

EXETER HARBOUR BOARD

Monday 14 March 2022

Present:-

Councillor David Harvey (Chair)
Councillors Allcock, Pearce and Leadbetter
Simon Adams, Anthony Garratt, Owen Michaelson and Steve Sitch

Apologies:-

Andrew May, Richard Eggleton, Councillors Buswell and Sparkes

Also Present:-

Engineering, Waterways and Parking Service Manager (SC) Harbour Master (GF) and Democratic Services Officer (SLS)

Rex Frost, Chair of Exeter Ports Users Group

1 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 September 2021 be taken as read and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

2 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of discloseable pecuniary interest were received.

3 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

It was noted that there were no public questions and the Chair welcomed questions at future meetings.

4 **EXETER PORT HARBOUR USERS GROUP UPDATE**

Rex Frost, Chair of the Exeter Port Users Group, attended the meeting and provided a verbal update on activities and matters of interest to the Exeter Port Users Group (EPUG). He reported that they had held their last EPUG meeting in November 2021, with the Harbour Master and several of the City's waterways staff in attendance.

He acknowledged and commented on a number of issues:-

- the intent to mark the channel up to the Motorway bridge at Topsham.
- the forthcoming plan to carry out a pollution spillage exercise on the Estuary as this has not been done for many years.
- that should there be any future intention to impose Harbour Dues, that it should be acknowledged that there would be little opportunity to derive harbour income from properties such as car parks and slipways which allow access to the River Exe, as these have historically been the responsibility of other Councils so that avenue is blocked. The EPUG had discussed the option that future funding might be possible through a surcharge on access points considered to spread the load of harbour costs.
- at a recent meeting of the Exe Estuary Management Partnership, the Environment Agency representative had referred to the protection systems on Dawlish Warren would only be in place until 2040, with some withdrawn in 2030. The Environment Agency plans only ensure that road and rail

systems on the river banks could cope with sea level changes and flooding, but there was no plan to account for changes caused in the river itself. They felt the effect of the Warren on the Estuary was significant. The Group hoped that the Board would seek comment from the Environment Agency and Government on ways to protect or adapt businesses and facilities in the next few years.

The Chair thanked Mr Frost for the update.

5

HARBOUR BOARD VISIONING EVENT REVIEW

The Engineering, Waterways and Parking Service Manager reported on the Visioning event held in January, when a number of fundamental issues including the development of a Vision Statement and Mission Statement, identifying six core values and four key objectives were explored. The detail was included in the circulated report. The event had also offered the Board the opportunity to network in an informal setting as well as meet with members of the waterways team.

An update on a number of actions identified was given:-

- Officers to progress a report in support of funding for the Harbour Revision Order which was recognised as a fundamental aim of ensuring Port Marine Safety Code compliance (The Chair stated that the Harbour Board did not have a dedicated budget and any expert technical advice needing significant funding would require Council agreement).
- Discussions had continued on an agreement with Teignbridge District Council to provide the Designated Person for an initial period of time.
- Officers to identify options to deliver a Safety Management system.
- To clarify the relationship between the Board and the City Council's Executive.

A Board Member paid tribute following the sad and untimely death of former Board member Paul Labistour. They welcomed Simon Adams as a new member.

Board Members thanked officers for organising the Visioning event which had consolidated the purpose of the Board and recognised the interests of the many individuals and businesses associated with the river and canal.

The Chair would ensure that the purpose of the Board was embedded in the Council's processes and systems.

The report was noted.

6

HARBOUR MASTER'S REPORT

The Harbour Master, provided an update on the circulated report. He introduced the Canal Manager, Colin Acton who was present at the meeting as an observer. The waterways teams have been very busy but particularly since Christmas carrying out a number of necessary maintenance tasks including vegetation clearance on the canal banks and general repairs. The Heritage Harbour aspiration has meant some additional tasks needing to be completed before the start of the season, with the next three weekends being crucial to the canal team.

The Harbour Master responded to a number of questions:-

- Exeter Canal was not connected to any other waterways but there was a

growing realisation and support in principle for paying for use of some of the city's waterways. Repairs were expensive and if an arrangement could be made with organisations such as Inland Waterways then charges would only be made for a particular stretch of water.

- the recent bad weather had resulted in a number of boats breaking free from their moorings and a future registration of boats and database would be particularly helpful in such circumstances.
- an extension of the channel markers in Topsham to the Retreat Boatyard was being made at a cost of £6,500 will improve what is currently an unmarked channel. Topsham River Commissioners (TRC) had purchased six red and one green marker buoys as markers to signpost the channel. TRC were giving the buoys prominent names including one after local yachtswoman Kate McCabe. An exhibition at Topsham Museum was also being held on the history of the canal.

The Chair referred to the effort being made to engage visitors, ensuring their safety and wellbeing as well as ever more innovative ways to identify an income stream for use of the waterways. He also referred to the number of incidents requiring assistance from the team, citing the rescue of a man from a sinking boat and suffice to say that the team were there once again to save lives and money. He also responded to a Board Member's comment on factoring in a strategy or work plan for the Board to timetable future business to ensure that their duty was being met as well as looking at opportunities for maximising income and improving health and safety, and stated that the process had not been clarified, but it would be approved by the Executive and Council. The matter would be discussed with the Director and Service Lead.

The report was noted.

7

UPDATE ON PREVIOUS HARBOUR REVISION ORDER

The Engineering, Waterways and Parking Service Manager, presented a briefing paper on the Previous Harbour Revision Order (HRO) as a member of the Board had requested an update on this matter. The previous HRO application in 2008 was made on the basis of a move from a traditional Municipal Port status to that of a Trust Port model. Any future HRO application would now be aimed at helping Exeter City Council to operate the existing Municipal Port more effectively rather than passing responsibility to a Trust Port model. It would also help enable the Council to reach compliance with the Port Marine Safety Code.

There was the opportunity to look at this in a completely different way and the appointment of a Harbour Master, and formation of the Harbour Board were all components of this process. The next steps would include consultation with the Board's participation and agreement culminating in a formal report to the Executive and Council for their consideration at some point in the future. A scoping report will be brought to the next meeting of the Board for Members' views and comments.

In response to a Board Member's comment, the Engineering, Waterways and Parking Service Manager advised that it was anticipated that the likely cost of achieving a HRO would be in the region of £75,000.

The report was noted.

8

SCOPE FOR IMPROVED SUSTAINABILITY WITHIN THE ESTUARY

The Engineering, Waterways and Parking Service Manager, presented a briefing paper following a request for information from a Board Member on the scope for

improved sustainability within the Estuary including the potential for wind turbines within the Estuary. Improved sustainability would be a desirable direction in view of the Council's key aims to meet Net Zero targets by 2030. The process would involve many stakeholders as well as landowners, leaseholders and the Environment Agency. The Harbour Master had engaged with Plymouth University and discussed renewable options, including investigating an electric engine for Topsham Ferry and charging point options. Exeter University also had the capacity for the design and testing of such engines in a marine environment and there could be scope for future charging points at the buoy store, and at the canal basin.

Board Members raised the following matters:-

- issues relating to wind turbines included acquiring the necessary planning permission and the viability of a commercial operation;
- tidal stream technology;
- wind generators and solar array farms could create issues for bird migrating routes; and
- welcome the opportunity to work with the local universities.

The Chair responded to a Board Member's question and stated that the City Council had an overarching ambition to meet a Net Zero target by 2030. This included the Chief Executive & Growth Director who had been seconded part time to work with the Exeter City Futures team, and the City Council's Net Zero team whose role included looking internally across the City Council's estate and operations. The Council's Corporate Energy Manager was also working toward achieving the Net Zero 2030 target.

Board Members referred to the need to ensure future sustainability of the waterways with local stakeholders, including amongst others the Water Sports Association and Exeter Port Users Group. An on-line form or drop box was suggested to allow contributions to the conversation. The Chair commented on the need for cooperation and understanding of the various interests and local wildlife and the impact of opening up the countryside to larger numbers of visitors.

It was noted that the Engineering, Waterways and Parking Service Manager would investigate options and conduct an exercise to gather comments and suggestions for a more sustainable approach to the Estuary. He would report back to Members in due course.

The report was noted.

9

HARBOUR BOARD APPOINTMENTS

The Engineering, Waterways and Parking Service Manager confirmed that he would commence the process for recruitment of two external Board Members for a further term. A Board Member was allowed to sit a maximum of two terms with any current member at the end of their first term of office also able to apply. Candidates would be considered by a panel consisting of the Chair, the Harbour Master and himself. The successful candidates, once confirmed would be invited to the next Board meeting in June.

(The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 6.45 pm)

Chair