

Marine Director's Annual Report 2021

First, for those who have not already heard. I must be the bearer of some very sad news. Our Chairman, Councillor Keith Evans, passed away on 27 December having contracted COVID 19 during a spell in hospital. Our condolences have of course been passed to his family and I am sure you will join me in reflecting on Keith's leadership and support to the Harbour Authority over the past decade. Keith was a wise and private man who spoke softly and had a clear and consensual approach which has brought us a long way in terms of safety and vision. His legacy in placing the Authority on a safe financial footing is clear. Council elections will take place in May and we expect a new Chairman to be appointed thereafter. Our Vice-Chairman, Councillor Peter Latham is acting as interim leader of the Board.

This year's Annual Forum is, because of ongoing COVID restrictions be conducted on-line. It is recognised that this is not ideal but also hoped that it gives as many people as possible the opportunity to ask questions of the Harbour Authority. As last year, 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. At the time of writing, it appears that progress in fighting the outbreak may give grounds for cautious optimism and a return to more normal recreational boating activity. We all watch developments and we look forward to welcoming those who have not for some time had the opportunity to visit their boats. Throughout the year, the Harbour Authority has maintained a full service and an 'open harbour'. In many respects, most notably in providing advice and assistance, it has been a much busier year, particularly when lockdown periods have been lifted. Thank you all for your support in ensuring that the River is safe.

Starting as ever on the from the perspective of development, activity has been limited. Premier Marina completed its re-configuration at the end of March 2020. An application from Universal Marina to extend has been granted Harbour Works' Consent on the basis of Navigational Safety and Environmental compliance; the only two factors upon which the Authority can decide. The Marina's separate proposal to the Crown Estate, which owns the moorings and from which approval must be obtained could not be agreed. The Crown Estate concluded that it could not agree to the proposal given it would otherwise result in 'detriment to its operations on the River Hamble and to the interests of its berthing holders both immediately affected and more broadly on the River'. Harbour Works Consent is just one of several approvals that any development on the river would require from several authorities. As the Board noted during its discussions, The Crown Estate has turned down this proposal, which means that the development cannot progress even with Harbour Works Consent in place. We have noticed some unconsented small developments have appeared this year. These have been taken up with the appropriate planning or environmental regulators. We welcome and encourage early engagement about potential projects within the area up to the High Water mark, however small. This includes advice about pontoons on mid-stream moorings and private developments. We will always be happy to guide prospective applicants through the permissions required.

Two routine inspections of our Marine Safety Management System by our independent Designated Person have seen previous actions closed out. This has allowed the Vice Chairman to write to the Regulator (the Maritime and Coastguard Agency) in January to

assure continued compliance with the requirements of the Port Marine Safety Code. Two inspections of our administration and effectiveness of our Aids to Navigation have been conducted by Trinity House and found the Harbour Authority in good order. Understandably this year, the usual organised River Activity has not been possible and we have witnessed the postponement of the usual much-anticipated elements of River life. Lifting of lockdown measures saw many return to the River and large increases in certain types of activity, most notably paddleboarding and kayaking and also launching of jet-skis at Warsash. The increase in small craft launches from Swanwick led the Harbour Authority to reconsider its risk assessment there and, as a result, new and targeted signage has been erected to guide those less familiar with the Rules of the Road in keeping clear of traffic in the Main Channel.

Better weather in early March has already seen the return of levels of anti-social behaviour at Hamble and Bursledon. Jumping from structures and trespass in larger groups has already taken place, drawing the attention of the Police and Council services. As ever, we continue to dissuade those involved with some effect but urge members of the public to report incidents to the Police. This year, joint planning among the relevant authorities is under way for the anticipated increase in such activity once COVID-related restrictions are lifted.

Our financial position has been in focus over the past year with a careful eye on reduced income from visitors. The large increase in River use in May and early June saw us recover that position to some extent and, as the year comes to an end, we are closer to a normal year's income, despite events. Increases in Harbour Dues and the correctly applied collection of fees for dry-stacked vessels have also strengthened our financial position and ensured that we commit the right amount from revenue to our Reserves for future asset replacement.

Our report on our Forecast Outturn and 2021/22 Forward Budget is available on our website under the minutes of the January Harbour Board.

With the Harbour Office building being subject to refurbishment last year, further external work will be conducted over the coming months. Access to Warsash Jetty, including safety access will not be affected. Our Harbour Wall, one hundred years old, is being refurbished. The past winter has seen planning and approval work with the relevant authorities mixed with separate effort to support enhancements of marine flora and fauna. Those visiting the Harbour Office and Warsash Sailing Club's Lobster Quay will be able to see small artificial basins attached to the harbour wall. The contents are periodically analysed by Bournemouth University for developments and add more to our knowledge of using structures to better benefit the aquatic environment. Our refurbished sea wall will also contain novel features within the concrete to add habitat opportunities fulfilling the type of 'biodiversity net gain' requirement that will soon become law for all developments when the Environment Bill is passed.

Mooring Holders will this year have noticed the introduction of our new, cloud-based Harbour Management System which gives improved account access and allows online payments and certification in a more modern way. It is understood that some will find this

harder to get used to but, in general, responses have been favourable with the overwhelming majority taking advantage of the online payment system. Further feedback on how the system might be improved is always welcomed.

Our Waiting List remains healthy in most categories. Berths for vessels under 8 metres continue to be available however, reflecting the general increase in the size of vessels within the River. All 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. Please do join the List if you wish to take up a mooring. It is possible that those above you on the List will not want a mooring when one comes up for offer.

While petty theft has continued throughout lockdown, the general level witnessed has reduced to reflect the COVID restrictions in place. Co-operation with the Police continues to bear fruit in bringing those responsible to justice. The Harbour Authority has also been working with UK Border Force to bear down on those wishing to exploit the vulnerability of recreational harbours such as ours to both illegal immigration and those breaking COVID restrictions. 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.

Our compliance with requirements for oil spill preparedness and response has continued to be audited and approved by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency. We responded to minor incidents involving fuel spills, deploying oil-absorbent equipment when necessary. One notable incident was a result of a vessel sinking on its mooring, and another was due to the negligent storage of oil containers - a matter which was also followed up by an enforcement visit by the Environment Agency to the site to improve its practices. The River Hamble Port Waste Management Plan has also been reviewed and approved by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency. This ensures that the River has sufficient waste facilities provided for vessels across its marinas, yards and clubs so that no vessel is ever left in a position to have to dispose of waste at sea. If any customers ever have comments on the quantity, quality or type of provision of waste facilities provided for use by vessels then please contact us or the site in question.

We are being supported by Southern Water in our ongoing efforts to replace our sewage pump out and supporting infrastructure. We are also part of a wider Solent to Poole multi-organisation initiative working towards a campaign to provide boaters with improved options, methods and materials for ensuring we can all minimise our impacts from boating on water quality. Please watch this space, and of course do look at The Green Blue's website that it full of suggestions of things that you can do now.

We are hugely disappointed that Highways England (HE) will no longer be removing pipes that drain road runoff directly from the M27 bridge into the river as part of its current Smart Motorway project. This had been due for completion by the time of writing but the Harbour Authority has been informed that insufficient funds are available. The Harbour Board has written in the strongest terms to HE which has admitted its responsibility but not committed to specific planned action. This is not acceptable and the Harbour Authority will continue to press for the earliest resolution. HE does intend to bid again in future funding rounds. RHHA

included the three relevant Members of Parliament in its correspondence. Further updates will be given in Management Committee and Board meetings with any decisions made being made publicly available.

We continue to fulfil our legal responsibilities with regard to safeguarding the Solent European Marine Sites, in part by retaining membership (and current Chairmanship) of the SEMS Management Group and of the Natural Environment Group. Working in partnership to represent and protect the interests of the Hamble is as important, so we remain members of the exceptional Solent Forum and we continue to administer the Hamble Estuary Partnership.

The Hamble is fast becoming a regional hub for exciting environmental research projects working on a variety of measures to improving the future outlook for habitats, species and water quality. RHHA is working with many partners to accommodate these projects here in a safe and sustainable way, with our estuary benefitting as a result. These include: the two sea wall projects mentioned earlier; Blue Marine Foundation's Solent Oyster Restoration Project; Portsmouth University's PhD trailing methods which combine saltmarsh protection with improving settlement of oysters and other species; a private project investigating saltmarsh regrowth using sediment retention structures; EU-funded project developing techniques to reduce nutrient levels in the water. RHHA also maintains its role within a technical group looking at ways of using dredged marina sediments to restore the Solent's saltmarshes. The Hampshire & IOW Wildlife Trust's project 'Secrets of the Solent' continues, and we are helping the project to establish connections with key user groups, disseminate information and contribute advice on relevant project areas. The project's professional artist will soon be painting murals on several iconic buildings in the Region depicting charismatic Solent marine species. A small section of our harbour office has been chosen as one such site, and the project aims to engage the community on the mural selection so watch this space.

Lastly, I would like to advertise that the new 2021 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.