

EXETER HARBOUR BOARD

Monday 17 March 2025

Present:-

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

Apologies

R Eggleton, J Green and Councillor M. Williams

Also Present

Harbour Master Exeter Port Authority and Democratic Services Manager

Also in attendance:

John Monks - Chair of Friends of Exeter Ship Canal
Paul Craven - River Exe Cafe
Martin Davies - Environment Agency
Rex Harrison - Chair of the Exeter Port Users Group

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MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 December 2024 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as correct.

2

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of pecuniary interest were made.

3

PUBLIC QUESTIONS

A member of the public, Mr C submitted the following question: -

- Does the Harbour Board have any influence over the business and decisions of the Exeter Quay and Canal Trust?

The Chair advised that the Harbour Board do not have any influence over the business and decisions of the Exeter Quay and Canal Trust.

Mr C, in asking a supplementary question, enquired where there was overlapping membership between the two bodies, whether there were arrangements in place to avoid any conflicts of interest?

The Chair advised that arrangements were in place to avoid conflicts of interest relating to any overlapping membership between the two bodies.

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CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair provided the board with the following announcements: -

- meetings were scheduled for April 2025 with Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council, and Teignbridge District Council to discuss sea defences;

- there had previously been unanimous approval for the Harbour Master to communicate the Exeter Port Authority's best practice approach to the fire services in relation to the Princess Marina Ferry Fire;
- an emergency action plan for incidents had been written but was waiting to be reviewed the newly appointed Designated Person (DP);
- a visioning event had been held on 1 February 2025 where several suggestions had been made from Members and Waterways team;
- the Chair and Councillor Read had met Tom Watts of West Country Rivers Trust to discuss salmon passages on the Trues Weir and Mill on the Exe and were advised that further work was needed on those passages;
- the Chair had attended the Exe Estuary Management Partnership meeting on 11 February 2025, and further information about the partnership was available on their website;
- at the Exe Estuary Management Partnership meeting, Myles Blood-Smyth had proposed depositing spent oyster shells offshore to create a natural barrier and build up a sandbank, which was being considered by the partnership;
- the Chair and Harbour Master had attended a meeting with Ashford's solicitors regarding the Harbour Revision Order (HRO) and discussions had included Port Authority and Harbour Board governance arrangements, a focus on collaboration between the Harbour Board, the DP, and the Duty Holder and updating the Terms of Reference for the Harbour Board; and
- Board Member Richard Eggleton had resigned from the board due to other commitments, leaving three vacancies on the board. It was intended to fill these positions by June 2025, with information circulated to all members and advertised on the website.

A discussion was held on whether board members could reapply after partial terms and clarification would be sought on whether the limit was six years in total or per term.

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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 and the following discussion points were made: -

- the Exe Estuary Management Partnership included various councils and was well-attended, providing a platform for collaboration across the region; and
- the Exe Estuary Management Partnership participated in organising litter picking activities and residents who had expressed an interest in organising a floating litter pick for the canal would be encouraged to contact the relevant authorities for participation.

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A STRATEGIC VIEW OF THE CANAL'S FUTURE

The Chair welcomed John Monks, Chair of the Friends of Exeter Ship Canal to the meeting, who provided a verbal presentation on the strategic view of the canal's future. During the presentation, the following points were made: -

- the Port of Exeter had a rich maritime history, dating back to the 17th and 18th centuries when it was a bustling hub for sailors, highlighting the estuary and canal being vital for trade and transportation;
- the port currently supported an active boating and water sports community, with a renewed interest in maritime heritage and restoration of historic boats;
- Dawlish Warren, being a natural breakwater, was eroding and posed a risk to the port's safety, which a Senior Ranger, had highlighted the need for a 'Plan

- B' to manage high water levels, flood risk and impact to loss of moorings;
- the canal was an asset, offering safe moorings and a potential for economic growth, with strategic opportunities available;
- the canal and port needed to be integrated into strategic planning, focusing on new enterprises, skills, and investment and boost the stability of the Exeter's resilience over the coming decades;
- encouraging boatyard businesses in exploring clean propulsion technologies, would support the enhancement of the canal and boost Exeter's resilience, and prosperity, while offering benefits for locals, traders, and visitors;
- the canal could also support water-based passenger transport and commercial activities;
- there were concerns about current plans that could hinder future opportunities, such as the end of boat building on the canal and the earmarking of Grace Road Fields for industrial use;
- the canal and port needed to be viewed as integral to Exeter's strategic planning, requiring partnerships with communities and various authorities;
- as a comparative analysis, the canal was compared to the Kiel Ship Canal in Germany which demonstrated how inland waterways can thrive with marinas, pedestrian walkways, and cultural attractions; and
- viewing the canal and port as integral to Exeter's future was important and a high-level strategic feasibility study was proposed to explore the canal's potential as a future asset for Exeter, which could attract outside funding and consultancy support.

In response to questions and points raised, John Monks advised: -

- it was not proposed to abandon areas south of Turf Lock and the remit of the Harbour Board was acknowledged;
- a need for a contingency plan was being requested to address increasing costs and difficulties in providing winter mooring, which was crucial for the port's income;
- the cost of a waterway's feasibility study for climate change and development impacts of Water Lane were not known; and
- conducting a feasibility study with consultants to assess the potential of the waterways was important for Exeter's future planning and potential grant funding from the Inland Waterways Association (IWA) was a possibility.

The Chair advised that future changes and increased powers from the Harbour Revision Order (HRO), would influence future operations and partnerships. She thanked John Monks for his presentation. A copy of the presentation is appended to the minutes.

RIVER EXE CAFE UPDATE

The Chair welcomed Paul Craven, Managing Director of the River Exe Café to the meeting, who provided a presentation and video on a new concept for canal pods. During the presentation, the following points were made: -

- an introduction and background of the River Exe Café which started as a local initiative and had been operational for 15 years;
- the introduction of two pods in the canal, designed to offer a unique experience beyond a typical Airbnb accommodation;
- the pods would be accessible by a specially designed boat that could navigate the canal's swing bridge and travel from Turf Lock to Double Locks for collection;
- the pods would be in the canal for eight months of the year and then moved

downriver for four months during summer season and permission had been granted for the pods to be placed in the river.

In response to questions and points raised, Paul Craven advised: -

- the boat to be used for accessing the pods would also operate as a taxi service between Double Locks and Turf Locks, enhancing accessibility and experience;
- the strong positive reaction from the Visioning Day was welcomed and highlighted the potential to boost tourism in both winter and summer months;
- currently there was a ferry service from Turf Lock to Topsham only operated during the summer, but historically there had never been a service running from Double Locks under the bridge;
- the new ferry would be enclosed, solar-panelled, and equipped with a backup diesel generator for emergencies, but would primarily run on an electric motor;
- trips would take about half an hour to avoid disturbing canal activities like fishing and a schedule would be developed in collaboration with Turf Lock and river users;
- the River Exe Cafe operated six months a year due to weather constraints, with attempts made to extend operations proving to be a challenge;
- the café did not directly compete with the Turf hotel and there was a potential for increased trade if the ferry service operated year-round;
- the service would offer two pricing tiers: affordable rates for the public during winter and higher rates targeting boat owners during the summer season;
- the boat currently accommodated up to 12 passengers, with potential plans to increase this capacity pending further approval;
- a waste boat system was currently in place, which operated in a comparable way to the cafe's operations, ensuring proper waste disposal;
- there was a potential to extend waste services to other vessels in the area, enhancing overall environmental management;
- there were plans to introduce electric people carriers to improve connectivity between Marsh Barton Railway Station and Double Locks, which was subject to demand;
- cycling routes were also being considered to enhance accessibility; and
- the possibility of establishing a floating restaurant / bar at the Quayside in Exeter, had recently been discussed and was pending a site evaluation.

The Chair advised that the Harbour Master would be able to provide further information on establishing a floating restaurant / bar at the Quayside. She thanked Paul Craven for his presentation which was welcomed by the board.

DAWLISH WARREN MANAGEMENT

The Chair welcomed Martin Davies from the Environment Agency to the meeting, who provided a presentation on Flood and Coastal Risk Management at Dawlish Warren and Exe Estuary. During the presentation, the following points were made -

- the Flood and Coastal Risk Management Strategy was initially developed in 2014, projecting changes to rising sea levels and climate change predictions for 100 years;
- in 2014 the Strategy originally planned for a 700mm sea level rise but had since been updated to plan for a 1-meter rise over the next 20 years due to changes in guidance, climate predictions, and legislation;
- completed and ongoing projects included: Exmouth, Topsham, Star Cross and Cockwood, and Clyst St. Mary;
- open coast resilience was being delivered with typical flood defence schemes

- which required some site changes for habitat creation, which the Exe Estuary was designated area for compensated habitat creation;
- Dawlish Warren had undergone significant changes over time, with images presented, showing shifts and erosion patterns;
- current monitoring indicated ongoing erosion trends, sand movement and the dominant wave direction and coastal processes, which contributed to erosion and defence challenges;
- erosion and defence strategies included continual beach lowering, and outflanking the relic gabion baskets;
- potential damage would primarily affect the western bank and the mainline railway, with declining impacts further up the estuary;
- the scheme was reviewed in 2020, which acknowledged larger changes than was first predicted and the next strategy update would include a consultation;
- there was a legal requirement to improve the condition of the Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), and dune features through the removal of some defences;
- the smaller exposed geotube required patch repair and the larger geotube was undamaged and mostly buried providing further resilience;
- the current Environment Agency policy for failing relic gabion baskets was to do nothing, allowing them to fail over time and to removed failing groynes as the beach continued to lower;
- most of the local community preferred visible defences which contrasted with the ambition for broader maintenance and sustainable defences;
- collaborative work was being undertaken with Network Rail, notably a project to set back power banks to create habitat in front of the railway; and
- there were plans to review management positions at Dawlish Warren and assess business cases for Topsham and Powderham.

In response to questions and points raised, Martin Davies advised: -

- the exposure of geotube and gabions interfered with natural processes, which had a negative impact and there was ongoing debate about the responsibility for relic gabions;
- it would be difficult to predict and model channel changes and sediment movement due to historical and future scenarios;
- there was no Council budget available for the Harbour Board to look at additional modelling, but annual surveys were undertaken which were shared with the Port User Group;
- the original flood defence plans for Topsham were envisaged as an embankment, but were reconsidered for property-level protection and was now led by Exeter City Council, focusing on community involvement and economic assessments;
- the strategy included a review of economic, technical, engineering, and environmental aspects to determine feasibility and impact of projects;
- the strategy would also involve engaging with relevant communities and groups, including flood risk groups, to discuss and refine plans;
- the strategy aimed to complete by 2027-2028, covering the entire area discussed in presentation slides;
- there were legal requirements to include comprehensive assessments of economic, technical, engineering, and environmental impacts in the strategy; and
- reporting back to the Exe Estuary Management Partnership would occur annually through the normal channels.

The Chair thanked Martin Davies for his presentation. A copy of the presentation is appended to the minutes.

GOVERNANCE AND HARBOUR REVISION ORDER UPDATE

The Harbour Master advised that: -

- a meeting had been held with Ashford's Solicitors on 17 March 2025 to receive an update on the Harbour Revision Order (HRO) application;
- the application was one of three applications and was awaiting a 42-day consultation period by the Marine Management Organisation (MMO); and
- there was no fixed date for the consultation period or completion of the revision order, but it was hoped that the consultation would be completed by summer 2025.

HARBOUR MASTER'S REPORT

The Harbour Master advised that an internal application to adopt MARNIS port risk assessment software for reporting had been approved by Strata.

MARINE SAFETY PLAN - MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

The Harbour Master advised that: -

- the Marine Safety Plan had been written and was now awaiting sign-off from the new Designated Person (DP), before being published online;
- James Hannan, the new DP, will visit on 26 March 2025 and will be invited to the Harbour Board meeting in June 2025; and
- both the DP and another individual would be involved in MARNIS assessment and would have flexible availability for both in-person and remote interactions.

STATUTORY HARBOUR AUTHORITY STATEMENT OF ACCOUNT AND 2024-25 FEES & CHARGES

The Chair advised that the statutory Harbour Authority Statement of Account and 2024-2025 fees and charges were included for members to note and had been compiled from reports to Audit and Governance Committee and the Council Budget.

Attendees were encouraged to email any questions that may arise from the Statement of Account and 2024-2025 fees and charges to the Chair.

(The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 7.05 pm)

Chair