

PLANNING AND STRATEGY WORKING GROUP

Wednesday, 25th January, 2017

MINUTES

Present: Cllr. Arran Harvey – Chairman
Cllr. Richard Blackwell
Cllr. Terry Mullard
Cllr. Karen Lewis
Arthur Atkins, Head of Environmental Services, SDC
Briony Williamson, Caravans and Licensing Officer, SDC
Gill Smith, parish clerk.

Apologies for absence:

None.

Approve Minutes of the meeting held on 2 November and matters arising.

All agreed Minutes were a true record and there were no matters arising.

Permanent Occupation of Non-Residential Caravans:

Briony provided details of her role and identified common issues of long-term living at caravan sites. She has met with management of all the sites in Shepway and has a close liaison with them in trying to tackle permanent living at the sites. SDC officers work together in housing benefits and licencing and consult with park managers if concern is raised about permanent living at sites. New Beach does take action against families that have breached contractual arrangements. The sites contract for each caravan, clearly states permanent living is not permitted. The contractual arrangement requires the owner of the caravan to provide a permanent address and to show council tax bills for their permanent residential property. The site is closed for two weeks each year, commencing 14th February each year.

Arthur provided information regarding the legislation governing caravan sites; Planning and Control of Caravan Sites 1960, Caravan Sites Act and Mobile Homes Act. Some of the sites in Shepway, were however, operational prior to 1960 when Conditions with Planning Approval were less stringent.

Residential sites have stricter regulation, residents pay council tax, are registered for demographic purposes and have occupancy 52 weeks each year. There are very little concerns or complaints regarding these sites.

It was considered that holiday parks need more supportive legislation to deal with some of the issues that arise from those abusing governance and using the site for permanent living.

SDC Officers, and many local authorities are aware of the issues; benefit claimants, permanent living, not eligible for council tax, not registered with doctor surgery and not accounted for on demographical data. This is a nationwide problem affecting several districts throughout the country. SDC has brought this to the attention of MPs.

Briony informed that Romney Sands Caravan Park has chosen to close its park for 4 weeks per year to avoid misuse and abuse of its regulations. New Beach Holiday Park is owned by the same company and its new management is working towards its operation being similar to Romney Sands Caravan Park, but there is no indication that a forced four-week closure will be implemented at the current time. Some customers have found loop-holes in the existing legislation and regulations of caravan parks, but all in authority are trying to close the loop-holes. Arthur is of the view that amendments need to come from site owners and not enforcement powers, as this could create an influx of homeless persons, which will have a detrimental effect on other service providers.

It was suggested that a communal fee/ tax per night for those on non-residential caravan parks (as is a requirement in France) would provide a contribution to the local area. There are very few places for tourists to stay and taking the majority of caravan spaces out of the equation, is detrimental to tourism trade.

Cllr. Karen Lewis and Arthur Atkins left after this item

Planning Applications:

No applications to consider.

Friends of Martello Tower No. 24

Richard informed a certificate is still awaited from the Charities Commission for the newly formed group. 18-20 volunteers have signed up to help open the Tower. Presentation boards are being explored. A web-site has been introduced and grants are being sort from District Councillors towards promotion/advertising. The Group is trying to keep the existing custodian engaged with English Heritage, particularly during the winter months. The Group plan to open the Tower to visitors on Saturday and Sunday and Bank Holidays from 11am – 2pm, Easter through to September. Educational leaflets are being planned for visitors and school groups.

Dymchurch Economic Strategy:

Gill informed SDC Officer Katherine Igoe has resigned and will no longer be addressing council on the Romney Marsh Partnership in February. DPC will need to wait for a newly appointed officer to be in post before any progression is made on the projects identified in the Strategy.

Richard informed Karen and Merlin Redding are planning to resurrect the Dymchurch Traders Association.

New businesses in the High Street are imminent, The Ship Inn and Mary's Tea Rooms and a Cobblers recently opened.

Promotion of the Village:

Amendments are needed urgently to the Dymchurch Leaflet. The leaflet will need to be re-printed by mid-March so it can be distributed by Take One Media from 1st April.

Any Other Business:

Richard suggested the open space at the top of Orgarswick Avenue be included in the Open-Space Strategy being produced by SDC. Also that the DPC Newsletter include a paragraph inviting organisations/clubs/societies to be included on the DPC web-site.

Meeting closed at 11.25am.

Next Meeting: Wednesday 22 March, at 10am.

Recommendations to Council:

There are no specific recommendations to Council, other than the Minutes be noted and:

- 1. The Dymchurch leaflet be printed by mid-March.**
- 2. The Dymchurch Newsletter include an article for local clubs and societies to be included on the web-site.**