

River Yealm Harbour Authority

Chairman's Report for 2021

Each new year brings new challenges and opportunities to every business operation. For the River Yealm Harbour Authority, 2021 was a welcome return to a harbour open to all users and resultingly a very, very busy summer season, so hence some real challenges, but many positive opportunities that the authority worked hard to ensure could be delivered on.

I would like to cover a few areas of activity and engagement by the authority in 2021 to better inform the general public and key stakeholder groups, such as mooring holders visitor yachtsmen and day-users, about what has been a very active, but highly productive year for the authority.

First, in March last year, we conducted our 3-yearly membership nomination and election process. This included the election of three mooring holder representatives and the appointment of local parish council, and Royal Yachting Association nominees. The mooring holder representative elections attracted much interest, with 8 individuals seeking election and more than 90 mooring holders turning out on a chilly March evening to cast their votes. Such a level of interest was extremely positive and encouraging for mooring holder engagement with the authority. A comprehensive new member 'joiner' pack was provided to the new members to ensure they were able to familiarise themselves with our rules, regulations, standing orders, and so on, as well as the port marine safety code, thereby ensuring they were able to understand their responsibilities and participate fully in the oversight of the authority as soon as possible.

Secondly, a few words on the new day-charge system. After appropriate debate, we decided to introduce a charging structure for day-users of the river, including kayakers, and stand up paddleboarders. In recent years the growth in the popularity of kayaking and SUPs has presented the authority with new operational challenges and additional costs. The authority thought carefully how best to reflect the increased demands represented by these users and decided that the introduction of a £20 season pass licence disc was the most appropriate approach. Licence disc applicants are given written information on the river, highlighting the need to be aware of tidal streams, large boat fairways and so on. Whilst the new regime was not welcomed by everyone, the vast majority of day-users understood the reasoning and welcomed the advice and information the authority staff were able to provide.

Next, the 2021 summer season. From early April, deep into late September, the harbour was extremely busy. Visitor yacht nights reached 5,558, the highest number since 2009 and substantially above the average for the past few years. The harbour master, ably supported by Jez Spring, the seasonal deputy harbour master and the assistant harbour master team, as well as, very importantly, Helen in the harbour office, all worked tirelessly to accommodate the needs of users of the harbour. The demands on all of them are many, ranging from coordination, direction, safety oversight, policing, patrolling, dealing with incidents, defusing potentially difficult situations and generally ensuring that everyone could enjoy the benefits that our unique harbour brings. The authority cannot thank Mark, Helen, Jez and the entire team enough for their commitment and the highly professional way in which they represented the authority throughout the year.

Next, a few general comments on our financial position. Over the medium term, the authority looks to balance its books, whilst ensuring that adequate funds are retained to cover both planned and unexpected expenditures, thereby ensuring we do not need to revert to bank borrowings. We seek to set annual charges at levels that meet this broad approach, but there will always be an element of forecasting and subsequent year revisions. As we all know, 2020 was a particularly difficult year and the authority incurred a retained loss for that year. 2021 by contrast saw extraordinary summer activity and as a consequence the authority achieved a retained profit for 2021,. The 2021 improvement was driven by record visitor yacht numbers and the implementation of the day charge structure for kayakers and SUPs. We currently hold adequate cash resources, which is the right position to be in, particularly during these highly uncertain times. Furthermore, it is likely we will need to incur some sizeable expenses repairing and/or replacing pontoons. I comment on this a little later on.

Next, the Port Marine Safety Code. The code has been an ever present feature of our operations, as well as our management and oversight of the authority for a number of years. During 2021, we continued to review and refine our processes and procedures, conduct periodic risk reviews and reflect on lessons learned through our operations. We continue to be supported by our designated person, Captain Keith Hart, who provides independent, objective assessment and guidance and also will, from time-to-time, provide improvement recommendations, which we accept and take action to address. The decision to stipulate more precisely the annual

maintenance requirements for 'A' moorings and the documentation requirements on mooring renewals generally, reflects the work we undertook with Keith Hart on the Port Marine Safety Code during the year.

Whilst we aim to fulfil the expectations placed on us under the code on a continuous basis, once every three years we re-affirm in writing by confirming our own self-assessment of having met the standards expected by the Port Marine Safety Code. Such a written confirmation was delivered to the Maritime & Coastguard Agency in April 2021. Generally, the authority seeks to take account of the Department for Transport's 2017 advisory guidance 'Ports Good Governance Guidance', wherever applicable to the River Yealm Harbour Authority, in conducting its affairs.

We reported at the annual meeting last April that one of the Yealm Steps pontoons had developed a leak and had been removed to Bridgend for welding repair. We knew that the repair was likely to be a temporary solution and this has proved to be the case, as it is still leaking. We are now giving serious consideration to undertaking a more comprehensive repair, as well as considering the possible acquisition of a new pontoon section at Yealm Steps.

During the year the authority undertook a review of its regulations and policies, which gave rise to a number of revisions. These were mainly to provide further clarity and a clearer understanding to harbour users and included revisions/updates on: sub-letting of moorings; fishing off the pontoons; owners' responsibility for the safety of their vessels, and 'A' mooring annual inspections.

The winter of 2021 and early 2022 was fortunately not too severe, although storms Dudley, Eunice and Franklin all within a week of each other of mid-February this year gave the harbour quite a battering, including the harbour office. There was damage to soffits and related areas. The authority is grateful to Mark Wilson for moving very quickly to assess the damage and address repairs. We anticipate that much of the costs of repair will be covered by our insurance.

With the arrival of April, the river is slowly coming alive with increasing numbers of mooring holder vessels, day-users and visiting yachts, which is great to see. With the hope for reasonable summer weather ahead, we anticipate another busy season.

I will just sign off with a further note of thanks from the authority members to Mark and Helen for their support and efforts over the past year. A very active summer season, new accounting systems, new part time people joining the team, upgrading data bases, and so on and so on all added up to a heavy workload for them, which they executed extremely well and for which we are very grateful.

I would also like to acknowledge the contribution of all the members of the committee. The authority has a good mix of different experiences, knowledge and skills that members are ready to share to support the authority. My thanks to them.

Dominic Crawley

Chairman

The River Yealm Harbour Authority

April 2022