

Pembrokeshire Coastal Forum Management Group 16 October 2003

The Future of the Forum

I had hoped to have a chance to meet each of the members of the management group individually over the past couple of months to discuss the future of the Forum. Unfortunately my own commitments, plus the urgent need to consider the implications of TF's maternity leave, have not allowed me the time to do that.

With the full Forum meeting on 6 December it is important that we come to at least a preliminary view on what the future holds for the Forum after December 2004 when the Objective 1 funding runs out.

The purpose of this note is to set out for discussion some principles that might be at the centre of a proposal for its future – principles that the organisations represented on the management group would wish to endorse. If we can agree a set of principles I propose to prepare a more detailed paper to flesh out the arguments.

Future context

The context within which the Forum is operating is developing rapidly, particularly with the implementation, in UK and at a Wales level, of the EU ICZM strategy. Within a couple of years from now a much more formal framework could emerge for ICZM [e.g. the possibility of a statutory framework for it]. What effect would that have on the Forum? It is difficult to predict exactly what would happen. However, the thrust of the EU strategy and the way that the UK / Wales strategy discussions are shaping up, suggests that, if a more formal system of ICZM is introduced, there will be an even greater need for an organisation like the Forum - to act as a focal point for ICZM encouraging research, discussion and better understanding of coastal zone matters, bringing people and organisations together in common cause for the good of the coast, and promoting integration at a strategic and operational level. The role of the Forum in this respect is developing well [the reception given to the Forum Officer's regular reports is but one indicator of this] Indeed the work of the Pembrokeshire Forum is being seen nationally as an exemplar of the kind of approach that is needed. **In this context, can we agree that it is providing a useful service that is not provided by any other organisation and that, accordingly, there is a future for the Forum after December 2004?**

Future constitution

One of the great strengths of the Forum is that it is made up of a wide range of organisations and individuals [900+]. It is very much a creature of those who are part of it. However, it is not formally constituted [as a limited company and/ or a charitable Trust], relying, in particular, on the MHPA to act as a host for employment, financial and other services/contracts. Thus far, this informality has served the Forum well – a pattern that many similar coastal Fora have adopted over the years. **Can we agree that for the foreseeable future no steps are taken to formalise the Forum's constitution in terms of turning it into a legal entity?**

Future role of membership

Closely associated with this question about turning it into a new organisation is the issue of how it is perceived as an organisation, not only by its members but also, in particular, by those who disburse funds. It is not like an independent voluntary body that has a life of its own. It relies on the member organisations for momentum and resources, though not without the good work of the Forum team. Its future depends on the role perceived for it by its membership. The key question is whether it is just another organisation seeking grant aid, competing with many others, or is it an organisation whose work requires regular investment from the community, so that it can provide a service for the community? **Can we agree that the Forum is in the latter category?**

Interim approach

It is unfortunate that we will not have the benefit of having to hand a completed ICZM strategy and action plan for Pembrokeshire. It was always anticipated that the long-term role of the Forum would emerge from these documents. Given that we cannot wait until they are completed, **can we agree an interim approach that establishes the necessary core resources for the Forum, to which can be added specific projects and initiatives that emerge from the planning process?**

Scale of operation / Resources

In this context the core resources required to run the Forum are assumed to be those that are currently deployed i.e. a team of two people with sufficient support budgets to enable them to run Forum events, prepare publicity, to disseminate information, to initiate research and employ specialist advice and to run an office. Currently the estimated annual cost of the team and its associated budgets is £70,740. This does not include office costs that are met by MHPA. Furthermore it would need to be reassessed in the light of rising costs, particularly salaries and associated on costs. This figure could therefore rise to £85,000. Before more work is done on refining these figures, **can we agree that this is the scale of operation that is appropriate to the interim approach described above?**

Sources of finance

The next key question relates to where the money might be found. Quite clearly the Forum membership must shoulder a significant part if not the entire burden. Given the varied nature of the membership – individuals, small voluntary groups, local authorities and government agencies – it is clear that no single approach will be appropriate. A membership fee, for example, for individuals or small organisations might produce a small contribution, but could equally be counterproductive in terms of engaging with them and would be heavy on administration at this very early stage of the Forum's development. It would seem, therefore, that the brunt of the investment in this service would need to be born by the public sector agencies that are already involved in funding the Forum. **Can we agree that this is an essential prerequisite for the discussion of the future of the Forum?**

Future national support

It will be important for Government to shoulder some of the burden, though indirectly it is already doing via contributions from national agencies – CCW, WDA, and EAW. Given the current interest in organisations such as the Forum at a national level **can we agree that an approach is made directly to the Assembly, with a view to engaging their interest and long-term support? In this context can we also agree that we approach the relevant minister with a view to making a presentation on the work of the Forum, possibly during a visit to the County?**

[There may well be opportunities for securing funding from other sources but these are generally project orientated and as indicated above we will not be in position to promote projects until the strategy and action plan are completed late next year]

The Forum meeting in December will give an opportunity to air these questions. It will be important for the management group to be in a position to air its collective view at the meeting.

Edward Holdaway
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