

Marine Director's Annual Report 2022

Since my last Annual Report, Hampshire County Council has appointed new Chairmen of both the Harbour Board and Management Committee. Councillor Sean Woodward now leads the Harbour Board and the vacancy created by his departure from the Chairmanship of the Management Committee has been filled by Councillor Hugh Lumby. Councillors Mike Ford and Pal Hayre have also been newly appointed as the Deputy Chairpersons of the respective committees. All are closely connected with the River and fully supportive of what we need.

Our 2022 Annual Forum and Tender Draw for Warsash and Hamble took place on 29 March at the Victory Hall in Warsash.

2021 saw few applications for re-development. Our focus has been on guiding small private developers in the correct processes for obtaining the correct approvals and also on extending two Harbour Works' Consents for works reasonably not completed within our three-year time limitation. The end of this financial year will also see the Crown Estate's rolling programme of pile replacement continue. 19 piles are being replaced over the course of March and April. I would advertise again that we welcome and encourage 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 correctly.

Two routine inspections of our Marine Safety Management System by our independent Designated Person have seen previous actions closed out. The recent strong gales have necessitated the issue of Notices to River Users regarding damage to Aids to Navigation. Hamble Point Sector Light and No 13 Buoy, off Warsash Jetty have both been subject to failure reports. These are expected to be rectified by the time this report is issued. Trinity House has conducted routine inspections of our Aids to Navigation and we remain compliant with our responsibilities.

Three named storms over a five-day period in February tested the resilience of the River to damage. I have already mentioned the two aids to navigation which sustained damage. Elsewhere, in the main because of the more westerly component in the direction of the prevailing wind, damage was less than it might have been. One exposed vessel became inundated and sank at her mooring off Warsash. She has since been recovered. A number of vessels partially broke free from their moorings and some experienced torn sails and covers. Sound mooring standards meant that damage was minimised. It further demonstrates the need for owners to check their moorings thoroughly as it is likely that several months' worth of wear will have taken place over the course of those few days.

As better weather beckons, we are considering jointly with other authorities our approach to the management of anti-social behaviour. Although it may not seem like it to some who experienced it, last Summer saw fewer recorded incidents. This may be because the message is getting through. It may also be that routine Police presence acted as a deterrent. Improved signage for this season will highlight the specific risks of swimming at a busy jetty. A joint programme to brief younger children at school so that they are better

informed as they grow older is being explored. What helps the Police is the reporting of incidents either on 101, 999 (for emergencies) or through the online reporting facility. The challenge faced by the Police is that, on occasion, resources are drawn to areas within Eastleigh Borough where there are more calls. By making those reports, we are all helping the Police to determine where to deploy resource to best effect.

In common with other local harbour authorities, we experienced some of the benefits of a busy sailing Summer with a corresponding increase in visitors' income. While by no means a certainty, it is hoped that this will continue. At the same time, we have conducted a review of our asset replacement plan to ensuring that we set aside sufficient capital for future investment. In doing so, we recognise that there is and will probably continue to be market volatility, both in terms of raw materials and manufacturing. That is why I have proposed a new, reasonable policy of a minimum holding in the Replacement Reserve to adapt to events.

Our report on our Forecast Outturn and 2022/23 Forward Budget is available on our website under the minutes of the January Harbour Board.

2021 saw the refurbishment of a major part of our Harbour Wall. The section adjacent to the path was over one hundred years old. We worked with Bournemouth University to create a very different face to the wall. Rather than flat panels, we have put in place formed and ridged faces with vertical inset pools to offer a habitat to marine species. The second phase of this work will see the western harbour wall finished in the same way. We hope to complete this next piece of work to complete the wall refurbishment over next winter. Separately, we continue to work with Portsmouth University and the Blue Marine Foundation to support the Solent Oyster restoration project. The current plan to lay a bed of shells is being finessed to ensure that it can be achieved with sufficient accuracy. The Harbour Authority has also purchased a replacement sewage pump-out facility which is being commissioned on our Warsash hammerhead free of charge by Southern Water at the time of writing. It will be operated by token, obtainable from the Harbour Office. The charging regime has yet to be determined but will offer a discount for harbour dues payers. This important initiative forms part of a wider Environment Agency campaign to offer boat users increased options for the discharge of black water and improve wider Solent water quality.

Our Waiting List remains healthy in most categories. Berths for vessels under 8 metres continue to be available. Anyone wishing a berth must join the Waiting List. Data on mooring trends continues to be passed to the Crown Estate routinely to enable the shaping of the mooring pattern to better suit customers' requirements.

Thankfully, the generally lower levels of petty theft witnessed under COVID restrictions have continued. The Department for Transport has recently changed the Law to grant harbour authorities additional powers to impound yachts associated with Russian designated persons. The Harbour Authority continues to enjoy a close working relationship with UK Border Force to assist in bearing down on those wishing to exploit the vulnerability of recreational harbours such as ours to illegal immigration. Reporting suspicious activity is

important and I would urge those with suspicions to report the matter to either UK Border Force, the Police or us.

As part of our ongoing duty to maintain currency in oil spill protection, this Autumn will see our three yearly practical exercise of our oil spill preparedness and response plan, approved by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency. Our command team has undergone refresher training this year. Our Port Waste Management Plan, reviewed and approved by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency, has undergone a routine inspection and the written report will be published as soon as we have it.

As I reported last year, National Highways (formerly Highways England) was not able to resolve the long-standing drainage problem from the M27 bridge into the River under the Smart Motorway initiative because of funding issues. Following Councillor Lathams' earlier letters, the Chairman of the Harbour Board has written to the Right Honourable Grant Shapps MP, Secretary Of State for Transport to ask for his personal support in the resolution of an issue of more than 20 years' standing. In her reply, Baroness Vere of Norbiton, the Minister responsible for this issue, told the Chairman that our concerns have been raised directly with National Highways. As a result of that exchange, National Highways has informed the Minister that its Designated Funds programme has a scheme for the M27 Bridge planned for feasibility in 2022/23, design in 2023/24 and construction in 2024/25, which will again be 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 and information will be provided to all appropriate authorities. That the response indicates that funding is conditional offers hope but also means that little has changed, save that we know when bids will be made and we will once more have to focus on influencing the correct outcome when the time for bidding comes. We will do so.

Continuing on the theme of the environment, our Environment Officer continues to provide the Secretariat function for the Hamble Estuary Partnership. The Harbour Master chairs the Solent Marine Sites (formerly Solent European Marine Sites) group, as well as the Environment Agency's Solent water quality groups. These offer opportunities to develop best practice, as well as share knowledge with partners and offer benefit to our River.

Broad engagement with partners has led to several new environmental developments. First, we have provided practical support and data to Coastal Partners' (the combined Local Authority team of Fareham, Havant, Portsmouth and Gosport councils) coastal management study for Hook Lake. The study seeks to better understand the site and explore potential for the creation of new intertidal habitats, as well as for wider recreational opportunities. The two-year study will run until March 2023 and will inform potential options. Our Environment Officer is participating in the RYA Blue Marine Foundation's initiative to establish a coalition of local and national experts to work together across the Solent and Sussex to discuss existing restoration projects, build consensus on working together to restore a connected seascape, and assess the opportunities and challenges to integrated restoration in the region.

While the Harbour Master chairing the Solent Marine Sites Group, the Environment and Development Manager (EDM) sits on the subordinate Natural Environment Group to track actions and receive updates on issues relevant to RHHA. Disturbance to birds and habitats from increased use of paddled craft across the Solent is an ongoing concern, and updates were received on a variety of measure being piloted and implemented to mitigate impacts. Signs are now in place in the Upper Hamble on the National Trust's marshes to discourage disembarkation onto sensitive habitats. The EDM also attended the Solent Forum members' meeting in March to receive updates on ongoing work to help address high nutrient levels on the Solent, and a presentation on the role of the consent process in informing marina design.

On the subject of water quality, the Harbour Authority has collated reports received over last Summer of excess algae causing concern locally regarding negative impacts on habitats, on restoration projects and on commercial fishing. These have been sent to the Environment Agency, Natural England, Southern Inshore Fisheries & Conservation Authority and the Solent Forum to assist with the evidence base in the work to address nitrate levels. RHHA is also supporting Portsmouth University in its work on the Rapid reduction of Nutrients in Transitional waters (RaNTrans) Project (via 8c below). The wider project will also develop algal mat removal and nutrient reduction techniques specifically for intertidal mudflats elsewhere in the Solent.

The River been used in several innovative projects led by three universities researching the practical delivery of environmental improvements in the South's estuaries. Projects now deployed and underway (in addition to the Solent Oyster Restoration work) include:

- a. Vertipools on the harbour office sea wall;
- b. Subtidal tiles comparing bio-receptivity of three different concrete mixes;
- c. Intertidal 'ortacs' researching the ability of oysters to take up nutrients from the water column;
- d. Biodegradable grids made from potato starch being used to trap sediment, reduce erosive flows and promote saltmarsh growth;
- e. Biodegradable grids as a potential substrate for oyster settlement;
- f. Coir rolls as a means of protecting saltmarsh edges from erosion and to encourage growth.

The RHHA Harbour Office has been 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. Murals have already been completed at Langstone Harbour Office, Hythe Pier and Newport Library. The Warsash mural has been delayed to Spring 2022 due to artist availability. The species currently in the lead on the public vote is, rather appropriately, the lobster.

Lastly, I would like to advertise that the revised 2022 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.