

## **REPORT TO HARBOUR BOARD 23 JUNE 2022**

### **Harbour Master Report Update**

A warm welcome to the new members of the Board, I look forward to working with you all.

In the near future I will send you an invitation to an online workshop provided by the British Ports Association (BPA) that will give you an introduction to the Port Marine Safety Code (PMSC) that will be an important part of the detailed briefings and discussions that we will have in Harbour Board meetings. When I send out the notification of training I will also send a link to the PMSC document and also the Guide to Good Practice (GtGP) that will help you understand the day to day practicalities of working in a marine environment and will also let you know what your responsibilities are as Duty Holders within the PMSC.

#### **Current Situation**

As Duty Holders, collectively the board are responsible for how the port operates and for the safety of both users and staff. As part of the PMSC, ports and harbours must demonstrate good governance and ensure that they have the right powers to enable the port to be managed successfully.

The Exeter Port Authority do not have the correct powers of Special and General Direction meaning that we do not properly control our waters either in the Exeter Ship Canal or the river Exe estuary. To gain those powers we need to go through the process of a Harbour Revision Order (HRO) otherwise the Authority (and specifically the Harbour Board) are open to challenge if there were to be an incident that could have been prevented by having proper control measures in place.

The Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) are aware from the last inspection that we lack the correct powers and although the Council made a commitment as far back as 2015 that the PMSC would be adopted, we have yet to move forward with the plan..

As the Port Authority we continue to work with all user groups around the waterways.

We hold regular meetings with the Port User Group, Canal Users Group, Topsham River Commissioners and the different Moorings Associations in the river.

### **Exeter Ship Canal**

Unfortunately the bascule bridge that crosses the canal on the A379 is still currently out of action and has been since just before Easter. It is expected that repairs will be completed by the end of June 2022. Thankfully, Devon County Council provided a crane on two separate occasions to lift the bridge span to allow a commercially built vessel to leave as well as two convoys of yachts out to sea from winter storage. My sincere thanks go to the engineers at the County Council for swift action to lift the bridge at short notice.

The canal team continue with the day to day maintenance of the estate, the locking in/out of vessels visiting the Turf or seeking shelter and storage. The use of the water by different organisations is growing exponentially. Again, to keep the service going and help maintain the levels and depths we need to both dredge areas that easily silt and stop leakage of water through the aging lock gates.

Exeter Quay has now achieved Historic Harbour status. The Exeter Quay and Canal Trust (EQCT) has employed a consultant to make recommendations to a plan to raise the profile of the Quay and part of that plan is to attract historic vessels to the port.

We have to dredge the approaches to the Turf on a regular basis to maintain access to the canal, and from time to time we need to dredge the build-up of silt outside the Kings Arms gates at the entrance to the Basin and the junction to the river Exe.

After a survey, we calculate that there is a need to remove 5,000 cubic metres of material from the canal in order to maintain the depths needed for deep draught vessels to access the canal basin or Exeter Quay. We are looking to speak with contractors to look for the best deal to complete this work if funding can be found.

The canal team work extremely hard to manage the expectations of water users. Unlike the rest of the River Exe, the whole area (including the banks) are owned by Exeter City Council and the area. The limited resources we have available are tight, the team often have to adopt a 'make do and mend'

approach to the job. Apart from the Exeter Anglers Association, nobody either as an individual or organisation are paying for the use of the canal.

The build-up of weed and algae in the canal is a perennial problem. Because of the accumulation of growth, this has a detrimental effect on some Watersports such as kayaking and rowing. On the other hand, wildlife enthusiasts and anglers prefer to have weed in the water to provide a home for wildlife and shelter for fish. We try to clear the middle of the water from weed but this is a very difficult issue to deal with.

### **Exe Estuary**

At the Buoy Store in Exmouth the team there continue with the maintenance of the navigation aids in the river, the commercial work that we are commissioned to do and the patrolling of the waters at busy times.

Notably, the main marked channel leading into the river had to be altered in May because of the changing nature of the sea bed. The deeper water is now East of where the charted positions for the navigation buoys were plotted. In total, eight buoys had to be moved. This exercise is not easy nor inexpensive. A survey of the approaches to the river was carried out in April which indicated that the channel had moved, just about the time that people were starting to get back out to seas in boats. Moving swiftly, we organised a tug from Teignmouth (four weeks later) to come and help move the buoys to new positions once we had worked out where to place them.

We need to replace our main workboat. The Can-Doo as she is called, is now no longer fit for purpose and needs to go. Working out at sea (in the navigation channel, anywhere south of no 10 buoy is classed as being at sea) we need to be working on a vessel that is coded under the MCA licencing scheme. Our current vessel does not conform to the code, therefore we cannot proceed to sea in it and hence we had to ask the Teignmouth Harbour Master to use their tug at a significant cost to us. If we had an MCA coded vessel of our own, we could have both done the move of the navigation marks sooner and at a greatly reduced cost.

The Can-Doo certification for lifting equipment is now out of date.

To purchase a new vessel to replace the existing one would be prohibitive and lengthy. A better solution is to sell our current boat and charter a purpose built

moorings barge that is both fully MCA coded and built for purpose. There is one available to us locally that we could start using immediately if this action was taken.

At Exmouth from the Buoy Store we use an open workboat as a tender to get to the mooring where our larger vessel is kept afloat. This smaller boat is now life expired and needs replacement (This was recorded in the Corporate Health & Safety Operational Remedial works Register of 2021). A clear way forward is that we dispose of this boat along with the small patrol craft that we use occasionally and combine the two roles together in one newer craft that is both cleaner for the environment and more fit for purpose.

Patrolling in the river continues at busy periods and at weekends. Our patrols regularly advise on speed limits and safe conduct on the water to users. After three seasons of being out on the river with volunteers it becomes apparent that it is the same group of people that infringe the Bye-Laws constantly.

In the main, the boating community respond positively to our being afloat, we have offered advice, gone to the aid of many and I believe we should have a visible presence out on the water.

### **Aids to Navigation**

We have been inspected to Trinity House on our Aids to Navigation and all of the Aids were found to be in the correct position and in good serviceable position. Another check was carried out on all of our reporting procedures and response times for Aids that are either broken or out of position. We were judged to be satisfactory in all aspects.

Since the last meeting of the Harbour Board, we have issued 10 Local Notices to Mariners.

### **Topsham Ferry**

The Topsham ferry is now operating a summer schedule of working six days per week, dependant on tides and weather conditions. Mr John Kent is the full-time skipper and reports that the service is getting more popular as summer approaches.

### **Harbour Master office/Buoy store**

The Buoy store has still not been refurbished, currently there is no planned start date for any works to be done on the building.

The staff are currently working from a failing base with extremely poor facilities. There is no heating or insulation in the building, no windows and an area the size of a small cupboard is the office for up to four people. Better facilities are needed for the safety and welfare of the team.

A working base at Exmouth is necessary for our work on the aids to navigation but our facilities need to be improved.

Aspirations for the Future include

Application for an HRO

Charter a replacement for Can-Doo

Replace workboat and small patrol boat with one more suitable vessel

Dredge parts of the Exeter Ship Canal

Improve the facilities at the buoy store

Members are invited to note the report.

**Grahame Forshaw Harbour Master June 2022**