

**Poole Beach Huts Association General Meeting
Newtown Conservative Club
6th November 2023**



Minutes

Chairman Bob Lister welcomed members and guests - Councillor Millie Earl and Councillor Mike Cox.

Apologies were received from Janet Coy and Cheryl Atterton.

BL introduced committee members and thanked them for their support.

He said members are concerned about any further rent increases next year as assurances that the current year's 12.5% increase would enable more beach staff to be recruited and maintenance of the shabby beach hut stock would be completed, did not materialise. As no response from the beaches team was forthcoming, Bob felt it was necessary to submit an FOI request to BCP Council for an explanation. A less than satisfactory reply did not provide a breakdown of where the additional £420,000 was allocated.

This year the state of some of the toilets continued to be a concern. Sandbanks in particular was frequently left with no adequate cleaning service with mobile units missing them altogether on occasions. This situation resulted in Sandbanks tenants reporting this beach facility was without any soap or toilet paper at critically busy times during the summer and the early September 'heatwave'. Branksome Dene Chine toilets have additional use when the community room is let for functions and are completely inadequate to cope and urgently need upgrading.

Branksome Chine toilets are currently closed for repairs to the roof of the building but no signage is available to direct visitors to the nearest facilities and no portaloos have been installed.

Sand has been a persistent problem this year with frequent high winds and the recent storms have added to the problem. Branksome Chine car park is permanently covered in sand resulting in disabled bays being indiscernible leading to inappropriate parking.

BL thanked Social Secretary, Yvonne Hartwell for another very successful summer social event at Branksome Dene Community Room. He also requested that a minute secretary is urgently needed to join the committee.

Committee members are listed at the end of the minutes.

Guests were introduced ...

Councillor Millie Earl

Cllr Earl explained that she was elected to BCP council in 2019 as the member for Newtown/ Heatherlands ward. Since the local elections in May this year, when the Liberal Democrats won a majority, she was appointed as deputy leader of the council to leader Cllr Vikki Slade. The new authority is known as the Three Towns Alliance with six Lib Dems and three Independents on the Cabinet. Cllr Earl has responsibility for the People and Connected Communities portfolio which includes tourism and the seafront.

She explained that the new council's focus is getting back to basics which they believe is what local residents want to see. Their approach is openness and transparency with debates in public, no more decisions made behind closed doors.

Councillor Mike Cox

Cllr Cox is a chartered accountant with a practice in Christchurch. He moved to the area in 2016. As a back bencher during the previous administration he challenged many of the decisions made by the former leader.

The previous Conservative administration has left BCP with a £44 million deficit and was running on a £30 million deficit every year despite inheriting significant reserves when the three authorities merged - all reserves are now gone.

Cllr Cox explained that since accepting the finance portfolio he has taken away all the 'fantasy stuff' and his goal is to balance the budget. He went on to explain that if a council goes into bankruptcy, government officials take over the finances and cut all non mandatory services e.g. libraries, public toilets etc.

Currently Children's' Services account for the majority of costs to BCP council. He illustrated that one special needs child can account for £27k per week in funding.

Cllr Cox confirmed that he has spent the last six months focussing on the budget with bi-weekly meetings looking at how to reduce costs. As a result Future Places, the contentious 'arms length' organisation, has now gone with a regeneration team now retained in-house. The former Christchurch town hall will be sold for development fairly promptly, however Poole's Civic Centre will take longer to dispose of due to its heritage.

In a further bid to reduce costs, voluntary redundancies will be sought from the BCP workforce and agency staff will be reduced where possible. On current calculations the deficit has reduced now to £12 million but this needs to get to zero.

When asked about plans for beach hut rents for the forthcoming year, he stated that there could be no change to the previously agreed five year plan - therefore tenants can expect a further rise of 12.5% next year.

Car parking charges will also have to rise and council tax will increase. Cllr Cox criticised the former administration for not imposing a council tax rise last year.

He also stated that second home owners could expect to pay extra council tax in the future although this could not be imposed until 2025.

The long term aim is for a Residents' Card to be introduced allowing local people to benefit from savings on council services.

Questions from the floor ...

Pre-requested questions/comments included ...

Q. Is there going to be a new cafe at Canford Cliffs?

A. There is no money for construction projects. The previously approved Seafront Strategy needs to be reviewed in light of the current circumstances.

Q. The current toilet cleaning arrangements are a disgrace, what can be done to improve it? There was criticism of operatives driving up and down the prom while cleaning was neglected.

A. Agreed, a basic service is necessary. This summer's service will be reviewed, extra staff may need to be recruited, where events are happening more cleaning is required.

Q. What is happening to Sandbanks Pavilion?

A. There is no likelihood of any change without a commercial partner. Ideally a second floor would be constructed offering further outlets but this is unlikely in the current climate.

Q. What about camping on the beach? There were reports of one enforcement officer being available last year. When called to attend he drove by without dealing with the problem.

A. It's good to hear first hand accounts from tenants of situations, this is noted.

Questions /comments from the floor included ...

Q. Electric BBQs need covers, no thought given to their maintenance.

A. These were wrongly purchased under 'emergency powers' some remain in storage but no more will be installed.

Q. At Sandbanks there are only five disabled parking bays situated far away from main facilities out of a total 532 spaces - wholly inadequate and needs to be addressed.

A. Thanks, noted.

Q. Beach Road car park - any plans to redevelop?

A. BL stated that the access needs to be changed to Beach Road and signage improved to alert visitors to the option of a nearby alternative site. The upper area could still be sold for development.

Q. Why are beach wheelchairs not available for use?

A. There are two available - one at Sandbanks, one at Branksome Chine but process for access seems unnecessarily complex.

Q. Why are short term rentals are only available for one month?

A. Introduced during Covid restrictions -unnecessary now, needs to be changed to weekly to raise more revenue.

BL raised the point that the merger of the three councils was supposed to create savings instead it has resulted in financial instability.

MC responded that the transformation process has cost over £50 million and the reliance on agency staff needs to be addressed. However, problems exist in recruiting and retaining appropriately qualified staff in certain key areas.

BL thanked all guests for their contribution to the meeting and members for attending.

42 members attended the meeting.

Committee members 2023

Chairman: Bob Lister

Vice Chair: Janet Coy

Treasurer: Tony Mullins

Secretary: Vacant

Newsletter Editor: Julie Snow

Social Secretary: Lizzie Manetta

Ordinary members: Cheryl Atterton, Yvonne Hartwell

7.11.23

JMS