

**Minutes of a meeting of the Barmouth Harbour Consultative Committee
held on 7 October 2008 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 R. Aeron Williams, Bill Pritchard (Barmouth Town Council), Julian Kirkham (Arthog Community Council), Mr E. L. Vaughan (Barmouth and Cardigan Bay Sea Fisheries Association), Mr K. J. Probert (RNLI), Mrs. Wendy Ponsford (Barmouth Harbour and Estuary Users Association)

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
Mr Mark Stone-Williams	-	Harbour Assistant
Mrs Glynda O’Brien	-	Committee Officer

Apologies: Mr Meic Ellis (Merioneth Yacht Club)

1. **ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN**

Resolved: To elect Councillor Trevor Roberts as Chairman of this Committee for the year 2008/09.

2. **ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN**

Resolved: To elect Mr K. John Probert as Vice-chairman of this Committee for the year 2008/09.

3. **DECLARATION OF PERSONAL CONNECTION**

No declaration of personal interest was received from any member present.

4. **MINUTES**

Submitted: Minutes of a meeting of the Barmouth Harbour Consultative Committee that was held on 28 February 2008.

Resolved: To receive and approve the minutes as a correct record subject to the inclusion of the following to be inserted at the end of paragraph 6 (b):
“Mrs Ponsford requested as to the possibility that the Maritime Unit would provide details of the cost of moving the causeway”.

5. **MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES - MINUTE 6**

The Causeway

Reported: By Mrs Wendy Ponsford that the minutes were not a fair reflection of the extensive discussion that took place regarding moving the causeway. In response, a member confirmed that there was a reference to the discussion in the minutes under Item 6 – Any Other Business. Mrs Ponsford noted that she had attended a meeting held on 22 February 2008 with Mr John Williams (Welsh Assembly Government), representatives of the Barmouth Harbour Basin Group, D.E. & T and Gwynedd Council. The above meeting took place with the relevant groups in order to work together to attain the aim of improving access over the sand bar as well as access to boats within the Harbour basin when they were asked to provide a list of ideas to the value of approximately £50,000 to £5m to be submitted for consideration. Also, the groups were asked to formally submit matters to Gwynedd Council and Mrs Ponsford’s task was to ask a formal question (at the request of Mr John Williams) regarding the cost of moving the causeway. Therefore, Mrs Ponsford asked if it could be costed, however, the Maritime Officer explained that the Maritime Unit did not have the resources or sufficient finance for work that would not be completed in the medium term. It was anticipated that moving the causeway would not be an option and the Members agreed with this view.

During the ensuing discussion it was recognised that an extensive discussion had taken place at the last meeting of this Consultative Committee on 26 February 2008 regarding moving the causeway, however, the majority of the members present were not in favour of moving it because of the possibility that lives may be lost as had occurred in the past. It was explained that since no formal proposal had been made at the last meeting regarding the cost of moving the causeway and in light of the objection from members present that no further steps had been taken regarding this.

Resolved - **To note the above.**

6. **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) Harbour Developments
- (iii) Ferry Service
- (iv) Events
- (v) Harbour Statistics
- (vi) Results of Customer Views
- (vii) Budgets
- (viii) Harbour Act

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

(i) that the **aids to navigation** were in an acceptable condition following examination by an officer from Trinity House. The aids had remained in their chartered positions except for one

that came off station two days prior to the Three Peaks Race. It was emphasised that their maintenance was very costly and it would be necessary to find £1,500 to complete the work.

Concern was expressed by a member that the lighting on the navigational buoys was insufficient and not up to standard on the evening of the Three Peaks Race as he had seen two boats coming ashore and one was totally lost. He was of the view that the buoys had not been correctly placed on station to cope with harsh weather and therefore consideration should be given to the quality of the work and not to low costs.

In response, the Maritime Officer explained that while accepting that buoy No 2 had come off station, a huge investment was made to maintain the aids in the past and this was an exception as buoys rarely came off station. As regards to the estimated cost for the work, the Maritime Unit did not always undertake work in accordance with the lowest tenders and the quality of the work was vitally important.

(ii) in the context of **harbour developments**, it was explained that due to the lack of financial resources that it had not been possible to purchase a pontoon, however, the Harbour Master would continue to seek estimates for a second-hand pontoon. It was explained that the Council had received a very poor financial settlement and the prospects for the next two/three years were not promising either and the Maritime Unit would give attention to small scale developments in the Harbour allowing that financial resources were available to undertake these.

The water pipe in the ownership of Welsh Water continued to cause concern and the Maritime Officer understood that Welsh Water officers had visited the pipe and that it could not be shortened due to the importance of the pipe to discharge in an emergency. However, it was proposed to send a letter to Welsh Water to press on them to remove the pipe.

In response to a query by a member regarding contacting boat owners who were responsible for the damage to the ladders on the quay wall, the Maritime Officer explained that it was difficult to prove and have evidence against any boat owner to recover the cost of damage. It was noted that one incident was to be seen on the CCTV camera, however, the picture was not clear enough to take a case against the boat owner..

(iii) it was noted that a new owner would offer a **ferry service** in 2009. In response to a query from a member regarding the certificate required to operate a ferry, the Maritime Officer explained that the Council required a Level 2 certificate, however, owners received an additional test by the Harbour Master when required.

(iv) in the context of **events** and specifically that the European Blue Flag was awarded to Barmouth beach in 2008 that it was possible that it may not be awarded in 2009 due to the water quality forecast. Formal confirmation was awaited from the Environment Agency in due course. The Maritime Officer gave an undertaking to send a note to every member of this Committee to confirm the water quality results. Samples were taken every fortnight by the Agency from one specific location between May and September. If the results were negative for the Blue Flag the Maritime Unit intended to submit an application for the Urban Beach Award in 2009.

Disappointment was expressed by several members regarding the above because Barmouth was dependent on tourism and the beach was one of the main tourist attractions in the town in the past..

(v) members were guided through the attached appendices to the agenda and were requested to note that there was a reduction in the number of Personal Watercraft registered in Barmouth, compared with last year. 69 had been registered and this included those who had registered via local recreation sites. 92 powerboats had been registered in Barmouth harbour and 104 boats had moored in the harbour this year, i.e. 9 boats less than last year. The likely reason for the general reduction in numbers throughout the County was the high price of fuel and the harsh weather. Thanks was given for the cooperation of the nearby caravan sites in Barmouth to register Personal Watercraft. The Maritime Officer proceeded to guide members through the comparative statistics for boats in every harbour together with the list of names of boats moored in the Harbour.

(vi) the results of the **analysis of customer questionnaire** would be submitted to the next meeting of the Consultative Committee in February.

(vii) in the context of the budget, it was envisaged that the income of Barmouth Harbour would be approximately £20,000 short of the target for the current financial year. Members were reminded that there was an overspend of £12,000 last year and that attaining the income target was unrealistic. In terms of the staffing structure in Barmouth Harbour, there were two full-time permanent officers to deal with the day to day work, whilst there was only one officer employed in Aberdyfi. He appealed to members to refer any concerns they had regarding day to day matters to the Harbour Master in order that they could be dealt with at the time..

As a consequence of all the cutbacks that the Council faces a member suggested that a deputation from this Consultative Committee should meet relevant officers in Caernarfon to discuss if it was possible for the Maritime Unit to receive a percentage of the receipts of the car park in Barmouth as it was the Harbour and its facilities that attracted tourists to Barmouth. In response, the Chairman explained that similar requests had been submitted previously, however, members were unanimous that another request should be made and that a strong argument should be made to the Highways and Municipal Unit.

(viii) following a recent query regarding the definition of the **Harbour Act**, the Maritime Officer explained the Council's internal legal view that meant that in accordance with the Barmouth Urban Council Act 1929, that Gwynedd Council had the power to repair, deepen, extend and safeguard the harbour. The Act did not place a duty on the Council to repair, deepen, extend and safeguard the harbour

Mrs Wendy Ponsford was not satisfied with the above wording and stated that it was misleading and other solicitors had a different view. It was suggested that the Maritime Officer's report avoided using the word "protect" and in accordance with the Act that Gwynedd Council had a duty to undertake the necessary work to repair, deepen, extend and safeguard the harbour in order to create a safe access to receive boats into the harbour. From this wording the Council had a duty to maintain and restore the facilities that existed according to need and not to allow the condition of the harbour to deteriorate.

In response to questions asked by Mrs Ponsford regarding if the Maritime Officer had asked for an external solicitor's opinion, he said that he had not done this however, any individual was free to challenge legal opinion at their own costs. The officer added that there was no budget available to dredge the Harbour, however, if Harbour facilities were unsafe then it would be a duty of the Maritime Unit to safeguard them.

The Chairman expressed disappointment that funding was not available from the Assembly Government to undertake a feasibility study for improvements in the Harbour together with projects such as the renovation of paths in Barmouth. In response, Mrs Ponsford explained that she had had a word with Mr John Williams, Welsh Assembly Government, however, the officer did not now deal with the Barmouth project and it had been transferred to Debbie Reynolds. In the meantime, it was suggested that a strong and firm letter should be sent stating the aspirations of this Consultative Committee to Mr Alun Ffred Jones, Minister for Culture and Heritage, Welsh Assembly Government with a request for him to meet the members to discuss their application for a feasibility study for harbour improvements. The Maritime Officer promised to draft a letter on behalf of the Chairman of the Consultative Committee. .

The Group Engineer suggested that the best way forward was for the groups interested in developing the Harbour to firstly come together to discuss ideas/aspirations in order to secure clear and strong projects to be included in a feasibility study.

Resolved:- (a) To receive and note the contents of the Principal Maritime and County Parks Officer and to thank Harbour staff for their work.

(b) To request that the Principal Maritime and County Parks Officer writes to:

- (i) Mr Dafydd Williams, Chief Engineer Transportation and Street Care, Highways and Municipal Unit to convey the Consultative Committee's wish for a deputation of the committee to meet the relevant officers in Caernarfon to discuss the possibility of the Highways and Municipal Unit transferring a percentage of Barmouth car park receipts to the Maritime Service bearing in mind that it was the harbour facilities that attract users to the car park and Barmouth.**
- (ii) Mr Alun Ffred Jones, A.M., Minister for Culture and Heritage, Welsh Assembly Government to convey the wish of the members of the Consultative Committee regarding the need to undertake a feasibility study for improvements to the Harbour to include the aspirations and ideas of the various groups/partnerships that are involved with Harbour facilities.**

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

The following matters, that had not been referred to the Principal Maritime and Country Parks Officer beforehand and had not been discussed at this meeting, were considered and the officer's response to them was received:-

- (1) Pontoons and dredging in the main and inner harbour.

Reported that there had been requests for pontoons at several meetings and the desire was to have a pontoon near the side of the slipway, however, unfortunately it was necessary to dredge the site to make it practicably possible to site a pontoon. It was suggested that it would be practicable to have a pontoon near the Ferry steps or at Aberamffra.

In response, the Maritime Officer suggested that the Yacht Club could submit an application for a grant from the SPLASH Scheme operated by the Environment Agency to fund community projects. He proceeded to say that it wasn't easy to manage dry pontoons because their use was dependent on the tide. It would be necessary to look into the possibility of having a temporary pontoon especially as the Yacht Club were undertaking commendable work promoting sailing for children. It was further suggested that it would be an idea to invite Cai Jones, Sports Council, to come and discuss the possibilities with the Yacht Club.

- (2) Harbour Development. A walkway between the main bridge and the harbour to join up with the coastal path from the north would bring in an enormous amount of business from known high spending cyclists.

That it would be beneficial to discuss the above with the Minister for Culture and Heritage especially as the Snowdonia Access Group were anxious to include the coastal viaduct as part of the coastal path. Without doubt, this would again strengthen the argument for developing and improving Harbour facilities.

- (3) A harbour model to find out where the flows are and what can be done to improve the harbour, again to attract businesses and tourists

Reported that the town's economy had to be increased by attracting more boats into the Harbour. It was asked if it was possible to extend the contract for beach cleaners/assistants until the end of October.

In response the Maritime Officer explained that it would be necessary to seek additional funding for this and it would be necessary to extend the service to every beach in the county. It was noted that if there are problems on the beach that harbour staff are available to deal with any practical issues that arise.

- (4) Harbour Act 1797, Barmouth Urban Council 1929, and the public inquiry in 1969 – should all be considered .

This matter had been dealt with under Item 6 (viii) above.

- (5) The sewer pipe still needs to be shortened. Can we put pressure on Welsh Water?

This matter was dealt with as part of the Maritime Officer's report in Item 6 above.

- (6) Can pressure be placed on the Council to do something about the toilets which are still appalling?.

Reported specifically that the condition of the Ladies toilets were shameful especially in the middle of the summer season and closing them at 5.00 p.m. was not practical in a seaside town such as Barmouth. .

A member expressed a wish for the Community/Town Councils to take responsibility for them because of the cuts that all Council services faced, as had happened in some areas. In response, a member noted that this would be acceptable if Gwynedd Council would transfer funding to maintain them rather than the Community Councils having to use their precept for this.

(7) Fendering on the ladders

It was recognised that the condition of the ladders caused concern and a repair work programme will be arranged to be completed before the end of December.

(8) Rod fishing from the harbour should be policed more than it is

The Harbour Master acknowledged that he policed rod fishing from the harbour wall, however, people moved and had removed the prohibition signs but he would ensure that more signs would be erected if required.

Resolved To receive and note the observations made together with the answers given by the Maritime and Country Parks Officer.

7. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

It was reported that the next meeting of this Committee would take place on Tuesday, 25 February 2009.

Resolved To receive and note the above,

CHAIRMAN