

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE PROSPERITY POLICY DEVELOPMENT
GROUP HELD AT FOLLATON HOUSE, TOTNES ON 28 APRIL 2010**

MEMBERS

* Cllr R F Croad – Chairman

* Cllr J I G Blackler – Vice-Chairman

* Cllr T Barber

∅ Cllr J Brazil

∅ Cllr F J Hawke

* Cllr R M Lawrence

* Cllr J T Pennington

* Cllr M Stone

* Denotes attendance

∅ Denotes apology for absence

Also in attendance and not participating:

Cllrs B E Carson

Officers in attendance:

All Agenda Items: Strategic Director (Community) and Member Support Officer;
Item 5: (Minutes PPDG.34/09 below refers) Head of Service Salcombe Harbour;
Items 5, 6 & 7 (Minutes PPDG.34/09, 35/09 & 36/09 below refer) Strategic Director
(Resources) and Head of Property Services;

Item 8: (Minute PPDG.37/09 below refers) Head of Environment Services; and

Item 9: (Minute PPDG.38/09 below refers) Head of Landscape and Leisure and
Tourism Manager

PPDG.32/09 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Prosperity Policy Development Group held on 7 January 2010 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to inclusion of the following amendments which had been previously raised at the Council meeting held on 4 February 2010 in relation to the budget proposals for 2010/11 (Minute 82/09(g) refers):

The proposed bid and possible savings in relation to crime and disorder were not carried by a unanimous vote, but were in fact carried by a majority vote.

PPDG.33/09 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Cllr R M Lawrence declared a personal interest in Items 7: 'Asset Strategy' and 9: 'Tourism and Marketing Strategy (2007-2012)' (Minutes PPDG.36/09 and PPDG.38/09 below refer) by virtue of him being a member of the Modbury Parish Council and remained in the meeting and took part in the discussion and vote thereon.

PPDG.34/09 BOAT PARK OPERATIONS – STRATEGY FOR THE FUTURE

The Harbour Master presented a report that informed Members of the issues surrounding the operation of the Boat Park, and in particular, winter storage. He stated that in essence, there were two substantive issues for consideration:

- The fragmented nature of the operation of the boat park between the lifting contractor, Winters Marine Ltd, and the Council, and the risks that this posed from a health and safety perspective; and
- The business case, should the Council consider making the investment in equipment in order to undertake the operation of the storage facility in entirety.

During the discussion, the following matters were specifically raised:

Consultation: It was confirmed that proposals to improve the boat park had been previously considered by the Harbour Board in 2007 and by the local town council during 2009. In terms of consultation with the local boat owners, the Harbour Master said he had not consulted with them in the last eighteen months.

The key issue was felt to be that local contractors and boat owners seemed to use the Council Car Park similar to a village green which was Council owned but currently used free of charge by boat owners when servicing and cleaning their boats, which included using the Council's water supply. The Council also had to maintain the land and clear the rubbish generated by the boat owners. It was suggested that a small administration charge be levied for those contractors registering for insurance and for using a prime council asset.

Costs to Improve the Car Park: A Member questioned whether the costs of improving the car park, such as resurfacing, would negate any benefits of the Council taking on the entire operation. In reply, the Group was informed that income was declining as the boat lifting service was currently very expensive. As a result, the Council could, in the long term, lose the £65,000 income altogether, yet still have all the management responsibilities of the boat and car park. Therefore, it was clear that a decision had to be made as to whether the Council or a suitably qualified boat yard operator managed the entire operation outright as neither would be able to survive financially on half of a diminishing income. He also highlighted that owners of very expensive boats expected excellent facilities and therefore a strategy was needed in terms of either giving a licence to operate or the Council operating the service. In the absence of a clear strategy the facility could be lost altogether.

Some Members were unhappy of the prospect of a private sector monopoly and the potential impact on small boat operators whose livelihoods depended on the facility. The Harbour Master also highlighted that a lease, if granted, would require a life span of at least twenty years to be viable to an operator and they would require the car park to be resurfaced and made good immediately.

He further informed Members that if the Council was to take on the entire operation, it would be for the Council to run as the asset owner (i.e. Property Services) and Street Scene from the car parks perspective. The Harbour staff could operate this facility on behalf of the District Council.

It was then **PROPOSED** and **SECONDED** and on being put to the vote declared **CARRIED** by a majority vote of 5 in favour to 1 against that it be:-

RECOMMENDED

That the Executive be **RECOMMENDED** that:

1. The Group note the report and acknowledges the difficulties and risks being managed by the Council of the winter storage operation; and
2. Approval be granted to proceeding with the proposal whereby the Council provide the service of winter storage at Shadycombe / Batson Car Park in house.

PPDG.35/09 DARTMOUTH EMBANKMENT

The Head of Property Services informed the Group that he had recently held a meeting with the Harbour Master of Dart Harbour Navigation Authority (DHNA). The Council had also sought legal advice and had been advised that in accordance with the 1954 Dartmouth Harbour Act, the Council was entitled to 75% of any landing fees levied for passengers and goods. However, this related to the Quay only and the definition of the Quay was stipulated in the 1882 Act. Thus, 75% of the total the Harbour Authority collected from landings at the Quay appeared to be minimal and this was because most landings were sited at the Town Jetty Bridge.

The Council currently charged DHNA £9,900 for the formal lease to land passengers. The lease would expire in 2012 so there was an opportunity to renegotiate the terms of that lease in two years time. Some of the Council's assets were not covered by the 1954 Act, for example, the dinghy rack, fundus moorings, running moorings and ladders. After discussions, the DHNA stated that they were willing to manage the assets on the Council's behalf for an annual fee. There was potential for some small revenue opportunities from the assets, and as these would require maintenance, the officer stated that the income could contribute to the management fee.

PPDG.36/09 ASSET STRATEGY

The Head of Property Services presented a report that informed Members of the updated draft Asset Strategy for 2010 which provided linkages between what the Council was doing to maximise the use of its assets to meet priorities, and how this fitted with the Council's financial plan.

The principle aim of the strategy was to minimise the opportunity costs of having resources tied up in land and buildings and that expenditure, capital or revenue, was used efficiently to maximise value for money. A fundamental core of the strategy was to review and challenge the Council's property holding and use.

During the discussion, the following points were raised:

- a) It was asked if other agencies, for example, Devon County Council (DCC), NHS Devon, Devon and Somerset Fire & Rescue Service and Devon & Cornwall Constabulary had been consulted in the compilation of the draft strategy. In response, the Officer informed that consultation had not been undertaken but that this could be incorporated. It was felt that this might not only be useful, but a critical exercise, as DCC was also currently undertaking an Asset Management review. Members also noted that discussions were taking place with DCC and other partners with a view to sharing the accommodation at Follaton House;
- b) A Member emphasised that they would like the issue of carbon reduction to feature in the review of assets when it was undertaken. The Chairman stated that it was a requirement to have a carbon reduction management plan.

It was then:-

RECOMMENDED

That the Executive be **RECOMMENDED** that the Group has noted the report and approves the Asset Strategy 2010.

PPDG.37/09 **LOWER FERRY MONITORING REPORT**

The Head of Environment Services presented a report that set out the performance of the Lower Ferry for the twelve month period from April 2009 to April 2010. Due to the Higher Ferry being out of service between February and March 2009, a reliable comparison between 2009 and 2010 could not be made. However, compared with 2008 it was demonstrated that there was a downward trend on vehicle usage. It was not possible to know whether the Higher Ferry had also experienced a similar downturn.

There had been a substantial drop in the number of commercial vehicles using the service and it had been noted that the Lower Ferry was unique in having two categories of commercial vehicle in terms of pricing structure. These being Grade 5 – weighing up to 1800kg, Grade 6 from 1800kg to 3500kg and no differential pricing for vehicles of over 3500kg to 7500kg. It was therefore proposed that vehicles up to 3500kg be reclassified to Grade 5 and be charged £4.70 and those from 3500kg to 7500kg be reclassified Grade 6 and charged £6.20. Concessionary ticket sales had also dropped substantially and it was proposed to reduce the charge to £25.00 for 20 tickets to align with the pricing of the Higher Ferry. Foot passengers however, had increased, and it was proposed to keep the charge at 50p in line with their competitor's charge.

The Head of Environment Services reminded Members that the Prosperity Policy Development Group had, at a previous meeting, supported the principle of granting delegated powers to both the Lead Member for A Clean Environment and the Head of Environment Services. However, it was still felt appropriate that any substantive changes should be reported back to the Group.

During the discussion, the following points were raised:

- a) A Member noted that traffic congestion was incurred in the centre of Dartmouth as a result of queuing for the Lower Ferry. To alleviate this, the Member suggested that perhaps the Lower Ferry could sacrifice some business to the Higher Ferry. In response, the Officer stated that many customers used the Lower Ferry because they wished to go direct to Kingswear, which was more efficient in terms of time and fuel. Also, an increase in commercial vehicle activity could create a build up and create further issues on the highway. Therefore, in the future, it might be appropriate to consider traffic build up, but at the current time, the main focus was on the pricing structure;
- b) It was discussed that the decrease in vehicle usage appeared to replicate a trend in decreasing car park income suggesting a continuation of the downturn in the local economy. It was suggested that it would be useful to discuss these issues at the next meeting of the Group.

It was then:-

RESOLVED

That the Group note the contents of the report and has commented as recorded above.

PPDG.38/09 TOURISM AND MARKETING STRATEGY (2007-2012)

The Head of Landscape and Leisure presented a report that provided Members with a review of progress in year 3 of the 5 year strategy. The Council had entered into a five year partnership to deliver Tourism and Marketing with the newly established Visit South Devon Company and Teignbridge District Council. The legal arrangement fixed the budget contribution for 2009/10 through to 2014.

The Strategic Director (Community) stated that the overarching aim of the Council was to taper down its investment in tourism marketing as it was felt that this was more a matter for local businesses. Instead the Council would concentrate its efforts on destination management i.e. in maintaining a clean and distinctive environment.

During the discussion, the following points were raised:

- a) A Member was critical on the overarching decision regarding the investment in marketing, noting the impact of tourism on the local economy in terms of visitor spend, businesses and jobs. The Strategic Director reiterated the point that the decision was one taken by Members as it was felt to be more appropriate in difficult financial times to prioritise investment in other services that maintain the 'tourism product' such as street cleaning, the provision of public conveniences and open spaces.
- b) A Member raised the matter of the provision of Tourist Information Centres (TICs), citing the example of Modbury TIC which received no regular contribution from the Council. The Community was very concerned about the withdrawal of support, as it was a very important part of their local infrastructure.

It was then:

RESOLVED

That the Group note the contents of the report and has commented as recorded above.

(Meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 11.50 a.m.)

Chairman