

## Felixstowe Town Council 13<sup>th</sup>. January 2021

### Agenda Item 8 – Report from Members appointed to Outside Bodies

#### Felixstowe Port – Local Authority Liaison Committee “LALC”) 30<sup>th</sup> November 2020 – Cllr A.J.A Smith

##### **1.0 Background**

The LALC was set up many years ago, understood to be in connection with one of the Port of Felixstowe (PoF)'s earlier planning applications, involving the use of land owned by Trinity College Cambridge for an extension of PoF facilities, which then and now involved many issues directly or indirectly related to planning.

It is jointly hosted by PoF and Trinity College, in normal times alternate 6-monthly meetings being held at the Port or at Trinity College in Cambridge. However, in this instance, the scheduled June meeting at Trinity having been cancelled due to Covid, it was the first for 13 months.

Its core role is to provide a forum for interchange of information and discussion of relevant issues between PoF, Trinity, County and District Councils, and importantly all the local Parish Councils seen to be potentially affected by development of Trinity land, by PoF or others, and also the Harwich Haven Authority (HHA).

I have attended for many years, formerly as an SCDC councillor, and since May 2019 as an FTC appointee, along with the Clerk.

##### **2.0 LALC structure and personnel**

Trinity College have for many years been represented by the Senior Bursar, Rory Landman, and by Tim Collins for their local Agents, Bidwells. However this meeting marked a significant “changing of the guard”, with Rory Landman attending his last meeting before standing down in January, when he will be replaced by Richard Turnill, and also Bidwells represented for the first time by new Local Partner Robin Hill, following the recent retirement of Tim Collins, along with support staff from both organisations.

PoF are represented normally by Paul Davey, Head of Corporate Affairs, and occasionally by their Chief Executive, on this occasion by their new CEO, Chris Lewis, along with support staff.

SCC and ESC are represented by 2 and 3 members respectively and senior support staff.

The Town and Parish Councils are represented by a Member and the Clerk.

##### **3.0 Meeting Overview**

The meeting was held via an online Zoom session, a first, but nevertheless in a very interactive and productive manner. In view of both this and changing circumstances of both personnel as above, and the current range of issues, it was held as a single entity, rather than the previous format with distinct meetings for Trinity Estates and Port matters. A total of 33 attendees were present, virtually.

This format proved to be very effective, with a wide range of both information from Trinity Estates and PoF, and a wide ranges of issues raised, and very well addressed, by the host companies.

Comprehensive reports were presented by each host, which can be made available to FTC members if required, and are summarised below.

The meeting happened to closely follow FTC consideration of the then current Walking and Cycling routes consultation by ESC and SCC. I and Graham Newman were able to use that background to question Trinity, with some very positive outcomes, notably a productive subsequent Zoom meeting with Robin Hill, at their request.

#### **4.0 Trinity Estates Report**

Robin Hill presented the report, including:

- Trinity Distribution Park remains at almost full occupancy with one or two small individual sites available.
- Anzani House has been demolished and the site awaits redevelopment by Maritime, the leasehold owner.
- Uniserve are developing out Plateau A/B Clickett Hill Road for a new 500,000 sq ft high bay distribution warehouse due for completion Spring 2021 and operational by mid-summer, expected to create in the region of 500 new jobs.
- Spoil from their site will be placed behind the new rifle range currently under construction and appropriately landscaped with grass/wild flowers and trees.
- The new rifle club construction is scheduled to finish by March when it will be handed over to Felixstowe Rifle Club for them to finish off and hopefully have open during the summer, and the surrounding ground also planted up with a mix of native grasses / wild flowers and trees.
- The UKPN electric supply network upgrade to the Felixstowe peninsula is intended to replace the overhead wires which run across the Trimley Marshes and beyond. These were expected to be dropped in 2021 but UKPN have said they will remain for at least another 12 months as the programme has been in part delayed due to Covid.
- During Covid lockdowns Mr Hill has noticed how busy the footpaths and bridleways have become and from his walk arounds there are areas where additional tree and hedge planting would benefit along with some footpath improvements, for example into the Distribution Park and along Blofield and Searsons tracks.
- Trimley St Martin parish council have also asked for a new permissive footpath which we are looking into as part of the estate wide strategy.
- Trinity are working with the Trimley St Martin Parish Council Footpaths Working Party in creation of a local walks booklet, and continue to engage closely with Suffolk Wildlife Trust regarding longer term improvement programmes.
- Trinity recently supported the Great British Beach Clean and survey at Trimley Beach/ Looipit Lake in September, where waste was removed and catalogued as part of a wider initiative across Suffolk, involving large numbers of volunteers.
- The College continues to support the Port Community Fund as a way of coordinating its charitable contributions to the area, awarded to local groups in Felixstowe and the surrounding area and at the last session, over £11,000 was awarded.

## Planning issues

- The employment land promoted for port related logistics at Innocence Farm was removed from the Local Plan following the public examination - Trinity were disappointed with the conclusions drawn and not convinced it reflects the dilemma faced regarding employment land allocation on the Peninsular. The availability of appropriate land will need some meaningful thought in months and years to come; Trinity will continue to work with the Council and Community on this, but there are no easy answers.
- The allocation of the College's land off Howlett Way for residential development was reconfirmed in the Local Plan and land to deliver the North Felixstowe Garden Neighbourhood has also been allocated, where the College is a minority landowner in this location.
- Walton North: up to 385 homes, including 92 affordable homes, a new link road between High Street & Candlet Road, a new linear park, enhancements to the curtilage of 362 High Street, conversion of curtilage listed stables to business use and relocation of Felixstowe Rifle Club. Outline permission granted, Design Brief approved and a preferred developer selected, reserved matters likely to be submitted in Q1 2021. The potential house builder has committed to following the conditions of the application including delivery of the link road and the principles established in the Design Brief, and confirmed both roundabouts and the link to be built as part of initial phase.
- Current status of a number of development sites in Trimley was reported
- North Felixstowe Garden Neighbourhood: The College is a minority landowner in this scheme, owning some farm land at the western end of the site. Engagement is underway with East Suffolk Council who want to build a new leisure centre on part of the College land.

## Questions and Answers

1. Andy Smith – How further along is the Walton North Residential Development?

Robin Hill – We are currently in final discussions with a house builder and hope to be able to release news on that soon. Suffice to say that we are conscious of time and delivery of an appropriate solution.

2. Andy Smith – Are there opportunities to discuss with the College on footpaths/cycle paths on the Estate, in particular Walton North and Felixstowe Garden?

Robin Hill – There are a number of opportunities for integration and upgrade of linkages. There are also several areas which need to be protected and kept wild however with some thought there are areas which can be improved. Very happy for a separate discussion on this, AH to contact RH separately.

3. Graham Newman – Concerned about the removal of trees and hedgerow on the cycle/footpath alongside the Uniserve development.

Robin Hill – This is a matter which concerned us all and the College will expect a like for like replacement by Uniserve and its contractor TSL.

4. David Southgate – Bidwells presence following Tim Collins' retirement?

Robin Hill – Bidwells continues to maintain a presence at Trimley and will continue to do so in the future.

5. Gareth Prosser – Can we confirm that Uniserve will not damage any further boundaries on Plateau A/B Clickett Hill Road?

Robin Hill/Rory Landman – The incident concerning the removal of trees and hedgerows was beyond our control however we are doing what we can under the lease to remedy the situation.

Rory Landman – Wanted to thank everyone for their contribution and cooperation over the years and looks forward to seeing everyone at Trinity College in due course.

## 5.0 Port of Felixstowe Report

- The impact of the Global Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on port operations, but only a limited number of employees have tested positive for the virus. PoF have made a great number of changes to the way we work to ensure social distancing and minimise risk to employees, including the mandatory wearing of face masks by everyone on site
- Initially the Covid pandemic reduced demand, with volumes at the port down by 25% at the peak of Lockdown 1. Some 12% of the workforce, were furloughed, though all had returned to work by early August. Since then, volumes have recovered strongly and PoF are currently experiencing high throughput levels. This has resulted in some congestion as reported by various media outlets.
- A spike in volumes occurred due in part to people's changed spending habits as a result of Covid; with consumers spending less on holidays and experiences and more on domestic goods along with a number of importers stockpiling before the end of the Brexit transition.
- Issues around number of long-stay containers of PPE had occurred but now moving, with consequent pressure on storage capacity. Current high volumes expected to continue into December and possibly into the New Year.
- PoF responses included recruiting additional 104 equipment drivers conducting private Covid testing for our staff and their families, and other operational changes
- The end of the Brexit transition will bring other challenges, discussions and a huge amount of work is ongoing. We are in close, daily, contact with the cross-Government Border Delivery Group and other statutory agencies to ensure we are as prepared as possible for the changes in January, likely to affect mostly outbound traffic.
- All of our Ro-Ro traffic is with the EU and will be the main area impacted by Brexit border control changes. We are working with our ferry operator, DFDS and Customs, to ensure the new Customs requirements are introduced without affecting the flow of goods. Our ferry services – at both Felixstowe and Harwich – all go to the Netherlands and it is believed that the Dutch are well prepared and will be using tried and tested systems to undertake customs clearances. We are confident therefore that the type of disruption foreseen for Kent will not occur locally.
- 55 port operatives were recruited prior to lockdown but recruitment then ceased due to the poor volumes and business uncertainty. However, volumes have recovered well since August, recruitment has recommenced with up to 80 further new starters expected by year end (i.e. a total of up to 135 for the year) and we will continue to recruitment the remaining 24 of the 104 newest operatives in 2021.
- Mr Davey reported in detail a number of commercial changes affecting various shipping lines and services, without any significant detriment to PoF, and including expected increases in ship sizes and container volumes.
- Mr. Davey reported on road haulage issues since the onset of Covid, with one result being hauliers booking multiple slots, some then unused, and resultant delays for others. The system has been changed to avert that, in consultation with Felixstowe Port Users Association.

- Rail-borne throughput: Mr Davey reported a temporary drop from 36 trains daily to 26, but now restored to 35, underlying demand for additional rail services remaining strong
- Felixstowe branch line and F2N capacity improvements: with the completion of the Trimley Loop last year, the minimum theoretical capacity on the Felixstowe Branch Line for intermodal freight services is 45 paths per day in each direction, however the limit is temporarily 37 pending the planned closure of the Routs Level Crossing opposite the Miller and Carter restaurant. Network Rail has been pursuing the closure of this crossing for some time, however, progress has been slowing.
- Rail capacity west of Ipswich remains problematic despite the downturn in passenger demand. The major pinch-point is Ely. Network Rail's completed Outline Business Case is due to be submitted to the DfT by mid-2022. Further development is dependent upon future funding decisions by the Department of Transport.
- Port Development: Work is ongoing to replace Ro-Ro Bridge 4, due to be operational in January 2021, capable of servicing larger Ro-Ro vessels over 200m in length. Ro-Ro services have operated from the port for 55 years and this £13.5m investment ensures that DFDS can continue to run its services from Felixstowe for many more years to come.
- Other proposals include a significant new inspection facility adjacent to 70 Shed and the Temperature-Controlled Examination Facility to the rear of Trinity Terminal, with a race to meet the operational deadline of 1 July 2021.
- Deep water remains a key requirement to continue to attract the largest container ships in the world to Felixstowe. PoF are halfway through a two-year programme to strengthen the quay at berths 6&7 so that they can be deepened to -16.5m Chart Datum (currently -15m Chart Datum), along with modifications to height and reach of 10 cranes. This will provide the port with two additional deep-water berths to service the largest container ships, giving us a total of four deep-water berths. Dredging of Berth 7 is due to commence in the first quarter of 2021; with Berth 6 to follow early in 2022 when the strengthening works are complete.
- Mr Davey reported on a long list of environmental issues being addressed by the port, in parallel with other Hutchison ports worldwide.
- PoF Felixstowe Community Initiatives: In 2020, the Port Community Fund (PCF) supported charitable, voluntary and community groups during the coronavirus pandemic by contributing to the Suffolk Coronavirus Community Fund.

#### Questions and Answers

- 1) I asked about potential effect of increased demand from Sizewell C on Port rail users. Mr Davey suggested that FTC may want to consider how Sizewell's rail ambitions could be an opportunity to persuade NR to create more capacity as a legacy benefit. There appears to be a recognition by Government that Ely works needs to be progressed.
- 2) Anita Toye of Trinity Estates asked what is the maximum PoF can see moving by rail. Martin Worr suggested that short term they would like to see an increase from c. 28% to app 36% of volume by rail – i.e. about a 30% increase. In further discussion it appeared that in the longer term an ever-increasing demand is likely.