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## PORTHMADOG HARBOUR CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE 9/10/19

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**PRESENT:**

Councillor Alwyn Gruffydd (Chair)  
Councillor Nia Jeffreys (Vice-chair)

Councillor Selwyn Griffiths (Gwynedd Council), along with Councillor Llywelyn Rhys (Porthmadog Town Council Representative), David Eastwood (Harbour Interests Representative), Dr John Jones-Morris (Leisure Interests Representative), Robert Owen (Commercial Interests Representative) and Will Walker Jones (Cricieth RNLI Representative)

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:** Barry Davies (Maritime and Country Parks Officer), Arthur Francis Jones (Senior Harbours Officer) and Eirian Roberts (Democratic Services Officer).

**1. CHAIR**

**RESOLVED to re-elect Councillor Alwyn Gruffydd as Chair of this committee for the year 2019/20.**

**2. VICE-CHAIR**

**RESOLVED to re-elect Councillor Nia Jeffreys as Vice-chair of this Committee for the year 2019/20.**

**3. APOLOGIES**

Councillor Gareth Thomas (Cabinet Member for Economic Development), Llyr B. Jones (Senior Economy and Community Manager) and Malcolm Humphreys (Porthmadog Harbourmaster) (who had recently lost his mother-in-law).

**4. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST**

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

**5. URGENT ITEMS**

Sea Stairs

The Porthmadog Town Council Representative noted that he wished to raise the matter regarding the Sea Stairs at the unanimous request of the Town Council meeting the previous evening, to report back to the Town Council on the matter at its next meeting. The Chairman noted that there was no objection to having a discussion on the matter.

The Town Council Representative noted that there had been correspondence for some time between the Town Council, the Maritime and County Parks Unit, and Porthmadog Sailing Club regarding public access to the Sea Stairs. He emphasised that these stairs were part of the history and heritage of the town of Porthmadog, and that the Town Council was strongly of the view that it was necessary to protect the age-old tradition of local people's right to enjoy the use of the Sea Stairs. He referred to the work of creating access to pontoons down the Sea Stairs between 2002 and 2004, emphasising that a letter received by the Town Council from the Maritime and Country Parks Manager, dated 16 September 2019, noted that "*when the original scheme to install a pontoon was developed by the*

*sailing club, the Maritime and Country Parks Service ensured that the development would not restrict access to the water near the Slate Steps [Sea Stairs] site". The letter also noted that "this was sold to the Sailing Club, and it is possible that this is minuted in a meeting of the Porthmadog Harbour Consultative Committee".*

He further noted that the metal gate with a sign noting "No access beyond this point" was contrary to the Maritime and Country Parks' Unit's instruction, at the time of the scheme to install the original pontoon, that public access would continue. In fact, it was now impossible to gain access to the original historic steps themselves, as the Access Bridge for the pontoon had now been built on top of them; and there was a need to rectify this.

The Leisure Interests Representative noted that the Sailing Club had written to the Town Council on three occasions explaining the exact nature of the situation, and that the sign clearly noted that anyone using the harbour had the right to access to the water for loading / unloading craft, etc.

The Town Council Representative noted that the sign read "Safety Notice - private access - pontoon for harbour users' use only - no fishing or crabbing". The words 'private access' and the iron gate did not invite access to the pontoon, even for boat users, and it caused people to feel as though they were trespassing on private property.

In response, the Leisure Interests Representative explained that the sign read 'private entrance' as the ramp was the property of the Sailing Club, and that it too was responsible for its inspection, its maintenance and its insurance. Therefore, it was necessary to set a restriction of some kind on who could gain access, but he reiterated the fact that any harbour user had the right to go down to the water.

The Maritime and Country Parks Manager explained that the Unit had co-operated on this matter with the Sailing Club, this committee and the Dwyfor Area Committee for a number of years. He noted that the original steps (which were the property of Gwynedd Council) were at times covered by the tide. They were therefore slippery and a number of accidents had occurred. Although there was no wish to close the steps, there was a need to be vigilant. He further explained, at the time of developing the scheme, that there had been an agreement that one pontoon would be reserved for craft visiting the harbour to load / unload, and that this situation had not changed. It was possible that there was an opportunity here to revisit the wording of the sign with the Town Council and the Sailing Club, but he emphasised, as far as public access was in question, that access was only permitted for use of the harbour.

The Town Council Representative noted that the steps should be made safe rather than closed off and given away to a private club. He added, accepting that the pontoon had been built on this location, and that the decision had been made years previously by agreement and consultation, that the current situation was unacceptable.

The Leisure Interests Representative noted that the scheme had been approved by Cadw as the walls were listed.

It was emphasised that it was vital that emergency services should be able to gain access to the water.

The Town Council Representative suggested that the gate should be removed, and a sign installed emphasising the need for access for emergency services. He once again emphasised that public access could not be restricted.

In response, the Leisure Interests Representative noted that the removal of the gate was not an option, and emphasised that harbour users were fully aware that they had the right to come and go as they wished.

The Town Council Representative noted that not everyone was aware of this.

The Maritime and Country Parks Manager suggested that the Town Council could propose an alternative wording for the sign, but emphasised that neither the pontoon nor the Access Bridge would be removed to reopen the steps, as the current situation was safer than it previously was.

In response to a query from the Town Council Representative, the Maritime and Country Parks Manager noted that there was no public right of way beyond the gate, but rather access for harbour users only. The Leisure Representative noted that he did not believe that changing the wording of the sign would make any difference as the current sign clearly noted that access was permitted for people who needed to load / unload their craft.

The Chair noted that it was evident that there was confusion regarding who had the right to use the ramp below the Harbour wall, and the Representative was asked to report back to the Town Council on the matters discussed at this committee.

## **6. MINUTES**

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this Committee, held on 6 March 2019, as a true record.

### Matters arising from the minutes

#### Item 2 - Urgent Items

In response to an enquiry, the Maritime and Country Parks Officer explained that there had been further discussions with the Wynnes Company, and that a very clear message had been conveyed to them to the effect that it would be impractical to vacate Porthmadog Harbour of craft in June / July 2020 in order for a ship to traverse the harbour in connection with the work on transformers at Trawsfynydd and Ffestiniog. It was suggested that the company should look at other locations, and they were in the process of assessing options at Morfa Bychan beach, which would mean bringing the ship in at high tide, landing and drying out. The lorry would leave the ship and make its way along the public road in the direction of Trawsfynydd. It was confirmed that the road was sufficiently wide to bear the load, and initial discussions had been held with the Council's Highways Department regarding the road quality/strength to bear the load. An assessment of the requirements and costs for this would be the company's responsibility, but as nothing further had been heard from them since then, it was very unlikely that the ship would be coming to the area in June after all. However, committee members would be notified should there be any developments in the meantime.

## **7. UPDATE ON HARBOUR MANAGEMENT MATTERS**

The Senior Harbour Officer's report was presented by the Maritime and Country Parks Manager, updating the committee on Harbour matters for the period from March 2019 to October 2019. The members were invited to give feedback on safety matters and harbour operational matters.

The following were circulated at the meeting:-

- A summary of the Harbour budget and the current financial situation up to the end of September 2019.
- A draft of the proposed fees and charges for Porthmadog Harbour in 2020/21 (including and excluding VAT). It was noted that the draft would be submitted to the Cabinet Member in December.

It was noted that the Gwynedd registration figures for powerboats and personal watercraft, included in paragraphs 2.4 and 2.6, were different to those noted in the tables in the appendices to the report. It was explained that the two sets of information had not been prepared concurrently, but that the figures would be reconciled by the next meeting.

The Maritime and Country Parks Manager noted that a member had enquired as to how the Council would deal with the issue of the increase in the mud / sand gathering on side of the Harbour nearest to the light railway. It was explained that although Gwynedd Council, as Harbour Authority, had the right to dredge the harbour, there was no requirement for it to do so. The work of dredging any harbour was extremely complex and expensive. Some dredging work had been completed in the Harbour in 1994, with the mud removed to a nearby dumping site. However, as this was now contrary to European regulations, the sediment would have to be transported to a site around 15 miles north of Holyhead. Although the arrangements, income levels and permits were in place to dredge the harbours of Pwllheli and Caernarfon, it was not anticipated that it would be possible to undertake works of this kind in Porthmadog, Barmouth or Aberdyfi. In response to a further query from the member, the Maritime and Country Parks Manager explained that the increase in mud / sand in the Harbour did not lead to an increased loss of moorings, as there was currently much capacity in the Harbour for moorings. An enquiry was made as to whether it was the owners of the houses on the far side of the Harbour who held the rights to the moorings located there. In response, it was noted that the seat for a Landowners' Interests Representative on this committee was currently vacant, and that they had a right to elect a representative to attend the meetings.

The Senior Harbours Officer presented the Harbourmaster's report, summarising the navigational and operational matters that had arisen between March 2019 and October 2019, including maintenance matters.

The following were circulated at the meeting:-

- A draft of the Harbour bye-laws, and a request was made for committee members to submit any observations they had on the draft bye-laws before 31 December 2019. It was noted that an electronic version of the document was available if members wished to have it.
- Porthmadog Harbour maintenance work programme for the October 2019 - February 2020 period.

Further to the content of the report, the following matters were raised:-

- It was noted that the Trinity House report, following its annual inspection of navigational aids in the Harbour and the approach channel between 14 and 16 October, would be presented to the next meeting of the committee, held in March.
- It was reported that the Unit had recently been shocked to receive observations from Porthmadog Sailing Club regarding a lack of maintenance of the Harbour's navigational aids. The Sailing Club's letter was read out to members. It referred to the incorrect location of aids and delays in conveying information to mariners, and it was emphasised that the Unit regularly notified mariners of changes to the channel. It was explained that the Sailing Club had been contacted again to suggest that they discuss these matters with their representative on this

committee, in order for him to expand upon the situation at this meeting. The Representative confirmed that he had not been asked to raise the matter, and the Maritime and County Parks Manager added that no other mariners, or Trinity House, had raised concerns.

- The Sailing Club was thanked for offering a berth for the Dwyfor boat by the pontoon which was owned and managed by the Club.
- The Maritime and Country Parks Manager gave members an update on the situation following a recent case of jet skis being driven in an irresponsible and aggressive way in Cricieth. It was noted that it was understood that the police was still investigating the incident. The Town Council Representative noted that he too had recently seen jet skiers behaving irresponsibly, and asked what members of the public should do in a situation of this kind, where the situation was evidently dangerous, but was not an emergency that warranted a 999 call. In response, the Maritime and Country Parks Manager noted that he would advise people to phone Galw Gwynedd, the Harbourmaster or the Maritime Officer in Pwllheli, noting the date, time and location of the dangerous incident. Members were asked to disseminate this message.
- The Maritime and Country Parks Manager noted that he had received a letter from Cricieth Town Council calling for a complete ban on personal watercraft between Porthmadog and Pwllheli. He had already explained to the Town Council that Gwynedd Council did not have the powers to do so, that it would be very difficult to manage, and that there would also be an economic impact. However, he had promised the Town Council that he would bring the matter before this committee. He further noted that there would be a need for more officers to supervise and work outside of normal hours. The Council was dependent on the public keeping an eye on the situation, but the number of complaints received was very low in comparison to the number of people who gained enjoyment from this activity. It was also noted, despite bye-laws being in force at Cricieth and Morfa Bychan, that this was not the case at other locations along the coast. Everyone was asked to report any unreasonable incident they witnessed. It was agreed that Cricieth Town Council should be notified that this committee had discussed its letter, suggesting that the current bye-laws should be reinforced.

In response to an enquiry, it was explained that there had been an attempt to boost the economic growth of the town in the past by not charging fees for holding events in the Harbour. However, the cost of cleaning and tidying after events meant that there would be a need to revisit this for 2020. It was confirmed that film and television companies were usually charged, and that those companies had to gain the Council's permission to film in the first place.

**RESOLVED to note and accept the report.**

## **8. NEXT MEETING**

It was noted that the next meeting would be held on 11 March 2020.

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and concluded at 6.50 pm

**CHAIRMAN**