

Notes of an Informal meeting of the Tourism Committee held via Zoom video conference platform on Tuesday 16th November 2021 at 10.00 a.m.

In Attendance:

Councillor C Tomes – Chair
Councillor T Foster
Councillor A Harris
Councillor C Moreton
Councillor M Whitwam
Mr M Norris – Swanage Museum
Dr M Ayres – Town Clerk
Mrs E Evans – Management Support Officer
Miss H Lagden – Visit Dorset
Mr C Milmer – Visitor Services Manager
Miss G Percival – Operations Manager
Miss A Spencer – Finance Manager

There was one member of the local press present.

1) Apologies

Apologies for their inability to attend the meeting were received from Councillor M Bonfield, Ms K Black (Durlston Country Park), Mr I Brown (Coastguard), Mr K Sheppard (RNLI Lifeguards) and Mr P Sykes (Swanage Railway).

2) Declarations of Interest

Members were invited to declare their interests and consider any requests for Grants of Dispensations in accordance with paragraphs 9 - 13 of the Council's Code of Conduct and regulations made under chapter 7 of the Localism Act 2011. There were no declarations to record on this occasion.

3) Matters arising from the Notes of the Informal Meeting of the Tourism Committee, held on 6th July 2021

There were no matters raised.

4) Matters arising from Minutes of the Beach Management Advisory Committee, held on 13th October 2021

There were no matters raised.

5) Tourism marketing plan – update

a) Marketing Working Party - update

Further to Minute No. 5) of the Informal meeting of the Tourism Committee held on 6th July 2021, it was reported that, due to an exceptionally busy season, the preparation of the draft marketing strategy had been postponed. It was anticipated that a draft set of principles would be established for March 2022 and the marketing strategy produced for 2023-24.

The working party members had discussed the Council's relationship with Visit Dorset and had supported retention of the services for 2022-23, however, it was noted that Visit Dorset would need to provide a clear set of actions to be agreed by the group.

The current allocated budget of £8,000 would be considered as part of the budget setting process.

6) **Events**

Further to provisional approval at the Full Council meeting held on 1st November 2021, the list of proposed events had been circulated prior to the meeting. A further three events had subsequently been requested which were:

- Swanage Bay Sprint Triathlon – 750m swim in the bay, 20 km bike and 5km run.
- Swanage Jazz Festival – various venues to include PAG, Bandstand and Hardstanding.
- Army Triathlon – 1500m swim in the bay, 40km bike and 10 km run.

Further to a brief discussion it was proposed by Councillor Tomes, seconded by Councillor Moreton and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:

To provisionally approve the use of Council owned land for the requested events for 2022, as set out in the briefing note, prepared by the VSM.

7) **Budget 2022-23**

It was proposed by the Chairman and AGREED:-

That Item 7 b) on the Agenda be brought forward to Item 7 a).

a) **Fees and charges**

Further to Minute No.64. of the Full Council Meeting held on 13th September 2021, where the beach hut fees for 2022-23 had been approved, consideration was given to the charges for the Council's other visitor services. It was noted that it was proposed that the majority of the boat park charges would increase by approximately 4% for 2022-23 and included a new launch fee for dinghies 12 ft or under in size.

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

That the proposed scale of Fees and Charges for 2022-23, as set out in the briefing paper, be taken forward to the next meeting of the Policy, Finance and Performance Management Committee for further consideration as part of the budget setting process for 2022-23.

b) **One off expenditure**

A detailed briefing paper, prepared by the VSM, listed one off expenditure projects and an indication of cost, which comprised of the following:

New beach hut booking system

It was noted that due to high demand the current online booking system did not adequately perform and was difficult for customers and staff to manage. It was anticipated that a new booking system would cost £15,000, however, this would increase customer satisfaction and save staff time due to increased functionality.

Further to a discussion it was proposed by Councillor Whitwam, seconded by Councillor Harris, and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:

That a budget of £15,000 to purchase a new advanced booking system, to better meet the needs

of customers and staff, be taken forward to the next meeting of the Policy, Finance and Performance Management Committee for further consideration as part of the budget setting process for 2022-23.

Boat Park customer improvements

It was reported that a review of service provision at the boat park would commence during the winter season of 2021-22, to identify areas in need of improvement. It was reported that the boat park had seen a 20% increase in income compared to 2019-20, which had rendered some provisions unsuitable for the increased demand.

Further to a brief discussion it was proposed by Councillor Tomes, seconded by Councillor Foster and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:

That the allocation of £15,000, towards boat park improvements during 2022-23, be taken forward to the next meeting of the Policy, Finance and Performance Management Committee for further consideration as part of the budget setting process for 2022-23.

TIC front desk redesign

It was reported that the current welcome desk arrangement at the TIC was impractical and impinged the ability of staff to socially distance from one another and to effectively serve the public. A cost of £15,000 was requested to re-model the desk area.

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

That a budget of £15,000, to re-model the TIC desk area, be taken forward to the next meeting of the Policy, Finance and Performance Management Committee for further consideration as part of the budget setting process for 2022-23.

Beach accessible mat

Further to Minute No. 6) of the Informal meeting of the Beach Management Advisory Committee held on 13th October 2021, committee members were in agreement to trial the beach access matting, and that delegation be given to officers to specify the most appropriate location. It was anticipated that the matting would be in position by Summer 2022. Furthermore, it was suggested that further research into the availability of a grant to support beach accessibility was made.

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

That a budget of £3,000, to purchase and install beach accessible matting, be taken forward to the next meeting of the Policy, Finance and Performance Management Committee for further consideration as part of the budget setting process for 2022-23.

Beach Gardens – Outdoor gym equipment

Further to the briefing note prepared by the VSM, it was recognised that the expansion of outdoor ‘free to use’ sports equipment at Beach Gardens would enhance the provisions already in place and provide an additional exercise area for visitors and residents. The installation of outdoor gym equipment such as pull up bars, steppers and static cycles were suggested, dependant on cost.

It was proposed by Councillor Moreton, seconded by Councillor Harris, and **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:**

That a budget of £6,000, to purchase and install outdoor gym equipment at Beach Gardens, be taken forward to the next meeting of the Policy, Finance and Performance Management Committee for further consideration as part of the budget setting process for 2022-23.

Public drinking fountain for water refills

Members discussed the importance of creating a more sustainable town and felt the installation of a public drinking water fountain would provide a valuable resource in that respect. The hardstanding area along Shore Road was suggested as a prominent and convenient location for the facility.

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

That a budget of £3,500, to purchase and install a public drinking water fountain facility, be taken forward to the next meeting of the Policy, Finance and Performance Management Committee for further consideration as part of the budget setting process for 2022-23.

c) Staffing proposals 2022-23

Further to a comprehensive briefing paper, prepared by the VSM, a brief discussion was held which covered the proposed changes to staffing for 2022-23, and included:

- TIC – It was anticipated that the exceptionally busy summer and a longer season, experienced this year, would be repeated during 2022-23, and therefore in order to maintain a high level of customer service, an increase in staff hours was proposed. The average increase over the year was reported to be 4.5 hours, at an additional cost of £3,500 to include associated costs such as National Insurance contributions.

Further to a brief discussion, it was proposed by Councillor Foster, seconded by Councillor Harris, and **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:**

That a budget of £3,500, to increase staff hours for Tourist Information staff, be taken forward to the next meeting of the Personnel Committee for further consideration as part of the budget setting process for 2022-23.

- Boat Park – As previously reported under item 7 c), the boat park had become increasingly busy during 2021 and seen a 20% increase in income compared to 2019-20. It was therefore proposed that a re-introduction of a dedicated Boat Park attendant to work 6 hours per day over a 6-day period, would provide a better service and reduce potential issues during the peak season, May to mid-September, with the remaining hours covered by Seafront advisors. Further to a brief discussion it was proposed by Councillor Moreton, seconded by Councillor Foster, and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:

That the re-introduction of the role of Boat Park Attendant and associated costs, be taken forward to the next meeting of the Personnel Committee for further consideration as part of the budget setting process for 2022-23.

- Seafront Advisors – It was noted that during 2021, additional Seafront Advisors had been employed, partly funded from a Dorset Council grant and had proved beneficial during a busy season. The proposal for 2022-23, as set out in the briefing paper, would see the employment of two full time Seafront Advisors between April and October, and an additional full-time advisor between July and September. It was anticipated that the Seafront Advisors' role would encompass beach hut cleaning duties, and therefore save £6,000 in cleaning contractor charges. The uplifted cost of the proposed Seafront Advisor hours, taking into account the £6,000 saving would equate to £11,000.

It was reported that the 12-month Seafront Advisor contract would terminate at the end of March 2022 and it was proposed this be renewed for 2022-23.

Members praised the Seafront Advisors and Depot staff for their work alongside Dorset Waste Services and their commitment to ensuring the town was clean, tidy and welcoming.

Further to a brief discussion, it was proposed by Councillor Tomes, seconded by Councillor Harris, and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:

That the recruitment of Seafront Advisors, as set out in the briefing paper, prepared by the VSM, be taken forward to the next meeting of the Personnel Committee for further consideration as part of the budget setting process for 2022-23.

d) Budget 2022-23

Further to a discussion surrounding the 2022-23 budget, as outlined in the briefing paper, and the resolutions in respect of items 7 a) to 7 c) above, it was proposed by Councillor Moreton, seconded by Councillor Foster, and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:

That the 2022-23 budget, as set out in the briefing paper, be taken forward to the next meeting of the Policy, Finance and Performance Management Committee for further consideration as part of the budget setting process for 2022-23.

8) Tourism Reports

a) **Visitor Services Manager & Business Development Officer**

Further to Minute No. 8) of the Informal meeting of the Beach Management Advisory Committee held on 13th October 2021, the VSM had no further updates.

Members wished to thank staff, volunteers and local businesses for their hard work in ensuring the town provided a positive experience for visitors and residents throughout the season and planned to publish a statement in a local newsletter to that effect.

b) **Dorset Council Tourism Manager**

The Tourism Manager provided an update which included:

- Visit Dorset website – relaunched, Swanage in top ten locations visited on the website.
- Publications – Swanage featured in many local and National press publications; Coast magazine, i-newspaper, Telegraph, The Times and an influencers blog.
- Dark Skies – Cranborne Chase and Durlston Country Park noted as best places in Dorset for stargazing. Encouragement of visitors beyond October with ‘Astro tourism.’

The chair thanked the Tourism Manager for her work this year and assistance with marketing.

9) Updates from outside representatives

The following outside representatives provided updates as follows:

Swanage Museum

- Re-opened mid-July but still met projected annual turnover with support from grants.
- Reduction in volunteer numbers was noted.
- Visitors reported how clean and tidy the town looked.
- ‘Walk and Talks’ had been cancelled but a programme of events would be planned for 2022.
- It was hoped that a celebration of Edwardian/Victorian Swanage could be organised for 2022 with the involvement of shops and cafes.
- The Prince Albert Memorial had been completed.

Swanage Railway

A report had been provided prior to the meeting which included:

- It was anticipated that the Wareham to Swanage service would commence a 90 day trial during summer 2022.
- Dining trains remained popular with ten Christmas luncheon trains scheduled and the potential for more to be added.
- Various dates during November and December 2021 for the ‘Steam and Lights’ service.

Durlston Country Park

The chair read an email which contained the following updates:

- Increase in total numbers of visitors, a portion of whom had not visited Swanage/Purbeck before and others that regularly visited the area but had not previously visited Durlston.
- Durlston Bus service – awaiting details of passenger numbers prior to discussions over the provision for 2022.

10) Items of Information and Matters for Forthcoming Agendas

a) Swanage Friday Market – Vision for the future

It was noted that this item would be included on a future agenda.

b) Visit Dorset website launch

The information was noted, and the Tourism Manager would appreciate members reviewing content and reporting back any changes required.

11) Date of next meeting

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as Tuesday 22nd March 2022 @ 10 a.m.

The chair thanked all members for attendance and for their hard work over a busy summer.

The meeting closed at 11.15 a.m.