

Bawdsey Parish Council

Working Group Report

1. Since the last report to the Annual Parish Meeting, there have been significant developments with the Parish Council's plans to build a visitor centre/café on and assume the ownership of the Amenity Site at Bawdsey Quay and consequently the activities of the Working Group.
2. Until the summer of last year all appeared to be going well. However, in September the Working Group became aware that the organization running Bawdsey Manor had gone into Administration with significant debts, and the Manor and its estate was for sale.
3. This created a great deal of uncertainty. The Working Group was of the opinion that until we were aware of the plans for the Boathouse, that is to say whether it would continue as a boatyard, whether it would be sold for development as a private home or whether it would be developed and expanded by a new owner as a café, confidence in the viability of the original concept was in doubt.
4. Added to that difficulty, the Working Group received a setback in its fundraising. It was anticipated that a significant source of funding would come from a fund called The LEADER Fund. An application was made and all appeared to be going well, but then the Parish Council was informed that because of the amount of funding it had already received from public bodies it was ineligible. This was a serious blow because given the nature of the project, sources of funding are limited.
5. The perception of the difficulties caused by the Manor going into Administration was shared by Suffolk Coastal District Council. On the 3rd January the Strategic Director wrote to the Parish Council in which he said that this event *"has significantly changed things and the problem we currently face is that it may have dealt the Project a fatal blow, although we can't be sure at this stage"*. The letter went on to say that SCDC would not be making a decision about the transfer of the site to the Parish Council until it knew what was happening in respect of the Manor.
6. Further discussions with representatives of the District Council have revealed that the District Council has also had a major shift in policy. Whereas three or four years ago it was prepared to undertake an asset transfer, now it is not. Now it wishes to retain its assets and seeks to secure much needed revenue funding from them where possible.
7. All of this appears to indicate that the plan in its original form is unlikely to proceed for the time being, if at all. This is a grave disappointment to the members of the Working Group who have invested a great deal of voluntary time over the previous three years in taking the project as far as it has. Of course, as the reality of the present position became more widely known, it became apparent that this disappointment was shared by all those in the village who had enthusiastically supported the Parish Council and the Working Group and who had done so much to raise money for the project.

8. **What now?**

Although the original project has stalled, the Working Group is pleased and grateful that the District Council has agreed to continue with the installation of the water main to the public toilets on the Amenity Site. As most people will be aware, this installation is in progress at the moment and it is hoped that it will be concluded towards the end of May. This installation provides considerable potential for future developments on the site.

9. **What next?**

The Parish Council/Working Group and the District Council are eager to continue to work together to achieve some improvements to the site in order to make it a more attractive feature in the village. With that in mind, a scheme has been proposed by the Working Group to restore the pond on the site. At the moment the thoughts are that the pond should undergo dredging to remove over thirty years of leaf mould, some cutting back of the canopy to permit more light to reach the pond and some tidying up and replanting around the edges. It was felt that this would make the site considerably more attractive, would benefit wildlife and also complement the bird and bat boxes. With this in mind, representatives of the Parish Council, the Working Group, SCDC and Suffolk Norse have met to discuss the creation of a strategy with a view to implementation, commencing in the Autumn.

However, no work will be undertaken without advice being received from the Suffolk Wildlife Trust and Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB.

The Parish Council and SCDC are also considering the viability of establishing an outdoor classroom to be used by school groups.

- 10 Developments at Bawdsey Manor, and in particular with the site of the Boathouse Café, will be monitored and if the opportunity should arise the Working Group would be prepared to continue its work to achieve the original objective.

Peter Wain
Chair, BPC Working Group
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