

REPORT TO HARBOUR BOARD 26 OCTOBER 2022

Harbour Master Report

1. Introduction.

After an exceptionally hot and dry summer, we are now firmly in the season of mists and mellow fruitfulness.

Since our last meeting the river and canal have seen huge numbers of people taking to the water and enjoying the different activities that the huge estate has to offer.

Now that the sailing season is coming to a close, the teams are gearing up for the type of work that we carry out at this time of the year.

2. Exeter Ship Canal

At the canal, boats are starting to come in for winter storage, some will remain at the Turf and others will convoy up to the basin for lifting out onto the quayside. Generally there will be two convoys which are usually done on a Saturday morning with the lifting out done on a separate Saturday. Because of the extra demand for mooring space at Turf we have installed an extra 42 metres of pontoon and by then laid a line of trot moorings.

Since early March the Bascule bridge that crosses the canal has been out of action, only being fully serviceable at the start of October. The impact of this has been enormous. We were able to have the bridge lifted open by other means to allow a commercially built boat and two out of hours evening convoys to transit down.-The bridge issue has meant that we have been restricted in our ability to bring boats up to the basin to visit or carry out essential maintenance. Indeed, even though the bridge is fully serviceable now we have lost a number of customers that would have brought craft up to the basin for the winter because obviously owners don't want to be marooned up at the basin next season if the ageing bridge were to break down again.

The bridge being out of action has also been trying for our commercial users. Stuart Lines Cruises had to curtail all of their booked trips up the canal, turning around at Countess Weir. Throughout the time of the bridge closure the engineers at Devon County Council tried to give some indications of potential repair dates but all these expectations were delayed further. Similarly our weed control in the canal was not able to be done because the Margaret R was on the wrong side of the bridge when it became unserviceable. The weed has probably been at it worst this year in our experience and a weed boat is needed to keep the Canal navigable during warmer months.

The developers of the Water Lane site have produced a draft plan of how the area will look in the future and I am in conversation with the project team to ensure that the operational needs of the canal are taken into account before the final plan is decided.

There are two areas of concern to me are the potential development at Gabriel's Wharf and also that part of the design brief for the planners is have easier access to the canal by local residents. I fully support this but increased access to the canal will have an impact on the canoe loops that the canal team maintain. As the Harbour Board are fully aware we do not at the moment gain any income from the users of the canal and

increased use of the access points to the water will mean greater wear and tear for the team to cover but without any extra resource.

At Gabriel's Wharf the development plan is to create an open Piazza area with buildings set back from the quay that will complement the area with limited road access. This plan will curtail our ability to crane out of the water large vessels that cannot be lifted elsewhere. Discussions continue about this.

There are a number of issues with boats in the canal not being maintained or abandoned.

Some boats will need to be disposed of and of these some larger vessels at great expense.

Existing all year round boats will need to comply with the new contracts.

Vessels over 20 tonnes will need to be lifted out at suitable boatyards outside the Canal for inspections and hull maintenance to ensure they remain seaworthy and comply with terms of their insurance.

A few liveaboard boats at the basin fall into this category where they exceed 20 tonnes and have had no hull maintenance done for many years.

3. The River Exe

In the river we have noticed an increase in people accessing the water, not surprising with the lovely summer weather.

The increase in water users has meant that we have had some problems on the water with anti-social behaviour. For example the number 31 navigation buoy was destroyed by a large boat running into it. The buoy was replaced within 24hrs but at present we do not know which boat collided with it or who might have been involved. During our work in the river in the dark hours we have seen many boats running at high speed not showing navigation lights.

The Safe Water buoy at the entrance to the river became unserviceable at the start of September and was removed so that we did not lose the ground tackle. A replacement has been ordered and will be on station at the end of October depending on the weather and suitable tides.

We continue to keep Trinity House informed of any alterations to the navigation aids in the river, we have had two visits by the organisation, one to carry out a physical check on the aids and the other to inspect all the paperwork and records. Both visits were useful to us and the inspectors were satisfied with our work.

The sand banks in the river continue to shift and change shape. The channel leading from the Safe Water buoy into the entrance to the river was altered just after Easter in the spring and thankfully there is no indication that the buoys need to be moved. In the river though the bank between no 13 and no 15 has spread to the south and west and above no 15 the bank has also spread west. We have laid an intermediate buoy between no 13 and 15 to keep traffic away from the bank.

Up at no 21 buoy we are looking at moving the channel further to the west and we are assessing whether to have another survey done by a contractor in early spring to confirm that there is indeed some deeper water to the west.

The Buoy Store has not yet been refurbished but work on providing improved facilities for the staff is progressing.

Work on the compliance with the Port Marine Safety Code continues. We have completed the Port Waste Plan, the Port Passage Plan and the first draft of the Safety Management System.

We are also progressing with a review of the Risk Assessments that appertain for the river and canal and we have created a new incident reporting system for the whole of the waterways. This reporting system will be used to compile a record of incidents which will help compile and adjust the Risk Assessments that cover the waterways and hopefully reduce accidents and incidents.

At the time of writing we are seeking to employ a new member of the canal team. At the Buoy Store, a team member is still recovering at home from surgery and is now in a phased return to work. To keep up with our work we have employed a casual worker on 21hrs per week to help keep our operations going. With the amount of work we have to do and the size of the area we cover we are still under resourced with staff.

Our volunteer patrollers have again been invaluable this past summer. With the weather being as good as it was we were able to put regular patrols out on the water and every weekend there was at least one patrol boat out and in the height of summer there were sometimes two afloat.

Our commercial work on servicing moorings for customers is just about to get under way, the first part of this process is the winterisation of a mooring which is a fairly simple task then we will bring ashore the mooring tops that we have taken off and service them over the winter in the Buoy Store before putting them back out in the spring.

The Can Doo which is our main moorings workboat has now reached the end of its usefulness and is due to be retired. In its place we are going to hire in the vessel that I briefed you about at our last meeting. This vessel will be Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) coded and be completely fit for purpose.

The small Dory that we use for carrying equipment such as heavy chains/buoys/warps/shackles out to the workboat is due to be taken out of service. This Dory is now about 40 years old, not MCA coded and life expired. We are currently looking at a replacement craft.

Members are invited to note the report.

Harbour Master, Grahame Forshaw,

October 2022