



Council Meeting

18 October, 2021

PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

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PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES COUNCIL – 18 OCTOBER, 2021

Question One

From Mr Coleman to the Leader of the Council:

Following a local referendum the Neighbourhood Development plan (NDP) for Hoylake was agreed to and this is administered by Hoylake Vision. As outlined in the proposal, the NDP explicitly does not include beach management.

The Hoylake Vision website states all the clear priority goals from the referendum including outdoor space for recreation and activities in Hoylake particularly along the promenade. The section is entitled 'WE HAVE CONSENSUS'

In the years since the referendum their primary priority seems instead to have been to campaign for a cessation to beach management, thereby removing the amenity beach which was previously a much valued area for recreation.

This is concerning for two reasons

1. It is outside the remit of a Neighbourhood forum and Hoylake Vision therefore has no mandate to act/seek to influence Beach Management issues.
2. There is no majority support for this. In fact a 12,000 strong petition in favour of beach management suggests that the CONSENSUS among the community is FOR beach management.

I ask that the council outline clearly and concisely the situations in which a Neighbourhood forum could be stripped of its privilege to deliver an NDP (as a national initiative there must be both clear limits to the power of such a forum, and legal ramifications for acting outside their explicit remit). Would, for example, a “vote of no confidence” by residents in Hoylake Vision, necessitate the winding up of the forum?

Response from Councillor Janette Williamson:

I make no comments about any particular circumstances of the of the Hoylake Neighbourhood Forum. However, in general terms there is provision under section 61F of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 for the Council to withdraw the designation of a Neighbourhood Forum if it considers that the Forum is no longer meeting the conditions by reference to which it was designated, or no longer satisfying the legal criteria which the Council had regard to when originally designating. The Council would need to give sound reasons for such decision and such action would be an exceptional step.

Question Two

From Wayne Verkade to the Chair of Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee:

Devon and Cornwall and North Wales councils understand the importance of raking and maintaining their beaches and keeping them clean and safe for locals and visitors alike to use and enjoy, they appreciate the importance of encouraging and supporting visitors = tourism = a boost to the local and regional economy, Wirral was once known as the leisure peninsular and was a popular tourism destination, and with some imagination, investment and planning could be so again, so why with these assets locally does this council persist in not helping but harming its small businesses with policies which do not attract indeed they deter visitors and spending in the local economy.

My question to this Council as a business owner myself in the Tourism sector trying to recover after the pandemic, is **Why is WBC seemingly unable to recognise the importance of tourism and act for the benefit of Visitor tourism and the economy on the Wirral as a whole?**

Response from Councillor Elizabeth Grey:

The council is not unable to recognise the importance of tourism to the borough, indeed quite the reverse is true. The council itself and working in partnership with a range of local partners...businesses and community groups, has a track record in supporting the tourism economy on Wirral; from the provision of events and support to joint city region events; through to general support to the visitor economy and business groups and others, either directly or via other organisations, for example the Chamber of Commerce.

What the council cannot do is act outside the law, in the case of Hoylake beach by carrying out any activity on the beach for which no licence or approvals are in place from the statutory bodies, who enforce the high levels of protection applicable to the beach and indeed much of the Wirral coastline, particularly Natural England. Other beaches around the country may also have environmental designations but without understanding the particular features of those designations a direct comparison of management activities is not possible. At Hoylake beach the Council is working towards the development of a beach management plan which requires the approval of Natural England so that it can be implemented legally.

Question Three

From Nicola Verkade to the Chair of Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee:

Quote from South Tyneside Council ' who operate a raking policy on their beaches ' We are proud of our beaches in South Shields and we want all who visit to have a safe and pleasant experience' however, litter and debris on Wirral beaches impacts on how the beaches look and how they can or can't be used, which directly results in reduced visitor numbers and obviously therefore negatively affects the local economy. A neglected unmanaged beach gives the impression to some that Wirral council doesn't care and that they need not clean up after themselves, There is also an obvious impact on marine wildlife and bird life locally which can eat some of the litter thinking it is food, or find themselves tangled dangerously in discarded items. **WBC neglect and lack of maintenance of Wirral beaches particularly at Hoylake beach has resulted in just these problems, meadow grass, weeds, litter and dog faeces which collect and hold the detritus and have created a situation which is equally bad for the community, economy and environment , as such what impact does this council feel the growing amount of litter and debris on Wirral beaches has on visitors?**

Response from Councillor Elizabeth Grey:

The council continues to remove litter by hand from beaches when resources allow. It also supports where it can and is very grateful to the various active groups who litter pick across a variety of locations on Wirral, including the beaches. As has been made very clear the council cannot operate machinery on the beach without the agreement of Natural England and any other relevant body without a new Beach Management Agreement in place, the work towards such an agreement being underway. Should a new agreement include authorisation for mechanical litter collection from designated areas of beach the council has the necessary piece of equipment in place to carry out such works.

In relation to the reference to the beaches at South Tyneside, as well as the quote about the council's pride in their beaches, the council also states that it carries out a "beach levelling programme which involves the use of heavy plant on the beaches to transport sand to where it is needed "and does this for three weeks moving sand around in significant quantities around the beaches. It then uses a surf rake to clear litter. Given the nature and scale of the works carried out using heavy plant over a three-week period, either the beaches have no additional protections as is the case at Hoylake or there is a Beach Management Plan in place with any relevant bodies which allow it. Other beaches around the country may also have environmental designations but without understanding the particular features of those designations a direct comparison of management activities is not possible. Given the high levels of protection of the beach at Hoylake and the advice from Natural England last year, such a level of intervention at Hoylake is hard to see being agreed. As the specific locations at South Tyneside have been raised further clarification will be sought from Natural England and the Marine Management Organisation.

Question Four

From Keith Randles to the Chair of Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee:

Hoylake beach is the amenity area for the residents of Hoylake as Birkenhead Park and Central Park are for the residents of Birkenhead and Wallasey.

Now because of an overreaction of the spraying error made by WBC on Hoylake beach in August 2019, this community has now lost its amenity area through no fault of their own.

The current depressing state of Hoylake Beach is having a negative affect on Hoylake and Meols residents daily lives.

Science says peoples amenity areas promote, good mental health and well-being, access to clean air, providing connection space, encouraging activity in adults & children, and offering family bonding sites.

This 1 mile strip of beach is so very important to this community as it is also our focal point for our 3 annual RNLI fund raising events,

The town of Hoylake has long history associated to its RNLI which are a massive part of our culture here.

Many people of all ages from the surrounding areas have enjoyed access to this beach for countless years and now they no longer can have that simple pleasure due to it being over grown.

With all these trip hazards, this has impacted our elderly and disabled residents the most.

At the March 16th ECE&TC meeting a proposal was put forward to allow a small 2/5s stretch of Hoylake beach to be restored and handed back to the residents, which would of been a bit of welcome relief during the pandemic, but this was somewhat cruelly rejected.

My Question is

Why did Environment committee at this worst possible time in many people's lives not show any compassion towards their health and wellbeing by deciding that meadow grass and the regular annual sighting of snow buntings were more important than the local people's needs especially during the pandemic when scientists and government had informed U.K residents to stay local and enjoy a daily walk to promote good positive mental health and wellbeing,

which is not possible here anymore due to the depressing state of this once beautiful Wirral landmark which many local people adored?

Response from Councillor Elizabeth Grey:

The council does recognise peoples' needs during the pandemic and has worked hard to makes spaces, parks and other facilities eg the Wirral Way as safe and accessible as possible for the increased levels of use, particularly during lockdowns. Work is now being put in train to repair and restore areas where additional use has resulted in more wear and tear. The council has not sought to decide that some issues are more important than local people's needs, it is simply complying with the law in respect of the protections afforded to the beach and seeking to develop a process which will lead to an agreed Beach Management Plan with Natural England. The advice obtained from Natural England last year made a reference to amenity beach on its last page and local thoughts and views on the need for amenity beach provision will form part of the consultation process. Until the new Beach Management Plan is in place the council cannot carry out any activities on the beach which would clear part of it.

Question Five

From Charlotte V J Smith to the Leader of the Council

I would like to submit the following question for the General Committee Meeting
The Wirral Sand Yacht Club were recently awarded their license following a Habitat Risk Assessment by the council at tax payers expense. However the Council have declined the HRA for Hoylake Sailing Club which host annual community events such as the annual fireworks display and Tug of War that takes place on Boxing Day and have been asked to pay for an HRA. Both these events raise much needed money for Hoylake Lifeboat who as you will know saves lives around the coast.

Will the Council be prepared to conduct an HRA like they did with the Sand Yachting Club, to allow the community to enjoy their cultural activities that has taken place for many decades. There is great anger in Hoylake and Meols at the apparent disparity between one organisation being given priority over others and that peoples patience with the council is running out at the neglect of Hoylake and Meols with their amenity beach, cultural activities being taken away from them. This question is not answered on the Hoylake Beach portal.

Response from Councillor Janette Williamson

The council treats all applications to carry out activities on the beach equally, it has not chosen to process some and not others. If a person or group want to carry out an activity on the beach, they need to make application to the council. The activities then need to be screened to determine whether they are likely to harm the conservation features of the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) which covers the beach. If there is a likelihood of harm to the features in the SSSI then a Habitat

Regulations Assessment (HRA) needs to be undertaken to look at the impact of the harm I greater depth. The HRA would then be provided to Natural England as part of an application for consent.

As of the end of last week (the 15th October) no applications have been received in respect of the activities referenced in the question. There has been contact with the sailing school to make the current position known. The council has not rejected any activities but there is a process which has to be followed. Any persons altering the beach, even to facilitate a charity event put themselves at risk of legal action.

The council understands the history and tradition around community events including the RNLI and has shared the occurrence of these events in previous years with Natural England. The council has also sought some initial advice from the RNLI at national level in respect of the operating parameters across the beach of their equipment and this initial response has been shared with Natural England.