

REPORT OF SENIOR RANGER (SOUTH)

SUBJECT:
FRESHWATER EAST SLIPWAY MANAGEMENT

Purpose of Report

To ask Members to consider a future management regime for the slipway at Freshwater East beach in order to meet the ongoing commitment to maintain the service and facilities provided at the slipway.

Introduction/Background

The slipway at Freshwater East was constructed by the Authority in 1986 through a S. 52 agreement with the previous owner, Govan Davies. Unregulated use of the slipway throughout the 1990s led to significant areas of the beach being used for car parking and the Authority has taken a proactive approach to management to improve the quality and safety of the beach environment since our acquisition of the land including the slipway in 2001. We have been working in close collaboration with the local community to deal with issues of congestion, safety, user conflicts and anti-social use of the slipway and beach for parties, parking and 4x4 driving.

The NPA has over the last five years provided supervision of launching activities at busy times by a slipway attendant along with infrastructure improvements and improved signage and information. This includes a lockable barrier installed at the top of the slipway and an information leaflet. A system of buoys has been purchased to provide zoned areas in the bay, separating swimmers from powered craft, which requires laying and retrieving each season. Approximately £3,000 of grant aid was used to fund most of the capital costs of improvements undertaken. We meet quarterly with Lamphey Community Council and other agencies to discuss management issues and have received considerable support for our approach.

Although levels of use fluctuate according to the weather, demand for the slipway remains high and upwards of 70 launches can take place per day in the busy summer season. The number of non-motorised boat users and small leisure craft has increased hugely in recent years whilst there appears to have been a decline in some of the faster craft and jetskis.

Officers feel that it is not appropriate to continue to support the cost of the level of service currently provided at the slipway without Members input and have been in discussion with the local community, including Lamphey Community Council and the Freshwater East Boatmen and Fishermen's Association (the Boat Club), about the potential of charging to offset the costs directly arising from the site. A number of options for future management are set out below for Members' consideration.

Comparisons

We have reviewed the costs of similar supervised launching services around the county which are as follows (2010 costs)

Solva: £5 per day, £15 per week

Porthclais: £3 per day

Fishguard Lower Town, £5 per day

Newquay £5-8 day

Lawrenny Yacht Station £8 per day

Stackpole Quay: permit holders only £134 for year

Tenby: £5 per day, limited summer access and parking for permit holders only

Saundersfoot: £5 per day to launch, £2 to park.

Options

Option A

Maintain the status quo. Continue to provide a peak season slipway attendant service, information to boat users and a buoyage scheme in the bay. The cost to the Authority is in the region of £6,000 per year. The benefit to the Authority is that potential conflicts between users are considerably reduced, safety on the beach is improved and the local community are content with the provision. The Authority continues to provide the only freely accessible slipway in the south of the National Park allowing public access to enjoy the coastline from the water. A local resident will continue to offer a tractor launching service to users for a fee.

Out of season the slipway barrier is kept in the closed position but not locked. This has already proved to be a significant deterrent to anti-social behaviour.

Option B

Introduce a charging regime with the ambition of covering costs and achieving a return for the considerable amount of management work invested by the Authority. Three levels of charging are suggested:

1. Annual pass and key. Available on application for a fee of £60.00 and receipt of a registration form giving boat and vehicle details and a declaration that suitable insurance is held for the use of the vehicle on the beach for launching a boat.
2. A 'rented' key available out of season from a local outlet. £20 per week plus a returnable deposit of £60.00. A registration form must be completed.
3. A daily charge (summer season only) of £6 made directly to the slipway attendant between specific opening times.

Users of the private tractor launching service will be charged for use of the slipway as above.

Out of hours during the summer we will investigate the possibility of locking the barrier between the hours of 10pm and 9am. Between the hours of 5pm and 10pm the slipway would be unmanned, the barrier would be left unlocked but in the closed position.

Option C

Withdraw the facility. The slipway could not be safely operated at Freshwater East during the busy summer season without supervision due to the potential for conflicts

between user groups in particular the operation of vehicles towing on soft sand in areas where children are often playing. Past experience suggests that without summer supervision the beach turns into a car park. Conflicts on the water between users also frequently arise and the unsupervised behaviour of some boat and jetski users can have a serious impact on the enjoyment of residents and visitors. Whilst it is not in the Authority's remit to control behaviour on the water, we do have the ability to limit access to it and thus to influence behaviour. If the slipway were not supervised it would need to be closed for the duration of the busy summer season, this would effectively close the only public slipway in the south of the National Park which is available to all craft.

If the Authority were to withdraw from any direct provision of service it would be feasible to investigate the possibility of entering into a franchise arrangement with a local organisation or business to operate the slipway.

Financial considerations

The current cost to the Authority of providing a daily peak season attendant is approximately £4,500 including on-costs. Laying, maintenance and retrieval of the buoyage scheme will cost in the region of £1,500 per year. It is expected that to proceed with option A would cost £6,000 per year.

Option B would include the provision of a security lock and keys for permit holders for approx £700 per year. A total annual cost of £6,700. It is anticipated that the suggested charges would adequately cover this cost.

Option C would not have a direct cost implication but could see a longer term income if a franchise arrangement is pursued.

Risk considerations

The South Rangers work closely with the local community at Freshwater East and have already explained the issues under consideration in this report with local groups and the Community Council who are broadly supportive. Charging for use of a facility which has previously been free would be unpopular with users particularly in the light of the recently increased car park charges and one or two local organisations have already expressed concerns, including the Boat Club who lease the adjacent boat park.

The risks of reducing the service or withdrawing it could have serious safety implications as detailed above, or would, by closing the only public slipway in the south of the National Park which is available to all craft, have a direct and negative impact on the delivery of Park purposes.

Compliance

Management of this facility allows the Authority to continue to provide for safe recreation at a busy site and as such directly supports Park Purposes, the Pembrokeshire Coast Recreation Plan and National Park Management Plan.

Human Rights/Equality impact issues

Unregulated use of the slipway has the potential to greatly increase anti-social behaviour at the beach and has a detrimental impact on local residents and other beach users, the vast majority of whom do not use the slipway and wish to use the beach and surrounding area of the National Park for quiet enjoyment.

Biodiversity implications/Sustainability appraisal

Management of the slipway gives the opportunity to give environmental messages to boat users and promote responsible boating behaviour. Inappropriate use of craft on the water can have a direct impact on cliff nesting birds and our management provides the opportunity to manage this potential issue. Charging for the use of the slipway gives a sustainable future to this facility.

Welsh Language statement

All signage and information provided at the slipway is bilingual.

Conclusion

The Authority has taken considerable steps to reduce anti-social behaviour and safety concerns at its public slipway at Freshwater East over recent years. As part of the ongoing commitment to the site, Members are asked to consider options for future management.

Recommendation

Members are recommended to support Option B which provides a sustainable future for this facility and are asked to instruct officers to proceed with consultation and publicity with a view to implementation in January 2012.

(For further information, please contact Libby Taylor, Senior Ranger, South)

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