

PWLLHELI HARBOUR CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE 12/10/21

ATTENDANCE:

Gwynedd Council: Councillors Hefin Underwood and Gareth Thomas

Co-opted Members: Stephen Tudor (Representing Pwllheli Sailing Club), Michael Sol Owen (Representing Plas Heli), Wil Partington (Representing Pwllheli Maritime Traders Association), Alwyn Roberts (Representing Pwllheli Lifeboat Institution) and Jenny Moss (Pwllheli Marina Berth Holders' Association)

Also in attendance: Barry Davies (Maritime Service Manager), William S Williams (Hafan Manager), Llŷr B Jones (Assistant Head of the Economy and Community Department), Einir Rh Davies (Democracy Services) and Alaw Hughes (Interpreter).

1. ELECTION OF CHAIR

RESOLVED To elect Councillor Hefin Underwood as Chair of this Committee for the year 2021/22.

2. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR

RESOLVED To elect Councillor Peter Read as Vice-chair of this Committee for the year 2021/22 in his absence.

3. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Peter Read

4. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declarations of personal interest were received from any members present.

5. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent matters requiring discussion at the meeting, however, it was noted that some Committee members wished to have a discussion with the Maritime Service Manager to discuss matters relating to Pwllheli Harbour as a whole.

6. MINUTES

The Chairman signed the minutes of the meeting of this Committee held on 16 March, 2021 as a true record.

7. UPDATE ON HARBOUR MANAGEMENT MATTERS

Members of the Committee were reminded that the purpose of the Committee was to provide an opportunity to raise concerns and that it was important for all stakeholders to contribute. Consequently, concern was expressed that many members of the Committee were absent.

External Bodies

Members of the Committee were also reminded that in order to meet the rules, they must submit the minutes of their meetings, together with a copy of their constitution, and ensure that the list of representatives was accurate and up to date.

Harbour Safety Code

The Maritime Service Manager referred to the paper he had circulated regarding the Harbour Safety Code, noting that the paper provided assurance that stakeholders were complying with the Code, and referred to the opportunity which had arisen for Committee Members to feed into the response. He confirmed that two inspections had been carried out by the Coastguard Agency and that the risk assessments were in place and in order.

Strategic Review of the Hafan and Harbour

It was confirmed that a Work Group had been set up to discuss the Hafan and Harbour with local businesses and to agree on a way forward, as Pwllheli was a very important unit. It was confirmed that the aim was to have a Masterplan for the future, to include the structure of the Hafan and Pwllheli Harbour.

Review of 2019 work

The Assistant Head of the Economy and Community Department gave an update stating that the Programme had been delayed and other issues had taken priority, but the programme now needed to be revisited. He confirmed that short-term measures had been identified, including:

- The Internal Structure of the Hafan and Harbour, following the retirement of the Hafan Assistant Manager
- Property, legal, and financial matters that are under the control of the Hafan and Harbour
- Commissioning a Masterplan to identify the vision
- Dredging Strategy and Dealing with the residue
- Prepare the Hafan and Harbour Investment Strategy for the short-term, long-term and medium-term

It was confirmed that an update would be available at the next meeting.

In response to a question regarding the timing of a change in management, it was confirmed that it was extremely important that the service continued and that there was no change to the service, and that they would be administrative changes to improve the service. It was noted that the post of Hafan Manager had not been filled. The vision is that someone would be appointed to the post of Pwllheli Harbour Commercial and Business Manager and that the new officer would be in post by March 2022. It was confirmed that the time had come to take a strategic look at the Hafan and Harbour and move on to offer a better service.

It was inquired as to whether there were plans for the Old Sailing Club and it was confirmed that the building was under Plas Heli Management, and the hope would be to collaborate with Plas Heli on any scheme. The need for discussion as soon as possible was reiterated, and it was confirmed that the Sailing Club had installed a 'Portacabin' on site to be used by the Betsi Cadwaladr Health Board and by children for 1 to 1 lessons, which had been a useful resource following the closure of the Frondeg Centre. The long-term desire to see it used for something with a maritime connection was confirmed.

Dredging Campaign

It was confirmed that the dredging campaign had been delayed due to the Covid situation. It was confirmed that it was still planned to dredge the harbour entrance around April 2022. Concern remained regarding the reduction in material that may be dredged out of the Harbour mouth in a short time due to the tide.

It was confirmed that the Royal Small company will be dredging Victoria Dock until late October/early November and then Pwllheli in the second week of November. Dredging work will be undertaken in the channel, as well as assessing mud in the pontoon, the capacity and the stilling bund. It was confirmed that they had trialled using a dredger closer to the harbour mouth, but a couple of problems had arisen, such as large stones that had come in. Dredging part of the channel will be piloted by pouring sand in the area of the sand tip near Craig yr Imbill.

Other methods of dredging were discussed, such as bagging it for drying and delivering from the site by truck, but it was confirmed that the mud was difficult to dispose of and that this will be a long-term problem. It was confirmed that the contract with Jones Brothers for works at the mouth of the Harbour will continue next year. It was noted that the dredging work using a vacuum will be completed by mid-December, if there were no further Covid restrictions, and following this, a hydrographic survey will be undertaken to measure success and the next dredging campaign around the pontoon will be carried out in Spring 2023.

In response to the above, attention was drawn to the sand bank adjacent to the Llŷn Marina Boatyard where there is little water, and it was asked if it was being addressed. The Maritime Service Manager confirmed that the Maritime Unit had identified areas to target where the channel was coming in deeper.

It was questioned whether there was a difference to be seen in the Groyne. In response, it was reported that there was a likelihood that a sandbar would be created following the work. It was confirmed that the new breakwater was much stronger than the previous one, and it was suggested that it might be possible to undertake a topographic survey to measure the amount of sand falling to the east of the breakwater. It was also confirmed, following an aerial photo survey, that there was a change in the harbour entrance.

Following confirmation of the work that Jones Brothers will be undertaking at the river mouth (as part of the scheme will go as far as possible), it was noted that a bucket needed to be created to allow the sand to fall into it so that it would not be carried into the harbour. It was suggested that the appropriate assessments would show what was possible.

Gratitude was expressed for being able to view the hydrographic surveys. It was confirmed that the boats would need to be moved if dredging was to be done around the pontoon and this was not a problem, although it was possible to dredge the area between the main pontoon without moving the boats if required.

Financial Matters

Unfortunately, the financial information was not shared in advance, but it was anticipated that £259,121 would be sent to the fund. It was reported that the Service was anticipating a reduction of £18,666 in harbour expenditure. It was confirmed that although the situation was looking healthy, half the year was still to come.

Fees and Charges

Reference was made to the situation with regard to rising gas and electricity prices, and the need to keep an eye on the situation. The need to be careful and to bear funding in mind for possible additional costs was noted.

In terms of fees and payments for next year, it was confirmed that further discussion was needed on how to take the matter forward. It was confirmed that any increase in cost had an impact on customer retention and attracting new customers. The hope of keeping any increase in fees as low as possible was noted and better consideration will be given when the inflation figure becomes available.

Further to the above, the following were noted:

- The mooring figures are much better than expected, but a valiant effort must be made to keep as much of this income as possible in the Harbour and Hafan.
- A change in management was planned next year in terms of VAT on bringing boats back to this country - referred to as a Brexit dividend - and further information was sought.
- As fuel prices rise, it may be possible to include solar panels at Hafan as a long-term goal in the masterplan.

The Maritime Service Manager confirmed that VAT issues will have an impact, such as increased costs and he confirmed the need for further discussion with the Council's VAT experts.

The concept of a loyalty bonus was welcomed.

Hafan Manager's Report

Trinity House

It was confirmed that an investigation had been undertaken by Trinity House and that everything was acceptable, and that no Mariners' Notice was currently in place.

Fuel Quay

It was confirmed that petrol sales had increased significantly, and the fuel quay self-service system had been excellent. It was confirmed that work was underway to look at the diesel situation in light of the changes, but no further information had been received from HM Customs and Excise, but it must be borne in mind that it may end in April 2022.

With regard to the petrol situation, it was confirmed that there was more stock, with E10 in it, and it was confirmed that a warning had been issued to boat owners of the need to exercise caution. It was also confirmed that one of the pumps was ten years old and that plans were in place to replace it very soon in 2022.

Registering Boats

The online boat registration system works well and saves a great deal of paperwork.

Slipway

It was confirmed that there had been an increase in 2019 from 299 annual residents to 378 in 2020. In addition, the number of visiting boats had also been very good. Huge concern and disappointment was expressed that Parking and Launching companies were not complying with harbour regulations and Council regulations in relation to registering boats and personal watercraft. During the season a large number of boats and personal watercraft were being launched without the vessel being registered with the Council. The boat launchers had a negative attitude towards staff and this was not acceptable. For 2022 the Council will increase the fee and strengthen site security by blocking the entrance and appointing an officer who will be responsible for ensuring that all boats using the Pwllheli harbour are registered with the Council.

Storing Boats

Reference was made to the lack of shore space for boat storage, but that first choice was given to annual berth holders of the Hafan and Outer Harbour to store boats on the shore, and it was noted that this was working well and was being appreciated.

Staffing

After losing a member of staff during the summer, the seasonal post was advertised but the advertisement did not receive many applicants. Although one of the seasonal assistants had already left mid-summer, two had continued to work at the Hafan throughout the season and it was anticipated that they will be kept on over the winter.

Following the update, the following responses were received:

- Stakeholders were pleased to see the defibrillator in place
- Plas Heli had seen an increase in the number of inquiries, and it was noted that the computer system for taking orders was in place, and there was good co-operation with the Hafan.
- There was concern about the slipway and many are ignoring the regulations and management

The Maritime Service Manager added to the report and thanked the Hafan staff. It was confirmed that the security system had been changed, whilst discussions were ongoing with Plas Heli to discuss parking issues and possibly installing electronic barriers.

Parking and Launching Fees and Payments Report

Fee and payment matters were reported, and two years ago, it was realised that the fee was not a fair contribution at all. Following the Committee's support for the report on fees, it was noted that discussions had been held with Gwynedd Council Members regarding paying less on the assurance that all boat companies ensured that everyone registered their boats.

It was reported that no co-operation had taken place, with the registration procedure being ignored, and the knock-on effect of this was that boat ownership was impossible to report. Therefore, the need was now noted to re-examine the arrangements, and one of the options would be to significantly increase the fee or install a barrier at the top of the Hafan. The Committee's attention was drawn to what was supposed to happen compared to what happened. The comment was reinforced by noting that some had a bad attitude towards staff about parking and launching and the disappointment surrounding this, especially as an agreement had been reached and it was confirmed that the appropriate steps needed to be taken. It was felt that it was the same customers causing parking problems, by parking on pavements and green areas, and this was noted. It was regrettable that there was no attendance at the Parking and Launching meeting. It was noted that the problem was at Hafan Pwllheli Slipway and not in the Outer Harbour.

In terms of the parking, it was confirmed that 300 boats could be parked between 5 companies and that each company had their compound but that there was no space in the compound due to demand. It was noted that the companies should have their own vehicle parking space and it was noted that a message to this effect had to be shared and then reported back to this Committee.

In terms of the fee, it was confirmed that it was significantly low compared to others, with a private individual paying £150 per term. The need to ensure that boats were registered was noted as it was an unfair position for staff.

It was confirmed that Plas Heli was keen to work with the Council, but that any solution to the parking situation had to come from all stakeholders. It may be possible to reach an agreement with Plas Heli as any income for Plas Heli would be acceptable. The Maritime Service Manager noted that companies were aware of these feelings and that concern had been expressed.

Consultation on the Use of Watercraft

Reference was made to the consultation that had already been shared and it was noted that the Maritime Service Manager would appreciate receiving the comments or opinions or recommendations of the Committee members by the 1/11 deadline. Option 3 was confirmed as the government's recommendation.

The Committee felt that adequate bye-laws were available and that it may not make much difference, although the concept of strengthening the regulations was supported.

It was confirmed that some stakeholders had sought the views of others, and that some wanted to comment individually. The Committee's support was thanked and everyone was reminded to get in touch if an issue arose between meetings.

RESOLVED :

(1) To note and accept the report.

(2) To respond as follows to the Department of Transport's Consultation Paper, "Strengthening enforcement of the dangerous use of recreational and personal watercraft":

- i. That this committee supports option 3, namely creating legislation under section 112 of the Railways and Transportation Safety Act 2003 to extend the relevant provisions of the Merchant Shipping Act 1995, and relevant regulations, to include recreational and personal watercraft.
- ii. To emphasise the importance of ensuring training for users and a call to increase the age limit for driving recreational and personal watercraft.

(3) To inform users of the Hafan slipway regarding the need to ensure that every recreational and personal watercraft is registered with Gwynedd Council prior to launch. This was in light of concerns raised about the current use.

Any Other Business

- The Committee was informed of a major event by RWE Wales and the opportunity it presented to demonstrate what North Wales has to offer and the desire to make it a worthwhile experience.
- It was reported that the new lifeboat hut was coming along and that the boat was in operation. It was also noted that six other members had been recruited to the team.

Everyone was thanked for their valuable contributions.

8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting will take place on 15 March, 2022 at 6.00pm.

The meeting commenced at 6.00pm and concluded at 7.50pm.

CHAIR