



[www.frintonbeachhutassociation.co.uk](http://www.frintonbeachhutassociation.co.uk)

## Frinton Beach Hut Association

### Minutes of the AMM at McGrigor Hall, Frinton on May 13, 2023

**Present:** chair Hayley Hill, membership secretary and treasurer Robert Hughes, minutes secretary Sue Totham, Peter Dias, Chris Halstead, Steve Cole, Graham Waltham, Sue Webb, Joy Saunders, Jo Lowery, TDC's Andy White and Jennie Wilkinson, and around 150 members.

**Apologies for absence:** Committee members Jane Watts, Julie Searles, and Philip Thornton. Twenty-eight FBHA members sent apologies.

**Welcome and introduction** from Hayley Hill, minutes from 2022 signed as a true record.

**Election:** Chair and all committee members re-elected unanimously. Sad to report the resignation of Julie Searles.

*A long meeting, précised as much as possible, with apologies to speakers who are not recorded.*

#### **Changes to licences:**

Jo Lowery, rentals representative on the committee, tried to point out the changes although the draft commercial licence was still being prepared. Andy White (building and public realm) and Jennie Wilkinson (property and projects) also spoke about the strategy.

A domestic licence will change to a five-year lease from April 2024 (with an initial fee for the lease of £75, and a further £75 on subsequent renewals plus an annual rent throughout the period of the lease) allowing you to rent your hut up to only ten days a year. Option two is a five-year commercial lease, allowing any rentals, costing double your current licence fee each fifth year. Rental rises are also planned, increasing gradually each year. Commercial leases were meant to be available from April but have been delayed. Due to the delay, rentals can go ahead now, on condition the lease is acquired when available.

Every fifth year TDC will send owners the new lease, to sign and return. If special conditions are needed the lease could cost up to £800, and late returns will cost the owner £100. All these are plus VAT.

Andy White explained that the leases would offer more official security of tenure than licences, under which security had only been assumed. He also explained that although longer leases would have been preferred, the administration costs would have been much too costly.

As expected there were many challenges to the new strategy, and TDC was accused of money-grabbing, ignoring owners' wishes, and poor communication. Committee chair Hayley Hill reported she had attended numerous meetings to try to put over the association's views on rentals as well as leases, but the opinions seemed to have been ignored. James Max (82 the Walings) said the 'bonkers idea' was destroying the market, by undermining confidence, at the same time as destroying the town's businesses because fewer huts would be available to rent. The strategy had unintended consequences because it had not been thoroughly researched, was costly and unnecessary. He said guarantees of reassignment should be written into the lease to promote confidence.

Richard Fletcher, (353) said he realised TDC was a financially poor authority, and saw the huts as a big asset, but the rental rises could price people out of their huts. He asked that the rises be linked to CPI rather than RPI for a fairer financial deal, and capped at five per cent.

Andy White said research on the internet for hut rentals had suggested the rise was affordable. Jo Lowery argued that huts might be advertised at that rate but it did not mean they were hired.

Restricting standard lease rentals to ten days a year meant others might not be able to afford the upkeep of their huts. Valerie Locks (395 high wall) said they used to rent out their hut a little, to help with costs. Increases and lack of rental income would lead to more ill-kept huts. The plan would have a detrimental effect on the look of Frinton, as well as on the businesses which relied on tourism. She felt worried that people would be forced to sell. Felicity Wall (273 Low wall) said it was important to remember that services were paid for by rents from beach huts, yet all visitors benefited from provision of toilets and bins.

Hayley Hill added that as a hut neared the end of its five-year lease it might become unsaleable, as there was no guarantee that the lease would be reassigned to the new buyer. Mrs Glasby (655) asked if huts could still be passed on to future generations. Andy White assured us that leases would not be cancelled without very good reason. Leases could be reassigned, probably without cost.

He went on to say that any money generated from huts would help to improve council services, such as enforcement, but admitted the income was not ring-fenced. He said the council believed that beach hut empires had been set up to make money from the huts, and it was only fair for others that some of this income should go back into services.

Jo Lowery insisted that there were no such empires, and the small rental businesses allowed other visitors to enjoy a beach hut which they would otherwise not afford.

She said the costs of cleaning, maintenance, insurance and advertising had all risen, and no-one was making a fortune. Most renters were happy to pay more, and meet safety criteria, but their opinions had not been considered. She asked for more collaboration in the future, to benefit both sides.

As the commercial leases were still unavailable, but valid from April this year, it was suggested renters were given a pro-rata deal to make up for lost business. Jennie White said this was unlikely, as many renters had carried on – which was vehemently denied by renters in the meeting. One said they had potentially lost hundreds of pounds as they had been forced to cancel regular visitors, who might not return to Frinton. Jennie said the pro-rata suggestion would be looked at.

Gill Miles (279) was very concerned about anti-social behaviour, both on the beach, and from huts that were rented out. She asked TDC to consider ‘alcohol prohibited’ signs as they have in Clacton, so that other beach users could refer to them if they needed to make a challenge. She also asked that rules for rentals should be printed inside the huts to try to stem the bad behaviour.

Jennie Wilkinson sympathised, but said although signage across the seafront area was being reviewed, more signage would probably be ignored. She said it was important to report any areas of continuous trouble, which could then be targeted by the small team of Ambassadors who will patrol the seafronts. Jo Lowery agreed, and said most renters already displayed rules in the huts. She also asked if there could be a procedure for complaints about rentals, to benefit owners as well as neighbours. Jennie Wilkinson said this would be considered.

Mr Eldret (495) feared that ‘beach hut services’ could be attractive to a private company and could TDC guarantee there were no plans to put it out to tender. Andy White insisted that was not in the plan but future councils might have different ideas.

James Max thanked the officers for their bravery in attending the meeting, but hoped they would take back to their councillors the level of dissatisfaction with the way the strategy had been delivered.

**Membership report** Robert Hughes said membership was now 811- still a very healthy representation. He again asked for anyone receiving postal copies to consider providing an email address if possible, to save postage. Membership stickers are available from Robert.

**Treasurer’s report** : Robert Hughes presented the accounts, which show £30,902 now most subs have been deposited. Costs include paying for professional patrols, the rafts, and a legal fight against parts of the seafront strategy. The accounts were proposed by Richard Fletcher and seconded by James Max.

**Damage Report:** Patrol co-ordinator Philip Thornton sent his apologies, but his report was included in the invitation pack. Again, a good year without so much

vandalism as suffered in the past. A huge thanks to patrollers, and more are always welcome – the role is not too onerous. Volunteers should please contact Philip at [pandgthornton@btinternet.com](mailto:pandgthornton@btinternet.com).

### **Any other business:**

**Cliff and hut stabilisation programme.** Several members voiced concern about their huts, which were ‘unsafe’ due to rotting bearers and sinking support posts. The Cooks, of 147a, had not been able to maintain their hut and were worried it could deteriorate further before the supports were renewed. Others said they had found the damage themselves, and feared for other huts if there weren’t regular inspections. Owners of H378, 147a The Leas, and all the 103s on the Leas presented photos of their huts to show the problems. Jennie White said the engineers plan was now being rescheduled after running out of money last year. The works would be done on a priority basis. Mr Smith (103 The Leas) was told that contractors would disconnect steps before stability work is done, aiming to retain their condition as far as possible.

**Crown Foreshore:** Hayley Hill asked if TDC had jurisdiction over the Walings, which were actually on land owned by the Crown. Andy White suggested the council was in its rights to control the huts acting for the Crown. James Max argued this could be illegal.

**Key code:** A safety audit has prompted a change in the key code system. Owners will now need to email TDC at least 48 hours ahead to get the code for car access onto the prom before 10am and after 6pm. The code changes monthly, so it is advised to ask for the code at the beginning of the month in case you need it later. In an emergency you can ring the seafronts team, and the number should be on the gate. It is also advised to know the postcode of your hut area, and the precise location on what3words.com which is used by emergency services.

**Extensions:** Peter Dias asked if rules about extensions to huts would be enforced. As former chair, he had urged the council to act on several unfair and illegal extensions over ten years. Although enforcement notices had been served, nothing had changed. People creating sitting areas and rear access were digging into a cliff which was already subsiding. Jennie Wilkinson agreed some owners were taking the micky with extensions, and this would be addressed. Andy White said the specifications were now under review, and reactions to those flouting the rules would depend on manpower. He suggested owners with illegal extensions could be asked to pay a more expensive lease (£800) or remove them. It was argued it was unfair to let people pay it away. Andy White also said that hut specifications had to be fully compliant before a lease can be reassigned. Jacey Dias (334) asked that TDC work with the Frinton and Walton Heritage Trust, as well as FBHA, to avoid further spoiling the face of the seafront.

**Solar panels:** new specifications would consider solar panels, but there were concerns that they could be washed or blown into the sea and would not comply with the council’s green plan.

**Cycling:** Mr Herrington (673) asked that more be done to prevent cycling along the prom. It was advised that we continue to challenge, but with care for your own safety. Again Jennie said if there were regular issues the seafronts ambassadors could target certain areas, but it has to be reported to the team.

**Parking at the Leas:** Mr Callaby (65 the Leas) asked about no parking signs along the private roads. TDC was unable to clarify, and no legal advice could be given. We realise inconsiderate parking can annoy residents, but also that hut owners have parked there for more than 30 years. Legal advice welcome.

**Thanks:** patroller Ian Harrison gave a vote of thanks to Philip Thornton for organising the patrols rota. This was thoroughly backed up by the meeting.

**Bins:** it was recognised that bigger bins, and more of them, had been installed, but they needed to be emptied more frequently. Bins along the Walings had been overflowing for weeks. Important to report issues to the seafronts team. Jacey Dias (334) asked for recycling bins to be installed.

**Rafts:** rafts will be launched at the end of May. Helen Cole (64 the Walings) asked that the association pay for another to be built and launched in tribute to the coronation. This was unanimously agreed. Cost is likely to be about £2,000, plus insurance. Helen suggested it be launched at the Walings, but access for the tractor might prove this to be too difficult. A signwriter is needed for the rafts, although Jane Hughes (113 the Leas) said perhaps they could be routed for a more lasting sign. Suggestions welcome.

It was a happy end to a long but busy meeting, which finished at 11.50am.

**Thank you to all who attended, and to all those reading this report.**

**Thank you to Jane and Jacey for the refreshments**

**Enjoy your beach hut**

Sue Totham, minutes secretary, [suehtotham@gmail.com](mailto:suehtotham@gmail.com)