

Dept: Executive Office
Telephone: 01843 577108
Email: cllr-rick.everitt@thanet.gov.uk
Date: 23 August 2024



Dear John and Stephen,

RE: Tall Ships Regatta Proposal

I am writing in response to the Tall Ships regatta proposal that you presented with Paul Bishop and Dawn Bishop from Tall Ships Global on 9th July. Thank you for sharing the feasibility study report and the report appendices, which have been very helpful in considering the proposal.

The relevant officers and I have now had the opportunity to discuss your plans with the rest of the council's cabinet and the corporate management team. I note the evidence presented in the feasibility study which indicates that tall ship regattas are hugely popular events that have the potential to have a long lasting positive effect on the ports, harbours and towns that host them. There is no reason to believe that this would not be the case in Ramsgate, especially considering its rich maritime heritage. We all share the view that such an event would be highly desirable, if it could be delivered.

Clearly, however, we have to be mindful of the cost of preparing for and hosting such an event. We had a very open conversation on 9th July about the cost of completing the feasibility work and of hosting a major regatta. The study suggests that some councils are prepared to provide core start-up funding for such events, although the report does not provide details of how those formal arrangements have worked previously, or on what contractual terms they were based. Understandably, there is more work to be done on the financial aspects, but the report currently indicates that similar events cost in the region of £400k to host. Much of this will be upfront expenditure ahead of ticket sales, so unsurprisingly there is an element of financial risk. We were unclear from the meeting and the report whether the £400k in principle sum includes the cost of the required dredging. However, having reviewed Annex 6, which was subsequently shared, officers have concluded that the dredging cost is not included in this figure. This is an important point as dredging is expensive and in this case would only be needed to accommodate the event, because it would be beyond the required depth for our existing customers. Officers have suggested that based on outline information the dredging cost could be in a range between £150-300k and may be capital in nature, depending upon the required target depth.

Another point we discussed is the need for safe public access to the vessels and the proposal indicates that permanent "legacy pontoons" could be installed in the Eastern Gully against the East Pier. There is no financial information on this aspect in the report, but it is noted that in an email on 10 July an estimated cost of £150k for the pontoons is suggested. There is also a notional contribution of £50k towards the capital cost in Annex 6. Officers believe the actual capital cost of providing the pontoons could be higher (possibly £300-400k including project management costs,

[Reception: 01843 577000](tel:01843577000)
[Web: thanet.gov.uk/contact](http://thanet.gov.uk/contact)
[Facebook: @ThanetDistrictCouncil](https://www.facebook.com/ThanetDistrictCouncil)
[Instagram: @OfficialThanetCouncil](https://www.instagram.com/OfficialThanetCouncil)
[Head office: Cecil St, Margate, CT9 1XZ](#)

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marine licensing fees, risk and contingency), but in either case the proposal appears to be for the majority of the pontoon cost to be funded by the council. Again this would be a sizable financial commitment which does not currently have a supporting business case to service the capital outlay. From the outline figures above it can be seen that the estimated cost of the regatta, including pontoon works, dredging and the event itself could therefore be in the region of £1m, albeit with the opportunity to recover some of that from ticket sales.

At the meeting it was proposed that the council contribute £10k of funding to enable stage 2 of the feasibility study to be undertaken by Tall Ships Global. We have carefully reflected on this request and have concluded that this is not something that the council can fund on a speculative basis, considering the uncertainty over the funding of the actual event; costs which would need to be committed in advance and at risk. It can be seen that at least some of the risk around event funding is more to do with cash flow based upon the timing of ticket sales but there is insufficient detail on what the council's temporary or permanent costs associated with the event might be. Unfortunately, the overall position does not therefore support the investment of public funds in the project at this stage, due to the financial risks and uncertainties surrounding the event. Over and above this and due to subsidy control issues, it would not be a simple matter of providing cash flow funding. To be clear the council is not able to provide funding even on a temporary basis at anything other than market rate and in this instance we have insufficient information in terms of a robust business case on which to base a decision.

I know that you will be disappointed by this response. To be clear, therefore, this is not a decision to reject such an event out of hand. We are supportive in principle of a Tall Ships Regatta being hosted at Ramsgate, but further development of the event plan is required before the council could possibly consider any financial contribution or resourcing commitment. Specifically, this would need to thoroughly address the financial risk exposure resulting from the required enabling works, including dredging and berthing as well as the overall event costs.

In view of the public interest in this matter, I am quite happy for this response to be shared or published in order that the council's position at this stage can be more widely understood.

I would like to thank the Ramsgate Society and Ramsgate Regeneration Alliance for sharing this proposal. We do not underestimate the work that has gone into the development of it so far. It is perhaps worth considering whether, following the work to date, the funding of the stage 2 study may be viewed as an attractive opportunity to a maritime sector private investor, although you may already be exploring that option. We are of course ready to look at the matter again in the light of such a study.

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Kind regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rick Everitt", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Cllr Rick Everitt
Leader of the Council

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