



Consultation ends at 4pm on 11th July 2014

Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, i-cubed, USDA, USGS, AEX, Getmapping, Aerogrid, IGN, IGP, swisstopo, and the GIS User Community

Southwold Harbour Lands Consultation

Introduction

Waveney District Council and Southwold Town Council formed a joint working group during 2013 in order to consider the future of the Southwold Harbour Lands.

A map of the area included within the Southwold Harbour Lands and the agreed terms of reference of this joint working group are appended to this consultation document.

Based upon the research, discussions and deliberations to date the joint working group is 'minded to' recommend to Southwold Town Council and the Cabinet of Waveney District Council that:

- i. The draft key principles and vision outlined in this consultation document be adopted;
- ii. A Joint Committee, with the delegated powers set out in this consultation document, be established in place of the current joint working group;
- iii. Investigations be made to identify the options for optimising external investment in, and delivery of, the Caravan site in line with the vision for that area;
- iv. Solicitors be instructed to develop the optimum options for the sustainable, long term, ownership, control and delivery of the Southwold Harbour Lands;
- v. A Community Engagement Strategy be developed and implemented to ensure the ongoing involvement of all relevant stakeholders as the vision continues to evolve and be delivered.

Consultation

Before making such recommendations to the two Councils the joint working group wishes to consult all stakeholders with regard to these draft recommendations.

This 'minded to' document therefore forms part of a 6 week public consultation from **2 June 2014 to 11 July 2014**.

There will also be an opportunity to directly put your views or observations in person to members of the joint working group. These individual sessions will take place towards the end of the 6 week consultation period. Details of how to express an interest in attending such a session will be made available on the Waveney District Council and Southwold Town Council websites from the start of the consultation period.

At the end of the consultation, and having reviewed all of the information, views and comments, the joint working group will determine what final recommendations to put to Southwold Town Council and the Waveney District Council Cabinet.

At this stage it is proposed that the working group's final report and recommendations will be considered by a simultaneous meeting of the Waveney Cabinet and Southwold Town Council in the week commencing 28 July 2014.

Improvements made during 2013/14

A significant number of immediate changes and improvements have been identified and actioned through the joint working group.

These have included:

- Strengthened and formalised management of the Southwold Harbour Lands;
- Various actions to bring the Caravan Park more in line with the model standards for such sites, including critical Health & Safety improvements (particularly with regard to electrical and fire hazards);
- Local empowerment (within agreed budgets) of the site manager for the Caravan Park and Harbour Master;
- Repair of the Harbour road;
- Development of toilet and shower facilities in the Harbour Master's office.

Vision

In addition the joint working group has been developing a draft 'vision' for the lands.

In developing this vision the working group has identified some consistent principles that underpin the entire vision:

- Improvements that reflect the culture & character of Southwold
- Local influence & accountability
- Working in partnership
- Discharging statutory obligations
- Financial transparency
- Investment & local re-investment
- Viability & sustainability (both financially and in terms of governance)

Guided by, and balancing, these principles the working group have established their draft core priorities and proposed approach to each of the four key elements that comprise the Southwold Harbour Lands.

Harbour Area

The role and statutory responsibilities of the Harbour Authority and Harbour Master, in accordance with the Port Marine Safety Code, should be maintained and made more resilient.

It is critical to the working group that the structural integrity (walls, training arm etc) of the Harbour is protected, maintained and appropriately improved. This is essential in order to fulfil another of the working group's priorities - to maximise the use of the harbour. This will include addressing the challenges that currently exist and render parts of the harbour of no practical use to vessels.

It is essential to the working group that the Harbour area achieves a good balance of uses. The main use should be as a working harbour, maintaining current levels of, and providing for future employment (e.g. Fish sales, Boat building, Harbour / Marine services & supply chain). In addition though, this should be supported by harbour leisure use (sailing) and attracting broader tourism.

It is essential to establish this clarity of vision for the harbour area as soon as possible in order to avoid previous situations where different external parties and internal council departments (e.g. asset management, planning & tourism) may have progressed proposals that could be inconsistent with this vision.

Coast & Estuary

Southwold Harbour is recognised as an integral part of the wider coast and Blyth estuary system. Achieving wider agreement on the long term sustainability of the area around the harbour, and the funding needed, are likely to remain significant limitations to the working group's ambitions for the Harbour Lands.

The working group considers it critical however to work closely with partners, particularly the Environment Agency, District Council Coastal Management Team and European funders, to seek to deliver the agreed priorities for the Harbour Lands. This will require innovative, adaptive and sustainable management, repair and maintenance of assets on the surrounding coastline and estuary.

Caravan Site

It is the working group's desire to maximise the revenue return that the caravan site can deliver in order to subsidise investments in other areas of the harbour lands (as above). The working group also recognise that the current site is neither fulfilling its financial potential given its Southwold location and brand, nor providing a facility that is befitting of the character of Southwold.

Comparison of the current site against the model standards for such sites, and initial scoping investigations, have also demonstrated that significant financial investment is required in the site.

The working group recognise that the leisure park business is a significant industry in the UK. In order to optimise the potential of the Southwold site it needs to be run as a professional business, and with greater technical expertise than can be achieved by either Council.

Even more critically it is recognised that investment is required which is beyond the current capacity of the councils. It is therefore proposed to explore the options for private investment and operation of the site. In developing such options the working group recognises the need to balance what may be competing priorities, including:

- Supporting current users
- Local operational delivery
- Length and format of any agreement
- Level of investment required
- Expected levels of revenue generation
- Compliance with Model Standards
- Risk appetite of the Councils

Governance

The working group is clear that it does not wish to get into lengthy and potentially expensive and confrontational discussions with regard to ownership and liability of the Harbour Lands. The working group has, however, identified that there is a willingness and an urgent desire to start to develop and implement alternative governance and delivery models for the lands, building upon the common ground and purpose between the Councils.

The current joint working group has no delegated decision making powers from either Council. In order to develop a revised delivery model and to build upon the success of the joint working group over the past year it is proposed that the working group is now replaced by a formal Joint Committee of the Councils. This Joint Committee would have delegated decision making powers from both Southwold Town Council and executive powers from the Waveney District Council Cabinet. It would therefore operate as a Strategic Board for the Harbour Lands, providing a strategic steer, ensuring compliance with legislation and holding to account the 'management' for the operation and delivery of the lands, within the budgets set by the Councils.

The Working Group has already carried out detailed investigations into the income and outgoing of the component parts of the Harbour Lands over the last ten years. It has recognised that due to the nature of Local Government accounting it has not always been possible to directly follow where a pound is generated or spent within the Harbour Lands. It will also therefore be a key aspect of the Joint Committee to put in place an additional transparent process for understanding and managing the ongoing finances of the Harbour Lands.

It is also proposed to commission external solicitors to develop sustainable long terms models for revised ownership and control of the Harbour Lands. In doing so the solicitors will be asked to consider and address a number of issues, including:

- Providing an open & transparent model that encourages local involvement;
- Any competing charitable, local government and harbour authority considerations;
- Ensuring legal compliance in the operation of the Harbour Lands
- The need to capitalise on the potential of the lands and to get an optimum return on all investments;
- Ensuring reinvestment back into the Harbour Lands of all surpluses generated within lands (NB Southwold Town Council are clear that they have no interest in making a financial gain from the Harbour Lands but there is a collective recognition that Waveney District Council's revenue is currently supported year on year by income derived for the Council from the Harbour Lands – which is then offset by capital investments. This arrangement will therefore require some form of phased transition so that all income earned by the lands is directly reinvested in the lands);
- Addressing the financial sustainability challenge of needing to balance long term large scale investments (including preventative investments) with ongoing balanced revenue budgets;
- Maximising tax and VAT opportunities;
- Addressing concern with regard to potential liabilities.

Responses to 'Minded to' Consultation

If you have any comments or observations with regard to the content of the 'minded to' document, or specifically with regard to the draft recommendations, then please can you

email your comments to
townclerk@southwoldtowncouncil.com
before 4pm on 11 July 2014.

Appendices

Appendix A – Terms of Reference of the joint working group

“Both Councils acknowledge that there are various complex historical and current issues that prevent any simple transfer or devolution of Southwold Harbour and its associated lands to any existing or other body. The Councils will however work through the Joint Working Group to overcome these collective challenges and to jointly seek to enable:

(i) In the short term, more local involvement and engagement in the management and delivery of Southwold Harbour and all other activities on the wider Southwold Harbour lands; and

(ii) In the medium term, implementation of a revised local model for the delivery of Southwold Harbour and its associated lands that addresses the future ownership, and long term sustainability, responsibility, liability and delivery.”

Appendix B – Map of the Southwold Harbour Lands

