CHAC minutes 5th May 2022

**Present**

John Corby JC, Waterside property owners and W Cowes boatyards – Outgoing Chair

Mark Southwell MS, RNLI – Incoming Chair

Peter Jackson PJ, Medina Clubs

Gary Hall GH, CHC Chief Executive

Ed Walker EW, CHC Harbourmaster

Clive Blount CB, CHC Commissioner

Cllr Richard Hollis RH, Cowes Town Council

Giles Peckham GP, Cowes Clubs and Classes

Rob Stewart RS, AMS

Cllr Karl Love KL, IW Council

Cllr Tracey Reardon TR, East Cowes Town Council

Mike Townsend MT, Boatfolk

Julian Sawyer JS, Williams Shipping

Dan Jehans DJ, Cowes Yacht Haven

1. **Apologies**: - Cllr Lora Peacy-Wilcox, Laurence Mead, Phil Hagen, Ben Willows, Dan Townsend, Bob Holt.
2. **Approve minutes of last meeting** – approved
3. **Matters arising not covered elsewhere** – Clock on Red Jet terminal still broken. JC said Red Funnel were to repair it by 20th September. If it wasn’t he offered to pay for the repairs. He asked if it could be a Cowes TC matter, RH said they would not pay for repairs. MS suggested they could lobby RF to get it repaired. RH agreed to raise it. It was then suggested E Cowes TC might be willing to raise it and ask RF. KL said E Cowes TC have monthly meetings with RF and would be happy to include this at the next meeting. Several members feel it doesn’t present the right image for visitors on arrival. (Note, clock now working).
4. **Change of Chair –** MS was welcomed by JC as the new Chair of CHAC. MS thanked JC for his six years at the helm and particularly for keeping the committee together and functioning during the pandemic. MS added he was pleased JC would remain as an active member of the committee. MS then congratulated Phil Hagen on his recent appointment as Chair of CHC. MS then outlined his ideas for future meetings as there would be no AoB. A calling notice would go out two weeks before a meeting asking members to highlight any matters they wanted covered and to include a solution to any problem they identified. The Agenda would go out one week before the meeting usually with standard items and any extra topics not fitting existing ones.
5. **Chief Executive’s report** – GH confirmed Phil Hagen’s appointment as Chair and James Evans as vice-chair. GH then outlined aspects of the new five year strategy recently published by CHC. He highlighted that more emphasis would be placed on environmental and sustainability as users expected that. HR and management of the commission had been updated since his arrival with job descriptions allied to the strategy and themes therein. All staff (including him) to have key objectives to demonstrate they are working towards the strategic aims of CHC. Marketing – a new member of staff had been taken on for marketing and media output. He hoped people had seen an improvement in the newsletter, social media and other outward facing activities of the commission. An online survey asking harbour users what they thought had gone out two weeks earlier. 150 replies by the time of our meeting (over 200 replies is most recent figure). It wasn’t a set-question survey and allowed people to say what they felt. The harbour handbook was now available online and in print. CHC AGM at ISC Thursday 26th May. A carbon management plan had just been received and CHC would look into the recommendations. CHC will report at next meeting the steps they are taking. A water taxi tender had been agreed with Cowes Water Taxis and as CHC is well aware a service cannot operate without some form of financial support a Stakeholder Benefit sum has been agreed with the operator. Stakeholder grants of £50,000 have been given out to organisations and businesses trying to encourage events back to Cowes post pandemic. So far this year £20,000 has been similarly granted.
6. **Harbour Master’s report** – The annual Port Maritime Security audit has been completed, there are no non-conformities and the recommendations are being worked on. The chain ferry has returned to service with all navigational requirements satisfactory and as they were before. Categorisation of waters was raised at the last meeting. EW has consulted with the MCA and the necessary changes are likely to be agreed soon to extend the current category from Watch House Slip out to the new breakwater. JC asked about taxis and others going out north of breakwater – nothing had changed but there is a dispensation subject to minimal extra equipment and a Risk Assessment for that to happen. The MCA didn’t accept a seasonal dispensation to the rules. MS asked how operators would find out. EW said any change is not a LNTM matter but he would advise this group and possibly include it in a newsletter. Flare amnesty. One is being planned for this year by CHC. There was a lengthy discussion and explanations on why out of date flare disposal is so difficult. Put simply there is no formal structure in place. The government went out to consultation, CHC responded but so far no conclusion has been reached. For obvious safety reasons flare disposal is highly controlled and therefore expensive. CHC is not in a position to offer year-round disposal and last year’s amnesty offered by them cost CHC £3,000. One proposal that it is hoped will work is that those who sell flares, take them back – probably for a fee. PJ asked what update there was on the control of jet skis (PWCs). EW said government had gone out to consultation, CHC had replied at the end of last year and no proposals have been made by the MCA so situation remains as it is. EW reported that in 2020 CHC had made 130 ‘interventions’ (usually stopping, having a discussion and offering advice and education) for vessels speeding in the harbour. Some were quite determined efforts by patrol officers to educate owners. Last year that had reduced to 33 interventions.
7. **Marine industry** – RS said the 250t lift was for anyone to use in Cowes not just WS or AMC, it had been provided in the hope it would encourage superyachts to have work done here. The impending merger with a French marine business is likely to bring some defence contracts to Cowes. AMC has been successful in getting grants and is now developing mothership and transfer vessels for the wind farm industry. AMC have significant contracts coming their way and will be busy for the next 4 to 5 years. RS feels there needs to be a significant effort put into training young people to get them into the marine industry. His experience being that colleges insist on educational standards and he needs people who can work well, understand the industry and don’t make mistakes and you don’t necessarily need GCSEs etc for that. This means he needs to establish a training college, hopefully linked in with Solent University. Professional mariners need to be trained to crew these vessels as well. Their drive to achieve carbon neutral will also bring many jobs. JC feels the need for all those employees could risk taking workers away from the yachting industry. RS feels if they train enough people up there’ll be a spin-off for leisure and yachting. It was pointed out various charitable trusts can assist young people into marine industry and that will be discussed outside the meeting. The need for AMC to establish a training school is urgent, there are multi-million-pound grants up for grabs on the Humber and Aberdeen, we just need some of that here. There is a perennial lack of land along the Medina for businesses to expand and that just adds to the problem. The Harrison site. It was uncertain at the meeting exactly what the planning status was of the site. Immediately after the meeting KL asked IW Council what the position is, they replied: - Planning ***permission was granted by the IWC on 18 June 2021, Condition 1 requires that the development starts within three years of the permission being granted – so they will need to commence the development by 18 June 2024.*** The committee were unanimous in saying the site should be for marine related industry for the benefit of both towns and the Isle of Wight in general. KL pointed out housing, particularly affordable, remains a major problem for residents and others wanting to work here.
8. **Commercial Vessels** – JS outlined the building successes of the turbine factory and that his barge will be transporting the largest turbine ever built here at an enormous 236m – the biggest yet in the world. Business is good.
9. **Leisure activity** – The Norris Castle development was raised as a question about whether it will impact on use of the harbour. Yes it will. During the build period East Cowes Esplanade will be the main route for contractors and will limit ease of public access to the beach. Concerns were raised that the sea wall may not take the strain and the proposed beach slipway project may fail to attract funding as well. Concern was raised that there is nowhere in E Cowes to launch straight into the Solent thus avoiding traffic in the Medina, the floating bridge and all the commercial & leisure activity in what is becoming an increasingly busy waterway. There is a great concern for E Cowes residents and that is echoed by CHAC. RH felt disruption caused by the development may add to problems E Cowes already experiences when the ferries are delayed. EW explained that isn’t a CHC matter as any operator’s schedule is for them to manage, not the harbour.
10. **Marinas, Moorings and Berths** – Damage to day boats on the swinging moorings overnight has been raised by an owner who asks if CHC can put out patrols after hours and during the night. EW explained this was best done when it’s suspected the activity takes place rather than have a random approach. If evidence can be provided to enable CHC to put out patrols they will. JC asked about allocation of swinging moorings and why more can’t be done to guarantee new owners of day boats get a mooring to keep fleets alive. GH explained the allocation is a normal business contract and CHC have no power to vary those contracts once issued. This led to a general discussion on provision and allocation of moorings and CHC have agreed to look at next year and ideally give preference to boats without engines. CHC were asked if they could look at increasing berths in the harbour. A proposal to link with walk ashore pontoons with ECSC hadn’t been pursued but it might be possible to find room between ECSC and the chain bridge, just off GKN. CB pointed out the demographic of boat ownership is changing nationally and CHC will look at other land and sites on both banks but that is a long term project. As CHC own Kingston they would certainly increase berthing there and look at ashore storage once planning is all agreed.
11. **Public Use** – BW had asked if CHC actively pursue sustainability and look into water quality which had been a topic of extensive media coverage of late. CHC do have an environmental and sustainable approach outlined in the 5 year strategy and will be announcing more details later. As for water quality CHC were clear it is the Environment Agency’s role to check and not a responsibility of the harbour. KL explained that ECTC had carried out a survey and checks on water quality on E Cowes beach which is now rated as a safe bathing beach and advertised as such. Questions were asked about the river and Cowes beach up to Egypt Pt. CHC confirmed the beach was the responsibility of the IWC and again water testing of the river and beach is down to the EA. It was mentioned that air quality is probably a more important topic and AMC had carried out a drone survey looking for noxious gases over their site and nearby and now have a report.
12. **Chair’s Updates** - MS explained this regular agenda item will allow for last minute information to be brought to the committee. He added he had the last year’s minutes but none older. JC confirmed he has all minutes for his six years in office and GH confirmed that CHC have an archive of all minutes published by the committee over the years. Minutes usually took JC a long while to prepare and CHC had now kindly offered to provide a paid minute taker for CHAC meetings who will produce them. This offer was much appreciated by MS. MS then proposed a change to the meeting structure of CHAC. It was agreed future meetings would be held in January, April & September on Wednesdays starting at 1000. The next two (September 7th and January 11th 2023) would be in Cowes Yacht Haven. MS thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting.

**Mark Southwell, Chair. Cowes Harbour Advisory Committee.**