

Minutes of a Meeting of the **TOURISM AND LOCAL ECONOMY COMMITTEE** held at The Grand Hotel, Burlington Road, Swanage on **WEDNESDAY 3rd JULY 2024** at **2.15 p.m.**

Chairman: -

Councillor C Tomes

Swanage Town Council

Present: -

Councillor M Bonfield

Swanage Town Council

Councillor J Lejeune

Swanage Town Council (until 4.15 p.m.)

Councillor C Sutton

Swanage Town Council

Outside Representatives: -

Ms L Bish

Swanage Chamber of Trade

Ms L Egan

Swanage Chamber of Trade

Ms A Hinsull

Accessible Swanage

Ms A Leigh

Swanage Museum

Mr R Marsh

Swanage Fisherman's Association

Mr P Sykes

Swanage Railway

Mr M Whitwam

Purbeck Community Railway Partnership

Also Present: -

Mr C Milmer

Visitor Services and Business Development Manager

Mrs S Relph

Administration Officer

Ms C Burns & Ms A Etherington

Purbeck Film Festival

There was one member of the local press present at the meeting.

Public Participation Time

A presentation was provided by representatives from the Purbeck Film Festival, which included:

- The success of the film festival to date.
- An aspiration to raise the profile of the festival.
- Working closely with local businesses for mutual benefit/promotion of goods/services.

A query was raised regarding accessibility to events. In response it was agreed that accessibility was an important consideration, however, some venue locations posed a challenge.

The Chairman invited the representatives of the Purbeck Film Festival to attend future meetings of the Tourism and Local Economy Committee.

Prior to commencement of the meeting, the Chairman invited all attendees to pay tribute to Steve Darrington, who had recently passed away. Committee members commended Steve on his dedication to the music scene in Swanage and his hard work to ensure the Blues Festival had remained a successful event for the town. Members offered condolences to Steve's family and a one minute silence was observed.

1) **Apologies**

Apologies for their inability to attend the Meeting were received from Councillor T Foster, Councillor J Dorrington, Ms T Churcher (National Trust), and Mr R Patterson (Swanage Railway).

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. 9) - Councillor Bonfield declared a pecuniary interest under the Code of Conduct by reason of being a regular beach hut user.

3) **Matters arising from the Minutes of the Meeting of the Tourism & Local Economy Committee held on 20th March 2024**

There were no matters raised.

4) **Matters arising from the Minutes of the Coastal Change and Beach Management Advisory Committee held on 7th February 2024**

It was noted that the next meeting of the advisory committee would be held on Wednesday 10th July at 2.15 p.m. at the Town Hall.

5) **Review of Corporate Plan: Promoting Sustainable Tourism and Supporting the Local Economy**

The Visitor Services & Business Development Manager (VSBDM) presented an overview of the process for reviewing the Corporate Plan for the period 2025-29. It was noted that as an initial step, each of the Council's standing committees would review the relevant page within the existing plan to highlight any potential changes, prior to engagement with councillors and local residents later in the year.

Members briefly reviewed the 'Promoting Sustainable Tourism and Supporting the Local Economy' section of the Corporate Plan, which included a commitment to ensuring that Swanage continues to be a high-quality visitor destination. It was proposed by Councillor Bonfield, seconded by Councillor Sutton and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:-

That the Committee supports the proposed way forward in reviewing the Corporate Plan.

6) **Planet Purbeck: Change is Coming Report – To consider implications for tourism and the local economy**

A representative from Planet Purbeck provided an update following publication of the 'Change is Coming' report, which included:

- The report had been developed through the Wild Purbeck partnership (which included a total of 37 groups which ranged from conservation groups, landowners, government and local government organisations).
- A public consultation had attracted 7,000 interactions.
- Planet Purbeck reported that there had been a mixed response to whether an improvement to local employment could be attained through supporting nature-based recovery, however, this was considered to be an area to explore.
- Planet Purbeck would like to see conversations around a range of nature-based topics, including the impact of tourism, to be led by the community with engagement from local parishes, councils and tourism committees.
- Funds were currently being sought to assist with the progression of projects.
- Purbeck had been identified as being one of the most biodiverse destinations in the world.
- Tourism is changing with more nature-based experiences being sought by visitors.

- It was acknowledged that although revenue is required, further consideration around the suggested ‘Purbeck Pound’ tourist tax would be required.

The content of the report was noted and the representative thanked for his attendance.

7) **Events – Consideration of new event applications**

Further to the meeting of the Events working party, held on 25th June 2024, consideration was given to the contents of a briefing paper, prepared by the VSBDM, which outlined requests for events to be held on Swanage Town Council premises.

It was noted that the Women’s Institute Picnic to be held at Days Park on 6th August 2024 had been approved by the working party.

It was reported that the Swanage Sea Rowing Club had requested an extension to their 5th October Veterans Sea Rowing Regatta to 6th October, a two-day event incorporating the Junior Championships. The Blues Festival would be held over the following weekend, but as the date of 5th October had previously been approved the working party recommended that the additional date be agreed.

A further event request had been received from Gladiator Events (on behalf of the Alzheimer’s Charity) for an event on 7th June 2025 on Forres Field, as the start and end point of a 26-mile trek. It was noted that the 2025 events list was scheduled for approval in the autumn, however, an exception would be made to provide the Alzheimer’s Charity the opportunity to publicise the event in advance and maximise funds raised.

It was noted that an application for a Polar Express Christmas Market, to be situated in Main Beach Car Park, had not included the additional information required at this time and, therefore, a further update would be provided to a future meeting.

It was proposed by Councillor Sutton, seconded by Councillor Lejeune and **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:**

TO RECOMMEND:

That the Town Council approves the Junior Championship Sea Rowing Regatta event on 6th October 2024.

It was **FURTHER RESOLVED:-**

TO RECOMMEND:

That the Town Council approves the Alzheimer’s Charity Event on 7th June 2025 and that delegated authority be provided to the VSBDM, in consultation with the Events working party, to negotiate an appropriate fee.

At the working party meeting Members considered an amendment to the event application process, which would allow for events to apply to hold an event for up to two years in advance, rather than the current one year. It was acknowledged that the amendment would better meet the needs of event organisers, who frequently requested the same dates year on year, and would assist with forward planning for the Council. It was noted that event requests received would be presented to the Council meeting held in October for approval. It was therefore **AGREED:-**

That a change be made to the event application process allowing events to book for 2025 and 2026.

8) **Tourism Marketing – Visit Swanage Website Update**

The VSBDM provided an update regarding the Visit Swanage website, which included:

- At the time of transfer 76 businesses historically on the Visit Dorset site had remained on the Visit Swanage site and a further 37 businesses had since joined.

- The site appears third on Google search.
- The plan to develop seasonal videos and content for the website would be undertaken in due course.
- It was acknowledged that blogs reached a wide number of visitors and therefore a series of blogs were being developed which included: wild swimming, dog friendly Swanage, and eating out.

It was noted that a website, which provided accessibility information about different venues and events around the UK entitled ‘Access Able’, was a useful resource regarding suitable facilities/attractions and the National Trust have many of their properties listed on the site.

It was noted that a meeting would be arranged with a member of the Committee, a representative from Accessible Swanage and the Chamber of Trade to discuss the potential inclusion of facilities in Swanage on the ‘Access Able’ website.

Further to his declaration under Minute No. 2) Councillor Bonfield left the room during consideration of the following item.

9) Beach Huts – To consider fees and charges for 2025/26

Members noted the content of a briefing paper which outlined discussions held at the meetings of the Beach Hut working party, held on 11th and 25th June 2024, at which consideration had been given to a new fee structure for 2025/26.

It was noted that beach hut usage had changed since 2019 and demand had significantly increased; other changes to usage included occupancy during the summer having reached full capacity and a relatively high level of usage being recorded over the winter period. The previous fee structure had provided a wide range of period discounts in order to encourage out of season and upper-level bookings, but it was noted that the upper-level beach huts now had a higher occupancy than the lower-level beach huts.

The draft proposals for the fee structure included an introduction of revised price periods to better meet demand for huts over the year (supplied in Appendix 1 of the paper), a reduction in Easter period fees to encourage increased occupancy during a quieter period, a simplification of the current discount periods with only two new periods: Full Year bookings, at a 25% discount and Winter period bookings (1st November to 28th March) at a 25% discount.

The draft proposal for the booking procedure was outlined within the paper, which included a restriction on the number of huts available for bookings of 52 weeks, with the remainder available for bookings for one week or more as shown in the table below.

Day	Assumed release date	Period	Huts available
Day 1	8 th October 2024	52 weeks	Shore Road: 10 pre-designated huts (avoiding Artisans’ huts except upper-level premium)
Day 2	10 th October 2024	1 week+	All Shore Road huts
Day 3	11 th February 2025	52 weeks	Spa Retreats only
Day 4	12 th February 2025	32 weeks	Spa and Spa Retreats
Day 5	13 th February 2025	1 week+	Spa and Spa Retreats

It was noted that the increase to business rates would be reflected in the price charged for beach huts in the future.

A query was raised around the usage of the charity beach huts and in response the VSBDM confirmed that they were being used by a variety of charities and that all the schools in Swanage were sharing a hut for wellbeing purposes, which had proved to be very successful.

The contents of the paper were noted and it was agreed that a final proposal would be considered at the Council meeting to be held on 22nd July 2024.

Councillor Bonfield re-entered the meeting.

10) Fishers' Huts Allocation – Review of Policy

Consideration was given to a briefing note which set out the current allocation policy (agreed July 2004) in regard to the Town Council's fishers' huts situated at Peveril Point. It was noted that the huts were currently fully occupied and that there was a waiting list. Officers were, therefore, currently assessing the eligibility both of existing hut occupiers and those on the waiting list. However, it was noted that there were some questions as to how to prioritise those on the waiting list, such as existing hut occupiers who were seeking a second hut.

Members expressed the view that the fairest way forward would be for those currently in occupation to be issued with licence agreements for the current year with any changes to be implemented in the spring of 2025.

Further to discussion, it was proposed by Councillor Bonfield, seconded by Councillor Sutton and **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:-**

That a working party be appointed comprising of Councillors Bonfield, Sutton and Tomes, together with a senior council officer, to review the existing policy regarding the allocation of fishers' huts in detail, with a recommendation to be made to a future meeting of the committee.

11) Visitor Services & Business Development Manager Report

The following update was provided by the VSBDM and included:

- **Blue Flag Award**– It was reported that the Town Council had been awarded the Blue Flag Award for the 23rd consecutive year.
- **Lifeguards** – The lifeguards had relocated slightly further north on the beach than in previous years which gave a clearer vantage point along the bay and better vision across the designated bathing zone. The lifeguards would operate every day from the end of May to mid-September, between 10 a.m. - 6 p.m.
- **Recruitment** - It was noted that all posts for the summer period had now been filled.

12) Notes of Parish and Town Council Tourism Workshop held on 24th April 2024

The notes from the meeting of the Parish and Town Council Tourism Workshop had been circulated prior to the meeting. The VSBDM explained that a small group which consisted of councillors and representatives from the National Trust were looking at the potential of developing a destination management organisation for Purbeck and an update would be provided to a future meeting.

It was noted that Bournemouth hoteliers had recently held a referendum for the introduction of a tourist tax to fund the promotion of tourism, although its implementation had been delayed due to legal reasons.

Clarification was sought as to the current situation regarding a ride that had recently been installed at the Santa Fe Fun Park. It was reported that the key issue related to planning permission, and that this was being dealt with by Dorset Council.

The Chairman acknowledged that the situation had been emotive and thanked members of the Town Council's management team for all their hard work over the last two weeks in meeting with those concerned and the provision of updates to the community. He extended his thanks to Swanage News for the informative article that they had published regarding this matter.

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

Outside representatives provided the following updates:

- **Chamber of Trade** – It was reported that the Chamber were undertaking a review of signposting and visitor maps in Swanage. Investigation of the use of the brown road signs for visitors had suggested that costs would be in the region of £8k to £20k. It was agreed that signage should be added to the agenda for the next meeting of the Tourism and Local Economy Committee, and Accessible Swanage asked to be consulted on this subject.

The Chamber had also investigated water saving options and reported on the successful use of an enzyme cartridge called Dry Urinals being used at the Grand Hotel. The Chamber were also exploring the introduction of a QR code that could be posted around the town to take visitors to a town map of services, local restaurants and businesses.

It was agreed that the possible introduction of a town QR code/app should be added to the agenda for the next meeting of the Tourism and Local Economy Committee.

Councillor Lejeune left the meeting at 4.15 p.m.

- **Purbeck Community Railway Partnership** - It was reported that the Partnership is part of a national network to promote and support rail travel, although, unfortunately, the service between Swanage and Wareham has been suspended for the foreseeable future. The railway line needs more funding and the PCRPs are currently in talks with Perenco to see if there is a possibility of developing a hydrogen engine service, a 'green' project which would hopefully attract funding.
- **Accessible Swanage** - The Accessible Swanage Facebook page has a lot of new members and the group are working on a number of projects. It was stated that consideration was required for all forms of disability when considering accessibility, not just physical disabilities.
It was agreed that accessible car parking arrangements be added to the agenda of the next meeting of the Tourism and Local Economy Committee.
- **Swanage Railway** - It was reported that Swanage Railway had been holding more events to increase income. The business recovery plan was reported to be on target to achieve 200,000 passengers which will be the first time since 2018. Costs have risen dramatically which has impacted on recovery.
The Jurassic Adventurer ticket had been launched this year and has been very successful so far. This is an unlimited 24-hour ticket for the bus on Morebus, the train from Norden to Swanage and boat by City Cruises.
It was noted that during large events the Northbrook Road railway bridge can become extremely busy as a viewing area causing potential safety issues and the Railway were asked to consider mitigation measures.

14) Date of next meeting

It was noted that the next meeting would be held on Wednesday 27th November 2024 at 2.15p.m. at The Grand Hotel, Burlington Road, Swanage.

The Chairman thanked everyone present for their attendance.

The meeting closed at 4.55 p.m.
