

A MEETING OF THE TASK AND FINISH GROUP
FOR THE ELING EXPERIENCE CENTRE

MINUTES OF MEETING
Wednesday 11th December 2024 at 10.30 a.m.

PRESENT: Councillors S. A. Shepherd (Chair), L. S. Shelley and L. P. Francis.
The Town Clerk (T&ETC)
Eling Tide Mill Experience Manager
P.A. to the Senior Leadership Team

1. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies.

2. MINUTES APPROVAL, UPDATE AND ACTIONS

Minutes of the meeting dated 9th October 2024 were approved as a true record.

3. UPDATE ON TIDE MILL MACHINERY

- a) It was reported that the New Forest District Council had asked for the pricings in the full report had been returned to the consultancy for review, with a view to identifying any cost savings. In the meantime, it was confirmed that the NFDC had confirmed that they would be putting the bid for funding forward in January for the initial £200k which was required in order to get the Mill working for demonstration purposes.
- b) It was stated that the previous NFDC representative at the Board Meeting had now left the District Council and the new representative was Alan Bethune (Finance). The ETME Manager stated that continued efforts were being made towards achieving an appropriate contact within the NFDC in order to promote a unified working relationship.
- c) It was confirmed that the eel passage work would definitely go ahead in 2025.

4. CAFÉ AND VISITOR CENTRE OPERATIONS

- a) The recent Christmas Fayre had been very popular and positive feedback had been received on Facebook regarding the Fayre and the “meet Santa” experience.
- b) New seasonal menu offerings had proved popular and images would be put on social media to further promote these items.
- c) The dishwasher had broken down and the quote for repair was very high. Further estimates for repair or replacement would be investigated, and it was felt that high costs could be due to Listed Building status of the café. In the meantime, this would result in increased staffing costs for washing up by hand.
- d) The ETME Manager reported that the intention was to make the Café more Olde Worlde and would be looking to source old furniture items which were being given away, all furnishings would be approved prior to changes.
- e) The latest new supplier of consumables had been found to be the cheapest thus far, with no minimum order requirement.

- f) The ETME Manager reported that various options were being investigated as alternatives to the lift which has been out of action since April 2024. It was stated that they would speak to the Head of Projects and Community Services for clarification on Listed Building status, implications and suggestions from the Council's Health and Safety advisor.
- g) The financial report showed that this year's figures continued to be an improvement on those of last year.
- h) It was reported that a local charity would be starting their booking of the Visitors Centre area on 1 day a week from January on a regular basis. This would possibly be on a Tuesday when the café was closed, but there would be a member of staff present. It was stated that the intention was for this to increase to 2 days a week and that they may want to use the kitchen in the future, and that this would require supervision by qualified relevant staff.

5. BUSINESS PLAN PROGRESSION

- a) It was reported that the Appendices were available and would be issued, including the Risk Register and calendars. The monitoring/evaluation plan would follow once completed.
- b) It was stated that the Business Plan and all Appendices would need be finalised in order to submit for funding bids in the New Year 2025.

6. ELING EXPERIENCE FINANCIAL BUDGETS

- a) Up to date budget figures showed that that the overall income attained had already reached 100% of budget for the year and expenditure was 53% of budget which was on course for the year.
- b) Toll bridge income was reported at 92% for the year, exceeding budget to date, due to various isolated traffic incidents resulting in heavier usage than normal.

EVENTS, PROMOTION AND MARKETING OF ELING EXPERIENCE

- a) See item 4 above.

7. TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT

- a) It was stated that although the bridge was deemed to be safe for the immediate future, this view did not take into account the recent increase in traffic load due to problems on the main road routes. This should be highlighted at the next Board Meeting.
- b) It was stated that the proposed change in opening hours would be put before the P&R Committee in January 2025.

8. MATTERS FOR FORTHCOMING BOARD MEETING

It was noted that the NFDC had officially requested a toll exemption for their vehicles. In response, information regarding the number of vehicles and crossings had been requested in order to work out an annual cost, and it had been stressed that vehicles over 2 ton limit should not be using the bridge in any event. The item discussed above in 8. b) would be added to the next Board Meeting agenda.

The meeting closed at 11.30 am.