

## **River Yealm Harbour Authority**

### **Chairman's Report for 2023**

I am pleased to present the Chairman's report for the River Yealm Harbour Authority for 2023 and will also take the opportunity to comment on the recent elections process and resulting changes in Authority membership.

Looking back on last year, I believe 2023 could be described as a satisfactory, positive and more settled year for the Authority, following a period of disruptions caused by Covid lockdowns, staffing changes, and so on.

Last year's summer season was one of contrasting periods of weather – a wonderful warm, sunny May, June and beginning of July, followed by wet and unseasonably cold weather in August, before becoming more settled again in September. Nonetheless, across our 'summer season' from April to the end of September, the harbour was generally very busy as all user groups were able to enjoy the facilities provided. Visitor boat nights reached 5,394 compared to 5,669 in 2022, so another extremely active year.

As ever, Jez Spring, Debbie Rhead, Toby Dowling and the entire on-the-water team worked tirelessly to accommodate the needs of users of the harbour. The expectations placed on them are significant and wide ranging, and their diplomatic, positive approach throughout the year has been of immense benefit to the Authority, mooring holders and all harbour users.

As is normal, I would like to mention a few specific areas of activity and engagement by the Authority in 2023 and over the winter period.

First, the Authority continued to maintain a high level of coverage on the water, directing visitor vessels to available moorings and minimising the risk of potentially dangerous situations developing. During the year a total of 27 reportable incidents were logged and included, 7 collisions, 2 groundings, 3 entanglements and a number of illegal fishing occurrences. In addition, as I am sure most of you will be aware, we had an incident at Bridgend involving a fatality and our sincere condolences have been passed to the family. The Authority has agreed to fund the installation of a defibrillator at Bridgend and our thanks to Pam Prosser for allowing it to be placed on the wall of her house and to provide an electricity supply, for which we and the local boating community are extremely grateful.

Next, a few comments about work on the Yealm Steps Quay wall during winter. The Yealm Steps and the quayside are the responsibility of South Hams District Council (SHDC) and when it became apparent that a corner section of the stone facing was becoming detached, the Harbour Master quickly engaged with SHDC to review the problem and initiate repairs which were completed in January 2024.

There has been considerable local discussion and engagement following the court judgement in favour of the Environment Agency (EA) against International Paints Limited (IPL) concerning historic pollution in the foreshore area of the International Paints Laboratory, commonly known as the 'Paint Station'. A comprehensive, detailed submission has been made representing a number of local groups, which the Authority has lent its support to, as well as the Authority spelling out certain operational requirements, in the event remediation is

undertaken. IPL submitted an application to the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) for a Marine Licence for their proposed remediation works and a 28-day Public Consultation period began from 7 February 2024. We understand there have been a significant volume of submissions into the consultation process. We wait to see how that process unfolds.

Generally, regarding incidents of pollution in the river, the Harbour Master and his team (on behalf of the Authority) remain vigilant to report any evidence of pollution in the river to the EA, which is the body responsible for enforcing laws that protect the environment.

The 3-yearly Mooring Holders' election process was held in February 2024. One existing representative (Andrew Mathews) decided not to stand again. Six individuals submitted nominations and a total of 56 mooring holders came to the Newton Ferrers WI Hall to cast their votes, which demonstrates great interest and engagement by the mooring holders. The election results saw two existing representatives (Nicky Tewson and Stephen Maltby) being re-elected and one new representative (Ian Kennedy) joining the Authority. My thanks to Andrew for the many years of support he has given, as well as the counsel and positive advice he has provided to me during my time as Chair of the Authority. At the same time, I take the opportunity to welcome John Stansell as the new Wembury Parish Council representative and thank Dermot Drought, who he has replaced. Similar to Andrew, Dermot was a member of the Authority for many years, and I thank him for his support and commitment.

In addition, Rodney Carter will be stepping down from the Authority shortly to coincide with the N&N Parish Council AGM. His 35 or so years of service on the authority on represents a vast amount of local knowledge and experience, which he has been generous in sharing and I have appreciated his advice, support, and occasional reprimands! I know the Authority can always call on him for that knowledge and experience, if needed.

I would now like to make a few general comments on our results for 2023 and 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 (and if appropriate, increased) to cover both planned and unexpected expenditures, thereby ensuring the Authority does not need to assume potentially onerous financial liabilities. We seek to set annual charges at levels that meet this broad approach, however, there will always be an element of forecasting and subsequent year revisions.

Income for 2023 increased by £20,435 (+10%) to £233,740 for the year. The Authority reported a pre-tax profit for the year of £18,088, compared to a pre-tax loss of £17,614 in 2022. Staffing costs were higher, reflecting the decision to increase on-the-water support in response to increased harbour user activity and the period of team member overlap felt appropriate to ensure that handover of responsibilities to the new team was achieved without disruption.

The financial resources of the Authority remain strong, with cash balances of £197,122 at the end of 2023, compared to £218,036 at the end of 2022. Despite the profit generated during 2023, the reduction in cash balances reflects the purchase of a new section of pontoon at the beginning of the year at a cost of £57,253 and the decision to replace the engine on the harbour launch after 16 years of continuous and extensive use.

We continue to review and refine our operational safety plans, processes and procedures, to fulfil the expectations of the Port Marine Safety Code. I commend the Harbour Master on this; his attitude of continuous improvement and learning is a significant positive for the Authority and our user stakeholder groups. We are grateful for the support we continue to receive from

our 'Designated Person' (Captain Keith Hart), who provides independent, objective assessment and guidance. 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.

With the arrival of April, the river is slowly coming alive with increasing numbers of mooring holder vessels, day-users and visiting vessels, although the weather so far this month could best be described as awful! However, we keep our fingers crossed for reasonable summer weather ahead and we anticipate another busy season.

I would like to close by acknowledging the contribution of all the members of the Authority, all of whom provide their time and engagement on a voluntary basis. We have a good mix of different experiences, knowledge and skills that members are ready to share to support the Authority. My thanks to them.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'D. A. Crawley'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the bottom.

**Dominic Crawley**

**Chairman  
The River Yealm Harbour Authority**

**18<sup>th</sup> April 2024**