

CLLR MARK TURNER MBE (FERRING WARD) COMMENTS ON THE PROPOSAL FOR ADDITIONAL BEACH HUTS AS PRESENTED TO THE ECONOMY COMMITTEE ON THE 16 APRIL 2024

Introduction:

1. This item was presented to the Economy Committee for consideration with a number of recommendations with a view to *“Encouraging the development of the District as a key tourist destination, supporting and enabling improvements and activities to increase visitor spend and to update members on any potentially viable sites for new beach hut installations”*. There was considerable concern and disquiet raised by members across the Chamber and from others in attendance. The main concern was the obvious lack of consultation with members and affected parishes. This process of necessary consultation is now underway and much appreciated.

Cllr Turner - Guest Attendance at the Economy Committee Meeting:

2. I read the committee papers before the meeting and attended as a guest. I was both surprised by the lack of previous localised consultation and by the superficial nature of the report’s findings. The Chair kindly allowed me to speak and the extract of the minutes from the discussion at the Economy Committee 16 April 2024 shows that: *“The first to speak was Councillor Turner who declared a Personal Interest as Ward Member for Ferring and as a member of the Ferring Road Scheme Association. He confirmed that he welcomed the notion of economic development in the east of the district and initiatives that would improve tourism. However, the traffic light system in the appendix relating to Ferring and Pattersosn Walk was felt to be overly optimistic due to accessibility and parking issues in the car park around the Bluebird Café and Marine Drive. **Councillor Turner’s view was that for the Ferring Parish elements of the scheme, these should be classified as non-viable sites.**”*

Further Points for Detailed Consideration:

3. In preparing these comments I stress that I have had a home in Ferring for over 60 years and I am fully conversant and familiar with these key factors:
 - a. The Bluebird Café and the often flooded and always crowded mixed ownership car park to its rear.

- b. Current Beach Hut owner/users often find it impossible to park locally in order to visit their huts.
- c. Following face to face discussions, I note disquiet amongst some Beach Hut Owners due to the:
 - i. Lack of consultation on the renewal of their leases.
 - ii. The high rental charges and restrictive T&Cs and charges on any future sale.
 - iii. The diminishing value of ADC Beach Huts due to their restrictive T&Cs.
 - iv. Despite the apparent “perceived high demand” for beach huts ADC is only allowing ADC Residents to access their stock. This must surely have had a marked impact on the “perceived high demand” and the resultant market value of ADC Beach Huts.
- d. The totality and associated parking restrictions of the private roads abutting Pattersons Walk all of which are managed by the Ferring Roads Scheme Association (FRSA). Parking on these roads is not allowed and is not suitable at any time of the day or night.
- e. The limited Public Conveniences situated in the car park behind the Bluebird Café and the more distant Public Conveniences situated at the Southern End of the Plantation on Marine Drive (walking distance of 1.02 miles).
- f. The Rife and associated footpath.
- g. The Kingston Gorse Private Estate to the West of the Bluebird Café.
- h. The Beach and shifting shoreline.
- i. The constant and consistent historical degradation of sea defences, the loss of a sandy below beach below high tide and resulting deposits of shingles, pebbles and debris onto the walkway (Pattersons Walk) making it unfit for disabled use. There has been change in the past and the current poorly maintained defences are unlikely to prevent change in the future.
- j. The already considerable footfall of beachgoers, swimmers and dogwalkers made up of both tourists, visitors and residents.
- k. The presence of information boards (wildlife and the WW2 Pillbox) stressing the environmental and historical benefits of the Beach and its immediate surrounding area.
- l. The availability of limited free parking (with overnight Campervan restrictions) on Marine Drive (walking distance of 0.73 miles from the Bluebird Café).
- m. The regular intrusions of illegal encampments on the Greensward on Marine Drive.

4. Detailed Comments on the Paperwork supporting the proposal:

- a. Para 4.4.10. There is no “Greensward” on the subject area. The Greensward by Marine Drive stops at the junction of Marine Drive and Sea Lane.
- b. Para .8. The proposal to set annual rents for a new beach hut at £1214 will need market research and testing given the negative response I have detected amongst current owners. If you expect to be able to charge this annual rental, then the current absence of any supporting infrastructure will need to be factored in. Only with considerable infrastructure improvements could this rental charge be justified. Owners will not be willing to potentially walk up to 1 mile to park or to use a Public Convenience. They will expect to be able to park within 100m in order to carry their items to their hut for the day. This is already difficult for current owners. A stated target of 5-10% of wheelchair accessible huts is currently unachievable given the nature of the quality of access onto and wheelchair movement on Pattersons Walk. Wheelchair access will need considerable capital investment to improve infrastructure for parking and access and thereafter operational spending to maintain the wheelchair access.
- c. Para 4.9. Given the problems of parking, access, lack of infrastructure (public conveniences, water points, rubbish bins etc) and unstable shoreline where there are no obvious or stable flat spaces that would be suitable for beach huts.
- d. Para 5.2. The building of beach huts would almost certainly have a negative impact on Ecology. The unstable and unsuitable surfaces available would not be receptive to the planting and survival of any beneficial greenery, shrubbery or trees. The Tamarisks at the Eastern End of Pattersons Walk are significant and should not be removed and beach huts directly in front of them would impact growth and preservation through increased abuse (inappropriate use as a public convenience) and penetration from visitors.
- e. Para 5.3. Additional Beach Huts may not be contrary to planning policy, but Ferring Residents will certainly not be so supportive. The disruption during site preparation, construction, congestion and ongoing use will be a significant detraction from the current character and landscape of the area causing a diminution of tourist activity and consequential economic benefit.
- f. Para 5.4. I have serious doubts as to the validity or accuracy of this in relation to Ferring. For example, there are a number of stretches of the upper shoreline dominated by large boulders, a flint wall or the

Tamarisks, where the installation of Beach Huts would be problematic.

- g. Para 5.6. There is no para 5.6 regarding consultation with local ward members or Parish Councils.
- h. Para 6.1. “Do Nothing” is often the only pragmatic and deliverable recommendation.
- i. Para 6.2. Further sites may be viable but would need a far stricter initial assessment.
- j. Para 6.3. I am not convinced that ADC fully appreciates the absence of “customer satisfaction” within its current customer base (at least within Ferring). Improving its service to customers will cost, increasing the numbers of huts in the future will cost in terms of management and administration and failure to maintain this service at an adequate level will cost both economically and representationally. I think some research work to better understand the “wants and needs” of its **current customer base** is much needed and long overdue. I would support this research even if the building of further beach huts is put on hold. See paras 7.1 and 8.1.
- k. Para 7.1. See above Para 6.3.
- l. Paras 8.1 and 8.2. See Para 6.3. Regardless of the Council Vision this project is looking increasingly flawed, and I would be surprised if a detailed investment appraisal or business case would be successful.
- m. Para 8.5. As I stated at the Economy Committee, I believe that the variables are overly optimistic for Ferring and that too much reliance has been placed on what may look good on a map but would clearly fail following detailed site investigation.
- n. Para 8.6. This is a tacit recognition that the long-term economic viability of some these huts is questionable. The need to avoid this risk by achieving our “Return on Investment” quickly can only lead to excessive charging, poor customer experience, representational negativity and loss of income.
- o. Para 15.1. I tried unsuccessfully (on 111) to report the illegal entry and vandalism of a private beach hut near the Bluebird Café. The presence of additional beach huts will bring additional risks of vandalism and illegal access.

5. Site Appraisal Table and Site Plan 10.

- a. The assessment of the surfaces available on the shingle beach is wholly inadequate and unrepresentative of the actual surfaces present. It is, however, representative of the lack of attention paid

by the Environment Agency to this shoreline which I have seen markedly changed and degraded over the last 60 years. **Red - NOT VIABLE.**

- b. Access to Location. Exactly where is the (vehicle) access fair? Is it from the already crowded Bluebird Café car park or the already crowded Marine Drive free parking. The walking distances that would be involved for beach hut owners are totally impracticable. It is noted that access and parking afforded for Ferring (Site Plan 10) is also used to cater for East Preston (albeit amber site Plan 9). **Red- Not Viable.**
- c. Parking. Exactly where is the parking fair? Is it from the already crowded Bluebird Café car park or the already crowded Marine Drive free parking. The walking distances that would be involved for beach hut owners are totally impracticable. Whilst the map shows that there are plenty of roads north of Pattersons Walk these are all “NO PARKING” and I would expect Ferring Parish Council and the Ferring Road Scheme Association to take issue with any ADC Plan that sought to place any (illegal) parking onto these already congested private roads. It is noted that access and parking afforded for Ferring (Site Plan 10) is also used to cater for East Preston (albeit Amber site Plan 9). **Red – Not Viable**
- d. Public Conveniences. Public conveniences in Ferring are an emotive issue. The ones located in the car parking area to the rear of the Bluebird are vital to the already considerable footfall. During wet weather they are often inaccessible due to flooding. The car parking space is of a very complicated mixed ownership. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] The alternative Public Conveniences are at the Southern End of the Plantation and 1.02 miles from the Bluebird. **Orange - Partially Viable**
- e. Nearby Amenities. The Bluebird Café is an extremely popular and successful Café and local amenity. It draws not only residents but visitors from afar. It would only be viable for the western end of Pattersons Walk. **Orange- Partially Viable**
- f. General Comments. For the significant reasons of poor access, parking, no wheelchair access and lack of suitable surfaces the overly optimistic viability should be reclassified as **Red – Not Viable.**

6. **Summary.** As an Arun District Ward Councillor for Ferring I cannot, as yet, support this proposal as it applies to Ferring. I expect that many of my concerns would be echoed by councillors of other affected areas. Whilst I

am supportive of any beneficial economic development measures, I believe that this proposal currently lacks merit for Ferring and across the wider ADC. I recommend that:

- a. ADC consolidates, processes and analyses all the returns from Ward Councillors and Parish Councils before any further public action. Points for clarification should be considered and resolved through appropriate site visits including with third parties (such as the Environment Agency).
- b. ADC initiates a full review of its Beach Hut current customer base and its waiting list (however limited) to ascertain exactly their level of customer satisfaction/expectation regarding leases, rental costs, disposal charges, restrictive T&Cs and much more.
- c. The Economy Committee is presented with the outcome of the above two studies before any further public action. Relevant Ward Councillors to be sighted on all resultant paperwork.
- d. Given the disquiet that has already been created due to stories of “beach huts being built everywhere” I strongly recommend that ADC issues a press release advising that *“As part of encouraging the development of the District as a key tourist destination, supporting and enabling improvements and activities to increase visitor spend ADC is conducting a detailed and lengthy research project to identify potentially viable sites for new beach hut installations. This research is broad based and involves Parish Councils, Ward Members and a range of expert third parties such as the Environment Agency. No decisions have been made or will be made before draft proposals are scrutinised by the ADC Economy Committee and ultimately its Full Council.”*. Accompanied by a suitably calming comment by the Chair of The Economy Committee or Leader of the Council or both.

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