

# The River Hamble Harbour Board's Strategic Vision and Plan 2025-2028

10 January 2025

## Introduction

1. This document joins the Strategic Vision of the River Hamble Harbour Authority and its Strategic Plan.
2. The Vision seeks to meet the aspirations of all those users who have a stake in the future prosperity of the River Hamble, whether their interests are commercial, recreational or environmental. The Strategic Plan is developed from the aspirational Vision and sets out the framework for what the Harbour Authority must do and what it would like to do over the next three years.
3. Both the Vision and the Plan are evolutionary and have been developed by the River Hamble Harbour Board (RHHB) as the Duty Holder<sup>1</sup> with advice from the River Hamble Management Committee (RHMC), as well as officers of Hampshire County Council (HCC). Both are used to inform decision making by the RHHB.
4. HCC is the River Hamble Harbour Authority (RHHA) and delegates its executive decision-making function to the RHHB. The RHMC provides policy advice and performs a scrutiny function over the Board's decisions.
5. Detailed planning for each year will take the form of the subordinate annual Business Plan and Forward Budget. This will be based on the Strategic Plan but will adopt a flexible approach to adapt to the prevailing circumstances and be agile enough to take advantage of opportunities.

The Harbour Board's Strategic Vision is:

**To conserve the natural beauty, environment, character and history of the Harbour, balanced with the needs of those who use it, whilst ensuring that it is safe to navigate and accessible to as many people as possible, now and for succeeding generations.**

Within that Vision, the Mission Statement of Harbour Board's Strategic Plan is:

**To ensure that the Harbour is operated safely and efficiently, so as to safeguard the Harbour, its users, the public and the environment both now and in the future. The Board is committed, within its powers, to fulfilling all its duties and responsibilities in a safe and efficient manner, to the enhancement of access and facilities for river users and to the enhancement of the well-being, enjoyment and economic benefit of the River for all.**

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<sup>1</sup> Within the meaning of the Port Marine Safety Code.

## **Background**

6. Situated at the heart of the Solent, the River Hamble is widely recognised as a major centre for recreational boating, important both regionally and nationally. It is a popular waterway and harbour with a unique history and a diverse range of uses. Commercial activities on and around the River bring considerable benefits to the local economy and are a significant factor in the local employment market. The River is also a very important part of the local environment and supports many species of birds, plant life, fish and invertebrates. The Hamble Valley is covered by several national and international environmental designations in recognition of its importance as a rich and diverse habitat. The navigable part of the River extends over 6 nautical miles from Southampton Water as far upstream as Botley and Curbridge. It is home to over 3000 recreational craft berthed afloat and many more kept ashore. Leisure activities on and near the River include yachting and power-boating, dinghy sailing and windsurfing, rowing, kayaking and canoeing, paddle-boarding, swimming, fishing, bird-watching, rambling and sightseeing. The RHHB wishes to provide clear leadership and direction for all interested parties, including the three riparian local authorities (Eastleigh, Fareham, and Winchester) to achieve a universally agreed approach to the evolution of the Harbour and to influence developers in striking a balance between contemporary design, commercial interest and conservation.

7. The role of the Harbour Authority is to manage, maintain and improve<sup>2</sup> the River Hamble Harbour. Whilst the RHHA is not the planning authority for the River Hamble – this role falls to the three riparian authorities – the RHHB nonetheless wishes to play a key role in defining the Harbour's future, primarily by considering and determining consent for harbour works. Full enjoyment of the Harbour is dependent on the relationship with adjoining land users and its true non-statutory extent may be said to be all that land which supports and sustains the harbour activities and those of other interested parties – i.e.. the support infrastructure. For clarity, the Board has no desire to extend either its statutory jurisdiction or its statutory responsibilities.

## **The Vision**

### **Purpose**

8. The RHHB's Vision is not intended to be a plan or a statement of policies. Rather, it is a starting point and a statement of shared values. It aims to take a proactive approach to the evolution of the Harbour as a centre for a wide range of recreation, as an economic hub and as a site of environmental importance. It seeks to avoid being over-prescriptive and, to that end, stops short of setting out detailed proposals for future development activity. It is intended, however, that this Vision will help to guide the RHHB when considering future applications for Harbour Works Consent. It is also intended to be a living document. Comment and feedback are welcome and it will be subject to regular review. A measure of its success will be its adoption by a wide range of interested parties as the primary reference by which proposals for change can be judged fairly.

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<sup>2</sup> Harbours Act 1964

## Scope

9. The RHHB will seek to conserve the natural beauty, environment, character and history of the harbour, balanced with the needs of the many people who use it. The Board has expressed a firm commitment that, within the RHHA's jurisdiction, it will not permit any further marina or boatyard development North of the currently consented extent of Eastland's Boatyard.

10. The RHHB is alert to the cumulative effects of river development. Concerns about cumulative effects are due, in part, to the increasing diversity of Harbour users and a perceived increase in congestion and pressures to the environment. There is a clear requirement for a process that is seen to be transparent in safeguarding the River and its amenities, and in balancing user needs and entitlements, be they environmental, recreational or commercial. As a finite resource, the Harbour requires careful husbandry to ensure that it is sustainable as a thriving centre for a diverse range of marine activity now and for succeeding generations.

11. This Vision should be read in conjunction with the RHHA's Strategic Plan, which forms part of this document. The Vision is underpinned by an inter-active multi-layer mapping system, known as Hamble Riverview, which depicts key aspects of the Harbour and surrounding area to demonstrate how diverse marine activities co-exist currently and could be used in the future as a tool to assist in highlighting areas of conflicting interest and identifying where opportunities may arise to improve the environment and facilities. It depicts the situation as it is today but can be easily updated as changes occur in the future.

### Harbour Board Objectives:

#### Maintain Safety.

12. Safety within the Harbour is the primary responsibility of the RHHB (as Duty Holder under the Port Marine Safety Code). The Board seeks to:

- ensure that all users feel safe and are safe on the water;
- ensure that all users understand and respect the needs of other users;
- accommodate the diverse range of craft currently found in the Harbour;
- ensure that appropriate navigation channels are available to meet their needs, whether in terms of depth, width, accessibility, shelter or crossing places and;
- provide relevant information on safety which can be widely disseminated to harbour users.

The RHHB recognises the importance of safety for sailing dinghies and other small craft in the Harbour and will seek to ensure the preservation of safe areas for these activities. The RHHB will also encourage the safe use of the Harbour by children and, where possible, provide and promote access for those less able.

#### Preservation and enhancement of the Harbour's environment.

13. The RHHB will ensure its compliance with appropriate environmental legislation. In carrying out its statutory functions, it must have regard to nature

conservation, water quality, waste management and heritage features. Thus, protection of the precious environment of the Harbour is a key aspect of the RHHB's statutory responsibilities. It is vital that the protected habitats such as salt marsh and intertidal mud be conserved in order to perform their natural functions such as sea defence, carbon capture and support of a range of species of flora and fauna. The rural aspect of the upper reaches of the River should remain as such to be enjoyed by future generations.

The RHHB is aware of the impact of climate change and sea level rise and will continue to recognise, monitor and raise awareness of the effect on the Harbour. Promoting an understanding here will assist in improving the Harbour's resilience to climate change.

The RHHB will therefore seek, where practicable, to support initiatives that will enhance the environment, restore nature and reduce carbon emissions and activities that contribute to climate change. The Board also recognises that maintenance dredging and, occasionally, capital dredging may be necessary to maintain navigable depths for access and to safeguard useable River space.

#### Ensuring commercial and recreational balance.

14. The Hamble is a busy recreational harbour and is widely recognised as an important boating and sailing centre, appealing to owners of vessels of all types including racing and cruising yachts, motor cruisers, kayaks, canoes, rowing boats, sailing dinghies and Stand-Up Paddleboards (SUPs); other, new, water-based activities may also become popular in the future. Furthermore, the River is popular for fishing, bird-watching, dog-walking, swimming and simply 'sitting and watching'. It is a vibrant and important commercial location, with businesses offering almost every boating service adding millions of pounds and many employment opportunities to the local economy. The Harbour's recreational activity is vital for the survival of these businesses. It is imperative that a balance is maintained to ensure that businesses, investment and employment can thrive alongside the demands of all recreational activity.

15. The RHHB understands the great importance of the marine businesses around the Harbour and will seek to provide support for the appropriate private and public infrastructure so that economic and employment benefits are realised into the future. These businesses include large commercial marinas, smaller specialist boat yards, mooring providers/maintainers, yacht clubs, specialist engineering and support businesses and those services such as local shops, pubs & amenities, the water taxi, ferry and river bus which enable both boat owners/users and non-boat owners to have access to and experience the water. The RHHB will encourage marine businesses around the Harbour and anticipates that they will continue to be flexible, open to change and adaptable to the diverse demands of Harbour users in the future.

16. The RHHB recognises the equal importance of the Harbour as a recreational resource for all who wish to access it. The Harbour has something to offer across a wide range of recreational activities. The RHHB believes that the Harbour should continue to meet this recreational demand and will seek to ensure that such activities

can take place safely and with the minimum of conflict between users or negative impact on the natural environment. Ensuring that there is sufficient space for recreational activity is important but the RHHB also recognises the need to balance this against demand for an appropriate distribution of moorings and berths so that the full range of activities may take place safely.

#### Ensuring our financial future.

17. The RHHA forms part of HCC but is self-funding (mainly through the collection of Harbour Dues and fees for services and consents). The RHHA is a 'not-for-profit' organisation and the RHHB is committed to ensuring that any surplus is reinvested in the infrastructure of the Harbour. This will include sustaining pro-actively the Asset Enhancement Reserve to take advantage of opportunities as they arise.

#### Responding to future demand.

18. There are considerable pressures on the RHHA and a great deal of competition for space within the Harbour. In balancing future demand, the RHHB will seek to preserve public access to the Harbour for all types of recreation (with appropriate restrictions to ensure safety of navigation and environmental protection). It will work with local planning authorities to maintain access to the shoreline for non-boat users and seek to encourage the provision of facilities for non-boating visitors when appropriate.

19. The RHHB aspires to manage the space available for all categories of Harbour users and to give due consideration to 'zoning' of activities where practicable. Optimal use of space has not yet involved the clearing of moorings from specific areas but may do so and the RHHB accepts that moorings elsewhere may need to be reconfigured to accommodate displaced boats. The RHHB will, where appropriate, seek the agreement of the Crown Estate to this. Competition for space is not limited to the water and the RHHB recognises the importance of adequate facilities for car and trailer parking and will maintain a dialogue with local planning authorities to encourage the inclusion of parking issues on their agendas. The RHHB wishes to encourage access to the facilities of the River for boat users of all means.

#### **Engagement and consensus building**

20. The Vision is for a harbour where there is a shared understanding between all the individuals and groups who use it. The RHHB is committed to working to build consensus between these individuals and groups. The RHMC will continue to lead on consultation with those whom Members represent and will advise the Board accordingly when Members believe that consultation is required. Consultation and engagement will be open and accessible where possible. The RHHB will also work to disseminate information about the Harbour, how it is managed and operates and its history and environment, so as to inform local communities and build ownership of this valuable resource. To this end, the RHHB seeks to encourage a more 'joined-up' approach to planning and development in the Harbour, working in cooperation with the local planning authorities and other interested parties. Finally, it is fully intended that this Vision will be a living document, to be reviewed every three years and amended on a regular basis.

## **The Strategic Plan**

### **Purpose**

21. The Strategic Plan is derived from the broader Vision and sets out within that what the RHHA will do. It will:

- Comply with all legal requirements;
- Aim to meet the national requirements of the Port Marine Safety Code;
- Heed the Guide to Good Practice on Port Marine Operations, published by the Department for Transport (Ports Division);
- Act in pursuance of the South Marine Plan issued by the Marine Management Organisation.

In doing so, it will exercise its functions openly and transparently in the long-term interests of the Harbour's River Users and other concerned parties and beneficiaries.

### **Scope**

#### Port Status and Governance Arrangements.

22. Responsibility for the governance of the River Hamble was transferred to HCC in 1970 and the Harbour has been operated as a municipal port ever since. It is assumed that this arrangement will continue for the foreseeable future. HCC is also a major riparian landowner. An on-line multi-layer map of the River, known as Hamble Riverview, is available on the RHHA website and displays a wide variety of information about the Harbour. HCC and its representatives on the Harbour Board form a democratically accountable body responsible for overseeing the operation of the Harbour and the impacts arising from it. The RHHB and its members are individually and collectively responsible as the Duty Holder for the Harbour as defined in the Port Marine Safety Code. The RHMC (constituted in accordance with the River Hamble Harbour Revision Order 1969 (as subsequently amended) provides advice to the RHHB and is responsible for scrutinising its decisions.

#### Planning Constraints.

23. Although HCC is the Statutory Harbour Authority for the River Hamble, it is not the local planning authority for the River. Planning for development on and around the Hamble is covered by the Local Development Framework produced by the riparian local district Councils; all structural development on the River which is attached to the land requires their planning permission. However, no structural works can take place on the River without the works consent of the RHHA (under the Southampton Harbours Act 1949). Factors for consideration when determining applications for RHHA works consent are contained in the Port Marine Safety Code and environmental legislation. The Marine Management Organisation's South Marine Plan must also be used for all planning decisions for the Hamble.

#### External Constraints.

24. The following external constraints have been identified:

- the complex needs and conflicting interests of River users and other interested parties need to be understood and balanced against the statutory and business constraints within which the RHHA operates;
- National and Local Planning Authorities' policies and controls which may constrain the scope for development and improvement of facilities and amenities;
- The requirement to operate subject to the terms of a management agreement with the Crown Estate, which will alter from time to time.
- (iv) Recognition that many River users and actors will be unaware of the different roles and responsibilities with respect to the River of HCC, other local authorities, the Crown Estate, the RHHB and the RHMC.

### Internal Factors.

25. The following internal pressures have been identified:

- the RHHA is funded entirely by River Users and visitors and must be operated as economically and cost-effectively as possible;
- the RHHB's statutory responsibility for ensuring safety of navigation dictates that the Harbour Office staff must be available to monitor and supervise activities on the River outside normal working hours;
- the RHHA has wide-ranging environmental responsibilities, some of which are carried out on behalf of HCC and the Crown Estate;
- the RHHA is unique within HCC's wide portfolio and pan-council systems are necessarily adopted for the RHHA undertaking. The need to adopt certain formats for information sharing, for example web-based material, has both advantages and disadvantages.

### Finance.

26. The RHHA operates as a business unit of HCC. Annual income is 'reserved' (ring-fenced) and the RHHA operates its own separate Reserves. An annual budget is produced and the accounts are audited by Hampshire County Council and, periodically, the Crown Estate.

### Equalities Impact Assessments.

27. RHHA services and facilities are openly available to all, regardless of age, gender, disability, race or religion, in accordance with current equalities legislation. Equality Impact Assessments for the services and facilities provided by the RHHA have been prepared and are held in the Harbour Office. These assessments include a requirement to collect and analyse data about customers and their needs, so that appropriate measures can be taken where practical to ensure that everyone who wishes to use the services and facilities provided by the RHHA can do so on equal terms. However, simply understanding who the RHHA's customers are and identifying their needs is not sufficient. The RHHA will promote equality of access for all. To that end, all decisions of the RHHB must be considered in terms of the impact which they might have on equality of access to its services and facilities and identify actions which must be taken as a result. Every reasonable effort must be

made to ensure that all users are treated equally and that appropriate information and facilities are provided to all.

### Staff Training and Development - Investing In People.

28. HCC is an accredited 'Investor in People'. A significant element of this is to ensure that staff receive the training which they require to do their job and such additional training as may be required to encourage their career development. Maintaining accreditation as an 'Investor in People' requires that all training undertaken is assessed in terms of its contribution towards the aims and effectiveness of the organisation. Development training will be provided for permanent staff as appropriate to their current role and future aspirations as HCC officers. The RHHA will be pro-active in implementing HCC's 'Valuing Performance' programme for staff appraisal.

### **Strategic Objectives.**

29. For functional delivery within the constraints, the RHHA will set the following strategic objectives for the coming years:

- Governance: To govern the River Hamble in compliance with the Department for Transport's 'Municipal Ports Review';
- Navigational Safety: To make the Port Marine Safety Code the central pillar of everything the RHHA does to ensure the safety of all those who use and work in the Harbour;
- Environment: To discharge its responsibilities under the Habitats Regulations and all other relevant environmental legislation through conserving and where practicable enhancing the environment, promoting nature recovery and maintaining approved pollution prevention and nature conservation measures;
- Public Relations and Communication: To enhance the public perception and understanding of the RHHA through building and maintaining the confidence of River Users and other interested parties by informing them of plans, progress and achievements, as well as by a commitment to enhance public understanding of the governance arrangements;
- The Crown Estate: To maintain a productive relationship with the Crown Estate and its agents;
- Moorings: To manage the mid-stream moorings efficiently and fairly on behalf of the Crown Estate and assist the Crown Estate in its decision making where practicable to develop the mooring pattern to match changing needs;
- To be pro-active in monitoring the River for the impact of Climate Change and identifying the implications of decisions. Additionally to implement where practicable initiatives and inform, encourage and support the initiatives of other river users in reducing carbon emissions and activities that contribute to climate change;
- Enhancement: To encourage and facilitate the enhancement of access and facilities for River Users and the enhancement of the well-being, enjoyment and economic benefit of the River for all. This should target improvement of facilities, where practicable, for visitors;
- Planning and Consents: To plan for the future of the River Hamble, providing a clear and effective works' consent process as the primary decision-making

authority on matters affecting safety and ease of navigation in the Harbour, and having due regard to the RHHA's responsibilities for environmental protection;

- Consultation: To listen to ideas and suggestions put forward by River Users and other interested parties and consult on proposed changes;
- Visitors: To promote and advance the provision of appropriate facilities for visiting yachtsmen, both afloat and ashore and to manage them as efficiently as possible;
- Policy: To ensure whenever possible that its views are taken into account when future government policies on ports, harbours and the marine environment are under consideration;
- Future Trends: To respond appropriately to new trends in recreational boating, for example: larger boats, Rigid Inflatable Boats (RIBs), Personal Water Craft (PWCs), dry-sailing and Stand-up Paddleboarding;
- Financial: To maintain and manage the harbour cost-effectively, and within the available resources;
- Staff: To employ and retain a well-motivated, properly trained staff and provide regular training for Harbour Board and Management Committee Members;
- Health and Safety: To ensure that staff and visitors to Harbour Authority facilities are made aware of health and safety policies and procedures and their own individual responsibilities.
- Anti Social Behaviour: Acknowledging the Police lead, to meet with the Police at the beginning and end of each season to plan for and review effectiveness of RHHA supporting effort.

The Harbour Board's Mission Statement combines these Objectives and sets the headmark for operational and tactical decision making.