

NEW FERRY COULD BE THREAT TO LIFEBOAT SERVICE

C.T. March 28, 1969

A NEW motorised ferry service between Mudeford Quay and the sand bank, which starts next Tuesday, may well be a threat to the lifeboat service, the CT was told this week.

The ferry has always been a rowing boat, operated by local fishermen, many of whom form Mudeford's lifeboat crew. And when the emergency siren is sounded they are always on hand to launch the rescue craft. Now the old service is in danger of closing.

Christchurch Council decided on Tuesday to allow three young men to start a new motor service between the quay and the landing stage, to run throughout the summer. Said Mr. Ken Derham, secretary of Mudeford Lifeboat: "It's going to be a great blow to the lifeboat service and I think the council are making a very big mistake. It will have the effect that the crew of the rowing boat won't be immediately available in an emergency lifeboat call."

He mentioned local fisherman Mr. Mike Parker, who often operated the ferry and had crewed the lifeboat on more than 50 per cent of its calls, because he was close at hand.

TAKE LONGER

If the rowing boat service ceased and the fishermen were away from the quay the lifeboat could not be manned as quickly. "It takes time to get men to that quay in an emergency," said Mr. Derham.

He added that he would certainly be investigating the matter.

And he criticised the council in their decision to let the three young men, who were not familiar with the Run, operate the service. "It can only be fishermen who have worked there all their lives who know the dangers of the Run and its currents," he said. "I think it may possibly lead to trouble.

"A boat controlled by an oarsman is infinitely safer, because he knows his limitations and nothing can go wrong with oars. There's never been an accident with the ferry in the Run.

"It's a fast tide and if the power unit fails in the motor boat, for any number of reasons, the great danger will be in passengers panicking. In no time at all you'll have passengers jumping overboard into the current."

Mr. Derham added that whatever differences existed between the fishermen and the council it would ultimately be the public which suffered.

"It's in the public interest that they come to terms," he said

Mr. Parker told the CT that although the new ferry was starting on Tuesday, none of the ferrymen had heard about it. "It's just typical of Christchurch Council," he said. "ill mannered and no grace at all, The least they could have done was to write to us and tell us what was intended."

The rowing boat is run by the fishermen, entirely independently of the council.

"The motor ferry will take trade away from us. We won't be able to afford to stand around all day," said Mr. Parker.

OPERATORS

The new ferry operators, all from Southbourne, are 21-year-old John Gelsthorpe, 20-year-old Keith Pike and his 17-year-old brother, John.

Only Keith has operated a motor ferry previously—at Wick.

Their boat, "Penny," will hold 12 passengers and will operate at a fee of Is. and 6d. for children. The existing ferry has never levied a charge for the service.

Mr. John Macfadyen, town clerk, said the council did not intend the existing ferry should be affected. He said the idea for a motor ferry was first put out to tender last year and, although the fishermen had the opportunity of starting it, they made no offer.

Mr. Parker told the CT the only time a motor service would make any sizeable profit would be in August, at the peak of the holiday season.

At the council meeting on Tuesday, beach committee chairman Ald. James Bell said the members had been exorcised for some years as to the advisability of having a motorised ferry because of increased traffic and increased sailing activity in the harbour. Last year the council had asked the fishermen and at boat yards if they were interested in running such a service but no-one had shown any interest.

However, the committee had included £250 in the estimates for the provision of steps on Mudeford Quay to lead to the ferry. The application from the three young men came this year—just after the £250 had been taken out of this year's estimates.

"Every conceivable safeguard" had been incorporated in the beach committee's recommendation to the council to approve the ferry, said Ald. Bell.

He reminded the council that the approval was subject to the payment of 25 per cent of the gross takings arising; from the operation of the ferry, by monthly instalments in arrear, with a minimum payment of £50 for the season; that arrangements were to be made to the satisfaction of the borough treasurer for the keeping and production of accounts and vouchers and the issuing of tickets; that the boat should operate between Mudeford Quay and Mudeford landing stage and the person in charge of the boat should exercise all due care for the safety of passengers embarking or disembarking.

Other conditions were that the permission was not transferable; that the person in charge of the boat should hold a boatman's licence granted by the Corporation and should be not less than 18 years old; that the boat should be licensed by the Corporation as a pleasure boat after being certified seaworthy; that an insurance policy be taken out to provide cover to the boat operators and the Corporation against any claim which might arise as a result of the operation of the service.

The council also agreed to provide additional steps for use with the ferry at or near the head of Mudeford Quay.

The committee proposed to put a pontoon at the far end of the Mudeford Quay facing down the harbour which would not impede in any way the flow of the Run, said Ald. Bell. There would also be some wooden steps, with hand rails, leading from the quay to the pontoon.

Beach committee members had, over many years, given a motorised ferry, a lot of thought. "Possibly some years ago it was not considered necessary but with increased traffic in the Run this will surely be adding another amenity of quick access to Mudeford Beach — not in opposition but parallel to the 'Noddy' train that takes people to the Sandbank," he added.

Coun. Tom Staniforth wanted the recommendation deferred for a month to give the councillors time to "mull over" the recommendation.

Coun. Maurice Lynk wanted to know how often the ferry would run — he didn't want to see queues of people waiting for long periods because there weren't enough to make the journey worth while. He had made a rapid calculation of the revenue to be derived by the ferry — which was to operate from April 1 to October 31 — and thought that the £50 assured payment would mean that a very small number of passengers would be carried.

Ald. Bell said at the present time it was not known how many trips were made but it had been estimated two or three each way in an hour. "This is something which must be found out by trial and error."

Coun. Bridge wanted the assured payment reduced to £25 because he didn't think the three young men were "going to have a very easy job at all to run the ferry."

Borough treasurer Mr. H. A. Preece said that the £50 was "an assured payment in case the thing folds up quickly." The committee were, he said, proposing to spend £250 on steps.

Coun. William Bentley said that the motorised ferry would by no means be in competition with the existing arrangement at the quay. "The manual ferry will continue, as far as I know. I don't see that these other ferry men are going to pack up." He thought the service across the Run would be improved by the introduction of the motorised ferry.

Coun. Bridge's amendment to reduce the sum to £25 was lost by 11 votes to six and the recommendation carried with no members voting against.