

## Concerns re Swanage Ferry Price Increases

Having read Helen Ffitch's report of the 18 November, I have the following comments : -

- 1. Congratulations.** At last the ferry company's proposal is almost reasonable, shame it took the previous meeting in September 2018 with a barrister and many angry but constructive critics to finally persuade the company to put forward a much fairer proposal. Allowing RPI increases has a lot of merit but fails to take into account all specific conditions. We have not started from a fair base. In the last 15 years prices have been allowed to increase ahead of RPI under the guise of funding the ferry replacement. Hence the base figure should be nearer £3 not £4.50 for a car.
- 2.** We have the most expensive short ferry per metre in the world. That is not a proud boast. If we compare Sandbanks to similar ferries there will always be anomalies to confuse the comparison, but take the Torpoint ferries, there are three, run by two local councils and run to make a profit so no subsidy. Torpoint charges a toll payable one way at £2 per car crossing and £1 for locals who sign up to their Tag payment system. The distance is twice Sandbanks crossing but their traffic volume is three times greater hence they have three boats. Similarly the Itchen Bridge toll charges 80p peak time and 70p off peak discounted to 40p and 30p for locals.  
Other differences, we have a monopoly run and controlled by one man who lives in Essex. This may mean that not all decisions will benefit the local community. Surely this quirk of accident and time should not be allowed to continue to control a major transport link in Purbeck and Sandbanks. Nationalisation has and is being used particularly in transport to maintain efficient services and safeguard the local communities.
- 3. Proposal by NT.** Wow! Amazing a proposal with original thought. It has been a constant concern at all the previous public enquiries into price increases that local people have been neglected by the attitude of the ferry company. Many locals will now never use the ferry both because it is too expensive and the company is too greedy and unconcerned about local communities. In 2008 the total car traffic for the year was 856,972 this compares with the combined average for years 2014/2016/2018 of 744,775 a drop of 15% and 112,197 cars.  
NT's idea of seasonal or low usage times discounts would exactly be aimed at local communities. The ferry company has set out proposals that limit car discounts to a maximum of 26% and 30% (Torpoint and Itchen are at least 50%). A significant number of businesses in Purbeck rely on a substantial part of their trade arriving via the ferry. Last year the ferry had mechanical problems and the ferry did not run for several months, the impact was severe but not caused by a pandemic. When the ferry eventually recovered there was nothing other than an apology. How about a goodwill gesture of say a month of crossings at half price?  
To prove the National Trust's point why not run a campaign giving SFTC holders 50% discount for an off season period to measure the reaction allowing for a non pandemic period and after giving ample publicity?
- 4. Two main objectives** = running the ferry and paying dividends. Mr Kean is always seeking to increase dividends at the same time as increasing the fares that will pay those dividends. He argues that a fair dividend would be around 6/7% of net asset value or c£1,000,000. The net asset value he uses £15.1m includes £12.5m of revalued assets, a spurious method. It should be obvious that such

large dividends detract from the ability to fund the purchase of a new ferry. The Kean family originally invested less than £100k in purchasing the company and over the years have reinvested several million pounds worth of profits to improve the viability of the company.

The company has three family directors and no outsiders or non executive directors from the community. Mr Purchase was appointed a director in 12/18 but resigned in 8/20. The dangers are obvious for a company that is effectively a monopoly and run by one man.

5. **New Ferry**. As cars will now have to be EV's by 2030, I would have expected the anticipated replacement for Bramble Bush would be electric too. Countries like Norway, Sweden, Finland , Canada are all now introducing electric ferries. Countries like the Netherlands and Poland are building them. It is important that the new ferry is both environmentally and practically efficient. Improved building methods and materials will reduce the down time while allowing more cars to travel.
6. There are some fundamental decisions that need to be taken. There may not be the appetite to take them now, in which case the ferry will stumble on as it has for the last 15 years providing local communities with very little and local businesses with uncertainty. It will make a lot of money for one man and a very expensive service for the general public – a poor heritage.

Roger Tipple

Swanage