

Minutes of the Meeting of the **TOURISM AND ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITTEE** held at the Town Hall on **Monday 27th March 2006** at **10.00 a.m.**

Chairman: -

Councillor Mrs C Gainsborough Swanage Town Council

Present: -

Councillor C R Bright Swanage Town Council

Councillor Mrs J Farrow Swanage Town Council

Councillor G M Suttle Town Mayor

Councillor M Tyrer Swanage Town Council

Mr A Leeson

Town Clerk

Mrs A Holmes

Tourist Information Centre
Manager

Dr M Ayres

Assistant Town Clerk

Ms J Bowry

Purbeck Tourism Officer

Mr N Brown

Swanage Railway

Mr R Johnson

Swanage Pier

Mr A Marriott

Swanage & Purbeck Holiday
Accommodation Association

Mr B McGhee &

Swanage and Isle of Purbeck

Mr M McKenzie

Chamber of Trade and Commerce

Mr H Murray

Durlston Country Park

Mrs J Scadden

Swanage Caravan Parks

Mr D Taylor

Swanage Bay View Catering

Rev J Wood

Association of Churches Together
in Swanage

Mr T Marcus

Blue Level (until 10.50 a.m.)

Mr A Campbell

Blue Level (until 10.50 a.m.)

1) Apologies

Apologies for their inability to attend the meeting were received from Councillors Mrs Bartlett and Pratt.

2) Web Site Design Proposals

The Town Clerk introduced Mr Tim Marcus and his colleague from Blue Level Media, the designers of the Town Council's current website, and invited them to present their options for its development.

Mr Marcus stated that the current website was now four years old and in need of some improvement. However, it still attracts a large number of visitors from around the globe and is the first hit reported on most of the major search engines. He noted that there were three main elements to the Council website, relating to Town Council matters, Tourism, and the Swanage Bay View Holiday Park. He recommended the development of a portal page through which each element could be easily accessed. The elements could each be allocated their own

domain name (such as swanage_tourism.com), while still ensuring that all had a shared design.

In terms of the Council's web pages it was important to ensure that documents could be uploaded by staff to keep the site up to date. Town Council jobs could be advertised on-line and in the future it would also be possible to develop a town archive, potentially working with other institutions, such as Swanage Museum, to assist in compliance with the Freedom of Information Act.

Referring specifically to the Tourism pages, Mr Marcus described possible enhancements to the accommodation listings, including more photos and listing accommodation by the number of hits. This could potentially be linked to a new 'cost per click' billing system. He also highlighted the success of the virtual postcards on the site, noting that this was a good way of gaining publicity for the town.

Other possible developments included the introduction of an e-payment system for fees and fines, along with the potential for selling books, maps and souvenirs. Bookings for beach huts, caravans and boat park spaces could be made on-line and a sea front webcam could be introduced. Overall, the website should be enhanced to ensure that it kept pace with recent developments in IT, with other Council websites and alternative Swanage web pages.

Mr Marcus then took questions from outside representatives, and it was noted that it was possible that on-line booking facilities for hotels and other holiday accommodation could be developed in line with this system. It was also recognised that links to outside organisations could be strengthened as an important way of assisting the public in accessing information about the town.

The Town Clerk stressed that input from outside organisations was extremely important as discussions about the future of the site were at a formative stage. He stated that it was anticipated that development costs would be funded from existing budgets, and that any expenditure would have great benefits in helping the Town Council consult more widely under Best Value regulations, and ultimately lessening the amount of officer time taken in dealing with enquiries. There was also potential for the Town and Community Partnership to have an improved web presence.

Councillor Bright raised a number of points: enquiring whether the words 'tourist information centre' should be included in a domain name, highlighting the need to enable the Council's staff to update the site, suggesting a link to Purbeck District Council in respect of planning and other issues, and raising the possibility of advertising the Town Market and making the Council's newsletter available on line.

Mr Marcus and Mr Campbell left the meeting at 10.50 a.m.

3) Matters arising from Minutes of the Meeting held on 28th November 2005

Further to minute 2) Councillor Tyrer enquired about progress relating to coach parking. The Clerk stated that it had been discussed at the Town Council's Policy and Resources Meeting on 20th March 2006 and that the timing of action was largely determined by the procedure set out by Dorset County Council.

The Chairman enquired about the incorrect siting of the sign recently erected in Gilbert Road, in co-operation with the Chamber of Trade. The Town Clerk reported that a meeting had been held with representatives of Swanage Railway and the Chamber of Trade within the last seven days, at which it had been agreed to leave the board where it is, but to paint it in Swanage Railway colours.

4) **Tourism Reports**

Mrs Holmes reported on the following matters:-

a) **Blues Festival**

A large number of positive comments had been received about the Swanage Blues Festival, which was now in its sixth year.

b) **Fair Trade Fortnight**

A recent exhibition at the Tourist Information Centre to celebrate Fair-Trade Fortnight had been a great success.

c) **Britain in Bloom**

The Tourist Information Centre currently has a display to raise awareness of the town's entry in this year's Britain in Bloom competition.

d) **Leaflet Distribution**

New 'Caravan and Camping' and 'Swanage facilities' leaflets are expected next week, to be distributed through local holiday parks, tourist attractions and TICs.

e) **Coach Company Promotions**

A promotional mail shot has been sent to 250 coach companies encouraging them to spend longer in Swanage. Other promotional work has included the preparation of information packs to be given to drivers on market days and the sending of a selection of editorials to the Coach Drivers' Magazine.

Ms Bowry reported on the following matters:-

a) **New PDC Website**

Purbeck District Council has re-organised and modernised its website www.purbeck-dc.gov.uk to make it easier to use. Any feedback would be gratefully received.

b) **Dorset Destination Management Organisation**

Purbeck District Council is working in co-operation with other local authorities in Dorset to create a county wide Destination Management System, to include features such as online booking facilities. Working together should ensure economies of scale and that each authority has a compatible system. South West Tourism has also created a working group for a regional Destination Management System.

c) **Purbeck Map and Guide**

This year's map and guide are currently being distributed.

d) **Training**

A number of training events had been held recently, ending tomorrow with Welcome International. A two-day Green Business course had also been held covering topics such as energy saving, waste minimalisation and transport. This had been well attended, but, unfortunately, a subsequent afternoon course on Green Tourism had to be cancelled due to lack of attendance. South West Tourism has also launched a Green Tourism Business Scheme.

e) **Jurassic Coast Arts Strategy**

The Arts Strategy for the Jurassic Coast will go to print in the near future. This is linked to the run up to the 2012 Olympics and there will be a landmark event at Winspit.

f) **Journalist Visits**

Visits to Swanage and Purbeck by journalists are being encouraged, with articles already appearing in the Great Outdoors and YHA magazines.

g) **Swanage Museum and Heritage Centre**

The Museum and Heritage Centre will be formally opened on Monday, 3rd April 2006 by Professor Julian Richards. The launch will include a treasure trail with prizes.

h) **Staffing**

Ms Nina Elston has returned to Purbeck District Council after her maternity leave and will now be job-sharing with Ms Bowry.

5) **Reports from Outside Organisations**

a) **Durlston Country Park**

Mr Murray reported on a successful year at the Country Park with increased visitor numbers. The Lookout café had developed an excellent reputation. New educational sessions had been introduced and the website improved. The Durlston Management Plan was now in its final draft and would go before the Cabinet of Dorset County Council in early April. Mr Murray addressed concerns raised by the Town Council, but stressed that there had been a long consultation process prior to the production of the Management Plan. The level of parking fees and the success of last summer's shuttle bus service were also discussed.

b) **Swanage Pier**

Mr Johnson stated that the Pier was involved in the collection of wave and tidal data by Southampton University and DEFRA as part of a survey relating to global warming. In relation to the summer visits of the Waverley paddle steamer, Mr Johnson expressed some concern over the availability of Bournemouth Pier due to Health and Safety considerations. Among other matters, a trial concession for parasailing had recently been entered into by the Pier and the exhibition in Marine Villas is currently being upgraded by Mr John Page, chairman of Swanage Museum. Finally, an open day is to be held at the Catholic Hall on Friday 31st March as part of public consultation on the future of the Pier.

c) **Swanage Bay View Restaurant**

Mr Taylor reported that the Swanage Bay View Restaurant would be opening on Friday 31st March.

d) **Swanage Caravan Parks**

Mrs Scadden noted that bookings were good for this year and that the demand for accommodation was increasing. One problem was the increased size of tents, which was causing difficulty in complying with site regulations,

and leading to a need to increase pitch sizes. She reported that the Green Tourism Day had been a great success, and finally noted some concern at any proposal to charge those listing holiday accommodation on the Town Council's website on a cost per click basis.

e) **Swanage & Purbeck Holiday Accommodation Association**

Mr Marriott reported on a good winter season with strong weekend bookings. He expressed some concern that the Association's members were unable to help local festival organisers to expand their events because of the limited number of places to stay now available in the town.

f) **Swanage Railway**

Mr Brown commented on the large amount of work carried out over the winter period in improving the railway track. Little progress had been made on the Wareham link due to the ongoing franchising process of the south-west rail network.

g) **Association of Churches Together in Swanage**

Revd Wood reported on the programme of concerts organised for this summer and drew attention to the recent success of the First Annual Purbeck String Festival. The possibility that St Mary's will host some events for the Folk Festival and an art exhibition later in the year was raised. Revd Wood expressed hope that the parish church would grow in attracting visitors, and again noted his regret that the Museum had had to vacate the Tithe Barn.

6) **Any Other Matters**

The development of the Town Council's website was further discussed and the Town Mayor stated that the improvement of the section devoted to Town Council business should be a priority. He also highlighted the need to work with the District Council, which has used e-government funds to re-develop its website. The Town Clerk noted that much of the delay in improving the Town Council's website had arisen from waiting for national government to set out its policy. At present e-government funds were limited to principal authorities, despite a campaign by NALC for funds to filter down to the Town/Parish level. The Town Clerk stressed that the purpose of the presentation was purely to generate ideas and involve outside organisations in this process. The matter would now be discussed further at the next meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee.

Councillor Bright questioned whether the Town Council was aware of a major sailing event that had taken place over the weekend of the 25th/26th March. The Town Clerk stated that the Council had received very little notification and that a letter had been sent to the organisers expressing concern at this.

Mrs Scadden raised the issue of car parking charges, stating that visitors frequently complained about their high level. The Town Clerk replied that car parking charges are used to offset expenditure in promoting the town and funding expenditure on operations such as beaches, parks and recreation.

The meeting closed at 11.55 a.m.
