

**Poole Beach Huts Association Annual General Meeting  
Merley Community Centre  
27 January 2016**



## Minutes

Chairman Bob Lister welcomed members and thanked guests including speakers, Inspector Shawn Whitley, Dorset Police Neighbourhood Inspector - Poole South and also Councillor Mohan Iyengar, Portfolio holder for Culture and Leisure and Councillor John Rampton whose portfolio includes responsibility for beaches, for attending the Association's fourth Annual General Meeting.

BL also thanked committee members for their support in making the Association a success and thanked Martin Stevens, Treasurer for providing the venue for the AGM and members serving refreshments.

BL introduced committee members and welcomed Borough of Poole officers, Anthony Rogers, Recreation Manager and Tracey Moore, Beaches Team Leader. He thanked the team for their continued hard work in relation to the clear condition of the prom despite high winds during the winter.

He reported on an eventful year for the PBHA with bi-monthly committee meetings, regular meetings with senior officers from the beaches team discussing issues raised by members and a public meeting held in September at St Aldhelm's Church Hall with 80 plus members attending. On the social side, a successful barbecue was held in June at Branksome Dene Community Room. A new leaflet promoting the Association was produced in the summer to encourage new membership.

The formal AGM was led by Jack Crewe, retiring Secretary. Committee roles were appointed for the ensuing year and a list appears after the minutes. In his report, he referred to the formal complaint lodged by the PBHA to the council due to their approval of the *Seafront Development Plan* which in the opinion of the majority of members was without sufficient consultation. This has been acknowledged and will be dealt with under BoP's formal complaints procedure.

MS reported that there was currently £2585 in the accounts. Members who had not paid their fees were reminded to do so.

BL introduced Inspector Whitley who gave members a summary of his 24 years of policing much of which was spent in Dorset and more recently in Poole. He explained how criminality has changed since his early days in the Force in the late eighties and how partnership working is key to modern policing. He stressed the need for public assistance in solving crimes and the importance of crime prevention. With regard to beach huts, he advised that the presence of a strong lock is likely to deter most petty criminals but he strongly advised against storing valuables. New technology has made relatively inexpensive sensors available on the market which can alert owners of an intrusion by text (see Winter newsletter for details). Although the record of hut break-ins in Poole was much improved, in fact there had been a very recent spate of damage to 25 huts at Branksome Chine which was awaiting forensic results. He urged the public to report any suspicious activity on 101 but always 999 when a crime was in action.

BL thanked Inspector Whitley for his entertaining and interesting talk.

BL then introduced Councillor Mohan Iyengar and Councillor John Rampton who started proceedings. He summarised the Council's dire financial situation with successive government funding cuts over many years continuing to zero by 2019, therefore no revenue support grant. This has led to a strategic policy of consistent saving across all departments and increasing income by

introducing commercialisation where possible. At the same time the borough has a demographic problem with the highest number of over 65s and over 85s resulting in a high level of funding spent on vulnerable and older people.

Councillor Iyengar added that it was imperative that the council makes the best use of all its assets. This includes looking at all areas of potential economic growth - businesses are being encouraged to move here creating more jobs. Poole Tourism is actively encouraging visitors whose spending boosts the overall economy. Talent from local universities also boosts key sectors towards growth but providing housing is vital to keep people here. He reported that the *Supporting Poole's Seafront* planning document had been approved by Council in December. He acknowledged that it is an ambitious planning framework for the next 25 years but some contentious elements may not happen due to planning consent being required before development can proceed. The recent proposed plan for a sand sports arena has been withdrawn by the developer and would have been refused by planners for a range of contraventions.

Anthony Rogers, Borough of Poole's Recreation Manager was introduced. He stressed that the beaches team have to develop income streams to support the council's beaches strategic plan which was now in Phase II with 170 new huts proposed at Canford Cliffs subject to planning approval. It is estimated that this development of better quality huts and improved facilities such as a new cafe and promenade will result in an annual income of £1.6 million from beach hut rentals and concessions. He also stated that charges will continue to rise by 7.5% to March 2017 and it is likely to that from 2017 the rise will be 10%. A change to payment methods will see the introduction of 10 monthly payments on a par with council tax.

Pre-requested questions/comments included ...

Q. 'Eye-watering' increases have been compounded over recent years and are way above inflation how can this possibly be justified?

A. AR replied that there was continued investment by the council in the beaches. Solar panels had been introduced at Sandbanks to reduce costs and commercial events and new concessions are being encouraged to generate income. The new hut programme was incurring an investment of £3.6 million by BoP. He added that a demographic analysis of beach hut tenants had been carried out and it revealed that the majority lived in the most affluent parts of the borough. Cllr JR added that if market values for beach hut rentals were not achieved it would effectively mean that one part of the borough was subsidising another. The original rental fees came from a low original base.

Q. Shared tenancies were suggested by the PBHA, to formally allow two existing tenants to share one hut thereby releasing the other hut to the waiting list. This appears to have been rejected by the council, why?

A. AR said the proposal had been explored but it was felt this would incur additional admin but informal 'sharing' arrangements do exist which do not affect the contract and would not be opposed although they were technically against the conditions of the rental agreements.

From the floor members commented/asked ...

Q. With so many new huts being built and rental prices rising beyond the income of many existing tenants, resulting in keys being returned, surely this risks over-supply?

A. AR - The current waiting list has 1450 applicants, some with multiple requests for huts, resulting in approximately 1100 actually waiting for an offer, thereby outstripping the supply of huts even with an average of 100 keys being returned annually. He added short-term huts had now been reduced to only 50 from 100 allowing 50 applicants from the waiting list to take up tenancies.

Q. Is any other area of the council experiencing charges raised by 7.5% compounded every year? It feels like beach huts are an easy target.

A. Cllr JR - Every single asset is being looked at with commercial measurements being applied.

Q. Is there a rolling programme of maintenance?

A. TM - Five years ago Sandbanks and Branksome Dene were maintained, this year the first two tiers at Branksome Dene will have complete plastic fronts which will be much quicker to install with far less intrusion for tenants and the benefits of being long-term maintenance-free. Other areas will have more piecemeal maintenance on a reactive basis. She added that the weather-damaged sides of the two-storey 'port hole' huts at Branksome Chine had been replaced with plastic cladding.

Q. Is the Sand Polo event going to be charged at an increased rate?

A. Cllr M I - The rates had been increased since the event's inception and it was now an established event at Sandbanks with a regular following. Rates will continue to be reviewed. Insp. SW added that licensing conditions at the event's popular party nights have been changed. AR added that the nine day event falls outside the school holiday period and studies by Bournemouth University estimated that it generates £350K annually to the borough. He stated that increases in charges to the operator will exceed 10% each year.

Q. When and where will the 170 new huts be built?

A. AR - Subject to planning approval, the majority of new huts will be created by converting single storey huts at Canford Cliffs to two storey. Bore hole tests have revealed that existing huts may need to be replaced rather than an additional level being added due to structural limitations. It is hoped that this work will be started this September and completed by May 17. Work will be staggered and phased, tenants affected will be allowed a rent-free period to cover any displacement during the work period. They will be offered first choice of new huts which will be varied in size and structure. Public engagement events will be held in March when tenants can meet the appointed architect to discuss issues.

Q. What is happening with the ramps for new huts at Brankome Chine?

A. AR - There have been significant issues due to the sub-structure of the promenade following excavation to install ramps resulting in major ground works. This should be completed by the end of February.

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

35 members attended the AGM.

### **Committee members elected for 2016**

Chairman: Bob Lister

Vice Chair: Martin Stevens

Treasurer: Jack Crewe

Secretary: Lyn Thomas

Newsletter Editor: Julie Snow

Social Secretary: Yvonne Hartwell

Ordinary members: Janet Coy, Cheryl Atterton