

Project Description:

Proposed works to improve public access to the River Hamble – Warsash slipway/hard.

Introduction

The public slipway/hard at Warsash on the River Hamble is by far the most popular and busiest location on the River for public access to launch and recover boats. See photo 1 below. It is used throughout the year but usage peaks during the summer months. The vessels launched and recovered include canoes and kayaks, sailing dinghies, Personal Water Craft (PWCs), Rigid Inflatable Boats (RIBs), larger motor boats and small trailable keelboats and yachts. Many of the users are inexperienced in launching and recovery operations and the present condition and profile of the slipway (described below) can make what should be a straightforward operation into a significant challenge.

Background

The existing slipway presents a number of problems which can restrict or complicate public access to the River Hamble, as follows:

- I. The **gradient** of the slipway is inconsistent, with an almost flat gradient area half way down the slipway length which covers and uncovers with water at about at mid-tide, making launching and recovery of boats almost impossible for long periods during the tidal cycle as there is insufficient slope to float the boat on or off the trailer. At the seaward end, the gradient is steep enough to make launching and recovery of boats fairly straightforward, but this only applies for a couple of hours around the time of low water. At the landward end, the gradient is steep enough to make launching and recovery reasonably easy at spring high tides, but at neap high tides the period when the slipway is useable to launch and recover larger boats can be very short before the tide ebbs away.
- II. The slipway is immediately downstream of a boardwalk with a wooden clad vertical boundary and a concrete training wall which rises about 50cm above the bed level. These features have the effect of trapping **seaweed and other debris** on the strand line at the landward end of the slipway. This can build up to volumes which make access extremely difficult, particularly during the summer months, and require regular clearance at considerable expense. If the seaweed is not cleared at least once per fortnight during the summer, the slipway can become virtually impassable to all but 4x4s. (See photo 2 below).
- III. Along the downstream (southern) edge of the existing slipway, the compacted gravel surface gradually gives way to **soft mud** which has caused considerable damage to vehicles and inconvenience to their owners when they have become bogged down.
- IV. Towards the seaward end of the slipway there is a substantial **concrete hard-standing** area with 5 wooden piles available for boats to dry-out for routine maintenance. The north-east corner of the hard-standing impinges on the width of the gravel slipway and can cause a bottleneck on busy days. Furthermore, the edge of the hard-standing stands up to 25cm proud of the surrounding gravel, causing a significant hazard to the appendages of smaller vessels trying to cross it after launching or prior to recovery.
- V. The gravel surface of the existing slipway is uneven and subject to **potholes**, causing hazards to towing vehicles and trailers, and to those on foot.
- VI. At its seaward end, which is used for launching and recovery at low tide, the gravel slipway gives way to an area of soft mud interspersed with some **large boulders** which can cause a hazard to propellers and lightly built dinghy hulls when attempting to launch and recover.

Proposed works

As shown on the general arrangement plan, the proposed works are designed to overcome these shortcomings, as follows:

1. The creation of a raised compacted gravel 'beach' at the landward end (coloured pink on the plan) , designed to form a level area which will be at about the mean high water spring tide mark. It is proposed that the gravel will be held in place by 'Grasscell' blocks or similar which will also reduce rutting of the gravel surface by towing vehicles and trailers. Access to the lower levels of the slipway will be via a stepped section of compacted gravel (shown in green on the plan), with a steeper gradient. There will then be a level area (shown in orange on the plan) where this slope matches the height of the upstream concrete training wall, with the intention that a large proportion of seaweed accumulations will be carried further upstream by a combination of wind and tide. Note that the areas immediately downstream of the coloured areas (shown in white) will be graded to match the contours to existing features (i.e. the low stone-built groin). The installation of wooden gravel boards on the downstream edge of the slipway, back-filled on the slipway-side with compacted gravel will make good the existing silt-covered gravel surface and remove the risk of vehicles running off the edge into deeper mud downstream. The edge where the gravel board drops away will be clearly marked with vertical wooden posts which will be clearly visible at high water.
2. The removal of the concrete which forms the northeast corner of the hard-standing and the raising of the surrounding gravel to bring the slipway surface to the level of the hard-standing as far as possible.
3. The infill of existing pot-holes with compacted gravel and minor regrading of the surface (shown in purple on the plan).
4. The clearance of boulders from the seaward, low tide area of the slipway and the laying of a Dycell mattress, in-filled with gravel, to cover the existing silty surface.

Consultation

A working group, which includes regular users of the slipway, was formed by the River Hamble Harbour Authority Management Committee to consider option for improvements. Options for improvements to the slipway were brought the Hamble Consents advice panel in June 2012 and advice given by all the regulatory authorities has been incorporated into the final design.

Environmental Constraints and Issues

ABP Mer were commissioned by the River Hamble Harbour Authority to undertake a feasibility study of the proposed works in May 2013. NB. As a result of this study, minor modifications were made to the proposed profile of the slipway and the location of the gravel retaining board to that shown in the report. Nonetheless, the ABP study provides a great deal of useful information including hydrodynamics, so it is attached to this application for background.

The proposed works will have a minor impact on the tidal prism by virtue of the introduction of about 1000 cubic metres of new fill material.

The proposed works predominantly lie outside any areas designated for nature conservation but are close to an area with the following statutory environmental designations (also see location plan):

- Lee on-the-Solent to Itchen Estuary SSSI

- Solent Maritime Special Area of Conservation.
- Solent & Southampton Water SPA and Ramsar Site.

The downstream edge of the proposed works extends 5 metres into the Solent Maritime Special Area of Conservation. This area was historically part of the old hard and as far as is known (it is never exposed by the tide) it is now gravel and mud. The works to this section will involve laying preformed concrete interlocking blocks in this area which will be overlaid with gravel.

The new gravel will be deposited on areas of existing gravel/hardstanding along the slipway length, including the small area lying within the SAC, and will be separated from the adjoining inter-tidal mud downstream by virtue of the gravel retaining boards.

No fresh concrete will be laid so there are no risks of pollution to the water during construction, and the nature of the material used will mean that the new surface will be gravel which will likely get covered with a layer of silt over time, as has occurred on the existing old hard in the lower sections. The proposals do not involve any piling or dredging works. The works will be undertaken using medium sized plant. The proposed works will not have any impact upon the designated sites.

The installation of the wooden gravel boards on the downstream edge of the slipway will prevent vehicles from encroaching onto the inter-tidal mud.

Seaweed and other debris are currently removed from the landward end of the slipway as compostable waste on a regular basis in order to maintain access. Volumes are in the order of 100 cubic metres per annum. The proposed works are intended to reduce this waste volume considerably, but this cannot be quantified.

There are no known archaeological features within the bounds of the proposed works, and no dredging or excavation works are proposed.

Land Ownership

The slipway area below the mean high water mark is owned by The Crown Estate, but is leased to Hampshire County Council, which is the Harbour Authority. The small area above mean high water mark is owned by Fareham Borough Council. Both landowners are aware of the proposals.

Anticipated outcomes

It is anticipated that these proposals will have the following outcomes:

- A reduction in seaweed and debris accumulation at the landward end, making vehicular access easier. This will reduce clearance requirements and the quantities of waste material produced.
- An improvement in access for launching and recovery at all states of the tide, by creating an additional graded slope for launching and recovery, accessible at or near high water.
- An improvement to the surface of the slipway, particularly where it is currently silty-covered and pot-holed in places. This will reduce the risks of vehicles becoming bogged down in the adjacent mud areas or damaged by the poor surface.
- A reduced risk to the hulls and appendages of small craft launching and recovering at low tide.

Photo 1 below - The public slipway/hard at Warsash on the River Hamble



Photo 2 below – Accumulation of sea weed in the absence of regular clearances

