

## **River Yealm Harbour Authority**

### **Chairman's Report for 2022**

After the slow emergence for the constraints of 'lock-down', which gathered pace in the summer of 2021, last year, 2022, saw a return to business as usual with the harbour open to all users throughout the year.

From early April, deep into late September, the harbour was extremely busy. Visitor boat nights reached 5,669 substantially above the average for the past few years. Mark Beighton, Helen Philips, Jez Spring and the entire on-the-water and office team worked tirelessly to accommodate the needs of users of the harbour. I believe it is important to highlight that the expectations placed on the team are many and varied. In addition to a significant ongoing administrative burden, which users don't see first-hand, the team ensures extensive interaction with all user groups, including: providing information, explanation, direction and guidance; to water users, plus ensuring safety oversight by patrolling and addressing boating incidents, defusing potentially difficult situations and generally ensuring that all harbour users could enjoy the benefits that our unique harbour brings. The Authority cannot thank Mark, Helen, Jez and the Assistant Harbour master's enough for their commitment and the highly professional way in which they represented the Authority throughout the year.

As is normal, I would like to cover a few specific areas of activity and engagement by the authority in 2022. Some of the activities were more visible, others less so, but they all represent important priorities that were progressed during the year.

First, with sustained high vessel activity on the river, the Authority maintained a high level of coverage on the water, thereby helping to direct visitor vessels to available moorings and minimise the risk of potentially dangerous situations developing. Notwithstanding the team's efforts, it is worth noting that from the beginning of April to the end of September last year, the harbour staff logged over 40 individual incidents, including 6 collisions, 1 grounding and 5 situations involving personal injury.

Next, a couple of goodbyes. As many of those reading this report will be aware, we say goodbye to both our Harbour Master, Mark Beighton and our Office Manager, Helen Philips. Mark has been Harbour Master since 2019 and his last day 'in the office' as they say was the 31<sup>st</sup> March. The Authority can't thank Mark enough for his calm competent stewardship across a wide range of responsibilities and engagements as our Harbour Master. Mark is keen to remain involved and he will now be seen sporting an assistant Harbour Master polo top, whilst on duty patrolling the river, taking direction from Jez Spring, but also available to provide advice and support, if and when needed. Turning to Helen, I am not quite sure where to start. Helen has been our Office Manager and Administrator for the last 17 years and has been the competent, positive friendly face that so many of you reading this report see whenever you visit the Harbour Office. Helen's wealth of experience and local knowledge is huge and will be missed.....but not lost, which leads me on to talk briefly about the transition to the new team.

First, our new Harbour Master. The Authority's earlier decision to employ a seasonal Deputy Harbour Master has reaped benefits, as Jez Spring now steps up to the role of Harbour Master after 2 years as deputy and after a winter making himself available to shadow Mark ahead of stepping up to the HM role. Again, Jez will be a familiar face to many of you; please make him welcome in his new role.

Secondly, our new Office Manager. The Authority made the decision to start the process to find a replacement for Helen early last summer and we were fortunate enough to have Debbie Rhead join the team last October. This has ensured a seven-month period of learning and familiarisation for Debbie, allowing time for Helen to share her extensive knowledge and mentor Debbie into her new role.

We also welcome Toby Dowling as our new Deputy Harbour Master for the summer season. Toby comes with a wealth of merchant navy experience and is a local sailor with a genuine passion for our beautiful estuary and coastline.

A few comments about work on the Yealm Steps pontoons over last winter. It became clear last summer that essential repairs were required to certain sections of the Yealm Steps pontoons which take the ground at low water and are most vulnerable to wear and tear. The work was commissioned and completed. We also made the decision to commission a new pontoon section to augment the current pontoons at Yealm Steps. The new section is delivered and in place. Considerable planning, organising and logistics were involved to complete the repairs and installation and the authority is grateful to those that helped Mark in those exercises.

Next, a few general comments on our financial performance during 2022 and our current financial position.

As I believe is generally understood the Authority looks to balance its books over the medium term, 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.

Previously the Authority benefitted from being on the flat rate vat scheme, but for 2022, and going forward, that is no longer the case, and the impact is reflected in our financial statements for 2022.

Combined turnover for 2022 was down £5k to £213k for the year. The Authority reported a loss for the year of £14,913, compared to a pre-tax profit of £25,593 in 2021. Staffing and manning costs were significantly higher, reflecting the decision to increase on the water support in response to increased harbour user activity and the period of double manning felt appropriate to ensure the handover of responsibilities to the new team was achieved without disruption. The financial resources of the authority remain strong, with cash balances of £218k on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2022, compared to £238k on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2021.

During 2022, as in previous years, we continued to review and refine our operational safety plans, processes and procedures, to fulfil the expectations of the Port Marine Safety Code. We are grateful for the support we continue to receive from 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. 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.

An observation concerning incidents of pollution in the river. The Harbour Master and his team remain vigilant to report any evidence of pollution in the river to the Environment Agency, but it is important to highlight the authority's role is to be vigilant and report. It is the EA which is the body responsible for enforcing laws that protect the environment. We have seen this in the recent court judgement in favour of the EA and against International Paints.

The Authority hopes to witness the start of an innovative electric water taxi on the river this year provided by a separate Community Interest Company with largely volunteer support. We understand the electric water taxi service will operate separately to, but not in competition with the long-established ferry service operated by Billy Gregor.

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

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 2023**