

## **Harbour Master report to the Harbour Board 14 December 2023**

### **Canal**

Normally at this time of the year the canal the team are well into the maintenance programme, which includes pontoon repairs, pressure washing of equipment, canal bank maintenance and cutting back foliage growth. Maintenance to our own canal workboat vessels is normally done at this time of year, however due to a small turn over in staff the work routine has had to be altered to cover the recruitment and training of new members of the team. We welcome Robert Williams who was already with us on a temporary contract but has now changed to working with us full-time and Carl Allen who is with us on a part-time casual basis.

The Autumn locking in of over-wintering boats to the canal and convoys up to the Basin went ahead as planned along with the two craning days on two Saturdays in November for lifting vessel onto the east and west quays for essential winter maintenance.

Staff resources are fully stretched, the Canal Manager and I are having to make difficult decisions over some work projects, concentrating more on our statutory obligations more than other tasks that are a 'nice' to do.

Now that our smaller harbour workboat is about to enter service (see below), early in the new year we will be able to bring on the volunteer help from the Friends of the Exeter Ship Canal using our former small patrol craft from the river. This group will be primarily involved in monitoring safe use of the canal, litter collecting from the banks and some foliage control. The training for the volunteers will start late January/early February once all the risk assessments and safe working practices have been agreed.

### **River Exe**

Harbour patrol volunteers were of great help to us up to late September when we stopped regular patrolling, there will be continuation training for the volunteer team in the new year.

I am now pleased to report to the board that by the middle of January our three working boats in the river will be fully certificated under the MCA code of practice. This is part of our work to become compliant with the Port Marine Safety Code. For servicing our navigation aids we have chartered the workboat Port Constructor that will be ideal for our work. She is of steel construction, complete with a working crane and haulage a capstan winch that will be able to lift and service all of our heavy ground tackle in the river and canal. In unison with that we are soon to take delivery of the smaller workboat which will be called 'Harbour Workboat' and this will be used to ferry equipment/stores and spares out to the larger boat on its' mooring and also be able to service moorings closer to shore in shallower water. Now that we have taken charge of Port Constructor we will now be able to resume our commercial work afloat which has been on hold since the end of May when we took the former workboat Can Doo out of commission. We will also not have to hire in the services of the Teign C, the large workboat from Teignmouth to repair or relocate our navigation aids that are damaged in bad weather or moved out of position due to adverse conditions.

### **Harbour Master office**

Apart from the final telephone line connection, we are now able to work from our new office at the Exmouth dock complex. This facility has all the welfare requirements for the staff. The buoy store will still be our workshop space for the maintenance of equipment, and storage of kit. The long term plan is still to refurbish the building in due course and addressing some of the H&S requirements that are still outstanding.

## **Port Marine Safety Code**

We are working towards compliance still but we have identified that we need to audit our progress. The canal operation is long established but the river team have only been in existence for four and a half years so there is some disparity between the two work areas. What we have decided to do is ask consultants ABP Mer to conduct a Gap Analysis of our efforts to compliance, particularly in the area of ACOP (Approved Codes of Practice) towards fulfilling the shore side Health & Safety requirements in a port environment.

We will also be looking to work with a specialist contractor carry out an assessment of our commercial activities to see where improvements could be made.

## **Aids to Navigation**

We are starting work on servicing the navigation buoys currently and I am expecting our annual inspection by Trinity House to be early in the New Year.

## **Wrecks**

In the recent autumn gales there have been three more boats washed ashore onto the riverbanks. The owner of one has been identified but to date has not done anything about it, the hull is holed below the waterline and stranded above the mean high water spring line. I do not expect it will become a hazard to navigation and will be left for the landowner to clear. The owners of the other two have not come forward or identified, and are similarly damaged.

## **Staff training**

Members of the canal team have completed powerboat training and chainsaw courses, some oil spill training is yet to be completed and so is training for confined space working. This is important for lock chain pit inspections to be carried out.

Grahame Forshaw

Harbour Master