



Report No: **79/2008** Public Agenda Item: **Yes**

Title: **Proposed lease of old Lookout Tower, Daddyhole Plain**

Wards Affected: **Wellswood**

To: **Harbour Committee** On: **25 March 2008**

Key Decision: **No**

Change to Budget: **No** Change to Policy Framework: **No**

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1. What we are trying to achieve and the impact on our customers

- 1.1 To seek the views of the Harbour Committee about a possible lease of the old lookout tower on Daddyhole Plain, to the National Coastwatch Institution.
- 1.2 A National Institution providing volunteer watchkeepers overlooking the waters of Tor Bay can only enhance the overall safety of our customers afloat.
- 1.3 Providing investment in a strategically important asset and easing the Council's short term repairing liability must have a positive impact on our immediate customers and on the wider community.

2. Recommendation(s) for decision

- 2.1 That the Director of Marine Services, in consultation with the Chairman of the Harbour Committee, the Director of Law and Support and the Director of Financial Services (Estates Service), be authorised to grant a lease of 15 years to the National Coastwatch Institution for the lookout tower on Daddyhole Plain.

3. Key points and reasons for recommendations

- 3.1 An opportunity exists to offer a lease on the old lookout tower, Daddyhole Plain, to the National Coastwatch Institution. It is likely to be a full repairing lease for 15 years and the National Coastwatch Institution would invest up to £20,000 in repairing and modifying the structure (subject to planning consent). In return for the proposed investment a 'peppercorn' rent would be payable for the duration

of the lease.

- 3.2 The old lookout tower on Daddyhole Plain, which is incorporated within the harbour estate, has been used most recently to house weather recording instruments. It is no longer necessary to locate the Council's weather recording instruments at this site although the tower remains a useful strategic asset.
- 3.3 An opportunity exists to offer a lease to the National Coastwatch Institution that will secure significant investment in the lookout tower structure. At the same time the tower would be returned to the equivalent of its original use, whilst retaining any future strategic use that may be required by the Harbour Authority.
- 3.4 A similar timber building at Eastcliff, Teignmouth has been let by Teignbridge District Council to the National Coastwatch Institution for 5 years and the rental valuation was based on an equivalent rate for beach huts. If Torbay Council were to take a similar approach the market rent would probably be in the region of £300 to £400 per annum, if in a reasonable state and condition.

For more detailed information on this proposal please refer to the supporting information attached.

Kevin Mowat
Director of Marine Services

Supporting information to Report 79/2008

A1. Introduction and history

- A1.1 In June 1998 the responsibility for Torbay Council's weather services transferred to Marine Services. At the same time the Council's Meteorological Officer became a member of harbour staff and Marine Services started to manage all of the assets connected with the weather service. One of these assets was the old coastguard lookout tower on Daddyhole Plain, where several instruments used for recording meteorological data were located. After a while it became apparent that the lookout tower was not listed on the Council's asset database and at that time the Director of Marine Services asked for the asset to be listed as part of the harbour estate.
- A1.2 After over 100 years of providing meteorological data to the Meteorological Office the Council received notification in February 2007 that the data was no longer required. As a consequence of this decision the Marine Services part-time Meteorological Officer was made redundant and the Council's own need for weather data was re-evaluated.
- A1.3 During 2007 Marine Services determined that weather instruments located at Daddyhole Plain were not as important as collecting data more locally at the individual harbours. A view was taken that the lookout tower remained a useful strategic asset that was worth keeping as a potential future site for radio aerials, navigation instruments, etc. However, the structure was in a state of disrepair and had been targeted by vandals. Given this situation, in December 2007 the Director of Marine Services decided to approach the National Coastwatch Institution (NCI) to see if they might be interested in taking a lease on the old lookout tower. Since that initial approach the NCI has shown a ready appetite for this proposal and several site meetings and preliminary discussions have been held to date.
- A1.4 The National Coastwatch Institution (NCI) is a voluntary organisation set up in 1994 to restore a visual watch along UK shores after many small Coastguard stations closed due to Government cutbacks. NCI is a registered charity and controlled by a board of Trustees with a Constitution agreed by the Charities Commission. In 1994 when two fishermen lost their lives off the Cornish coast below a recently closed Coastguard lookout, local people decided to open and restore the visual watch. When the first station was opened at Bass Point on the Lizard, NCI was born. During the next ten years other stations followed and at the start of 2006 NCI had thirty operational stations keeping visual watch around the coastline of England and Wales.
- A1.5 NCI stations have been set up along the coast from Lands End in the South West to Hartlepool in the North East. Each station has a qualified and highly trained team to watch over its own particular area whether it is a popular seaside town, busy port or shipping area. Accidents will always happen at sea and along the coastline, wherever there is an NCI station a watchkeeper will be looking out for danger and helping to improve the safety of people on the water. High technology and sophisticated systems such as radar and telecommunications have vastly improved safety at sea, but the NCI claim that there is no substitute for a watchful pair of eyes. They know that accidents do happen and that a computer or other technology cannot spot a distress flare, an overturned boat, a

yacht with problems, a water sports enthusiast in difficulty, or children or adults in trouble, or indeed possible pollution incidents. This is why the NCI believe that their lookouts and watchkeepers are an important service provider to all those who use our coastal waters, footpaths and coastline.

- A1.6 Each Station is manned by a team of fully trained and dedicated volunteers who keep a daylight watch up to 365 days per year. Stations are equipped with telescopes, radar, telephone and weather instrumentation as well as up to date charts. Close contact with the Maritime Coastguard Agency (MCA) aims to promote the stations to Declared Facility Status in order to become an integral part of the National Search and Rescue Structure. It is expected that a station at Daddyhole Plain would keep in regular contact with the harbour offices and provide an extra set of 'eyes and ears' for Tor Bay Harbour Authority.
- A1.7 NCI watchkeepers come from all walks of life and offer a wide range of skills and experience. Full training ensures that all volunteers reach the high standard expected by the NCI and MCA. Regular assessments take place at all stations and retraining programmes are held to maintain standards, and to keep watchkeepers up to date with latest legislation or improved operational procedures. Watchkeepers are the eyes and ears along the coast, keeping a visual watch, monitoring radio channels, using radar and providing a listening watch in poor visibility. Watchkeepers remain vigilant at all times. Surveillance work is mainly routine but watchkeepers are trained to act in an emergency, report to the MCA/Harbour Authority and if required co-ordinate with the search and rescue services.
- A1.8 The NCI ensure that a log of all water-based activities is kept during each watch, and if required weather conditions can be passed to yachtsmen and fishermen before they set to sea. Also, with the new generation of web cams they can identify sea conditions for those who wish to check on the weather or sea state prior to doing any watersport activity, hopefully reducing the need for MCA response and RNLI call-outs. Furthermore, during each watch other activities such as canoeing, diving, etc, are closely observed, as are bathers, walkers and climbers who walk along the coastline. When on watch the watchkeepers provide a vital link with all the emergency services and can provide an emergency contact point on land for both sea and shore users.
- A1.9 NCI is a registered charity and is controlled by a board of Trustees with a Constitution agreed by the Charities Commission. Each station is run by a manager who is responsible for the provision of trained personnel and the maintenance of the lookout. Fund raising at station level relies upon the goodwill of local people, businesses and assistance from other sources who wish to support the important work carried out by NCI. The funds raised cover the maintenance of the building, all equipment and the necessary paperwork to keep the station running efficiently. Watchkeepers provide their own uniform and do not expect to be reimbursed for any expenses getting to and from the station. Volunteers also put in many hours of their free time to ensure that the high quality of service to the public and water users is maintained.

A2. Risk assessment of preferred option

A2.1 Outline of significant key risks

A2.1.1 None

A2.2 Remaining risks

A2.2.1 It may be necessary to commission an asbestos survey and possibly a legionella report prior to letting the property.

A3. Other Options

A3.1 Not to enter into a lease with the National Coastwatch Institution and to maintain the lookout tower as a strategic asset at a cost to the Harbour and/or Council.

A4. Summary of resource implications

A4.1 None

A5. What impact will there be on equalities, environmental sustainability and crime and disorder?

A5.1 A lease of the old lookout tower to the National Coastwatch Institution will help sustain a strategic asset and may well have a beneficial impact on anyone minded to engage in crime or disorder within the view of the watchkeepers.

A6. Consultation and Customer Focus

A6.1 This proposal has been discussed briefly at the most recent Torquay & Paignton Harbour Liaison Forum.

A7. Are there any implications for other Business Units?

A7.1 None. Cultural Services who operate adjacent land and assets have indicated support for the proposed lease.

Appendices

Appendix 1	Letter from the National Coastwatch Institution.
Appendix 2	Plan showing location of the old lookout tower.
Appendix 3	Drawings showing the proposed alterations to the tower.

Background Papers:

National Coastwatch Institution website: www.nci.org.uk