



Marine Director's Annual Report 2023

The past year has seen no changes in the Chair or membership of the Harbour Board or Management Committee. Our Designated Person, responsible for independent assessment of our Marine Safety Management System has changed. Details are available on our website but Captain Martin Phipps MBE, formerly Southampton Harbour Master and member of the Management Committee for many years knows our River and will be bringing his considerable experience and a fresh set of eyes to bear on our MSMS. This will undoubtedly assist in driving its further continuous improvement.

Our 2023 Annual Forum and Tender Draw for Warsash and Hamble takes place on 21 March at Warsash Sailing Club.

2023, like 2022, saw few applications for re-development. Our focus over the past two years has been on guiding smaller developments through the correct processes for obtaining the necessary approvals. We have seen the usual applications for maintenance dredging and pontoon replacement which have taken place over the Winter. This year will see planning for the next Crown Estate pile replacement programme in consultation with its mooring contractor. For those wishing to re-develop, I would make our usual request for early engagement about potential projects within the area up to the High Water mark, however small. Whether this is for development or dredging, we will assist in ensuring that applicants navigate the process and are aware of the relevant permissions.

By this time last year, three named storms had descended on the River. This year has not seen a repeat, fortunately. Our Marine Safety Management System, new to our Designated Person, will be reported on over the Summer. Captain Phipps brings much to the River and we expect a thorough analysis to ensure we take advantage of current thinking on best practice. Meanwhile, the General Lighthouse Authority, Trinity House, has conducted its annual routine physical inspection of our Aids to Navigation and found them to be in Good Order. We remain compliant with our responsibilities as a Category C Local Lighthouse Authority.

Since my last report, several projects have been commissioned at the Harbour Office. Our new black water pump-out facility at Warsash has been fitted and made available for use. Regrettably, a power failure to a buried electrical cable near Shore Road caused the system to become unserviceable in February. That electrical supply defect is now rectified and we await re-commissioning of the facility. It is expected that it will be back online by the end of March. It is encouraging that word of its availability is getting around and we look forward to seeing many more vessels use it this season.

River Users will be able to access a new Harbour Authority website this Summer. The new more modern site aims to be more intuitive and contain information which is better ordered and, we believe, in a more appealing format. We have commissioned drone fly-through footage from the mouth of the River inwards with commentary to indicate the hazards and best practice in safety when approaching and using the River. A new weather station will link to the site and provide current weather conditions and improved tidal information will also be available.

As many will be aware, 2021 saw the refurbishment of a major part of our Harbour Wall. The second phase is now well underway and will see the remainder of the wall to riverward of the building replaced in a similar way. This means a continuation of formed and ridged wall faces with vertical inset pools designed to offer a habitat to marine species. Completion is expected at the end of April.

Our Cheetah patrol craft have served us well for the past 13 years. With the forecast lifespan of these essential operational assets approaching its end, we submitted last Summer via the Management Committee and Board a paper recommending their replacement. Funding had been set aside in our reserves for this purpose. Three new craft have been purchased and are being built out of recyclable and robust High Density Polyethylene (HDPE). These craft are more carbon-efficient and will offer greater availability, last for around 40 years, achieve year-on-year savings in terms of all operating costs and contribute to a strengthening of our reserve position. The current delivery forecast is June. They will retain our distinctive colour scheme and be obviously marked as Harbour Authority Craft.

April 2021 and 2022 saw the arrival of better warmer weather. We look forward to seeing everyone afloat soon, including those who may have been out of the water over the Winter. However, the arrival of warmer weather in April has brought each year the first occurrences of anti-social behaviour. Last year's Police analysis showed that action was taken against some perpetrators. Our Body Worn Cameras, procured to protect our staff from abuse,

help the Police in identifying those responsible. As, ever, we will support the Police in every way we can to bear down on anti-social behaviour. The Police always make it clear that timely reporting using the online facility as well as using the 101 facility, will allow them to respond most effectively. It would be most helpful therefore if anyone witnessing anti-social behaviour, wherever it takes place, reports it to the Police.

Our financial position has continued to benefit from a general increase in the popularity of boating, meaning that Visitors' numbers remain higher than pre-COVID, although numbers are not quite as high as last year. The consequence is that income streams remain positive. We continue to monitor that position. As a result, taking into consideration our asset review work and last year's final accounts, we were able to recommend a relatively modest (in comparison to many indices) 1% increase in Harbour Dues. While by no means a certainty, it is hoped that these conditions will continue. The Board will be considering the annual Asset Review report at its next meeting and will take that into account alongside our annual accounts when considering the setting of Harbour Dues in June. Our report on our Forecast Outturn and 2023/24 Forward Budget is available on our website under the minutes of the January Harbour Board.

Our long-standing support to the joint Portsmouth University and Blue Marine Foundation to support the Solent Oyster restoration project will reach an important milestone in April. This will see the culmination of significant planning and licensing work to lay a thin layer of broken shell (called cultch) in the deeper waters around Swanwick bend. Once monitoring has taken place to ensure that the terms of the Marine Management Organisation's Licence are met, juvenile Solent Oysters will be laid soon afterwards. As many will be aware, work to determine the mortality rate of native oysters has been ongoing and results have supported the decision to deposit this larger quantity of juvenile oysters which will hopefully contribute to the re-establishment of a once large local population.

In the absence of any progress to resolve the long-standing problem of drainage into the River from the M27 Bridge, the Chairman of the Harbour Board has written to the Secretary of State for Transport for support. Baroness Vere of Norbiton's response indicated funding timelines for possible resolution through National Highways' Designated Funds programme. This scheme indicates planning for feasibility this year, design in 2023/24 and construction in 2024/25, subject to securing approval of funding for each stage. National Highways will engage with Hampshire Council during the Designated Fund scheme development and scheme works information will be provided to all appropriate authorities. Giving the funding dependency and the 30 years over which the RHHA has been pressing for a solution, a positive outcome is by no means certain. We will continue to press for one.

Every three years, the RHHA conducts a practical training exercise to validate its Oil Spill Preparedness & Response Plan. October's exercise was attended by the Regulator (The MCA) and the Environment Agency and sought to explore in greater detail the challenges that might be faced in waste disposal. Some useful lessons on waste disposal were learned and those are being incorporated into our Plan.

In March last year, the MCA undertook a routine audit of the River Hamble Port Waste Management Plan (PWMP) in line with The Merchant Shipping and Fishing Vessels (Port Waste Reception Facilities) Regulations 2003. The MCA assessed RHHA's compliance with

the Plan and its record keeping, and inspected site facilities at the Harbour Office, at Swanwick Marina and at Deacons Marina. The resulting audit report was positive, with the inspected sites found to be compliant with the Plan and maintained in a clean and safe condition. Potential for minor updates and improvements to the PWMP were discussed.

In April, our Environment and Development Manager attended the Hook Lake Coastal Management Study Steering Group, as one of several representatives of Hampshire County Council's various interests in the site. Coastal Partners (the combined Local Authority team of Fareham, Havant, Portsmouth and Gosport Councils) are investigating the future management of Hook Lake (part of the Hook with Warsash Nature Reserve) as part of The Regional Habitat Compensation Programme (RHCP), a strategic programme run by the Environment Agency which seeks to replace habitats that are lost due to the management of coastal defences. The project has undertaken an array of investigations, surveys and modelling to produce a long-list of options. These are being assessed against project objectives and screened to create a 'shortlist' of most viable options that will undergo detailed appraisal, utilising the process set out in the Environment Agency's national Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Appraisal Guidance. A public consultation event of the project - the 'Shortlist Exhibition' was held in Warsash on 12 and 13 July 2022. More can be found on the Coastal Partners' Website at <https://coastalpartners.org.uk/project/hook-lake-coastal-management-study/>

The Harbour Authority was also asked to contribute to a Defra-commissioned study researching options to improve waste management for end-of-life recreational marine vessels. The study aims to cover a range of issues including vessel abandonment, number and type of vessels coming to the end of their life, disposal options and barriers, current clean-up efforts, and potential policy options to tackle the issue. Defra will use the study to help inform policy decisions and shape the development of future legislation.

The Harbour Authority was invited during the Summer to join the Southern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (SIFCA) led Conservation Group for the Solent, comprising stakeholders in the District who can provide information and advice regarding the conservation and management of local fisheries and activities, including bait digging, hand gathering of shellfish, and oyster restoration. Attendees include the Environment Agency, National Trust, harbour authorities, The Wildlife Trusts, RSPB, Blue Marine Foundation and other Non-Government Organisations.

The Blue Marine Foundation, along with 9 project partners, has secured a \$US 5 million grant from the Endangered Landscapes Programme to restore seagrass meadows, oyster reefs, saltmarsh and seabird nesting habitat across the Solent over the next 5 years. In addition to physically restoring areas of these four key habitat types, the Solent Seascape Project will also work with landowners and regulators to improve the protection and management of existing Solent habitats, to monitor the benefits of seascape scale restoration scientifically and to ensure that local people and sea-users co-design the project, thereby becoming more connected and engaged with their own marine environment. The Harbour Authority will continue to encourage and facilitate any proposals in the Hamble, which will likely build upon those already underway with Blue Marine Foundation, the Environment Agency and Portsmouth University.

Our usual engagement in other important groups has continued throughout the year. The Harbour Master has been re-elected as Chair of the Solent Marine Sites Group. Our

Environment and Development Manager (EDM) sits on the subordinate Natural Environment Group to track actions and receive updates on issues relevant to the RHHA. Our EDM continues to facilitate the Hamble Estuary Partnership, a vital vehicle for discussion environmental issues around the River. Both offer much useful information on their websites.

You may recall that the Harbour Office was selected by Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust (HIOWWT) as one of several prominent locations across the Solent to host a small mural to raise the profile of local native biodiversity. The winner of our public vote was the Lobster; those who visit Warsash will have noticed that the Lobster now features on our Office at Warsash, offering a reminder of the diverse Solent habitat.

Lastly, I would like to advertise that the revised 2023 edition of the River Hamble Handbook, part-funded by the Harbour Authority, is now available from the Harbour Office and Marinas and Boatyards.

I hope as always that River Users will have found this report useful and would welcome any questions that may arise either now or at any stage direct to the Harbour Office.