

**Tankerton Bay Beach Hut Owners' Association
& Beach Hut Watch Scheme**

MINUTES

***Of the Annual General Meeting
Held on Sunday, 15th November 2009
At the Masonic Hall, Cromwell Road, Whitstable***

<i>Present:</i>	Daniel Hardy	Chairman
	Keith Jones	Deputy Chairman
	Anthony Aherne	TW Representative
	Brenda Bradshaw	Website Co-ordinator
	Jain Castiau	Committee member
	Mike Charlwood	Membership Secretary
	Ian Chatfield	Committee member
	John Marsh	Treasurer
	David Richards	Beach Hut Watch Assistant Secretary
	Marilyn Richards	Association Secretary
	Ken Tappenden	Beach Hut Watch Secretary
<i>Apologies:</i>	Joe Alexander	Assistant Secretary
	Hilary Tongue	PR & Communications

Daniel Hardy, Chairman of the Association, welcomed everyone to this year's Annual General Meeting, which was the eighth such meeting since the Association began. He began by saying that apologies had been received from members who were unable to attend, namely Mr. & Mrs. Molloy and Linda and Enzo Cavalli. There were approximately 60 members in attendance.

A welcome invitee once again was Mr. Andrew Cook, of the Herne Bay Beach Hut Association, with which our Association is closely affiliated.

The Chairman referred to the very busy year that the Association has had, and introduced the Secretary, Marilyn Richards, to review the outcome, so far, of the numerous public meetings involving our members and Canterbury City Council, and the regular Foreshore Team meetings which she attends with Andrew Cook.

1. Beach Hut Scrutiny Review – what next?

Mrs. Richards began by saying that the Committee had obtained a good result so far, and the two Associations were maintaining a cordial relationship with the local Council. As beach hut owners were already now paying the revised rents, and had also been informed, by the Council and in the local Press, about the plans to charge hut owners a fee (after the 1st April 2010) of five times the beach hut rent (upon selling a hut), Mrs. Richards asked if any members had any questions about the new arrangements.

No questions were asked at this point, and Mrs. Richards continued by saying that, ultimately, local hut owners had seen a rent increase of approximately 5% overall ó a much better outcome than we had anticipated a year ago, when a figure of up to 40% seemed possible. We will also maintain a beady eye on next year's Council budget.

Further good news was that hut transfers would continue to be free between close family members, both now and after the 1st April 2010. Hut sales before that date would attract the current fee of £81.00, payable to the Council.

After that date, hut sales will almost certainly attract a premium of five times the beach hut rent, which would be approximately £1,475. This was a large figure, but would only be paid on the sale of a hut, and those who wished to keep their huts would not be troubled by it. It was accepted that it was only by the Council charging a premium on a sale that enabled rents for existing owners to be kept to a reasonable level.

The current Council concession offered to local pensioners who were also hut owners of 15 years or standing or more, would continue, and they will pay only around £106.00 p.a. for their rent. Mrs. Richards urged that any local pensioners who were unaware of this discount should call Steve Haddock of the local Council, on 01227 862293. We understand that approximately 16 local pensioners enjoy this discount at the moment.

The Association has pressed for a similar discount for pensioner hut owners who have owned their huts for a shorter period. This idea has been declined by the Council for the time being, but we have not been discouraged to try for this again at a later date, and indeed, there may be a discount that we can negotiate for non-locals, but who are Kent-based. Certainly non-locals pay the highest rate at the moment, and we will try and help them too if we can.

Currently there are 380 beach huts in the Tankerton area, including Tankerton West, Tankerton East, Marine Crescent, and Long Rock, going from west to east. 240 huts belong to locals, making local ownership up to 63%.

The local ownership aspect reminded Mrs. Richards that she and Andrew Cook had met, at our request, with Mr. Graham Cox of the Whitstable Society, in an attempt to put right some of the misunderstandings that Mr. Cox was understood to have had, following speeches that he had made at two of this year's public meetings. He had believed that local ownership was very low, and that huts changed hands (often as speculative investments) at £25/£30,000 apiece.

We put him right on these figures, and indeed it seems that the recession has caught up with hut prices. Mrs. Richards said that the last four hut sales of which she was aware fetched prices up to £20,000, but with two going at £12,000 each. All of these were in the early summer, and included huts in good condition, and in good positions.

The meeting with Mr. Cox was very cordial, and he agreed with us that more beach huts should be built! We hope to maintain a good relationship with Mr. Cox, and the Whitstable Society.

With regard to new huts, the Council still plans to build beach huts of its own (the 'öinfillö huts, as mentioned in the Scrutiny Review and local Press). The Council still has to give Planning Permission to itself, so nothing much will happen until at least the Spring, but the Associations have been assured that we will be involved with this.

Tenders will be put out to builders such as Quinneys and Fitts to design and build huts in keeping with our own at Tankerton. (They will not resemble the Harbour Board huts, which, although beautifully-built, are varnished like sheds and are rather soulless). The Council huts will be both verandah and closed-in types, and will be painted in various colours, as ours are. We will keep an eye on the plans for these.

Once built, the Council intends to rent them out, on short-term bases (hopefully, weekly or fortnightly, to enable more people to enjoy them) for around £100/£125 per week.

This is one of the reasons why the Council has decided not to allow us to sub-let our huts, at least for the time being, which is something that the Associations have pressed them to do (again, this would allow more people to use the huts, and would help hard-pressed hut owners with the rent).

The Council wants to test the water first, to see how their rental huts fare. If there is overwhelming interest from locals and tourists alike, they may well let us have a piece of the action too! We shall see. At this point in the meeting, Mrs. Richards asked for a show of hands to see if anyone might be interested in sub-letting their hut at some point in the future. No one present seemed interested in this, although one member remarked that one or two hut owners already sub-let their huts, against hut rules.

The subject of overnight sleeping came up too at the Foreshore Team meetings. Although the Council decided earlier on in the year to change our licences in order to allow overnight sleeping, on further consideration, both the Council and the Associations thought this to be an unsafe decision (especially bearing in mind the terrible problem of arson which we have endured this year). Consequently, overnight sleeping will be prohibited in the new licences which the Council will issue from 1st April 2010. Rest assured that the two Associations will keep an eye on the wording of these too. We have been told by the Council that this will only be a 'tidying up exercise' – now where have I heard this before? Seriously, we do not expect any major problems in this regard.

The Council have also decided to allow 'For Sale' signs (the commercial-type signs) on the beach huts, but these will be restricted to A4 size only, and then only with both the Council and the owner's permission.

2. *Other Beach Hut News*

One good idea that one of our members came up with during the summer, was to start a 'Hut Buddy' system. This came about when a local dog walker fantasised about having a beach hut of her own, but couldn't afford it. What a good idea it would be, she thought, if the Association could bring people together who wanted to sit in a beach hut with a nice cuppa, and would also look out for the hut, making sure all was well, with owners who couldn't get to their hut as often as they'd like, but wanted to make sure their hut was OK and cared for.

The Council thought that this was an excellent idea (and another way of extending hut usage). We plan to develop this idea, so if any of the members wish to meet up with a 'Hut Buddy', do let us know. No money would change hands; just a key to the hut, and access to the kettle. A request for a show of hands at the meeting gave little idea about the feeling for this, but members were asked to let us know later what their thoughts are on this. Such an idea is likely to be advertised on Council notices along the Promenade, if there is any interest from hut owners.

An idea which we came up with – using the old Coastwatch hut at Tankerton West as a 'look out' security hut (allowing local bobbies to use the hut for that same cuppa) was a winner, we thought. However, the Council have decided to earmark it as an 'educational centre' for local schools, the Foreshore Office, and the Adopt-a-Beach initiative. All good intentions, for sure, but letting the local police use it after dusk seemed a better use of it to us. We shall see how it goes, but will keep our security idea up our sleeve for another time.

Over the past few weeks, numerous businesses have approached us with a view to attracting beach hut owners ó the first of these was Ryan Insurance Ltd., which was mentioned in the Summer Newsletter. They charge very competitive rates, and their number appears at the bottom of these Minutes.

Our currently-advertised insurers, T.L. Risk Solutions Ltd., are now well aware that they have competition, and it is hoped that they may reduce their prices. Do query their prices when you call them ó they hope to remain competitive. They have also told us that they now promote various beach hut activities, such as beach hut days and (my favourite) a ðbathing beauties competition (for huts!) in Mablethorpe. How very English.

Although we know that our members tend not to be particularly ðclubbableö when it comes to suggested joint events, this idea will be mentioned to the Oyster Festival Committee in due course, as they may like to take up the reins with something like this. Again, if any members have any interest in such things, they should let us know.

The estate agents, Century 21, based in Tankerton Road, Tankerton, have let it be known that they are keen to get involved in the buying and selling of beach huts. (Don't forget though, they will also charge a fee to sellers).

Finally, Fitt Fencing has asked us to let it be known that they also design and build beach huts from scratch. Contact details below.

4. *The Fighting Fund*

During Mrs. Richards's speech, member Mr. Dakers stood up to say that, although he accepted the conduct of the meeting, he did not believe that it was right to relegate members's questions to the Any Other Business section at the end of the meeting. It was explained to the meeting that this was done so that all members of the Committee could speak to the members on their various subjects before the meeting went on too long, and some members may have had to leave.

However, Mr. Dakers was invited to speak. He said that the Committee had worked hard (there were murmurs of assent from the members at this point) but he said that we had raised a ðFighting Fundö which was intended at the time (in 2005) to pay for Counsel's Opinion on the legality of our licences, and our rights. He correctly said that this was ring-fenced money, and that the members were entitled to obtain their own legal advice.

Mrs. Richards said at this point that this was rather overlooking the fact that the Association had won a good deal from the Council, and reminded the members about what we could have lost. Mrs. Jain Castiau, who had Chaired the Association at the time of the raising of the Fighting Fund, supported Mrs. Richards at this point.

Mr. Dakers said that increased hut fees were also a target of the Fighting Fund.

Member Mrs. English, who stated that she too, like Mr. Dakers, was a barrister, said that the Council had been confronted with our members's original outrage, and had backed off. She agreed with Mr. Dakers that the Association should seek a legal Opinion, so as to ðdraw a line in the sandö. She stated that she would draft a brief, free of charge to beach hut owners, at which point the members applauded.

Mr. Dakers said that the Fighting Fund could not be used in any other way, so why not use it? He said that we should find out what underlined the make-up of our licences/leases. He said that if it was found that our licences/leases were agreed for years to come, the Council may be bound by that. He said that he believed this to be in the interests of beach hut owners, and said that he would help Mrs. English with the brief to Council, also free of charge. There was further applause at this from the members.

Mr. Cook said at this point that he was surprised that Mr. Dakers and Mrs. English had come forward at this point, when the fight for the beach huts was taking place last year and beyond.

Mrs. English said that she was very supportive of the work that Mr. Cook and Mrs. Richards had done for the two Associations, but that she believed that we needed written evidence of legal advice, otherwise we did not have a leg to stand on. She said that she was not trying to undermine the work already done, but that things had a way of coming back, and there was still a fear of the doubling or tripling of our rents, and of our huts being taken away. She said that Mr. Cook and Mrs. Richards had negotiated something perfectly good with the Council, but the fact that the Council had initiated this fear in the first place meant that they could revisit this.

Mr. Cook said that if the Associations engaged a barrister tomorrow, nothing would change. He said that we were in a better position than many beach hut owners in other parts of the country, and we had gathered more information on this subject than anyone else.

Mrs. English agreed that Mr. Cook had acquired a massive knowledge about all things beach-hut related, but she still maintained that a legal Opinion on our current position was necessary. Mr. Cook argued that we would need around £10,000 to pay for this, if we went down this path. He said we had negotiated a good deal with the Council, and we had to remember that our huts are on Council land.

At this point, Mrs. Richards stood up to say that she was very unhappy at this turn of events, that we had worked hard with the Council to negotiate a satisfactory deal for the members, and that we had forged a good and trusting relationship with the Foreshore Team. She reminded the members that the Fighting Fund was raised when we had a real fear that our huts might be taken away from us. She now believed that this fear was gone. She said that she would have no part in continuing to have meetings with the Foreshore Team, while at the same time instigating possible legal proceedings against them.

Mrs. Castiau said that obtaining a legal Opinion would only be clarifying the situation, and obtaining this would not necessarily lead to anything further.

At this point, the Chairman asked for a vote from the members as to whether such a legal Opinion should be sought. The members present voted overwhelmingly for this.

The Treasurer, Mr. John Marsh, asked what the financial commitment might be. He said that the Tankerton Association had further monies in hand. The Chairman said that no further monies, other than that which made up the Fighting Fund, should be expended on this, without further recourse to the members.

Mr. Cook said that, on balance, he was in favour of obtaining an Opinion, and that it should be sought on the wording of both the current and the new licence (when we are advised of the wording) simultaneously. He also said that there were many other members of the Associations who were not present, who would also have a view.

It was decided that information be given to Mr. Dakers and Mrs. English so that they may prepare a brief for Counsel.

Committee member Mr. Ken Tappenden said that if new licences should arrive at members' addresses, we were advised not to sign them, pending legal advice that we may be given. The new licences are due to arrive on or around 1st April 2010, although, as mentioned earlier, Mr. Cook and Mrs. Richards have been told by the Council that they will be included when the wording of such licences is discussed.

Mrs. English said that the obtaining of an initial Opinion should be considered strictly confidential to the Associations and their members.

In the light of Mrs. Richards' refusal to accept any of this, Mr. John Marsh, the Treasurer, said that he would assist Mr. Dakers and Mrs. English, along with Mr. Cook, in the obtaining of information for legal Counsel.

5. *Treasurer's Report*

At this point, the meeting resumed to its usual business, and Mr. Marsh went through the Association's accounts with the members. A copy of the accounts had been provided to each member present, and any other member who wishes to see a copy may request one from us.

He said that a major cost was that of stationery and postage – a vital part of keeping our members informed. He also said that members had been encouraged on arrival at the meeting to check the sign-in sheets in order to make sure that their email addresses (if they had one) were correct. Our members are encouraged to let us know their full addresses, phone numbers and email addresses, along with the correct addresses of their huts (i.e. TW12, or LR55, and so on) so that our information is up to date. If anyone believes that their information is out of date, please do let us know.

Of the remaining items in the accounts, Mr. Marsh said that the Fighting Fund remained at £2,367.84, and the Association had a further £6,434.69 banked from subscription monies.

As there were no questions on the accounts, Mr. Marsh then thanked Mrs. Richards and Mr. Cook for their work for the Association, to which there was applause from the members.

The Chairman thanked Mr. Marsh, and introduced Mr. Mike Charlwood, who runs the Association membership database. Mr. Charlwood said that we still have members whose information only consists of a hut number, and that some members have inadvertently paid their £5.00 subscription fee seven times over in one year. He said that it was vital that members checked their bank statements, and reviewed the Standing Orders that they had given to their banks. Mr. Charlwood said that a lot went on behind the scenes in making sure that the database ran smoothly, and Mrs. Castiau pointed out that, without Mr. Charlwood's expertise, the Association would not be able to function.

6. *Security Report*

Mr. David Richards began by saying that we have had fewer beach hut crimes this year than last - a drop of some 14% – which equates to a drop from 93 incidents in 2008 to 84 incidents this year. This is still a very high figure for a comparatively small area.

However, there is a more sinister element emerging, with arson attacks that both Tankerton and Herne Bay huts have suffered. 14 huts in total have been affected, over both areas, 6 of which have been badly damaged or destroyed by fire.

Sadly, there is little we can do to protect a wooden structure from fire. Mr. Richards suggested spraying weedkiller along the boundaries of the huts, in order to keep the grass from acting as a tinderbox in the summer months, or placing a pebble boundary around them. Removing gas bottles in the winter is a good idea, downsizing the gas bottles in any case, and making sure, if the bottles are left in the huts due to their size, that the gas is switched off from the canister. This at least prevents the gas bottles from becoming missiles in the event of a fire. Arson is almost an unproveable crime, but at least the Police did arrest two drug-dealers who had commandeered a hut belonging to one of our own Committee members. (They were arrested for the drugs, not the burglary and wholesale wrecking of the hut). It is understood that they received a Police caution.

When the local crime figures were published in the recent Police leaflet, received by all local households, both Tankerton and the Harbour ward areas had higher crimes in general. Mr. Richards reiterated the point he makes every year, which is that each and every crime against the beach huts must be reported to the Police, and a crime number must be obtained from them, whether or not the damage is covered by insurance.

The beach hut areas have had increased Police resources, to the extent of 13% of local patrolling overtime, and they have poured away hundreds of litres of alcohol confiscated from underage drinkers during the summer. However, Mr. Richards said that extra Police resources will only be maintained if we report these crimes. The 'Lean graffiti tags that were found all over the huts, beach area and Town itself eventually led to an arrest, although again this only resulted in a Police caution. We have plenty of crime, but very little punishment. Anthony Taylor, arrested for two non-residential burglaries, was also treated more leniently. His compensation order amounted to less than 10% of the damage he had actually caused breaking into the huts. The local Press also reported that youths Mr. Scott and Mr. Singer had been arrested for numerous graffiti attacks using the tag 'Roadkill'. Damage here amounted to more than £1,000 to rectify. Their tag still adorns at least two parts of Tankerton, and rubbish skips in the borough still have these tags on them.

However, this is not going unnoticed by the local Police – at a recent Foreshore Team meeting, a Police District Commander was in attendance, who was surprised at the amount of crime numbers which we had amassed. It is the crime numbers that feature in Police statistics.

Other recent crimes in the beach hut areas include the usual ones of spindles ripped off, panels kicked in, gables torn off, and rough sleepers using the huts. The latest fad, it seems, is for hut steps to be torn off, sometimes for bonfires, often for no reason other than 'why not?' Two Committee members have had this happen this summer. (Another Committee member visited her hut just after the AGM meeting to find panels kicked in, and spindles missing.)

We need more help! We need people to walk around the area, preferably with their mobile phone cameras. Take pictures of suspicious activity, and let us have them, so that we may include such pictures with the intelligence we have already gathered. This can then be passed on to PC Pope, PCSO Downes, and PS Brenchley. Don't let them get away with it! Keep an eye on your neighbours' huts too, and be aware of your own little patch.

There were no questions put to Mr. Richards, and he therefore handed over to Ms. Brenda Bradshaw.

7. Website

Ms. Bradshaw said that she had been running the Association website for around two years now, but the time had come for it to be professionally re-designed. Once completed, the website will contain sites for useful information on beach huts; there will be a picture gallery, huts for sale, easier print-outs, and even a secure section for the easy payment of Association subscriptions, if members would prefer to pay this way.

Ms. Bradshaw urged the members to keep watching the website for new and improved additions. The site is at www.tankertonbeachhuts.co.uk

At this point in the meeting, Mr. Tappenden referred to the re-election of the current Committee members, if this is what the members present wished. No one came forward at this point to join the Committee, and there was no opposition to the present Committee being re-elected as a group. Therefore, Mr. Tappenden declared that the current Committee be re-elected for a further year.

Before the meeting closed, Mr. Tappenden said that many of the Committee members had been here since the inception of the Association, eight years ago, and he said that we have come a long way since then. We had gained much expertise, and our future was much more secure.

As there were no further questions, the Chairman declared the meeting closed, to applause from those present.

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If there are any members who were not present at the meeting, but would like to make a comment about the proceedings, then do please email the Secretary on pluminthebeachhut@talktalk.net, or call 01227 262066.

IMPORTANT NUMBERS TO NOTE:-

Police at Maidstone	01622 690690 (use postcode CT5 2BE)
Handyman, Michael Fitt (hut repairs)	01227 771779
Fitts Fencing	01227 771779
Quinneys (hut builders)	01227 712913
Dovetail Joint (hut renovators)	01227 361591
David & Marilyn Richards (security & secretary)	01227 262066
The Foreshore Team (Matthew Young)	01227 266719
Beach Hut Watch Scheme (mobile phone alert)	07957 479704
T.L. Risk Solutions Ltd. (hut insurance)*	0113 2245350 * 15% discount to members
Ryan Insurance Ltd.	0800 440 2962
Century 21, Estate Agents	01227 266644
Camp Freddy (camping & hut kit)	07704 334356

Website: www.tankertonbeachhuts.co.uk