

Report: Operational Services Manager
To: Bideford Harbour Board Working group
Subject: Harbour Masters Quarterly Report
Date: Thursday 20th October 2022

PURPOSE OF REPORT:

To report to members of the Bideford Harbour Board Working Group about the activities and commercial vessel movements in the port and estuary since the last meeting on Thursday 16th June 2022.

1. INTRODUCTION

Torrridge District Council is the Statutory Harbour Authority for the Port of Bideford and the Competent Harbour Authority for the Taw and Torrridge Pilotage District.

The Harbour Board provides strategic direction to the Harbour Authority. The Harbour Board reports to the Community and Resources Committee who are the Duty Holder for the Harbour Authority as described in the Port Marine Safety Code.

2. REPORT

This has been a relatively busy quarter with 6 ship movements to Bideford and the Harland and Wolff shipyard, as well as a formal assessment and MCA approval of the ports new Oil Spill Management Plan. Steady progress has also been achieved in gaining compliance with the mooring policy from some of the berth holders.

Vessel Movements

Bideford

1. The Celtic Mariner arrived at Bideford on 10th September and sailed on 12th September for Castellon, N Spain having embarked North Devon ball clay.
2. See below for more detailed commentary on the recent discussions with Sibelco and Pike Ward with regard to further clay shipments.

Appledore

1. On 24th June, the ex RN minehunter, HMS QUORN was brought into the Harland and Wolff shipyard (H&W), for repair and onward sale to the Lithuanian Navy. Her sea trials and final delivery date are scheduled for Q3 2023.
2. H&W finished construction of a 53m pontoon which is bound for the RNLI station at Tower Bridge on the river Thames. On 7th October the pontoon was moved from the dock to the New Quay and on 10th October, the barge departed Appledore for onward passage to London, arriving 14th October.
3. The Crane barge "Bristol Giant" remains alongside at Middle Dock where she will remain waiting for orders or, until the dock is required for other TDC business. The owners continue to promptly pay their dues on time and in full.



4. On 12th October, a second ex RN minehunter, HMS ATHERSTONE was brought into the Harland and Wolff shipyard, this vessel for use as a source of spares for ex HMS QUORN on a “combine 2 bad vessels to make 1 good one” basis. Intentions for the disposal of the remaining GRP hull after work is complete is unknown.

Yelland

1. There have been no shipping movements to either of the Yelland jetties in the reporting period. The dredger Deo Gloria is expected to return in May 2023 for her annual Bristol Chanel sand extraction campaign.

Other Items

Sibelco – It is normal practice to conduct a pre-arrival river survey and the one conducted before the arrival of the Celtic Mariner, revealed that a number of the sand banks in the river Torridge had grown over the dry summer to lie nearly 0.7m above chart datum. This obliged the HM to impose a more restrictive sailing draught on the vessel and resulted in her sailing with 340 tonnes less cargo than originally planned. The safety of the navigation of the vessel and the port was ensured but the shortfall prompted a testy ultimatum from Sibelco requiring a guarantee of a dredged channel to Bideford or the threat of a cessation of clay ship trade to Bideford. HM was able to give this (see below) but in return requested a commitment that they would bring 6 ships per year to Bideford. See below for more detailed dredge discussion and explanation of the plan.

Dredging – the Board members will recall that the HM has been in dialogue with the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) for nearly 9 months trying to advance a dredging proposal for Bideford. The MMO had started out by proposing to charge Bideford Harbour £4000 for the privilege of opening and reading the dredge claim paperwork. Having refused to pay this, grudging acknowledgement was finally gained from the MMO that while Bideford Harbour might have permission to dredge and sell the material through the 1925 Bideford Act, we did not have permission to deposit dredged material at sea without a licence from the MMO.

For clarity, the Bideford Harbour Act of 1925 says:

“Paragraph 7. (1) The Corporation (TDC) may deepen, dredge, scour and excavate any portion of the foreshore and bed **of the River Torridge** within the harbour and **as far as its outfall to the sea** to such extent as may be necessary **to secure a sufficient waterway** and approach to the harbour and to the quay or wharf for vessels using the same.”

“Paragraph 7. (2) All sand mud and other materials dredged up or removed for the purposes and to the extent aforesaid **shall be the property of the Corporation** and **they may sell or otherwise dispose of or re-move or deposit the same as they think fit**. Provided that no sand, mud or other materials shall be laid down or deposited in any place below high-water mark without the consent in writing of the Board of Trade (MMO in modern parlance) having been first obtained.”

HM has approached Keynvormorlift Limited to conduct an initial trial dredge campaign starting in November, using a small jack up barge and backhoe dredger. This will initially be with a view to removing the high points from the offending sand banks (up and down stream of the H&W shipyard, opposite Snuffy and adjacent to the TDC offices).

If approved by the Harbour Board, HM proposes to periodically authorise on going work to clear and maintain a 75m wide navigational channel, ideally at chart datum, all the way up to Bideford.



It is very fortunate that the banks are comprised of high grade river sand which is suitable for sale for agricultural and building use. The sand will be landed at Yelland and sold on by Keynvormorlift paying a £1 per tonne bounty to Bideford Harbour. This bounty rate has been benchmarked with Padstow Harbour who engage in a similar activity. It would be expected the first dredge operation will remove 1000 tonnes of sand for the river generating £1000 for Bideford Harbour, successive campaigns every 3 months might be expected to remove 1500 tonnes giving a potential annual income for Bideford Harbour of £6000.

The last item will be to commission a river sonar survey (last one was 4 years ago priced at £500) which should provide sufficient hard evidence to Sibelco on the state of the navigational channel and to enable the HM to challenge them to make good on their commitment of sending 6 ships a year starting in January 2023.

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Oil Spill Plan and IME – In July the newly rewritten Bideford Oil Spill Plan was formally validated in a Incident Management Exercise, christened “Ribena.” It was run by Adler and Allan, our Tier 2 provider and witnessed by the MCA and the Environment Agency. The day long exercise vigorously tested the HM, liaison with the DHM on site, the knowledge and practical skills of our own oil spill responders and the flow of information to and from TDC corporate Comms. We were assessed as having passed the exercise and our plan has been validated for another 3 years.

Mooring Policy – work to gain full compliance with the mooring policy from all berth holders continues with the HM and the DHM trying to strike the right balance between dogmatic insistence on immediate compliance, acceptance of long held precedent and sensible compromise solutions as berth holders slowly begin to realise and grudgingly accept that Bideford Harbour is slowly but surely moving into the 21st century.

A notable success story is the Boa Pescadore on Bank End where, after considerable pressure from the HM, actual work has begun to try and restore the vessel to a sea going state.

Spirited negotiations continue with the owner of the Zebedee, now a sunken wreck and it is anticipated that the vessel will be removed from the harbour at the owner’s expense in the next 2 months.

Attention in the next quarter will swing to the vessel moored at East the Water, none of whom pay mooring fees, comply with the mooring policy or comply with modern grey and black water sewage regulations. It is anticipated that legal enforcement will be required to achieve this.

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Harland – The case comes before a Judge at Bristol on 28/29th November. Work on the vessel has been recently carried out.

Bideford Harbour Office - Bideford Harbour Office was painted 12-14th October.

Squirty Fountains – The original manufacturing company visited and examined the fountain equipment. We are still awaiting a quote for repair. In the light of the public interest it generated when working it is still considered a worthwhile exercise to repair.

Harbour Users Group – In attending a recent Estuary Strategy Review meeting at TDC, it was discovered that there is already an Estuary Users Forum group whose membership is largely the same as the proposed HUG. HM elected to postpone initiation of the HUG until the chair of the Estuary Forum could be contacted and the viability of this organisation



understood. Duplication will only dilute effectiveness – if the Estuary Group is defunct, HM will inaugurate the HUG.

Commercial Mooring Buoys – HM is working on a business plan and a proposal in partnership with Keynvormorlift Ltd to lay 2 commercial deep water mooring buoys for 1 or 2 vessels of up to 100m to lay by and moor at Crow Pool. On the assumption that a suitably profitable arrangement can be achieved for TDC, it is hoped to lay the moorings in the spring 2023 and then investigate the possibility of expanding this to include leisure deep water moorings. Crown Estate, from whom TDC lease the fundus where the buoys would be laid, are supportive. HM will bring a more developed verbal plan to the Board meeting with some outline financial projections.

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3. IMPLICATIONS

Legal Implications

Enforcement of the Mooring Policy as above will likely require legal support.

Financial Implications

None

Human Resources Implications

None

Sustainability/Biodiversity Implications

The Harbour Authority is committed to working with colleagues and Partner organisations in supporting all relevant environmental protection legislation.

Equality/Diversity

The Harbour Authority seeks to comply with all Equality and Diversity Legislation.

Risk Management

The Harbour Authority has a Safety Management system in compliance with the Port Marine Safety Code and all risk assessments were reviewed in January 2022.

Compliance with Policies and Strategies

Bideford Harbour Authority seeks to comply with all Torridge District council policies and Strategies.

Ward Member and Leader Member Views

Date of Consultation –

3. CONCLUSIONS

Bideford Harbour authority continue to work towards maintaining full compliance with all statutory legislation and government Policy on the Port Marine safety Code.



