

4 November 2019

DRAFT – WPC RESPONSE TO SOUTHWOLD HARBOUR CONSULTATION

East Suffolk District Council is carrying out a consultation on the structure of the Southwold Harbour Management Committee (HMC) that was agreed in May 2019. A document prepared by a legal consultant to East Suffolk has suggested a HMC that consists of 11 members – 6 of which are East Suffolk District Councillors and 5 from outside. Further, they proposed that in the first year, 4 of the 5 external members would be from Southwold Town Council.

Walberswick Parish Council, in agreement with other local Councils and groups, oppose this management structure. It is contrary to the commitment made through the earlier consultation to make the HMC focused on the future of the Harbour and serving the interests of the local community, rather than being driven by the District Council which has, in the past, used its ownership of the Harbour as an income generating asset for Waveney rather than using the monies earned at the Harbour to invest in the needed infrastructure to keep the Harbour functional and in service to the local community.

Given that East Suffolk District Council retains the authority to make all spending decisions on the Harbour above £25,000, WPC feels strongly that the HMC should operate as an independent advisory committee to help steer the District Council in taking decisions that ensure the Harbour's future sustainability. Therefore, as expected after the previous consultation, we would recommend that the HMC be smaller and that the majority of membership NOT be District Councillors, but rather be representative of the local community. We would propose the following:

TWO members from the District Council, including the Chairmanship of the Committee with an additional casting vote in case of a tied decision on a recommendation.

TWO members from the Southwold Town Council

ONE member from the Walberswick Parish Council

THREE members co-opted by the Southwold Town Council who are representative of Harbour user groups or with specific technical qualifications related to the Harbour.

In choosing Councillor membership from among the local Councils, attention should be paid to the need for skills, to the extent possible, in financial management, organisational management, marine or maritime expertise.

In response to the remainder of the consultation questions:

1. How long should members be appointed for? Initially 3 years, with right for reappointment.  
Over time, reappointment should be staggered so that the HMC retains continuity from year to year.
2. Are their comments on the Business Plan? Consideration of the business plan should be the first priority of the HMC.
3. How can the public be involved? By having a broader based membership of the HMC, as proposed above, there will be good public and user voice. On the other hand, an HMC dominated by the East Suffolk District Council precludes a meaningful public voice.
4. Proposal to have at least one public meeting per year. Yes. Could be done at a time when accounts are made public.
5. How should financial and performance information be made available? Per above. A decision on the content should be an early priority of the HMC.