

Maldon Harbour Improvement Commissioners

NOTES OF THE 10TH ANNUAL JOINT RIVER SAFETY MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY, 19 MARCH 2019, 7.30 pm AT THE BLACKWATER SAILING CLUB

Present

The meeting was attended by 35 delegates and speakers from organisations including Maldon Harbour Improvement Commissioners, Blackwater Sailing Club, Maldon District Council River Bailiff, Essex Police and Marine Police, Marine Coastguard Agency, National Trust, RYA Eastern Region, Sea-Change Trust, TopSail Charters, Thames Sailing Barge Trust, Steam Tug Brent Trust, Essex Waterways Heybridge Basin Lock, Heybridge Basin SA, Maldon District Council Councillors, Frangipani SUP, Blackwater Tri, Marconi SC, Goldhanger SC, Maldon Gig Rowing Club.

Apologies were received from Councillors, local clubs and from other river users who were unable to attend. Essex and Suffolk Water, Natural England and Anglian Water all provided statements and welcomed any matters arising to be referred to them via the Clerk, MHIC.

The meeting was chaired by Jim Dines, Chairman, Maldon Harbour Improvement Commissioners.

1. Welcome and Introductions

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked the Blackwater Sailing Club for the use of their room. Individual introductions were initiated.

2. Essex Police Marine Unit

Sp Officer Toby Speller gave an overview of the work of the Marine Police. He is based at Burnham on Crouch.

Part of Essex Police Specialist Operations, the Marine Unit base is at Burnham on Crouch. In conjunction with UK's planned departure from the EU, there has been a recent increase in officer establishment to raise the number of full time specialist Officers attached to the unit. The remit includes Project Kraken, antisocial behaviour and crime, and working with local authorities, the UK Border Force and National Crime Agency working to promote a safer coastline.

The unit is heavily involved in maintaining the security of our coastal borders. The team patrol both on the water and by vehicle with shore-based patrols including important commercial and infrastructure sites and developing closer links with the wider marine community to obtain information and intelligence regarding any suspicious activity.

Members of the unit regularly conduct high visibility patrols at clubs, marinas and attend maritime community meetings to increase public awareness on issues surrounding marine crime and national security.

During 2018 season there were successful days of action enforcement operations at key locations North & South of the county including enforcement of local authority byelaws. These have already resulted in several successful prosecutions with further cases currently being processed.

For the 2019 season Essex Police are at the advanced stages of entering a joint venture initiative with Maldon District Council for the purchase of two PWC craft to increase the capability for high visibility shoreline patrols and to assist with enforcement activity.

Project Kraken

Project Kraken's aim is to provide a hostile environment to terrorists and criminals looking to disrupt the everyday lives and safety of those who live, work or travel in the UK. Working with the maritime community of Essex, it delivers an enhanced crime and counter terrorist intelligence gathering & vigilance capability. Understanding that it is members of the maritime community who are best placed to recognise what is out of the ordinary, Project Kraken encourages key stakeholders such as Harbour Masters, the coastguard and marina managers, together with people who live or work in the marine environment, or who spend their leisure time on or near our waters, to actively report any suspicious activity.

Contact

A dedicated Marine Unit direct email circulation address and duty mobile number has been set up for non-emergencies.

marineu@essex.pnn.police.uk Duty mobile: 07976 065917 or 01621 782121

In case of emergencies please always use 999.

Essex Police Marine Unit Notices can be found on the MHIC website www.mhic.org.uk, under the News tab.

3. Maritime and Coastguard Agency

Jeremy Littlewood, Senior Coastal Operations Officer for HM Coastguard gave an overview of the Coastguard Operations. He manages the volunteer Coastguard teams. 2018 saw a jump in incidents but analysis had not identified any specific causes. The new set up with the Coastguard had been in place for 4 years is now bedding in.

4. River Safety, Enforcement and Prosecutions, General Update (MDC)

Nigel Harmer, River Bailiff, Maldon District Council, provided an update. Dredging was due to start at The Quay which would be a limited dredge, mostly from the Visitors' Pontoon. The next Trinity House Inspection is planned for 22 May 2019. An initiative with MDC working in partnership with Essex Police is starting this year.

The Chairman read a statement from David Burnham, MDC Leisure and Community Services, Designated Safeguarding Reporting Officer (DSRO):-

"From a Leisure perspective sailing and water sports continues to remain sustainable within the District. Many clubs are actively engaging with their communities which in turn is ensuring new members are introduced to the club and helping to keep the clubs in a financial sound position for future developments."

4a) Heybridge Basin Lock

Alistar Sims, Essex Waterways, reported that over the previous year, considerable progress had been made on the work on the lock gates with some continuing improvements.

5. Natural England – Coastal Path

The Chairman read a report from Darren Braine, Senior Adviser (England Coast Path, Essex Hub) West Anglia Team, Natural England, as follows:-

“For the two sections that were referenced this time last year, things haven’t moved on much further.

The Maldon to Salcott Stretch

Essex County Council were invited to apply for a grant to fund the establishment works (path surfacing where necessary, waymarkers and posts, information boards etc). This application has not yet been forthcoming, resulting in slower than anticipated progress in establishing the current network to National Trail standards and eventual opening as part of the England Coast Path.

Burnham on Crouch to Maldon

Post publication and review by the Planning Inspectorate in April 2018, Natural England have not yet been informed by Defra and the Secretary of State of the outcome of the Inspectorate’s decision. We continue to await this decision. This has been deliberately held back as in the intervening time. Since publishing the report there has been a European Court Ruling (relating to a wind farm in Ireland) that impacts how all planned developments need to consider and mitigate for any impact upon international wildlife designations. Therefore Coastal Access reports around the country that had already been published but not approved by the Secretary of State were held back for approval (this does not affect the Maldon to Salcott stretch as was approved) and we also have held back from publishing new stretch reports whilst the legal basis for moving forwards was established.

Overall we do not anticipate this ruling to impact on the coast path programme, but we have had to reconsider the approach to how we detail the potential impacts and mitigation plans on wildlife within our reporting structure.

We believe the route as published, pending any comment or direction from the Planning Inspectorate having heard the Objections, will still stand as the proposal.

We do though have to review and re-draft the accompanying Access and Sensitive Feature Appraisal to ensure it is compliant with current legal understanding and ensure we have fully met the expectations of the Habitat Regulations.”

Questions can be passed on via the Clerk, MHIC.

6. Essex and Suffolk Water Authority

The Chairman read a report from Afsaneh Janbakhsh, Environmental Scientist, E&SWA.

“Maldon Port Dredging

ESW will continue to fund the dredging project at the port for shifting 2500 tonnes of silt per year in order to keep the navigation channel open. This year we will fund another bathymetric survey of the estuary to identify the site due for maintenance dredging during the next three years.

Catchment Management

Essex and Suffolk Water and the Chelmer & Blackwater partnership has been working with landowners to reduce the impact of diffuse pollution on drinking water and the water environment for approximately 10 years. Work has consisted predominantly of 1:1 on farm advice, community workshops and regular communications. The partnership is between ESW and the Environment Agency and is governed by a steering group made up of further stakeholders including Catchment Sensitive Farming, The NFU, Essex Wildlife Trust and Essex & Suffolk Rivers Trust. All though it's difficult to assess, feedback received suggests that during this time there has been a change in attitudes towards the land management practices being implemented.

In 2018/2019 the Chelmer and Blackwater Catchment Partnership has been focussing on the river Brain (sub-catchment of the Blackwater) through an initiative called 'Clean Streams'. The intention is to engage all farmers and landowners within the sub-catchment through a 1:1 visit, in which the Tom Harris (ESW catchment advisor) will raise awareness of local issues and identify farm practices that could be improved to reduce the impact on downstream water bodies. The Brain was chosen for this project as a result of high levels of nitrate and phosphate being detected. A current regional priority is for the prevention of ecological/biological deterioration of the Blackwater estuary, which has occurred partly as a result of an in-balance in nutrient availability. This is a perfect example of how the work of the partnership compliments these wider priorities and why it is vital that there is a continued collaborative effort among CaBA members.

The announcement of the metaldehyde ban in late 2018 will undoubtedly bring about a shift in priorities with regards to ESW's stake in the partnership. Although it's too early to know exactly what this means it's hoped that some of the funds assigned to metaldehyde protection will be diverted into a broader range of measures.

Although we're increasing the scope of catchment work to cover a range of sectors, it's certain that agri advice and support will still form the basis for partnership work for the foreseeable future. It's accepted however that going forward, there is a need for a more holistic approach to land management practices that will achieve multiple benefits including: managing Invasive species, habitat creation and enhancement, and flood management. As such we will be keen to work with those that have an interest in these areas going forward to ensure that the advice given has the best possible result for all parties.

Floating Pennywort control & eradication programme on the River Blackwater/Langford

Over the past 2 years ESW have worked with contractor 'Native Landscapes' to control and eradicate the invasive species Floating Pennywort (*Hydrocotyle ranunculoides*) from the Langford Stretch of the River Blackwater along with neighbouring stretches of the

River Chelmer and Langford Cut. Floating Pennywort has been a problem in the area for the past 20 years and has had a negative effect on biodiversity and in some years prevented access for recreational boat users and navigation along the rivers in that area. ESW recognised the problem in parts of the Blackwater close to our Langford Water Treatment Works site so decided to take action and got together with Native Landscapes to undertake a programme of works to control and eradicate floating pennywort and prevent it from spreading further downstream and causing more problems elsewhere. Treatment took place in 2017 & 2018 and during this time has been very successful and included manual removal and routine spraying of the worst affected areas. As of November 2018 it was confirmed that the majority of floating pennywort had been treated and removed from the Langford stretch of the River Blackwater, leaving just a small amount of follow up treatment work to do and a survey for 2019 to ensure that it has been fully eradicated from the area.”

Cllr Sue White (Purleigh) expressed concerns regarding increased sewage entering the river from a proposed local development. It was not clear to her which authorities had responsibility for the decision to allow this. She is initiating a workgroup among Harbour and River Users to address this and similar issues. She would like to hear from anyone who would like to join the group or who has further background information. Contact Cllr Sue White at cllr.sue.white@maldon.gov.uk

7. The National Trust

David Piper, Lead Ranger, Essex and South Suffolk provided an update on the Northey Island project which is redeveloping the saltmarsh, especially the far side. This is a large scale project. More work has been done on the northern boundary. Works on the southern part of the island are about to start.

He expressed concern that recently there has been an increase in unauthorised visitors going over to the island and remaining there between tides. The NT is looking at how to publicise regulations regarding access to the island. Visitors should ring in advance (01621 853142) to arrange a permit to visit the Island.

Jim Dines asked for clarification of where the boundary of the island was. David Piper explained that it is the outside of the marshes. There was discussion of the need for notices. In the past there had been signs indicating that it was private and a bird sanctuary. The NT wish to avoid multiple signs around the island and are also considering notices posted in local sailing clubs and asked that anyone seeing the marshes being infringed to notify him.

David Patient (MHIC) enquired if the sea wall should be replaced to prevent access and encourage the marsh to form. David Piper stated that there is already considerable accretion. The NT were considering measures to enhance and improve the situation and their feasibility. Careful consideration is being given to the design.

8. Anglian Water

The Chairman read a report from Rebecca Bromley, Coastal Catchment Manager

“As the Coastal Catchment Manager for Essex, a key part of my role is working with other stakeholders to investigate any potential risks to bathing waters and shellfish beds along the Essex coastline. These risks range from in depth and on-going reviews of Anglian Water's own assets but also very importantly reviewing any potential impact from third party assets and diffuse sources with local authorities and the Environment Agency.

Third party sources previously found to have an impact on water quality include:
misconnections from homes where waste water has been incorrectly plumbed in to a surface water line,
poorly maintained private discharges,
houseboat waste,
dog/bird faeces,
and some more surprising sources including seaweed, and disturbed sediment.

Anglian Water have worked closely with the Environment Agency, Local Authorities and other interested parties for many years to investigate and manage risks to bathing waters. We are keen to build on this at a catchment scale with greater focus on shellfish harvesting areas.

I am happy to hear from anyone regarding anything which could be considered a risk to water quality - I cover the whole Essex coast and try to get out as much as possible but it is always useful to hear from people with in-depth local knowledge.

People can direct queries via the Clerk, MHIC, or make use of my email address which is rBromley@anglianwater.co.uk.

Anglian Water's Pollutionwatch campaign was launched in 2016 to raise awareness of sewage pollution, the reasons it can occur and the impacts it can have on the environment. I would strongly encourage people to make use of our Pollution Hotline number 03457 145 145, to report instances of suspected sewage pollution, as this means our operational staff can investigate accordingly. Indicators of sewage pollution include grey/discoloured water as well as the more obvious wet wipes and other toilet waste.

Anglian Water do not take water quality samples linked to bathing waters or shellfish waters; any queries on water quality should be directed to the Environment Agency as they are the regulatory body. To contact them with an enquiry via email please use: enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk.”

9. Marine Management Organisation

Questions to the MMO could be passed on via the Clerk, MHIC.

Jim Dines reviewed the role of the MMO including licensing rules on dredging. These would be posted to the MHIC website when clarified. Matt Wilson (Countryside and Coast Manager, MDC) will be having a meeting with MMO licensing officers.

10. Paddleboarding - Safety in the Harbour

Anni Ridsdill Smith of Frangipani SUP provided an overview of paddleboarding. There is no single governing body but British Stand Up Paddleboarding Association were working hard to provide a set of regulations. Currently paddleboarding activities were a reflection of the professionalism of the local instructors and what could be covered by insurance.

Addressing risks in the Harbour and River, she commented that it is a very accessible sport and anyone can paddle out regardless of any experience of tides and other negative conditions. She demonstrated the different leashes that paddleboarders might be using, some more suited to surfing were longer and might tangle with obstructions under water. Coiled spiral leashes were preferable as they rested on the board, and they should have a quick-release tether. Wearing a leash was imperative. Personal flotation devices were worn by some paddleboarders, either as a small flotation belt or as a jacket. Personal flotation devices were compulsory at Frangipani. Boots were recommended. Ian Hiner (MHIC) enquired what specific guidelines were followed with respect to larger vessels, - they were:- keep out of the channel; cross as a group; watch out behind and maintain high levels of vigilance. Paul Jeffries (Barge Operators Group) stated that there had been no issues with paddleboarders and thanked Frangipani SUP for telephoning in advance to notify of any paddleboarding activities. Jim Dines commented that high visibility clothing should be encouraged.

11. Swimming – Safety and Procedures

Natalie Roberts of Blackwater Tri provided information on issues affecting swimmers. It was noted that Blackwater Tri only swam in the lake. Most swimmers used flotation devices and went out in groups. She expressed concern regarding water quality, mentioning the sewage overflow at Beeleigh. Jim Dines and Nigel Harmer, (River Bailiff, MDC) expressed the need for high visibility equipment. The River Bailiff had some high visibility swim hats to give out.

Matt Wilson (MDC) would assist with contacting with the Dengie Triathlon organisation for further information regarding swimming in the Harbour.

11a) Gig Rowing

There was discussion with the representatives of the Maldon Gig Rowing Club regarding the increase in their sport. There were no reported issues with their activity in the Harbour and River.

12a) Update from Maldon Barge Operators Group

Paul Jeffries, Maldon Barge Operators Group reported that there are very good lines of communications between barges and the Blackwater Sailing Club which had developed a mutual understanding of each other's operations.

The cadets are particularly well organised and chaperoned and all credit should go to the club for all the work they do. No incidents had been reported.

The only incident to raise any concerns was with a dinghy from a visiting sailing club that capsized ahead of a barge, mid channel upstream of no 14 buoy, during the summer and

was reported to MHIC and the MCA. It was not easy for a barge to get out of the way of a capsized dinghy, given the width of the channel and the manoeuvrability of a barge. This had been the first incident of its kind.

12b) Update from Maldon Harbour Improvement Commissioners

Jim Dines reported on the last 12 months.

a) MHIC held regular Liaison Meetings with MDC.

These included discussions regarding the Visitors' Pontoon, but as yet there was no finance available.

If anyone had any Harbour issues they could let MHIC know and these would be raised at the meetings.

b) Light Pollution

Problems previously reported at the tennis courts had been resolved. There were still some concerns regarding lights in the Baltic Wharf which MHIC were pursuing.

c) Web Cams

MHIC were installing web cams which would be hosted by the Maldon Little Ship Club, funded by MHIC, providing views up and down the river. There would be live streaming and also a recording facility of approximately 4 weeks. This facility might prove useful to Harbour Users and they could contact the Commissioners if they needed to view past material.

d) Foul Discharge

MHIC and MDC were working to get the Environment Agency and Anglian Water to look at several identified locations in the Quay area.

f) Dredging

MHIC work with Essex and Suffolk Water and the Environment Agency with representation on the Siltation Committee. The aim is to straighten the River and keep it as deep as possible. MDC would be dredging at the Hythe Quay side of the river and MHIC would be undertaking dredging on the opposite side of the River.

g) MHIC Buoys and Navigation

Ian Hiner (MHIC) provided a buoy report. MHIC carried out routine maintenance of buoys and removal of debris from the Harbour. There had been an incident of unreported damage to No11 buoy. MHIC asked that Harbour Users should report damage and reminded that it is an offence to damage buoys. There was on-going overhaul of buoyage including fitting retro-reflective tape. River checks had been carried out with removal of floating debris including logs, ropes and plastic sacks.

h) Post Meeting Note – Risk Assessments, Incident Reports, Port Marine Safety Code

Copies of Risk Assessment forms for events in the Harbour should be sent to the Harbour Commissioners, email clerk@mhic.org.uk as well as to MDC. Organisations needing template forms can use the example on the Commissioners' website, www.mhic.org.uk, under Navigation and Safety.

Incidents in the Harbour should be reported. There is a template Incident Report Form on the Commissioners' website, Navigation and Safety.

The Port Marine Safety Code is being kept up to date in accordance with the requirements of the Department of Transport and is audited by Trinity House. Copy available on the Commissioners' website, Navigation and Safety

13. General Issues for Discussion

- a) Nigel Harmer (River Bailiff, MDC) asked that local organisation running events should let MDC know. Jack Ellum at Tourist Information could post information and notices.
- b) Andrew St Joseph stated that Natural England had become aware of disturbance affecting the estuary and have put into law measures regarding raising new homes in those areas. Essex County Council was seeking to influence developments to reduce and mitigate disturbances with an initiative - Recreation Avoidance Mitigation Strategy (RAMS).

14. Events for Information

Jim Dines invited organisations with events coming up to let the Clerk have the details and these could be posted on the MHIC website.

Note: the Maldon Port Guide is available on the MHIC website, under Navigation and Safety.

Meeting Close

The Chairman thanked participants for attending.