

## Meeting Notes

### Sutton Harbour Lock Gates Project

#### Joint Meeting of the Fishing Industry and Berth Holder Working Groups

**Time:** 6pm

**Date:** 12th December 2022

**Venue:** National Marine Aquarium and remote attendance via Teams

**Present:** Tim Jones (Independent Chair), Charles Blyth (independent fishing and maritime consultant), Philip Beinhaker (Sutton Harbour Group), Corey Beinhaker (Sutton Harbour Group), Mark Brimacombe (Sutton Harbour Group), Mark Veale (Sutton Harbour Group), David Harker (Environment Agency), Adam Higson (Environment Agency), Andrew Houghton (Environment Agency), Katy McCarthy (Environment Agency), Fiona Anderson (Environment Agency); Jason Clark (DCA PR), John Casey (DCA PR); representatives of the Fishing Industry stakeholder group Jason Berry, (Plymouth Fishing and Seafood Association), Graeme Searle (Plymouth Fishing and Seafood Association), Terri Portman (until 7pm); Dave Uren (on behalf small commercial MCA coded boats within the marina); elected berth holder representatives Chris Deane, David Evans, Natalie Kenyon, Nigel Green.

**Observing:** Richard Allan, Cattewater Harbour Master

**Apologies received:** Richard Trafford

#### Summary of Points and Actions from Meeting

1. Proposed Agenda (as circulated in advance) was presented as basis of discussion.
2. Independent Chair Tim Jones introduced himself and his role as independent facilitator. A brief outline was given of prior events, meetings and actions and the significant changes brought about to the suggested programme and timing for the essential lock gates works as a result of previous meetings and discussions. The position was outlined in respect of the essential nature of the works and the 'use-it-or-lose-it' position the city found itself in in respect of approved, time-limited Government funding for the works.
3. David Harker gave a presentation on the work of the Environment Agency and its contractors in reconciling feedback from consultations to date. This included analysis of a number of options (11 in total) considered to reduce the period of the works and rescheduling the project as two tranches of work in order to mitigate as far as possible the collective impact on harbour users. A detailed programme was presented on the proposed timing of the works to achieve the above and also to ensure that the vital flood defence work was completed in a timely manner and, crucially, within the agreed window for allocated budget expenditure.
4. There were questions from meeting participants but it was requested by the Chair that these were dealt with on completion of presentations by the project partners.

5. There was a short presentation by Corey Beinhaker, emphasising the commitment of Sutton Harbour Group to the consultation process and to the careful consideration the views and interests of harbour users as a collective.
6. Statements/questions were taken from the floor which covered matters including:
  - a. The view of some fishing representatives that the revised dates chosen for the works did not meet the industry's needs and would impact the industry greater than they would berth holders.
  - b. Concern expressed by Terri Portman that the result would be some vessels relocating (perhaps permanently) threatening the future of Plymouth's fishing industry and associated businesses. Also that engagement with fishers working out of Plymouth had been insufficient, as evidenced by the low level of participation to date by fishers in the stakeholder group.
  - c. Emphasis from berth holder representatives of the importance of the mid-May to September season and the need for a firm schedule.
  - d. The importance for both groups of agreed alternative berthing provisions where required during the works and in the case of the fishing industry, safe landing facilities, fuel, ice and transport to market for catch.
  - e. The importance of continued communication among all parties.
7. Charles Blyth introduced himself as an independent maritime safety and fishing industry consultant. He explained his role in being brought in by Sutton Harbour Group at the suggestion of fishing representatives to offer independent advice on options for alternative landing and berthing arrangements for the fishing fleet. He explained that the scope of his work had expanded to include consideration of alternative berthing arrangements for the leisure and coded vessel fleet.

Mr Blyth gave a presentation on his investigations to date, his discussions with fishing industry representatives and fishers and his methodology in identifying and assessing safe landing/berthing options. He said safety was a priority, including around any lifting arrangements.

He acknowledged that any alternative provision would not be as optimal as the current arrangements, however, his view was that it would be possible to identify a workable solution, adding that from his discussions with fishers on the quayside he felt most of them would accept the proposed dates and be able to work around them, provided there was a timetable and mitigation. He said in carrying out his work he was considering both stakeholder groups and Sutton Harbour Group, as a business itself.

Mr Blyth expected to present his findings before Christmas.

8. There were questions to Mr Blyth and requests that he consider a number of matters in his evaluation. These included:
  - a. A request that Mr Blyth engage directly with berth holders representatives as his in-person conversations to date had been limited to fishing representatives and fishers.
  - b. Confirmation that Mr Blyth had received the scoping document prepared by berth holders representatives – this was confirmed

- c. The differing needs of a diverse fishing fleet and design parameters of boats affecting their ability to use potential alternative landing/berthing arrangements
  - d. Regulatory considerations (including paperwork) for landing and transporting catch
  - e. Car parking at alternative landing/berthing arrangements – for both groups
  - f. Vessel safety and potential additional insurance requirements/costs in respect of alternative berthing for leisure vessels
  - g. Arrangements for landing passengers for coded boats
  - h. Taking account of size and access needs for coded boats and the working time directive to ensure statutory rest periods
9. There were some closing comments from:
- a. Graham Searle – said while there would inevitably be disruption, in his view and from discussions with others in the industry, it should be possible to find workable alternative provisions and that this had been achieved on previous occasions when work was carried out to the lock gates. He added that while the dates of the works were accepted as being in place, it would be helpful to the fishing industry if the start of the second tranche of works could be pushed slightly later (by some two weeks) into the latter part of February 2024.
  - b. Replying, David Harker said while this was technically possible it would need the agreement of all parties.
  - c. Andrew Houghton addressed the meeting. He emphasised the importance of the lock gate and associated flood defence infrastructure and the clear need for the works to take place. Mr Houghton reassured attendees that the Environment Agency was working in good faith to carry out these essential works and was doing its utmost to work with Sutton Harbour Group and all harbour users.
  - d. Mark Veale put on record the willingness of himself as Harbour Master and his team to assist in whatever way they could to help mitigate disruption to harbour users caused by the works.
  - e. Philip Beinhaker – emphasised the efforts that Sutton Harbour Group has made to support the fishing industry, including through initiatives to reduce the impact of fuel price rises and other costs. But reminded the meeting that Sutton Harbour Group was a company with shareholder responsibilities and was itself facing an impact from the works and associated disruption.
10. The Chair summarised the meeting and took the opportunity to put on record the interests of the 500-plus householders and business (not present) whose homes and livelihoods are protected by the flood defence measures provided by the lock gates.

It was acknowledged without the need for a formal vote that the dates for the works would be as identified in its programme by the Environment Agency, subject to further investigation by the Environment Agency into the timings of the second tranche of works in response to points 9.a and 9.b above.

Also that Charles Blyth should progress on this basis with his analysis and reporting of alternative safe landing and berthing arrangements.

11. Jason Berry agreed to be the contact between the group and the Plymouth Fishing and Seafood Association (PFSA) and its members. David Evans and Natalie Kenyon agreed to be the contacts for the berth holders.
12. The meeting closed at 20.10 hrs.
13. Next meeting No date was set for the next meeting although it was recognised that meetings would likely be required to be arranged with representatives of harbour users once Mr Blyth's report has been received.