



# VENTNOR HAVEN SEAWEED

TOWN COUNCIL MEETING

12 SEPTEMBER 2011

The purpose of this report is to provide members with information relevant for their decision about the request from the Isle of Wight Council for a financial contribution to their latest proposal for dealing with the consequences for the Town of the Haven's propensity to accumulate significant quantities of rotting seaweed.

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**No.   DETAIL**

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**1)   VENTNOR HAVEN**

- a) Funding approval from the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) programme for Ventnor Haven was secured in 1996 although the full funding package and related approvals took another six years to gather.
  - b) The final funding consisted of £1,240,000 from SRB2, £235,000 from DeFRA and £595,000 from IoWC to meet the estimated total cost of £2,070,000. In the event the actual cost turned out at £2,476,953 and IoWC agreed to make up the £406,953 shortfall.
  - c) The project had three major aims, to:
    - o provide a fair-weather haven for recreational and commercial craft and to contribute to the regeneration of Ventnor seafront and town;
    - o allow public access along the western breakwater providing extensive views of the coastline and town;
    - o provide sustainable coastal protection for Ventnor Eastern Esplanade.
  - d) Work began on 1 November 2002 with Raymond Brown Construction Ltd of Ringwood as main contractor following design by Posford Haskoning and was completed on 1 August 2003 with its official opening by Sir James Braithwaite, Chair of the South East Region Economic Development Agency on 7 August 2003.
  - e) The management service was originally let as a one year contract to Cheetah Marine LLP (Limited Liability Partnership; then for a three year period in 2004 – with no other contractors wishing to tender – and for another three years in 2007, at a payment to Cheetah Marine of £56,000 a year.
  - f) At the end of that term, a new contract was negotiated for a two year term from August 2010 with an option to extend for a further one year at the reduced payment level of £36,164 a year, made up of Staff costs of £26,910, Equipment £2,210 and Insurance £7,044.
  - g) In January 2005 IoWC applied through the Isle of Wight Economic Partnership for Market Towns Initiative Funding in a total bid of £55,000 (50% MTI and 50% IoWC) to provide a fixed walkway and landing stage leading from the existing slipway along the foot of the Esplanade Wall and out along the inside of the eastern arm together with deep water moorings outside the Haven for larger yachts and motorcraft, with a completion date of June 2005.
  - h) Following the success of a further funding application to the South East Economic Development Agency for a total of £486,000 for the development of fish meat food processing at Ventnor Haven, Delegated Decision 07/04 of March 2004 granted a long lease of 125 years subject to planning permission being granted to Blakes of Ventnor at an annual rent of £12,500 a year after the nil rent of year one.
  - i) The Delegated Decision paper justified the arrangement on the grounds that no other proposals had been received following advertisements in the County Press and that the fishing industry had the capacity to grow from an existing £130,000 yearly turnover to reach £800,000 by 2010 with the provision of 30 jobs.
  - j) The decision was back before IoWC in June 2006 with Blakes of Ventnor seeking revised terms. It was agreed that the rent free period should be two years instead of one and that years
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three and four would be £6,000 and £9,000, rising to the newly agreed total of £12,000 a year subject to review against the Retail Price Index every 25 years. The term remained at 125 years with an option to buy

- k) Ventnor Haven Fishery opened for business in March 2007.
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## 2) THE SEAWEED PROBLEM

- a) Ventnor Haven website, in its [information section](#), says:

When the Haven was originally designed the accumulation of sediment and seaweed was not a predicted problem. Cheetah Marine were first awarded with the contract to manage the Haven in 2003. Early attempts to alleviate the problem of accumulating sediments mixed with decomposing seaweed and the associated odour were not particularly successful. Various methods of removing the weed included using a specialized boat with a custom built grid to push the weed out of the Haven entrance and a diesel driven pump to pump the water containing the weed from the Haven.

- b) It has become clear that the Haven as constructed is a natural trap for seaweed which is then retained while it rots in a process with the bad-egg-smell by-product of Hydrogen Sulphide. The smell is often so unpleasant that some visitors and residents have concluded – wrongly - that it is actually raw sewage.
- c) A range of attempts by the Isle of Wight Council and Cheetah Marine to prevent this smell have all proved unsuccessful other than for very short periods, including the excavation during last year's season's removal of over 1,000 tonnes of rotting seaweed from the central area of the harbour where it had developed to a depth of over 12 feet.
- d) An effective solution is absolutely vital for Ventnor's future. It has already significantly damaged its local economy with tourists and holiday makers cutting short their time in the town and in increasing numbers stating they will not return – and the others they will then advise accordingly.
- e) For residents unable to open their windows and with regular exposure to the smell it is simply unacceptable.
- f) Cheetah Marine believe that unless an effective solution is adopted quickly the smell next year will be even worse.
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## 3) ISLE OF WIGHT COUNCIL'S CURRENT PROPOSAL

- a) The latest attempt to deal with the consequences of the Haven's construction has involved the hire by Cheetah Marine of a high capacity pump capable of taking out about 100 cubic metres an hour and that keeping on top of the problem requires the removal of about 500 cubic metres of seaweed a week in a 50% water to seaweed ratio.
- b) For the pump to be effective at that level, requires it to be purchased and fixed to a suitable catamaran structure that will allow it to move around the harbour.
- c) The trialling of the pump last month has left both Cheetah Marine and the Isle of Wight Council reasonably confident that this is a workable and sustainable proposition
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## 4) COSTS

- a) Details of the costs have been supplied to members on a confidential basis and, consequently, only summaries are available both for this report and for the discussion at the meeting.
- b) Cheetah Marine are proposing to purchase the pump and meet the costs of attaching it to an appropriate vessel with those costs being written off over a 10 year period.
- c) The operating costs would be likely to double the current annual cost to the Isle of Wight Council of the existing contract value.
- d) A letter from Peter Hayward, the Isle of Wight Council's Strategic Manager – Highways and Transport, dated 15 August has informed Ventnor Town Council that increasing the contract payment to that extent for each of the next two years as a trial period *will exceed our budget*
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*provision by a little under £12,500.*

- e) The letter goes on to state: *given that Ventnor Haven already operates with a significant subsidy from the Isle of Wight Council, I would like to suggest that you [Ventnor Town Council] fund the additional cost and would ask that you make a £12,500 annual contribution to help resolve the problem.*
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## 5) CONSIDERATIONS

- a) Following an informal discussion of this proposal, Ventnor Town Council has requested further information from the Isle of Wight Council and asked for a meeting with its Leader David Pugh, and Cabinet member George Brown.
- b) In view of existing commitments and timescales, a meeting has now been arranged with Cabinet Member Edward Giles, Stuart Love, Director of Economy and Peter Hayward for Thursday 15 September.
- c) At an earlier meeting with Stuart Love and Peter Hayward, on 4 August, the Ventnor Town Council delegation was told by Stuart Love that although the Isle of Wight Council accepted that they were responsible for the building of the Haven, they were advised that they would have a *Best Practical Means* defence if they decided that they were unable to meet the additional £12,500pa cost themselves.
- d) There are a number of issues in need of further information and discussion ranging from how and why exactly Ventnor came to be faced with this problem through understanding how effective and sustainable the proposed solution will prove to whether or not it is reasonable to expect Ventnor precept payers to contribute to it.
- e) In order to provide the time for further exploration of these matters, and in view of David Pugh's observation in his email reply to the request for a further meeting - *Having spoken to Stuart Love, we do not feel that it is vital to meet before next Monday, and on that basis we would not expect a final stance from VTC at your meeting that evening* – members may consider that a final decision should be a matter for the next Town Council meeting, on 10 October.
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