

Watchet Boat Owners Association
Meeting Monday 12th March 2018
The Esplanade Club, The Esplanade, Watchet

Minutes

Present: 17 members were present

Apologies: from four members

1. **Minutes of the last meeting:** February 2018

2. **Matters arising:** There were no matters arising

3. **Officer's Reports**

i. **Chair (Bob Hitchings)** – nothing to report

ii. **Commodore (Bruce Scott)** – nothing to report

iii. **Secretary – letter from Ray Ventura, read out by Martin Stevens**

Ray has given consideration to WBOA's position regarding the mud in the marina to date and in the future. He expressed concern that, other than continuing to work with the Marina (WHM), West Somerset Council (WSC) and other statutory bodies to drive communication channels, we have been completely unsuccessful in improving conditions in the marina. The one main concern is the lack of direct involvement from the Marina owner, although it was acknowledged that we believe Iain Lambert is doing his very best with an ongoing difficult situation. Ray believes that Tim Taylor should be in direct dialogue with the people for whom he is failing to provide a service in the marina, as well as requesting an increase in fees. He has provided absolutely no guarantees about even the coming season, let alone a longer-term solution for the mud. We appear to have reached a point where berth holders can barely use their boats. We have challenged WSC directly to start implementing the agreement they have with WHM, but they have not answered our challenge.

Ray suggested that it is essential Tim Taylor be invited to a berth holder meeting, to give a detailed explanation of the plan for WHM to return the marina to the asset for Watchet as it was intended to be. If he is unable or unwilling to do this, then we will call our own meeting to discuss further actions.

iv. **Treasurer/Membership Secretary (Martin Stevens)**

- The WBOA accounts produced from the AGM are in good order.
- There is a continued need to encourage further increased membership of the WBOA.
- The Mud Meeting Group is now a subgroup to the Watchet Harbour Advisory Committee. Brian Mitchell from the 'Silt and Mud Group' presented about 'air-lift dredging' to the Council. They have been asked to show a viable risk assessment, acceptance criteria and method statements, to satisfy the Council about safe practice. Additionally, a dredging license may be needed (which may take 6 months to obtain), but is uncertain, as the plan is a trial and will not be to dump mud, but place it back into suspension. Chris Hall and the Harbour Master (Captain Badsey) agreed with the proposed action.

- Feedback from the Harbour Board meeting – There was a discussion about the structure of the harbour, due to movement following the spring tides in January. Martin has noted some cracks in the walls, with specific concern about the state of the outer harbour. On the West Quay the fendering has disappeared, and the laddering has been crushed by vessels, and has not repaired. These both present a significant safety issue, as there is now no way to get up out of the outer harbour if needed. There is also concern about mud build-up in the refuge, as boats are unable to moor safely there after the gate has closed. The harbour is a sea defense to Watchet and therefore must be maintained. Additionally, Minehead has similar needs. A structural engineer should be asked to review the Splash Point wall.
- It was commented that Easter is fast approaching, and that there is concern that yachts from other parts of the Bristol Channel coming to Watchet will run aground.
- We need to continue to keep these concerns high on the agenda of the Council, and Martin will raise about them at future Harbour Meetings.
- Steve Yeandle has offered to show Council staff the problems in the Outer Harbour from the viewpoint of a boat in the harbour (rather than on top of the wall), which Chris Hall agreed was a good idea.
- All thanked Martin for his efforts.

v. **Other Officers**

Yard Officer (Brian Rich) – the water in the yard has been shut off due to a pipe burst.

Action: *Martin/Brian to fix in the next week.*

4. **Watchet Marina Feedback (letter from Iain Lambert, read out by Bob)**

- Beast from the East caused no serious damage, and marina staff responded to the two incidents quickly. Iain gave thanks to the “Watchet grapevine” for alerting staff to them.
- Chris has left the marina’s employment due to ill health, and Iain wished him well for his future. He is looking forward to replacing Chris in the near future with a marina assistant to work alongside Iain and Matt.
- The silt continues to be an issue and Iain is very aware of the impact on berth holders and visitors. He is currently sourcing a dedicated dredge team who, using the marina machine, will focus initially on the B-C basin, the gate area and the hammerheads, before tackling the rest of the marina.
- To compliment this, he is exploring alternatives such as chartering a small water injection unit for an early-season clear up, to assist in clearing the fairways quickly.
- The marina has been working in close collaboration with the Onion Collective and the East Quay proposed developments throughout the design stages, to ensure that the ongoing range of marina services will continue to be provided, including an effective boatyard operation. There is still not agreement on car-parking with the Council, but it is hoped to resolve this soon.
- Much consideration has been given about the marina tariff for 2018 and, balancing rising operational costs against the mud issue, it has been decided to cap this slightly below inflation. The rise can be avoided entirely, if boat owners choose to renew in full prior to the 1st April.
- Iain appreciates that these are serious issues, and he is very happy to discuss all or some of the above in person. If members wish to do so, please contact him at the marina office.
- Finally, Iain gave thanks for the continuing support of the marina and team, in their ongoing effort to provide the WBOA and Watchet in general, with a pleasant, practical and efficient marina.

5. **Any other business**

i. **Steve Yeandle**

Steve read out headlines from the Somerset Free Press in April 2006 where boat owners were asked to be patient about the mud; this was 12 years ago. As a Charter Skipper, he feels he is a broken man and his business is in crisis (as he now has to offer a reduced price/refunds; he cannot provide a service on a neap tide; he has continually to apologize to passengers; and he is losing business). Last weekend, on the neap tide, he had to move his passengers to the bow, in order to get his boat out of mud and the harbour. This meant he was significantly late in leaving, but then had to return early to get back into the harbour. He then found it necessary to cancel Sunday's business, as the tide was even lower. Steve stated that he has been unhappy about the mud for the last 12 years and the stress on him is now unbearable. He has continued to pay full fees over the years, without the mud being managed.

Steve is proposing withholding his Marina fees this year. Additionally, he would like to contact the Council to ask for a copy of the WHM lease through a freedom of information request, in order to review WHM's responsibility in their management of the mud. Finally, he is considering approaching local MPs about the issue. He does not want this being reported to the press, as he fears he will lose further trade. Steve asked members of the WBOA to join him in withholding Marina fees if they wished to do so, in order to exert pressure on the Marina to manage the mud problem.

A general discussion followed about the issues raised by Steve, and his proposal. It was highlighted that concern was expressed by WBOA members in August 2017 about the changing mud levels in the harbour, and proposals were carried that: that marina fees be based on the current state of the pontoons and retained water; and that the WBOA request a clear public statement on the timescale of the remedial work.

It was agreed, however, that the WBOA:

- Cannot offer formal advice to members to take action, but they can inform members of Steve's position.
- Can invite Tim Taylor to a meeting to discuss the situation further.
- Can request a clear public statement on the timescale of the remedial work to manage the mud.

There was the general expression by members present that they may like to withhold payment to the Marina, until such time that there is a plan to manage the mud; so that, if the gate is open, berthholders can freely leave and enter the harbour. Concern was also expressed about the need to inform the Watchet trades people of the situation in the harbour/marina, and potential impact on Watchet trade. Steve reported that he would raise this matter in a future Watchet traders meeting.

Action: *Martin to write a letter to all WBOA members to inform them of Steve's proposal. Steve's point of payment will be if he can continue to run his business.*

- ii. **Quiz** – Agreed that the next WBOA quiz at the Esplanade Club be on 27th March 2018.
- iii. **Club clothing** – To be discussed at the next meeting.
- iv. **Steve Yeandle** – as a member of Watchet Flowers and Bloom, he is looking for a donation of a dinghy to plant out with flowers, following one being damaged in a car accident on the harbourside.

6. **Time meeting closed:** 20:50 hours