



SOLENT PROTECTION

Protecting the Solent and its environment for future generations

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2016

In this report I shall deal first with the internal affairs of the Council of the Society then deal with the work of the Council in 2016 and finally look at the issues confronting the Council and how these are being or might be resolved.

Following the retirement last year of Colin Brown as treasurer of the Society our finances are now ably managed by Poh Chye Lim FCA. As the Society's overheads have increased he has been able to institute some helpful savings. He mentions in his report that the Society's turnover is such that it need not retain the services of an Independent Examiner. We thus save ourselves professional fees in excess of £1,000. Poh Chye is also investigating the Society's insurance arrangements with a view to a saving of premiums which, for a small charity are disproportionately large. He has ensured that the Society complies with the recommendations of the Charity Commission in relation to a reserves policy. This was on recommendations of the Charity Commission in relation to a reserves policy. This was no hardship to the Society which has always been very cautious in its expenditure of the capital created by bequests to the Society.

Another newcomer to the Council this year is Tim Kermode. Tim is a chartered engineer who worked for the Environment Agency and its predecessors for 35 years. During that time he has worked on the design of sea-defences, shoreline management plans and coastal strategies amongst other things. He now acts as a consultant on coastal matters. He is a valuable addition to the expertise on the Council and we welcome his arrival. Dr Peter Henderson is another recent addition to the Council whose name I mentioned last year. Peter is a director of an ecological consultancy specialising in the ecological impact of power generation and other large industries. He has already produced for the Society an insightful paper on fracking and its ecological effects; this can be accessed via the Society's website. Peter is another example of the expertise upon which the Council can call. Whilst the Society has this expertise upon which it can call, it should always be borne in mind, that a number of the Council members, including its Chairman, are generalists who have joined the Council because of their interest in the work of the Society and not because they have a particular expertise. The Council should ideally have representatives who represent the various areas of the Solent from the New Forest across to Langstone and Chichester, but this has proved difficult in recent years.

The Society has always maintained a close relationship with Solent Forum of which it has been a member since its foundation, it is a member of its steering group and is unique in being its only charity member. The other members being local authorities, NGOs and corporates, the Society brings a different viewpoint and, it may be said, a degree of independence to the Forum's deliberations. The Chairman of SPS represents the Society at all the Forum's meetings and this gives the Society useful access to thinking and deliberations across the Solent region in the field of coastline management and ecological policy. The annual subscription is a worthwhile expense.

Turning now to the work of the Council, it would be appropriate to deal first with financial expenditure of another kind. Research grants have become a feature of the Society's activities in recent years and 2016 was no exception. In February a grant, previously agreed, of £1,000.00 was made to Southampton Solent University to support the post-graduate research work of Mr Aldous Rees into zinc contamination in the Hamble, and later in the year a grant of £1,000.00 was paid to Mr Peter Barfield who is conducting research into the effect of invasive species in the Solent. Mr Barfield had given a presentation about his research to the Council in June. The Council is supportive of academic research which, in summary, has a relevance to the ecology and general well-being of the Solent. The Council has spent a little time this year in devising a set of principles which it will apply to the consideration of applications for grants.

In addition to the academic grants, the Council this year has made a contribution of £500.00 towards the cost of the shore protection work at Nore Barn Woods. This is a project which the Society has supported in the past and the Society's payment is a final donation to a scheme which is entirely in keeping with the purposes of the Society.

The Council has heard from other speakers this year; Karen McHugh who is the manager of Solent Forum and who spoke to the Council about the current work of the Forum, Dee Haas of the CPRE came in to a Council meeting in April again to update the Council on current concerns, and in July Jonathan Cox, and environmental consultant addressed the Council on the implications for the local environment and wildlife of the proposals for the route of the coastal access path through local lands.

It is inevitable that a Chairman's report should refer to planning applications that have been of concern to the Council in the past year and some are mentioned here. In 2016, the Council noted with satisfaction that the two appeals relating to Thorns Beach House, had been rejected. The Council had consistently opposed the development proposals which were out of character with the seascape. The Council has always recognised that certain planning schemes are a necessary requirement for the economic viability of an area, but it seeks to ensure that such schemes are imaginative, intelligent, ecologically sound and meet the needs of the local community. Thus the Council did not oppose outright the proposals by Red Funnel for the redevelopment of its terminal in East Cowes or the proposal by Wightlink to expand its terminal at Fishbourne, but in both cases the Council submitted letters of objection and comment on certain aspects of the proposals which it was felt were not in keeping with the principles which the Council seeks to uphold. On the other hand, the Council did oppose the planning application for a marina development on the Hamble south of the M27 bridge. The development would have interfered with a SAC site and affected the navigable channel. The application was refused.

Other projects across the Solent which were considered by the Council include the Coastal Strategy for the West, the development a Medina Yard, West Cowes, the consultation on the New Forest Local Plan, the growing interest in the beneficial uses of dredging, MCZs in the Solent (a quieter issue this year but where policing is clearly a major concern) and the Area Action Plan for the Medina Valley. There is insufficient space to comment in detail on these, but they give an indication of the extent of the interests of the Council.

Aside from the serious business, the members and guests of the Society enjoyed another successful 'Awayday', this time a boat trip along the Beaulieu River followed by lunch at the Gins Farm Clubhouse of the Royal Southampton Yacht Club. The fine weather and the excellent commentary contributed to a happy day for all who came.

The Society is in sound financial health and the Council firmly believes that the SPS has a role to play in environmental activities around the Solent. The major obstacle to growing that role is the lack of public awareness about the Society; too few people know what the Society does, what the Society is for. The Council is well aware of this problem and is seeking to address it in various ways; we already have a public speaking campaign and a management team are working on an initiative to bring publicity to the Society's work. The Council does not doubt that there is work for it to do and perhaps this report gives an indication of some of that work.

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