

PLA annual stakeholder meeting 11 June 2024 – attended for the RTS by Victoria Borwick, Peter Finch and Hilary Pereira

This was held in the Museum of London Docklands, but also on-line, led by the chair Jonson Cox. The chair explained the Board was in transition, with several of the top executives relatively new in post. He reminded the audience of the PLA's status as a trust port, with no shareholders and paying no dividends, expected to be self-financing and to re-invest all money made into the port.

Presentations were made from various of the top executive team, starting with Robin Mortimer the CEO. He went through the headline statistics for the port in an overview of the year. He also covered the top achievements under the PLA themes of Trading Thames, Destination Thames, Natural Thames and their Cross-cutting theme. [At the end of the meeting it was explained that the usual annual report could not be released yet, because of pre-election purdah, but this would be available on the website after the election. Hence no need to include details here of the year's achievements.]

Questions from the audience at that point were:

- How the silt that accumulated at Chelsea on the foreshore when the Clippers stopped during covid encouraging bird life, and how all that had been lost since the Clippers returned. The reply was this would be picked up later, though it was not.
- Yes, the template for the Thames Master plan as used successfully in the first 3 Boroughs would be used as the Master plan was rolled out to all other riparian Boroughs
- Dido Berkeley claimed Thames stakeholders were not involved in the masterplan and needed to be. The response appeared to be that they had enough of a voice within each Borough, though Dido wanted a bigger stakeholder forum.

Steven Lockwood, the Chief Financial Officer, then had his few minutes, followed by Sian Foster, the Director of Corporate Affairs. She explained a new PLA website had been launched and warned the audience they would be receiving a post event form for feedback. The next set of questions were:

- Whether some of the capital investment could be used to clean up the river, such as the wet wipe mound at Hammersmith. The response was this was being progressed, and an independent report had concluded that removing the mound was the right thing to do. This was now into the implementation stage, jointly with Thames Water, whose 5 year plan was expected on the 10th July.
- Peter Finch for the RTS said there had used to be a Thames Tidal Recreational club and a separate part of the PLA website for recreational boaters, but this had now gone. The response was there had been a concern about GDPR compliance, and the work on the website was still not complete
- The Wapping group asked how much of the capital programme would be used for repairs of steps and stairs. The response was this depended on ownership, which was often not the PLA, and they were advised to speak to Jim Trimmer who may be able to help the group.

James Stride the harbour master was next to speak, able to report zero serious incidents for the year. He encouraged reporting including near misses, but use of 999 when it really mattered. The service level for pilotage was 99.6%. Next was Grace Rawnsley, the Director of Sustainability with positive noises about net zero.

- What about black water discharge from vessels? The PLA responded that implementation was from 1st July but in view of the lack of market interest in discharge facilities, the PLA

were going through a procurement process themselves. They were also working with the river operators to ensure vessels were modified as needed

- Another question about Mogden and how the upper reaches would not be helped by the Thames Tideway Tunnel. The PLA claimed to be making noises: the lack of storm capacity at Mogden was severe, and a key problem was the lack of sustainable drainage upstream.
- Dido criticised the PLA for not pushing more on sustainable drainage, catching rain etc and following the lead of Philadelphia who had reduced rain water going into sewers. The chair responded that he was trying to increase the voice of the river, but did not have the powers to compel action here. The CEO claimed the PLA was at the centre of a clean water manifesto, but again had limited powers. Dido remained unconvinced
- There was a complaint about how balconies were being taxed through River Works Licences (RWLs) and how opaque the scheme for charging was. The response was all licences were unique but the charge depended on size, location, use and property value, using comparables over many years, but also losing connection with how the charges were first arrived at. Some charges were paid by the freeholder, some had paid for charges upfront. What about convening a working group with balcony owners to go over this? Peter Finch for the RTS welcomed this, pointing out the RTS had help broker a deal with end-of-garden RWL holders when they were in the same position some years ago, though the agreement was one of those now missing from the website. [It was added at the end of the meeting.]

The CEO then went through a forward look. Trading Thames could expect London Gateway berth 4 open in the next year and more progress on light freight to add to the trial between Putney and London Bridge, looking at the infrastructure and vessels needed. Destination Thames was hoping to progress increasing safe access to the foreshore, with also investment in passenger piers working with TfL, with more sustainable funding models and developers to make piers more commercially viable. Natural Thames would need a clear plan, and also include a refresh of the clean air strategy. Cross-cutting Thames involved the Thames masterplan roll out to more Boroughs, and delivery on net zero. Financial investments included replacement radar, a refurbished port control centre and a new VTS system. The people plan included continued recruitment of trainee pilots. The fleet would continue to be upgraded.

- Remarks were read out from Jason Debney and from Diana Roth who were not present in person.
- 3 resident groups were concerned that the PLA enforced the licences held by Thames Water – yes of course was the answer
- What about the poisoning of the air from cruise ships unable to use shore power in Greenwich? The response was there was no easy solution that was not far too expensive, and the air pollution did not breach WHO limits, so there was no clear public health case.
- Yet another comment about SUDS and porous services: to be picked up in the masterplan with the Boroughs? The response: the Boroughs should already be thinking along those lines.
- A Chelsea houseboat owner asked about enforcement of the RWL of his mooring operator. The chair explained he had been personally involved and aspects were now with the lawyers so he could say little. The boatowners should sit down with the operator and try to reach agreement, then the PLA can re-engage. The reply was the boatowners wanted to stay and the operator wanted them gone so he could introduce his own mega-boats. The PLA chair persisted in suggesting mediation, but also was aware of action being taken by the Borough.

The meeting concluded with tea and pastries and more informal chat.