

## **Marine Director's Annual Report 2020**

Exceptionally this year, the Annual Forum has been cancelled because of Government recommendations made against the backdrop of the Coronavirus Pandemic. Our annual draw for tender berths has been made separately and the results will be promulgated over the coming days to allow successful applicants to occupy their slots. I would first wish everyone well in every way over the coming months which, inevitably, will prove challenging for River Users and local businesses. The Harbour Authority will continue to deliver essential safety services on the water but I would ask that routine contact with the office is conducted via email and telephone rather than in person while this disruptive challenge persists. Thank you.

As ever, I would like to register my thanks for the support we have received over the past year. From a development perspective, it has been a busy year. Deacon's Marina works have completed and Premier's re-configuration will conclude at the end of March. The Harbour Office, now in its fifth decade of operations has undergone a much-needed refurbishment.

Your Harbour Authority Team this year is unchanged and the process of recruitment for two new seasonal patrol officers is underway. That process has even attracted interest from overseas applicants.

As usual, I will begin with safety matters. The two routine inspections of our Marine Safety Management System by our independent Designated Person have seen previous actions closed out and we continue to be compliant with the requirements of the Port Marine Safety Code. Our annual inspection by Trinity House as a local lighthouse authority will take place tomorrow evening. Individual River Events have been reported upon fully over the course of the past year in my regular papers to the Management Committee and Harbour Board. This year, we saw continuation of the anti-social behaviour of previous years at and near Hamble Jetty. Co-ordinated Police effort helped to reduce if not eradicate the impact of poor behaviour. This is now firmly on Hedge End Police's radar and similar steps will be taken this year to bear down on those responsible. Again this year, we will be issuing Notices to Rivers Users to highlight the risks to those using our Hamble Jetty legitimately. Petty theft has prevailed again, in particular between Mercury Marina and Swanwick. Three episodes have followed a similar pattern and some vessels have been broken into on more than one occasion. The target items appear to be tools. Patrols have been supporting the Marine Police Unit forensically and leads continue to be pursued and a number of arrests have been made. I would ask River Users to remain vigilant. Our CCTV systems continue to be effective in providing the Police with material to identify thieves at Warsash but theft remains an unfortunate reality for River Users, some of whom are taking advantage of technology to fit economically their own onboard CCTV systems to record evidence of break ins.

In Governance terms there have been no changes on the Harbour Board. After a decade of service, Dermot O'Malley has announced his retirement as the mooring holders' representative on the Management Committee and we will be seeking a replacement for

this important role. I should like to thank Dermot for the support he has given us over the years.

Our financial position has been a key focus over the past year. Recognising the effort that has been put into reducing costs for supplies and services, pressures on the budget remained. These are predominantly in the area of staff oncosts. Maintaining the levels of service demanded to comply with the Port Marine Safety Code is central to any Harbour Authority's business. Correct manpower levels are therefore fundamental to the provision of that service. Reducing costs further were not an option. An increase in Harbour Dues of 5% was therefore approved by the Board for the current year. While unwelcome to some, Harbour Dues remain competitive and are still 3% less than they were 10 years ago. While immediate pressures have been relieved, continued close monitoring of the budget and the Asset Review process is business as usual and will continue to ensure that Harbour Dues are set at a prudent level. Our recent success in our tender for the renewal of our Crown Estate Management Agreement for a five-year term is to be welcomed and will help to sustain our financial position. We look forward to continuing our good relationship with the Crown Agents, Knight-Frank.

Our report on our Forecast Outturn and 2020/21 Forward Budget is available on our website under the minutes of the Harbour Board meeting of 10th January.

March will see the conclusion of Premier Marinas' re-development of Swanwick Marina. The increase in pier numbers has led to a minor relocation of the starboard hand Aids to Navigation. The development has also involved one of a number of maintenance dredges taking place over the winter. Dredging has also taken place at MDL Marinas' sites and at Hamble Yacht Services, all to return to designed depths. The Crown Estate's annual pile replacement programme will see 21 piles replaced. With green heart piles increasingly hard to source, Crown Estate Policy is to replace old piles with steel. This programme will be complete within the next two weeks. The Harbour Authority has assisted several private developers in gaining permissions for like-for-like pontoon replacements and new pontoon applications. As ever, I would ask public and private prospective developers to continue to take advantage of the Harbour Authority's service in providing advice and guidance with regard to the application of existing and new legislation. The Harbour Office, covered in scaffolding for much of the winter, has been repainted. New windows have been fitted to replace originally fitted, leaking items. This investment has been made by the County Council, from whom the Authority leases the building. We have taken the opportunity to refresh the inside of the building and insert technology which will help communications, information sharing and CCTV recording too. With very few exceptions, all the work within the office has been conducted in-house, achieving notable cost savings.

Strong winds and associated increases in the predicted tidal levels have brought with them the usual challenges over the course of the past few months. The sustained period of inclement weather has, perhaps understandably, brought with it a benefit. Mooring standards have been good with owners conscious of the need to safeguard their vessels. Whereas some damage has taken place, we have been called out to surprisingly few events. I would like to thank mooring holders for the extra effort this year.

Helping us manage better both private and commercial accounts this year will be the introduction of a new Harbour Management System. The existing Access Database system has served us well for over ten years but will cease to be supported later in the year. The new cloud-based system safeguards private data to meet General Data Protection Regulations and will allow account holders to access their accounts, self-certify and make payments online. Existing payment options for cash and cheque will remain for those who wish but this new facility recognises that increasing numbers of those payments are online. As ever, we have enjoyed a number of very well organised events over the past year. Our sailing clubs offered full and exciting programmes with some excellent national and international regattas and training on offer. This year, with restrictions arising from the Coronavirus outbreak, things will be less certain and dependent on the progress made against the disease. The fifth River Hamble Games was programmed to take place on Saturday 6 June with the sailing event once again combining with the River Hamble Harbour Master's Charity Pursuit Race, in support of Parkinson's UK. Regrettably, it has been necessary to postpone the event. Updates will be given on the Games' website. Considerable effort goes into making this and other events a success and I would like to register my appreciation for the work that has gone into preparations. The Bursledon Regatta was again a great success last year with the theme being the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the lunar landings. This year's Regatta is programmed to take place on 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> of September with the theme yet to be decided. All these events will depend upon Government health advice.

I would like to advertise some updated information that will be of benefit to River Users. First, the 2020 edition of the River Hamble Handbook, part-funded by the Harbour Authority, is now available from the Harbour Office and Marinas and Boatyards. The revised version of the River Hamble Visitors' Guide which provides enhanced safety information, as well as useful material on facilities is also available. Copies of both are available here at the Annual Forum. We have been working over the past year with the UK Hydrographic Office to update information on the master data document for the River, Admiralty Chart 2022. A New Edition, dated February 2020 has now been issued and the associated data relating to updated surveys and marina configurations will also be included on the new editions of the Admiralty Leisure Folios and other providers' charts. A New Edition is issued reasonably rarely and we are very pleased that this has been achieved this year.

Following the successful tender for the Crown Estate's Management Agreement, we will continue to manage over six hundred mid-stream moorings and a strong waiting list for the next 5 years, safeguarding necessary income. The Waiting List remains very healthy in the usual categories. Berths for vessels under 8 metres are available however, reflecting the general increase in the size of vessels within the River. Those wishing a berth are advised to join the Waiting List. Data on mooring trends is passed to the Crown Estate routinely to enable the shaping of the mooring pattern to better suit customers' requirements.

I have already spoken about petty theft afloat and co-operation with the Police to counter anti-social behaviour. Co-operation with other agencies continues. The threat of illegal immigration is moving west and UK Border Force recognises the vulnerability of recreational harbours such as ours to such activity. Marinas and boatyards, as well as the Harbour Authority, witness international traffic which may be involved. Reporting suspicious activity

has resulted in operational action being taken against organised trafficking and we will continue to support that. Anyone who is suspicious of activity is encouraged to report it to the Police directly, or in extremis, via the Harbour Office.

Our Oil Spill compliance requires both paper and exercise audit. Last Autumn, the Harbour Authority invited the Regulator (the Maritime and Coast Guard Agency) to witness its three yearly full-scale exercise off Swanwick. Having previously explored options at the mouth of the River aimed at preventing material entering the Hamble, this exercise focused on minimising the impact of oil that had migrated further North. Useful lessons were learned which have been incorporated into the Oil Spill Plan and approved by the MCA, enhancing our knowledge about how to deal with disruptive challenges.

Work to follow up on our long-term effort with Highways England to safeguard the drainage from the M27 Bridge has continued. It is still intended to incorporate drainage work in the current 'Smart Motorways' initiative. Further updates will be given in Management Committee and Board meetings, with decisions made being made publicly available as usual.

The Solent Oyster Restoration project continues to attract interest. River Users will recall exposure on the BBC's Countryfile programme last year. Analysis of mortality rate data has been encouraging in all three densities laid. Portsmouth University and the Green Blue Foundation hope to lay a much larger base population over the course of the coming year.

Dr Simon Bray has added vigour to the Hamble Estuary Partnership (HEP), run by the Harbour Authority as a network for a wide variety of organisations with an interest in the River. I have chaired my first Solent European Marine Sites Management Group which has sought to focus on 17 areas of activity which impact on our marine sites. One of these activities is in promoting improved water quality through increased knowledge of black water discharge and leading on providing options for those requiring pump out facilities. At the invitation of the Environment Agency, I chaired a meeting involving all relevant actors at Eastleigh last May which has led to some significant pledges of financial contribution and intent upon which we now need to deliver. A follow up meeting will take place in June.

As a member of the Technical Group on the BUDS project – Beneficial Reuse of Dredged Sediment, the Environment & Development Manager (EDM) has been working on some of the small-scale saltmarsh protection options. These include the use of interconnecting bio-degradable lattices as a basis for localised saltmarsh regeneration.

The Hampshire & IOW Wildlife Trust's project 'Secrets of the Solent' is now well underway. The project aims to "start to establish the unique existing Solent Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) as recognised marine heritage sites which are understood, appreciated and cared for in much the same way as our National Parks". It hopes to capture the public's interest in the local marine environment in the way the BBC's Blue Planet has. RHHA, as a member of the Stakeholder Group, is helping the project establish connections with key audiences, disseminate information and contribute advice on relevant project areas.

RHHA's online interactive map 'Riverview' has now been updated with aerial photography and layers previously held within RHHA's Learning Zone map. Altering the scale of the map will display a variety of information including designated nature conservation sites, slipways, car parks, HCC land ownership, riverbank photographs, details of certain wrecks and the local planning authorities' mooring restriction areas. The map can be accessed on our website.

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.