

EXETER HARBOUR BOARD

Thursday 12 December 2024

Present:-

Councillor Williams, R (Chair)
Councillors Read, Rolstone, Sheridan and Snow
A Garratt, J Green, Lt Col D Marino, J Prescott and C Seddon

Apologies

Richard Eggleton

Also Present

Harbour Master Exeter Port Authority and Democratic Services Officer (PMD)

In Attendance

Rex Frost, Exeter Port Users Group (EPUG) Chair

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MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 September 2024 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as correct.

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DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of pecuniary interest were made.

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PUBLIC QUESTIONS

The Chair advised that no public question had been received.

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CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

New Strategic Director of Operations

The Chair informed Members that Adrian Pengelly had recently been appointed to the post of Strategic Director of Operations and would be taking up his position on 1 January 2025.

Terms of Reference

The Chair announced that the Terms of Reference were being reviewed. She stressed the importance of the relationship with the Designated Person and advised that she would be discussing this with the new Strategic Director of Operations at the earliest opportunity.

Visioning Day

The Chair reminded Members that the next Visioning Day would take place on 1 February 2025.

Democratic Services Officer

The Chair thanked Pierre Doutreligne for his work supporting the Exeter Harbour Board.

EXETER PORT USER GROUP UPDATE

The Chair of the Exeter Port Users Group (EPUG), Rex Frost, was in attendance. His update had been circulated to Members and was taken as read.

Identification of Boats

Mr Garratt remarked that he had been advised that, contrary to what Mr Frost stated in his update, there was no difficulty in identifying abandoned boats and their owners. Mr Frost gave more context about his personal difficulties in accessing ownership records for boats belonging to people who had either lost interest or passed away. The Harbour Master agreed with Mr Frost, commenting that, this year alone, the Exeter Port Authority had disposed of three unclaimed boats.

Dawlish Warren

Councillor Read raised the issue of the continuing erosion of Dawlish Warren and asked if Port Authorities had enough information to make accurate assessments. Mr Frost replied that they did not, remarking that, while environmental authorities did have a plan in place, they did not want to discuss it. He further made the further following comments:-

- the previous Government had said five years ago that the Dawlish Warren structure would not be reinforced;
- the Warren was genuinely in danger; and
- there were problems linked to the train lines.

The Harbour Master echoed concerns about Dawlish Warren, making reference to:-

- the lack of water in the navigable channel;
- the potential moving of some of the moorings between buoys no. 13 and no. 15; and
- repeated discussions about the Warren at meetings of the Exe Estuary Management Partnership.

Councillor Read asked if there anything the Board needed to do to prepare for a worst-case scenario. The Harbour Master advised that he had meetings scheduled with Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council and with Teignbridge District Council to discuss strengthening sea defences. He further remarked that Network Rail had already replaced a part of the wall at the Warren which was eroding.

SELECTION AND APPOINTMENT OF EXETER HARBOUR DESIGNATED PERSON

The Chair confirmed that the Designated Person, Mr James Hannon, would start in the role on 1 January 2025. She told the Board of Mr Hannon's extensive experience and explained that governance details would need to be ironed out.

HARBOUR REVISION ORDER

The Harbour Master advised that he had met up with the legal team and that:-

- Exeter's place in the HRO queue was now 3rd;
- the statutory 42-day consultation could start as early as Easter 2025;
- he would hold discussions the following week with the Earl of Devon and

with the mooring associations.

He also confirmed to Councillor Read that notice of the consultation would be given by way of advertisements in a local newspaper (two consecutive weeks) and the London Gazette (one week).

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HARBOUR MASTER'S REPORT

The Harbour Master updated Members on the following:-

Storms

- There had been a total of four storms in the river since the end of September, causing various types of damage;
- The additional problem was that not every boat owner was known; and
- As a result, the river was littered with detritus.

EV Dirac Project

The trials had proved successful; and

The boat would be on her way to Scotland next week and hopefully be back in Exeter in the spring.

He further advised that:-

- a new dedicated Waterways Engineer had been appointed and would be starting in January;
- two new boats would be coming to our waterways.

On the subject of the Princess Marina ferry fire, the Harbour Master responded to questions from Members as follows:-

- the collaboration with other agencies had been very good;
- the River Café was licensed by Teignbridge;
- no life had been at risk; and
- it had been the Fire Service's intention to let the Princess Marina burn out but this was over-ruled by the Harbour Master due to the risk of pollution; and
- the Fire Service had brought their own specialist pollution control team from Newton Abbot.

Councillor Snow asked if there was an emergency action plan for such incidents, similar to action plans for high pollution incidents. The Harbour Master felt this was an excellent idea and advised that he would discuss this with the Designated Person, along with business continuity.

Councillor Read remarked on the Fire Service's original intention to allow the ferry to burn out and suggested that the Harbour Master could officially communicate the Exeter Port Authority's 'best-practice' approach to them. There was unanimous approval for this idea and the Harbour Master took it as an **ACTION**.

The Harbour Master responded as follows to further queries from Members:-

- the Marie Claire would be lifted out the following week, then taken into the sheds to be dismantled;
- the tree works that remained to be done were considerable and, while the current situation was good for wildlife, it caused great problems to navigation;
- the HRO would help address the issue of boat ownership identification, as well as ensuring mooring buoys had the right number on them; and

- the Harbour Master's incident debrief about the Princess Marina fire would be sent to the Duty Holder.

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MARINE SAFETY PLAN - MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

The Harbour Master advised that:-

- the Designated Person's input was required for some of the objectives; and
- it was a possibility for Exeter to stop being a Competent Harbour Authority but that was a decision for the Designated Person.

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WATERWAYS - FINANCIAL INFORMATION

The Chair and the Harbour Master responded to questions from Members as follows:-

- at the moment, Exeter didn't charge for the use of the river;
- any decision on charging for the use of waterways would have to go to Full Council; and
- a number of boats had been asked to leave the canal as they were deemed to represent a risk.

(The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 6.25 pm)

Chair