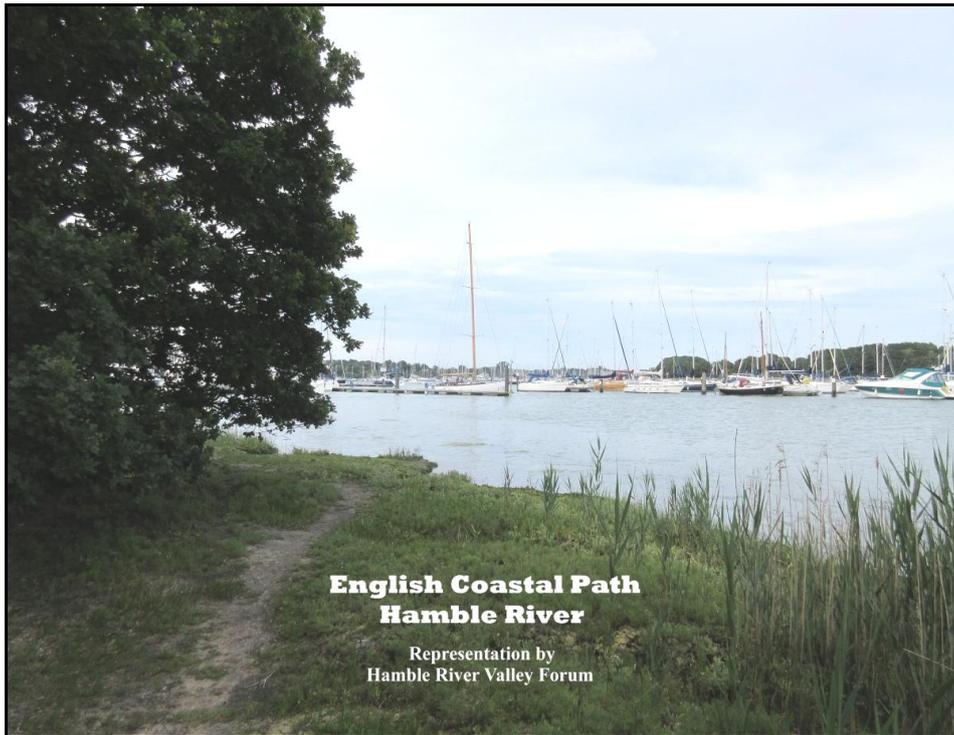


HAMBLE RIVER VALLEY FORUM (HRVF)

ANNUAL REPORT 2016/17



Hamble River Raid 2017

Ian Underdown

The Hamble River Valley Forum came into existence at its first AGM in June 2013, with the express intention of giving a voice to the estuarine parish councils and the residents who live within their boundaries about all matters of interest pertaining to the River Hamble and the river valley.

Five estuarine parish councils appoint representatives as Forum members: Curdridge (Winchester City Council) and Hamble le Rice, Bursledon, Botley and Hound (Eastleigh Borough Council). Fareham Borough Council is not parished and is therefore not represented by voting members of the Forum.

Current officers are Cllr Ian Underdown (Chair) - Hamble, Cllr Rory Kemp (Vice-chair) - Curdridge, Cllr Diane Andrewes (Hon. Secretary) - Bursledon. Other Members representing parish councils are Cllr Neil Lewis (Hound) and Cllr Lynne Newton (Curdridge).

The forum has three non-voting, co-opted members: Jeremy Clark (Solent Protection Society), Robert Hughes (Warsash Saling Club) and Cllr Jane Rich. Cllr Rich was appointed the EBC representative on the Hamble River Management Committee in May 2016.

The Forum has held 4 Ordinary Meetings, this year, in addition to the 2016 AGM. The average attendance was 15 and included Members, co-opted members and members of the public. Meetings have been held at Pilands Wood Centre and thanks are due to Cllr Jane Rich and the Pilands Wood Community Association for hospitality. Speakers have given illustrated talks on the Solent Mitigation Partnership, the National Trust land at Curdridge fronting the Hamble, the HRVF proposed link to Bursledon Bridge for the English Coast Path and Canoeing on the River Hamble.

The general public from both sides of the river are represented at Forum meetings

by individuals and members of community organisations and the Forum has a mailing list of 30. Warm thanks are due to members of the public who attend our meetings and prompt us to continue to work on issues that are important to them. We were especially pleased to welcome representatives of Swanwick and Burridge Residents Association to meetings this year.

The Forum has developed its knowledge and experience of the River Valley during the year and heard more about users of the river. Its main campaign, however, has been to identify and gain support for a proposal to Natural England to extend the England Coast Path to Bursledon Bridge as the first crossing point in all weathers.

Unfortunately, the Natural England rules for estuaries dictate that, if there is a ferry, then that should be used - and that remains their position. However, they are to issue a consultation paper later in the year and then there will be the opportunity for the public's case to be made for an alternative route to be recognised when the ferry is not available.

The Forum's case is made in a power-point presentation that has been sent to Natural England and shown in the community. It demonstrates clearly the undoubted need for footpath access on both sides of the River Hamble by local people. Why should Eastleigh residents not benefit from a similar, safe, riverside route that Fareham residents have? This could be made possible with the extension of the England Coast Path.

The Forum has drawn support already from the independent Open Spaces Society, parish councils, Hampshire Ramblers, numerous local walking groups, community and conservation groups. Unfortunately, there has been resistance from landowners and those with vested interests. There is hope that

Eastleigh Borough Council will come to recognise the undoubted benefit to its residents in improving the strategic footpath route between Bursledon and Hamble and increasing public use of the marine facilities that the public enjoy on the Fareham side of the river at Universal Boatyard.

The campaign at grass roots was master-minded by the Forum's Public Rights of Way Working Party, which was established in 2015 to share information about the public rights of way network in the Hamble Valley and to investigate the feasibility of expanding it, especially in areas of development. Initial hopes for the England Coast Path to allow a route up to Botley, encompassing the attractive villages of Hamble, Bursledon, Botley, Curdrige, Swanwick and Warsash, gave way to the obvious claim of Bursledon Bridge to be the first crossing point of the River Hamble for pedestrians. It was accepted, however, that the proposed upstream crossing at Bursledon Bridge would provide a gateway to the attractive Upper Hamble River Valley for walkers on the England Coast Path.

The Working Party's 14 members include estuarine parish council footpath representatives, representatives from HCC Coastal Access sub-group, residents' associations and Ramblers' representatives from Eastleigh, Gosport and Bishop's Waltham.

The Working Party has met 3 times with an average attendance of 7 members. The terms of reference include sharing information; developing the network of public rights of way in the Hamble River Valley; improving signposting; producing leaflets to advertise the network; exploring maintenance improvements. Work is proceeding on all these fronts, largely through work initiated by members in their communities. Everyone is aware of the importance of ensuring that new rights of way are introduced into new housing developments.

The Forum has continued to be active in Eastleigh planning matters. In particular, it objected to the Fairport application for Harbour Works Consent for a new jetty, and supported representations made to the Forum by members of the public and community organisations. The application was later withdrawn.

At Forum members' request, the Hamble Estuary Partnership (HEP) invited planners from both sides of the river to speak about planning issues where there was a need for a joint approach. Much to everyone's disappointment, the Eastleigh officer did not attend. There has been some concern about applications for development on the Fareham side, which need to be monitored.

We have attended River Authority meetings. The contentious matter of bait digging and the nuisance caused to local residents is being investigated by the Harbour Master's team and the police. The Forum has made representations to local authorities about the lack of public access points for small-boat users to the mid-river between Badnam and Bursledon and the Upper Hamble - a matter which was brought to the Forum's attention at a public session.

We continue to pursue equality issues with Jason Scott, Harbour Master/ Marine Director. This year, he has responded to users' calls for more tender billets by doubling free capacity at Warsash. Wider, tender moorings have been put in place for those less physically able. He is satisfied that, though the moorings waiting list remains long for most sizes of boats, the programme is managed fairly. The River Authority gives financial support for the River Hamble handbook and the river-wide activities. It has worked with HCC Countryside Service and Universal Boatyard to re-open the footpath on the Fareham side. It is planned to improve public access at Hamble and Bursledon.

HRVF'S CASE TO NATURAL ENGLAND (N.E.) FOR THE INCLUSION OF BURSLEDON BRIDGE AS THE FIRST ALL-WEATHER, 24/7 PEDESTRIAN CROSSING POINT OF THE RIVER HAMBLE ON THE ENGLAND COAST PATH.

In 2015, the Hamble River Valley Forum convened a Footpath Working Party to link the network of footpaths in the River Hamble Valley. Improved coastal access was a main aim. Hampshire County Council's Countryside Access Forum has a Coastal Access sub-group and one of its members serves on the Forum's working party. The Working Party discovered possible, linked, footpath routes alongside the river and has been investigating possible dedications and claims based on historical evidence.

The Working Party has met three times with N.E. representatives and urged them to accept a Statement of Case for inclusion of the River Hamble estuary in the English Coast Path. The Working Party reflects the views of the Forum's five estuarine parish councils: Hamble, Hound, Bursledon, Botley and Curdrige. Fareham Borough has no parish councils, but the Forum includes representatives from residents' associations, the Ramblers and a sailing club, who support the Statement.

In summary, the Forum believes

- that the Hamble - Warsash Ferry, the proposed first public crossing point of the River Hamble, is not available at all the times that walkers would wish to use the England Coast Path.
- that the coastal route from the Solent Way should continue through Hamble and Hound villages, marinas and copses close to the Eastleigh riverside;
- that a route is possible following the Southampton - Portsmouth railway line in Bursledon on land,

- that the first, fully-accessible, public crossing point for the coastal route should be accepted as the A27 Bursledon Bridge* ;
- that, on the Fareham side of the river between Swanwick and Warsash, there is an existing coastal path - a paradise for bird watchers and a public right of way close to the water's edge leading to the Solent Way;
- that this extension of the Coastal Path would provide enormous recreational benefits; enhance many businesses along the route; offer cultural benefits to walkers to experience the heritage assets of the villages of the Hamble peninsula; improve coastal access; provide an accessible, safe route for everyone.

*Bursledon Bridge on the A27 is

- a public, foot crossing
- a highway, maintained at public expense;
- permanent;
- available at all times and in all weathers, with no interruptions;
- accessible to all;
- free;
- of unlimited capacity;
- not reliant on tides or people;
- safe;
- ***the first possible alternative route at times of known high tides, flooding or erosion.****

When Natural England produces its report for consultation - expected late autumn 2017, the Forum hopes that everyone with an interest in extending the England Coast Path to Bursledon Bridge or providing an alternative route will respond using this information.

**Diane Andrewes Hon. Secretary
June 2017**

