

## **EXETER HARBOUR BOARD**

Thursday 13 July 2023

### **Present:-**

Councillor Ruth Williams (Chair)

Councillors Ellis-Jones, Leadbetter, Pearce, Read, Snow and Messrs Adams, Garratt, May and Michaelson

### **Also Present:-**

Harbour Master Exeter Port Authority (GF), and Democratic Services Officer (SLS)

David Rochester– Secretary of Exeter Port Users Group

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### **APOLOGIES**

No apologies were received.

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### **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 April 2023 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as correct, subject to the rewording of Minute 37, in the fourth paragraph, the wording of the final sentence to be changed to “It had been unfortunate for the Exe Water Sports Association that an open event they were holding was the following day.”

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### **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of discloseable pecuniary interest were made.

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### **PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

The following question had been submitted by a member of the public. The Chair, Councillor Williams invited Ms Jane Evans of the Exe Water Sports Association to read out her submitted question.

A premises plan will determine the Council land to be included as Harbour land in the Harbour Revision Order (HRO). Is the Harbour Board reviewing the allocation of land set out in the Supplementary Planning Document and Design Code for the Water Lane area between the canal and railway line so that essential harbour land is not allocated as development land?

The Chair responded and confirmed that there was no completed detail as everything was still at a work in progress stage.

Ms Evans asked a supplementary question citing the same request to the Board members, and the Chair reiterated her earlier response.

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### **EXETER PORT USERS GROUP UPDATE**

The Secretary of the Exeter Port Users Group (EPUG), David Rochester presented a verbal update on the Group’s recent activities:-

- the planned visit of Anne Marie Morris, MP for Newton Abbot was cancelled due to her busy schedule, and it is anticipated the trip can be rescheduled in the autumn.
- the numbers of boats on moorings in the Estuary have not returned to pre-covid levels with over 25% of moorings being vacant. Amidst the impending HRO, and lack of evidence, there have been concerns over the lack of information relating to the future level of charges which may be imposed and which may have a further impact on the numbers of boats moored in the Estuary. Although current charging was low, the estuary may not be seen as a favourable option, with the tidal flow and relatively shallow water.
- apart from the usual problems of silting, especially in the lower river area, the EPUG had no other issues to report.

Members noted the report.

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### **HARBOUR MASTER'S REPORT**

The Harbour Master provided the following update on his report circulated with the agenda: -

- they had successfully negotiated an arrangement for alternative accommodation for the Harbour Master's office in Exmouth, in the management offices for the Exmouth Marina.
- in respect of a Board Member's enquiry on the use of the remainder of the Buoy Store, some repairs will be made to the roof to make it weatherproof, but there will be a better use of the space overall, and the space that was currently earmarked for office accommodation will be able to be used as a drying space for their equipment.
- the patrolling regime for the waterways team was changing, with a new patrol on a Friday evening including around the Turf Hotel area. There has been an issue with the number of boats tied up on the pontoon. The team were also making every effort to engage with recreational boat users with safety advice.
- four body cams will be issued to the team later in the year, and will be a positive move in the effort to manage safety on the waterways and as an additional communication and evidence gathering tool.
- he had contacted the personal watercraft partnership and they are going to provide signage templates aimed at personal watercraft to put up at launch points. He will be making contact with East Devon and Teignbridge District Councils about obtaining permission to erect additional signage.

The Harbour Master responded to the following comments:-

- he thanked a Board Member for the reminder about the open invitation for all City Council Members and particularly Members of this Board to shadow the Harbour Patrol which offered an oversight of their role and some of the issues they faced when out on the water.
- he had not attended the recent Scrutiny Committee meeting when representatives from Southwest Water, the Environment Agency and Natural England were invited as a result of an earlier Notice of Motion to Council to answer questions from Members in relation to the water quality and use of the River Exe. The water quality and overall environment of the Estuary was something the Waterways team were very aware of along with the diverse flora, fauna and biodiversity. He added that he had been interviewed by students from Exeter University who have been carrying out a study on rivers and waterways in the south of England. There were issues relating to litter and

rubbish in the River Exe, including plastic and discarded fishing nets which could become embedded on the mud banks requiring the team to physically free off the material.

A Board Member also responded to comments made at the meeting about the water quality of the Estuary and a lack of testing. He was conscious that although there was less rubbish in the River Exe, the make-up of the pollution was different with potentially more invisible pollution, such as nitrate phosphate run-off. He noted a fellow Board Member's suggestion that the Board might consider how to progress issues relating to the Estuary, however encouraging the Environment Agency, as the testing enforcement body to carry out testing was not within the remit of the Harbour Board or even the City Council. He hoped however, that they could use every possible opportunity to engage with Southwest Water in relation to the river.

Members noted the report.

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### **HARBOUR REVISION ORDER UPDATE**

The Harbour Master reported that he had been working with the Council's Estates team on a mapping exercise of the Council's harbour land, which included eleven miles of the Estuary to the coast to put together a Port Premises plan as part of the Harbour Revision Order (HRO) submission.

The Harbour Master responded to the following comments:-

- there were varying issues with active points along the Estuary. He was aware that an electronic version of a map which indicated waterline development land had been circulated by a Board Member but advised that the detail of the mapping exercise had not been agreed. The profile of the latest HRO application had been raised but no decisions would be made without very careful consideration and consultation.
- a request for discussion on the Harbour land at the next meeting was noted.
- following a number of Board Member's suggestions, he would collate some information, communicating the reasoning and benefits as well as what a HRO will mean for everyone, to help provide a focal point of contact, and manage expectation in advance of the consultation and publish that detail on the Council's web site.
- any charging principle in association with a HRO to be levied by the Council would be included in the consultation exercise and would be considered by the Council's Executive.
- although future charging charges was a valid concern for some users of the waterways, and the future consultation would offer an opportunity to seek public comments on such matters and future use, the primary purpose of the HRO was to work towards compliance of the Port Marine Safety Code. Exeter was a municipal port and the Council would always have to offer support including funding, and any charges that might or might not be levied would make a contribution towards its upkeep.

A Board Member welcomed members of the public at the meeting, but as it was not possible for some who were visitors as well as residents to attend and he suggested that opportunities to attend or hold information events about the Estuary and the HRO at locations on the periphery of the Estuary be explored to further opportunities for attendance.

The Chair confirmed that representatives from Ashfords would attend the

September meeting and provide the latest update on progress.

Members noted the report.

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#### **APPOINTMENT OF NEW MEMBERS OF THE BOARD**

The Chair advised that following an advertising campaign for two External Board Members vacancies, she was pleased to be recommend two successful applicants for appointment, Jane Green and the reappointment of Richard Eggleton. Their applications had been paired against a review of the skills and knowledge of the current Board members. Satisfactory references had been received.

Members noted that Jane Green and Richard Eggleton had been appointed for three year period up to June 2026.

The Chair advised that the meeting would need to be moved into Part 2 in order to discuss the approach to dealing with a further vacancy on the Board.

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#### **LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT 1985) - EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

**RESOLVED** that under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph's 1 and 2 of Part 1, Schedule 12A of the Act.

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#### **HARBOUR BOARD MEMBERSHIP**

The Chair reported that following the resignation of Simon Adams, due to pressure of work and other commitments, she sought Members views for pressing ahead and recommending a further candidate for appointment so as to be able to invite the new Member to the September meeting. A further candidate was deemed suitable and was put forward for Members consideration. The Chair provided the profile and experience of the candidate. The Democratic Services Officer would make contact with him and confirm the Board's support to confirm the appointment subject to the candidate's satisfactory references being received. The appointment would be made until June 2025.

The Chair and Members thanked Mr Adams for his contribution over the last two years of membership and supported the Chair's recommendation for an appointment to replace Mr Adam's position on the Board.

(The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 6.30 pm)