

Statement and request for Chair and Harbours Committee from Lyme Regis Sail Club

LRSC has had its launching and storage fees increased by 76% and 84% respectively, as opposed to a general increase to other harbour users of 3%. Lyme Regis Power Boat Club has been charged a 28% increase.

Your December minutes record that *budgets, fees and charges for 2021/22 for Bridport and Lyme Regis Harbours* were recommended for approval to full council. We understand the council intends to standardise discounts to its harbour user groups across the county. We don't understand why. It removes any encouragement or incentives for clubs such as ours which provide outstandingly positive health, environmental and social benefits to our local community.

We appreciate that Dorset Council is under considerable financial pressure and that West Bay/Lyme Regis harbours make a loss, so we question why charges for other harbour users were only increased by a general 3-5%. Dorset Council appears to be failing to support local organisations in favour of visitors.

Mark Roberts stated in his letter that "*LRSC fees have remained reasonably static and comparably low for some time*". We contest the assertion that our "*fees have remained reasonably static*" as they have increased by more than double the percentage of other harbour users from 2013 to 2020.

We agree our fees are "*comparably low*". The rates originally negotiated with West Dorset District Council in 2009 reflect our special relationship with the Harbour and the benefits from our contribution to youth training, physical and mental fitness. The environmental impact of sailing is minimal and we support the local economy by providing employment.

Lyme Sailing Club has always worked to keep sailing costs affordable to avoid elitism, so increasing our charges makes it difficult for us to remain inclusive. The membership profile of LRSC reflects the demographics of the local area. The main cohorts are young working families with youths in our training schemes and retired members on fixed incomes.

We do of course realise that the Council is under considerable financial pressure, as are many of our members after the double hammer blows of Brexit and Covid, so raising sailing costs will result in some members giving up the sport.

We request that the proposed percentage increase is significantly reduced to be in line with other harbour users and allow the club to continue benefitting the community.

Response

Thank you for your statement and request. The Harbours Committee are aware of and support the excellent work and opportunities that all clubs associated with our harbours provide for our young people and the wider community.

It is important to understand the context of the fee changes for the coming years as the percentage increases outlined in your statement are not only proposed over a 4 year period but also start from a very low base. The sailing club will continue to pay around a quarter of that of an equivalent visiting boat.

For example, a visitor or non-sailing club member will pay £97 per metre or £388 for a typical 4m boat for six months storage and £110 for the season for launching or £11 each launch.

A sailing club member for the coming year will pay £75 per boat (not per metre) for storage for six months and £50 for the season for launching or £5 for each launch. It is currently proposed that in 4 years' time this will increase to £97 and £88 respectively.

Charges for the sailing club have remained comparatively low and will continue to do so. Fees and charges for visitors to the harbour are significantly higher than those of the sailing club hence the lower percentage increase which in monetary terms is similar to that of the sailing club. Fees and charges are benchmarked with other south coast harbours to ensure we remain competitive.

The Committee wish to support clubs and charities and recognise them as a key component of the 'Harbour Community', and it is not the intention to put them under any additional financial strain. The small increase of £2.50 per month for storage and no change to launch fees this coming year coupled with the proposed gradual increase in fees over 4 years recognises this. However, we have agreed to review proposed fees and charges with the sailing club at the end of each summer so we can understand if increased charges are impacting on club membership.

Questions from Councillor Kate Wheller (Dorset Council - Rodwell & Wyke)

1. I have read the results of the initial consultations on a new Harbours Strategy for Dorset Council. They do not tell us anything very much new but serve to usefully inform the ongoing process. Could you tell me the schedule for proceeding and is the committee on target to complete the strategy as they hoped?

Response

Work on the Harbours Strategy is progressing a little slower than anticipated just over a year ago prior to the start of the Covid pandemic impacting on the UK. A sub-group of the Committee have been considering the 500+ responses received from the initial consultation exercise and have with the assistance of the Dorset Coast Forum developed some draft Strategic Goals, a vision and a mission statement. These are currently out for consultation with key stakeholders and harbour users through the harbours' consultative groups. The next step is to rework the strategic goals based on consultation responses. We would anticipate further targeted consultation with harbour users with the intention of considering a draft Harbours Strategy at the next Harbours Committee meeting in June. Should Committee Members agree, the Strategy will go out to Public consultation following this. Ultimately, we are seeking to consider the final Harbours Strategy in September.

2. No-one suggests that "Sea-bins" and other devices will solve the problem of pollution in our oceans. However, there is evidence that they could help in harbours and marinas. Currently in Weymouth there are a few wonderful people who collect litter at low water from around the Stone Pier steps and other locations as far as it is safe to do so. And I know harbour staff also collect litter when time restraints allow. Litter, plastic bottles, food cartons, cigarette ends etc also collect by the Town Bridge and the North Quay bend where it joins with Westway Road. Whilst ultimately it is a matter of education and the reduction in single use plastics a 'sea bin' or similar could help keep these areas and similar areas in Westbay and Lyme cleaner. Could I ask the Harbour Masters and the committee to do some research into these devices and perhaps set aside a budget to provide them in the locations where they would be most use?

Response

All three harbours have teamed up with Odyssey recycling to take part in both the Marine Regeneration scheme, targeting marine litter and the Net Regeneration Scheme for end of life fishing equipment. The aim of this collaboration is to provide a waste management solution to the fishing industry's end-of-life gear and encourages fishermen to collect all types of abandoned, lost or otherwise discarded fishing gear (ALDFG) whilst out on their fishing expeditions with no negative consequences. All acceptable material from the Harbour litter picks will be deposited in these receptacles which will be located at the Fish Landing area. This collaboration is expected to commence in early April.

Further to this all three harbours have consulted with the Dorset Coast Forum and approved the installation of Sea Clean bins at the slipways. The aim of this project is to locate bins at popular angling spots, such as piers, quays and slipways, where unwanted line can be disposed of safely. It can then be recycled, as fishing line continues to cause problems at land-fill sites.