunes and the maram grass were not natural. The problem had grown over many years and had made it difficult for people to go onto the beach. The Chairman stated that Barmouth Town Council had discussed the matter when it was recommended to them to make a request to Gwynedd Council for advice from an expert regarding the further development of the dunes. Members were reminded that the Maritime and Country Parks Officer and also the Group Engineer had met the Town Council on site several years ago where it was agreed that it would be acceptable to allow sand dunes to develop in front of the breakwater.

- (2) Pontoon Siting a ramp down the right side of the ferry steps to run along yacht wall to a pontoon to improve access to boats particularly for the disabled and elderly.

The representative of the Yacht Club stated that the Club had plans to adapt access near the ferry steps.

The Maritime and Country Parks Officer asked members of the Yacht Club to consult with the Harbour Master regarding this as soon as possible as the Unit was also seeking a quote for a pontoon

- (3) Cleaning the harbour area – pigeons under the railway bridge continue to cause a real problem with their droppings.

The Chairman suggested to the Maritime Officer to contact the Highways Unit asking them to write to Network Rail with a request that they place a net under the bridge to prevent pigeons from going there as well as to make arrangements to clean the pavement in the harbour area.

- (4) Lack of access to side of slipway opposite the locker during August.

The Maritime and Country Parks Officer promised to investigate this.

- (5) Quayside winter berthing – concern was expressed regarding the health and safety of the public when walking on the quay as boat owners repair their boats with a grinding machine etc. It was crucial that boat owners could moor their vessels over winter or otherwise customers may be lost unless such facilities were available.

Several suggestions were proposed from individual members on how to try and alleviate the problem.

- Move the boats to Aberamffra
- Earmark a specific area near the compound or in the far end of the car park which was not used for parking.
- Ask the Harbour Master to investigate if a possible site was available
- Clear the fishermen's compound

Ask the Harbour Master to investigate the above proposals and report back to the next meeting of this Consultative Committee.

- (6) Control of dogs and dog fouling on the beach and promenade

Barmouth Town Council had received several complaints regarding the above and a question was asked regarding procedure.

In response, the Maritime and Country Parks Officer explained that although there were signs up, dog owners did tend to ignore them. The Harbour Master and many of the Maritime Unit staff had authority to issue fines and it was confirmed that this did occur.

Resolved To accept and note the comments made together with the response of the Maritime and Country Parks Officer to these..

7. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

The Chairman and Councillor Eryl Jones-Williams raised the awareness of the members of the Consultative Committee to a pilot scheme in the Pwllheli area that considers the control of flooding risk in communities that are at risk from flooding from the sea/and or from rivers in Gwynedd. The scheme derives from the Welsh Assembly Government's New Approaches scheme of Controlling the Coast and Flooding Risk that calls on the Council to undertake its duty as a community leader and to safeguard the health and welfare of residents. In the opinion of the two members this was vitally important for all coastal areas as the impact of the climate and the sea continually changed.

Resolved: To accept and note the above.

8. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

It was reported that the next meeting of this Committee would take place on Tuesday 16 March 2010.

Resolved To accept and note the above.

CHAIRMAN