

Cowes Harbour Advisory Committee

Meeting held by Zoom on Friday 7th August 2020, 15.00 – 17.00

MINUTES

Present

John Corby, Chair, waterside private property owners (JC)
Gavin Ford, East Cowes and West Cowes business associations (GF)
Peter Jackson, Medina Combined Clubs (PJ)
Stuart McIntosh, Harbour Master (SM)
Dan Jehan, Cowes Yacht Haven (DJ)
Rob Stewart, EC boatyards & wharfs (RS)
Mark Southwell, Cowes RNLI (MS)
Giles Peckham, Cowes Clubs and Classes Association (GP)
Clive Blount, CHC (CB)
Lora Peacy-Wilcox, Mayor CTC (LPW)
Karl Love, ECTC (KL)
Laurence Mead, Cowes Week Ltd (LM)
Ben Willows, UKSA and Cowes Training Schools (BW)
Jeremy Dale, CWT (JD)
David Riley, CHC (DR)

1. Apologies for absence

Ian Bayliss.

JC said that there would be various people listening & viewing the meeting in the background but not speaking, ie on receive but not transmit.

2. Approve the minutes from the previous meeting.

Approved

3. Matters arising

None.

4. Harbour Safety and General Directions

SM said there were two tragic incidents to report, firstly a man tried to swim across the river at the floating bridge, got into trouble, and his body was recovered the next morning.

Secondly there was (at time of the meeting) a missing jet skier after his jetski was found adrift off Gilkicker.

Also being the summer there are the normal incidents of swimmers in the harbour, particularly around Trinity landing, and CHC are working with the local police to put up further signage about the risks.

JC asked SM to confirm that swimming in the river is forbidden, which SM did but JC made the point that lots of people don't realise.

SM said CHC had been working very closely with Hampshire Marine Police and their Wavebreaker initiative to educate and enforce. He also said they are considering introducing a new GD to control personal watercraft in the inner harbour and outer fairway approach and require them to have a permit to operate in these areas.

JC thought that jet skis are currently treated like normal boats but SM said there was a complication based on the Goodwin case where a judge found that personal watercraft and jet skis are not vessels so not covered in the COL Regs which are included the the GDs.

PJ said he had noticed an increase in the number of jetskis being launched at the Folly because there are no other decent slipways along the river, and his greatest concern was whether these people had 3rd party insurance. He said there is a distinct lack of signage and safety encouragement at the public slipway at the folly and he sees a lot of people setting out without radios or lifejackets, just mobile phones.

SM said that 3rd party insurance would be a requirement for a permit. JC asked SM if CHC had the authority to grant permits, SM said they had recently taken legal advice on this and yes CHC can request that people have permission in writing, and a permit is in writing.

5. Red Funnel navigational incidents

SM said he had a good meeting with RF last week about safety and the MAIB report. There is good engagement and he has suggested that Leanna Lakes might give a presentation to the advisory committee about RF safety management.

6. Taxi prices

PJ reported that a couple had received a bill for £40 for the two of them to get to their boat and back, which was on the excessive side. He accepted that transport all the way to the folly can't be done for just a couple of pounds but £40 was too much. JC said this sort of pricing was disgraceful and gave a very bad impression to visitors.

SM said that CHC was currently subsidising the taxi service to approximately 50% of their daily cost. CHC has a standard charge sheet on their website and anyone charged differently should let him know.

JC said how important the 'front of house' in Cowes was with people working in the marinas giving a welcoming experience to visitors.

7 EC slipway

BW said that since the lockdown not much has progressed but that the working group now needs to re-engage and keep it as a priority project.

KL asked to be involved in the discussions.

8 Kingston

JC said that most of the complaints he gets tend to be about Kingston, for example people living on boats, and the gutter system for collecting antifouling rubbing not necessarily working as well as it should so the river getting contaminated. On a more positive note JC then reminded everyone how excited he was at the January meeting where SM revealed CHC's initial plans for new marine sheds on the, as yet undeveloped, lower terrace.

SM said CHC were aware of the live-aboards and that some people had abused a short stay license system but they were gradually reducing this.

Regarding the wash down bay, SM said that Kingston was the only facility equipped with a two-stage separator but he had become aware that the guttering hadn't been taking all the water and has rectified this with a temporary fix prior to a permanent one being installed.

As far as the development is concerned the architects are doing a costing but the proposed 100 tonne hoist might require additional groundwork. SM also said that they will be cooperating with the other local yards regarding the size of hoist that might be required which affects the amount of groundwork required. JC suggested that CHC was in a position to subsidise the groundwork if it helped local marine industry.

SM reminded everyone that previously they had two commercial operators, Wight Aggregates who have moved across the river, and IW Fuels that have stopped importing by ship and may be shutting down completely which affects distribution by road tanker around the Island. CHC are currently in discussion with IWC and Bob Seely about protecting the non-supermarket distribution of fuel around the Island.

PJ asked if this would affect the fuel pontoon, SM said there were a lot of questions about this but it had happened in very short notice.

KL was concerned about significant price increases.

JC asked if this was actually a harbour issue and KL made the point that if fuel was being transported on smaller tankers by RF there was a safety issue.

9 CHC billing during Covid.

JC said that there had been an odd murmur that maybe CHC hadn't been as sympathetic to its commercial tenants that maybe it might have been during the lockdown.

SM said that CHC had agreed a standard rent reduction during the lockdown which was probably more generous than many other harbour authorities. They are now in discussion with several tenants on a case by case scenario.

10. DIY boat maintenance facilities

JC started by saying how important to Cowes he felt this was to keep going and that the Hamble might not be quite so accommodating to DIY so we are in Cowes where we are quite lucky to have yards like Kingston and Medina Yard where owners can do essential work on their own boats. JC reminded everyone that at the previous meeting Alex Cottle, a tenant at Kingston, had said how opposed to DIY he was.

SM said he was generally supportive of JC's position which he felt was a stakeholder requirement anyway. CHC runs an open yard policy at Kingston. JC said that safety, for example ladders and scaffolding, is still most important but felt that the status-quo works at the moment.

GP was very supportive of this, particularly on behalf of the dry-sailors, and made the point that Cowes has a lot of local sailors who live close to their boats whereas on the Hamble most owners travel longer distances so rely more on professional maintenance contractors.

JC said that CHC could accept some maybe less commercially viable aspects of their business because in the big picture allowing owners to work on their boats benefited the town in a larger way.

LM agreed and said that investment to allow people to work on their own boats was good long term strategy.

11. Whitegates

JC recalled that the Whitegates pontoon used to be on the agenda at every meeting because an historical quirk meant it was owned by IWC not CHC and that there had been a plan to transfer ownership to CHC but nothing ever progressed. SM confirmed that it was owned and managed by IWC. Because some boats and dinghies seem to be abandoned he has agreed with the Newport HM to put notices on them warning they will be taken away to Kingston.

JC said that apparently there are also fishermen padlocking their boats to it and using it like a private pontoon.

As far as taking it over SM said the ball is in IWC's court but JC said that to progress, CHC would have to be the driving force.

LPW said she was very keen for CHC to take it on as the Newport HM had done nothing with it for many years but she didn't think it was fair for CHC to take it on without a condition study. She said she would raise it again at IWC.

12. Skills required by a future CEO of CHC irrespective of any merger

JC reminded everyone that SM would be retiring over the next twelve months and that the plan was to replace him with both a Harbour master and a Chief Executive. JC's only view was that the CEO needed to be somebody who could run a business with a turnover of between two and five million pounds and who

understood the boat business. He said he's seen too many people who had been successful in other types of business thinking they could run a boat business but finding they couldn't.

CB said that CHC would welcome any advice from CHAC about what to put on the job spec.

DR said that all comments would be welcome sooner rather than later.

13. To discuss improvements to CHAC communications

JC said that it had been suggested that CHAC doesn't actually represent the people it's supposed to, in which case this needs to be addressed. He thought CHAC was very transparent and with very detailed minutes of all the meetings. Going forward he felt it was possible, with Zoom meetings, to have the public listening in and was totally open about how CHAC operates.

GP said that there was no official rep for berthholders, and the proposed merger was worrying many berthholders about prices.

SM said he really valued the role that CHAC plays and that CHC has a responsibility to consult and listen to the Advisory Committee. He added that ultimately CHAC has the ability to go to the Secretary Of State for the Department of Transport.

JC said it was surprising how many people didn't really know the governance structure of both CHC and CHAC, and that CHC don't select CHAC or its chairman.

LM said that the CHAC certainly doesn't hold back in its discussions.

KL suggested live streaming which jC thought was a good idea but with only the actual representatives doing the talking.

PJ stressed the importance of down-streaming the discussions to stakeholders and that sometimes he has circulated a summary of the meetings to his stakeholder groups. He also felt that maybe it was time to look at the list of stakeholder groups and update if necessary.

CB stressed the importance of the representatives engaging with their groups and pointed out that there can be difficulties when a rep from a certain industry also represents a competitor and so dialogue might be awkward. He also sensed from the recent feedback that many people don't feel they are properly represented.

JD suggested that people add their stakeholder groups to their names at the bottom of their Zoom screens.

14. Any other business

Nothing was raised.

15. Review feedback received by CHAC about CHC joining with CYH

JC referred to the summary document he had sent out a couple of days earlier (see appendix below). He made the point that the messages of support were generally very short and the objections very long, and highlighted a couple of responses, firstly from Berthons in Lymington who were very opposed which JC felt was a sign that the merger must be a good for Cowes, and then the response from the Town Councils who were adamant about having a person on the new board of Trustees should the merger go ahead. JC said that when he was a Town Councillor, only one other person of the sixteen had shown any interest in boating and in fact many of the other councillors had been overtly hostile to anything to do with yachting. On that basis JC felt it was therefore strange that CTC should want an active role in running a boat business.

JC also said he was aware of a document that had been circulated, but not to him, of some 3rd party accounts for CWT indicating that it has been running at a loss. He said that other people thought that the Yacht Haven was tidier, in better shape and had never looked so good in its life, which he agreed with. He added that the merger plan had opened pandora's box and he had received a very wide range of opinions and some grumbles about other harbour related issues.

PJ was pleased with the way the harbour services had developed over the years, but was aware of how hard it been to also manage the Outer Harbour Project and had reservations about the mechanics of how the new organisation would be run so found it very difficult to either support it or not. He did however have sympathies with the Town Councils.

DJ felt that there were lots of details that hadn't been discussed but were being asked, but overall the project was about improving the community both sides of the river and would be good for Cowes.

RS didn't have a problem with it. Speaking for venture Quays he just wanted transparency and no conflict of interest, for example if he needed permission from the HM for something which might be in competition to the Yacht Haven.

GP highlighted the monopoly concern particularly from bertholders who he said didn't have specific representation. He added that local competition was the best way of competing against Hamble and Lymington and supported the idea for a public forum where it could all be discussed.

LM said that the board of CCC had a long meeting and then wrote to David Riley to say that they are not currently convinced that the merger is a good idea in terms of what it would deliver. They support the vision but think all the positive aspects can be delivered with a better partnership and better executive management between existing organisations and without the need for the merger which has downsides like the monopoly.

KL agreed with LM from ECTC point of view but didn't think his EC stakeholders had really grasped what it was all about which is why he wanted more time. He said that the port is not just about the river but also about the people that live around it and many people have lost confidence in being able to influence what happens in and around the river. He wants better working relationships but isn't sure if this is the best way to achieve it. Overall he thought it was too early to make a decision about whether ECTC was in favour or not.

LPW said the CHAC is really good but could be better and CTC couldn't support the merger yet. She was very impressed with JD and DJ at the Yacht Haven but was worried they might not stay there. She said that to bring the people with her, CTC needs a voice which they don't think they currently have. JC said they do have a rep on the CHAC but he doesn't always turn up.

GF said that CBA represents a wide range of businesses with only 17% being high street shops. He thought that people are loosely behind the project but want more information. He agreed with LM that there are other ways of delivering the challenges which have been highlighted.

BW stressed, as LPW had, that Cowes is much more than just people who go yacht racing. He agreed that more information is needed for example the board structure, broad objectives and goals of this new organisation and also what it's not going to do. He also felt that this was a really important moment for representatives to reach out to the stakeholders for their views.

CB said the first question CHC needs to consider is whether this is worth going any further with. He thought that CHAC were asking some good questions and admitted that CHC still had some due diligence to carry out anyway. He explained that CHC had been reluctant to spend time on very detailed planning if CHAC wasn't going to support the idea anyway.

SM said CHC was very much in listening mode and appreciated all the engagement which showed the strength of the CHAC. He guessed that the feedback had been supportive and unsupportive in about equal measures. He realises there are some key issues, eg monopoly, and welcomes other alternative ideas but accepts that there would have to be a very definite and strong mandate to take it forward.

JC said he had prepared four options as a way of trying to get an agreed response to CHC:

Option 1: CHC and CWT put more flesh on the plans and everyone looks at it again later in the year.

Option 2: Pause the plan, recruit the next CEO and restart looking at the merger in a year or two.

Option 3: Abandon the whole idea.

Option 4: CHC returns to being just a Harbour Authority and sells or gifts its assets to another organisation, eg CWT who also restructure.

JC then asked for other versions of these options.

GP suggested a slight amendment to Option 3 with a new structure with improved cooperation between all the organisations, and asked if delaying would create a problem.

SM said no great problem to delaying but there was an opportunity now. A risk of delaying might be continuing the status quo which hasn't really been taking the Cowes offer forward.

BW didn't understand the reason to pause as there was nothing to lose from CHC adding flesh on the plan. He suggested CHC should still come back with more detail.

LM didn't think anyone could argue with the vision statement JD had made in the previous meeting but thought that the actual merger should be paused for two or three years to see if the goals in that vision could be achieved without the merger, so a sort of Option 2.5. He said that CWL were concerned about all the moorings in West Cowes being controlled by one organisation. He said this was a great moment for positive change.

GF said there have been rumours about the financial health of the the CWT and could they survive two or three years.

JD reassured everyone that although CWT wasn't flush, they were ok and would still be around in twenty or thirty years time, no problem. He also added that the author of the 3rd party accounts (mentioned earlier) had apologised because their information was incorrect.

He also thought that neither CWT nor CHC were particularly strong at getting across the charitable work they might do. For example some of the feedback had claimed that Missisle was the only bit of charity CWT had contributed in many years when actually the list of charities they support in just a year is nearly a page long. In a nutshell they do lots of good work but don't shout about it.

He also mentioned a paragraph in the feedback which asked if the merged organisation would take over running racing and the answer was absolutely no way. JD then made the point that it was relatively easy to run a marina for residents that is between 80 and 100% full, but it's much harder to operate one for visitors all the year round in all weathers, which is what CWT does indeed do for the benefit of the town.

DR said that, speaking as an accountant, he was totally confident that there are no financial issues with the CWT. He then said that the main thing this has done is to get far more useful conversation going on, for example between CHC and CWL. Also, all the yacht club Commodores now talk to each other once a week. He admitted there is however a misunderstanding between the town councils and CHC as to the nature of a Trust Port and how the appointment of commissioners is set in law by the DOT.

He finished by saying if they do pause, they will still continue to try to improve the offering by Cowes to visitors.

CB said that a new charity organisation would open up a huge amount of new charitable funding which wasn't available to a Trust Port.

Right now as a Trust port CHC can charge what they like but they can't undercut local businesses. They can then spend their profits on stakeholder benefits.

JC finished off by saying that CHAC couldn't give the green light right now but they didn't want to abandon it either. CHC needed to come back with a lot more information, and basically Option 2+ probably summed up the committee response best.

Next meeting

Date to be advised

John Corby
Chairman CHAC

Appendix

Summary of feedback as of 5 August 2020

Compiled by John Corby CHAC

Five points:

1. This is a summary of feedback with specific points highlighted in blue.
2. CHC has already responded to many of these but their responses aren't included here.
3. We aren't asking CHC to respond to everything on Friday, they already have their own plan to do this soon anyway.
4. Some very important issues haven't been highlighted below because they aren't directly connected to the merger.
5. Some of the more personal correspondence has been edited.

Congratulations on the consultation for the combining and forming a charity status I fully agree

Sounds good. [If it's a goer, could the new organisation afford to take on Venture Quay and its development?](#)

Sounds a positive initiative.

If it goes ahead could the new body take over Venture Quays for boatbuilding, pontoons, swinging moorings, cafe/bistro and some affordable housing?

Broadly I support the Merger and other proposals [with the proviso that a clear and strong structure is put in place to monitor and control the executives and ensure compliance with strategy.](#)

"Both existing organisations are run for the public benefit and return financial surpluses back to our local communities and stakeholders. The idea is that, by combining our two organisations, we should be stronger together and more effective at providing and developing our leisure, yachting, visitor and event services for our customers, whilst also continuing to deliver our charitable objectives for our local community and for the enjoyment of current and future generations."

The Harbour Commission yes with the breakwater etc, but other than "Miss Isle" what has the waterfront Trustever done that justifies this statement.

I would be in favour of the proposed Merger.

I think it's a great idea and support it.

A plea for improving waterside access by public in East Cowes

I support the proposals because they **would create a simpler, more efficient and more effective organisation**. It would also facilitate swifter, more decisive action.

I observe that much of the decline in leisure use is due to restricted availability of berths at peak times / period. Many leisure sailors do not consider Cowes as somewhere to stay on a short-term or overnight basis because of the perceived congestion. Major regattas are a prime example of the problem. Cowes needs more berths and far more accommodation for regatta competitors.

The shabby waterfront also needs to be smartened up, both sides of the river because it is not sufficiently glamorous to attract anyone other than 'hard core' sailors. Cowes is a niche destination because of this feature.

Not a lot of detail here at this stage, the main concern must be the reduction on competition if these two organisations come together. Then on the other hand if this is done properly there should be the opportunity to reduce costs and make Cowes a more attractive destination. If this is one of the key objectives that would be good for Town as more visitors will benefit everyone. In principal I do not see reason to object at this stage, however I do feel that more information should be made available about the proposed deal and the benefits to the Town and our visitors. I look forward to hearing more details on this.

Do you envisage the new organisation to perform any of the roles that are currently undertaken by yacht clubs e.g. running racing, acting as an organising authority, Providing more substantial bar and restaurant facilities, involvement in the organisation of Cowes Week?

I have an open mind on the proposals but remain opposed until there is a consultation which allows a **full, frank and open exchange of views**. This isn't happening at the moment.

I strongly suspect the **Charity Commission will take a very dim view** of this once they become aware of the situation.

- 1 CHC main function is the safe navigation of Cowes Harbour
- 2 Red Funnel as the largest source of income should not be funding any short fall because of failed investments.

1. Is there a public business plan for the merger showing the financial viability and management head count consolidation envisaged.
2. What is the current and predicted surplus /loss for the organisations before and after merger?
3. Does the merged organisation currently need financial support due to loss of 2020 income?
4. How will the availability of annual berthing and the avoidance of a monopoly situation on costs be controlled?
5. Is there a charter in place to manage the real estate assets across both organisations and ensure they cannot be sold for re-development without public consultation?

MTP stands for Major Trust Ports.

CHC tick most of the boxes , however (your) issue is "Does the advisory body represent those who detailed as being represented"

Stakeholder Engagement Current Model

4.1 A fundamental principle underpinning the trust port model is that trust ports are accountable to their stakeholders and ultimately run for the benefit of those stakeholders. This theme runs strongly through MTP2. Central to the success of the trust port model is each port's ability to identify and engage meaningfully with its stakeholders in order to identify their interests to help guide the strategic direction of the port, as well as on more day to day issues.

4.2 The current model of stakeholder engagement is outlined in MTP2. This includes that: – trust ports are expected to identify their stakeholders and to include them in formal consultation on significant decisions – a trust port's stakeholders must be prepared to interest themselves in the port's operation and consider the interests of the port as a whole – trust ports may find it beneficial to establish formal stakeholder groups – trust ports should provide information and communicate this to their stakeholders – one of the key stakeholder groups for any trust port is the local community. Trust ports should ensure that there is an effective, continuing dialogue with the local authorities in its immediate hinterland. – trust ports should consider the need for local liaison and focus groups to ensure that the local community is informed. This should include a functioning and updated website, that could be supplemented by news letters – Open annual meetings , and other meetings where appropriate, should be held to discuss significant matters of interest to stakeholders at which Board members should attend

4.3 MTP2 also includes a non-exhaustive list of the types of stakeholders for trust ports, a version of which is as follows: – Port users – The local community

– Local authorities – Port employees – Related interest groups – Local and regional businesses – DfT and other government departments

Current company law already reflects the importance of stakeholder interests in corporate governance. The Companies Act 2006 puts a duty on all companies to promote the success of a company for the benefit of shareholders, and in doing so to have regard to stakeholder interests, amongst other matters. These include the interests of employees, the need to foster business relationships with suppliers, customers and others, as well as the impact of the company's operations on the community and environment.

2.9 Stakeholders have a particular significance for trust ports. In the absence of shareholders or elected representatives, trust port boards are accountable to their stakeholders. This has significant implications for trust port boards, see Part B.

From this I would think that you (JC) as Chairman should either be at the meeting or have the full minutes.

CHC say they have been working on this merger/amalgamation for the benefit of Cowes since September last year. I cannot find any reference to it in the "Advisory Committee's Minutes"

When were you first informed of the proposal? and "meaningfully engaged" as Cowes Town Council and Stakeholder.

Wight Shipyard would like to make it clear that commercial marine manufacturing will continue and expand on the Venture Quays site.

The intention is to attract larger craft that cannot be accommodated within the existing Cowes marinas. The Wight Shipyard marina facility is not in competition with any existing yards.

An example of the type of vessels that will be accommodated is the ninety foot Swan that is presently in the yard for refit.

I'm sorry if this is not what you want hear but I'm **totally against** the proposed take over of CYH and whilst I won't lead, I will certainly help any opposition to this. I understand that neither you nor CWT actually need any approval so all this public involvement is a bit of a farce anyway.

I fundamentally disagree that any Authority and Regulatory body should be an operator and have yet to see any examples of that working well. I also think there is a huge different between running and having staff in a regulatory role and that of a customer service business. I simply don't believe that prices will not be raised as I have it on good authority that is the plan.

This is nothing personal but I simply think the potential **conflict of interest outweighs any benefit and the monopoly situation in West Cowes is unacceptable** and will be looked at by the CMA.

At the moment CHC are regulated by the DFT and Trust Port Legislation. If they become a Charity or a Limited Company then the directors have full control and "Stakeholders None"

For us, there is a gap here, between what you are consulting on (the technicalities of the proposed merger of CHC and CTWT), and what we all really need to be discussing, which is how to re-energise Cowes and the waterfront. The tradition of Cowes is important for us all, but if we are to "Make Cowes Great Again", the traditional yacht racing DNA of Cowes needs to be grafted on to a more modern and forward looking vision. Combined with a clear plan and funding package to enable changes to the physical environment and streetscene.

For us, this is what we should actually be discussing, and the future of Cowes Yacht Haven is clearly at the heart of any scheme to revitalise the waterfront. What we want to know about is how the combined business/charity intends to take the Yacht Haven forward, and what you will do with the other assets that will be included in the enlarged group.

If the future plans for the Yacht Haven are ambitious, exciting and will draw more visitors to Cowes, and if the merger of CHC and CTWT is the best way to make these changes happen, then the merger is something we can get behind. But right now we have no real sense of the vision or plan, which makes the proposed merger difficult to comment on in isolation.

Two other points to flag formally

1. We have concerns about the muscle that the enlarged group will have in Cowes, with the link up of the Yacht Haven, Shepherds, Kingston and the other assets you hold. We do need re-assurance that the potentially monopolistic position that the merger creates through the aggregation of assets will be used in the interests of bringing more visitors to Cowes and creating a better destination.
2. We believe that the charity's aims and constitution should be drafted in such a way as to really ensure that the creation of a unique visitor experience and destination in Cowes lies at the heart of your thinking and ambition.

So to summarise, we really want to know what the vision, ambition and long term plan is here. What do you plan to do, and how will you pay for it?

If a change in the governance of CHC and CTWT is the best way to make this happen, so be it, but the merger needs to be an enabler for change, and it is difficult to comment on that unless we have a clearer understanding of what that change looks like.

Many people can document examples where Cowes harbour commissions actions over the last few years in no way reflect the ethos which Stuart is now

trying to infer will be present if this merger goes ahead. A leopard doesn't change its spots....!

Marine Employment

We have discussed on many occasions the importance of marine employment in Cowes, both in the currently thriving commercial ship building/reft/repair sector, and of course the wider marine industry in Cowes and East Cowes. More recently CHC shared some fantastic ideas for some new facilities at Kingston to support local marine businesses, many of whom have been displaced or are struggling for space due to the volume of commercial shipyard activity underway (sorry not sorry). This sector, albeit that it could use some updated facilities, is really strong but I am mindful that many smaller marine businesses need a place that enables them to compete on a level playing field with the likes of Hamble and Lymington. I therefore sincerely hope that, if successful, the new charity will keep these potential plans on track and therefore actively encourage the wider marine sector to thrive both sides of the River Medina. Furthermore when it considers funding for projects in the community I sincerely hope it will examine the security of marine employment closely.

East Cowes

I think it's clear from the wider feeling of the CHAC that East Cowes is equally important and as such very little needs be said on this matter except to reiterate the above. The facilities at Kingston should remain of utmost importance in order that marine businesses can thrive.

Cowes Week

As mentioned over recent years Cowes Week has seen a decline in participants but the shore side element has grown to a point where, in my view, there is too many race villages fighting for a piece of the action. As two of these would be under the control of the new charity then perhaps a focus on one really good race village would be a good idea.

In summary it's clear to me that this isn't a commercial enterprise and any concerns raised over perceived monopoly or commercial advantage are unfounded. If, as I believe, the intentions of the charity are 100% in the interests of the local community then I can see little downside. This is a clear opportunity for Cowes to inwardly invest in itself for the benefit of itself.

MP SUPPORTS VISION & PROPOSALS FOR COWES HARBOUR'S WATERFRONT

Proposals to create a single organisation dedicated to ensuring Cowes continues to be the destination of choice for yachting and events by combining Cowes

Harbour Commission (CHC) and Cowes Town Waterfront Trust (CTWT) have received the support of MP Bob Seely.

Mr Seely said: "I was very interested to learn about the exciting new proposals for Cowes and the public consultation by CHC and CTWT to combine into one charitable harbour trust, which would work in partnership with local groups and the community to maintain and build on Cowes' reputation as the destination of choice for tourists and recreational boaters.

"However, I do want to [make sure that these proposals have wide community support](#), and therefore I have asked that CHC and the waterside trust discuss fully their proposals with reps from the CBA and the town council and councillors to make sure that as many people are informed, and have the chance to have their say.

"This joint vision which could maximise the potential of the Cowes leisure waterfront, including improving access, enjoyment and use of the waterfront, has been talked about for many years and links to one of my key goals for the Island, which is to improve our visitor offer and develop high-quality tourism across the Island.

"[The proposals from CHC and CTWT to work with the local community and business could be key to assisting the future prosperity of the local and High Street economy](#), which is so reliant on visitors and the yachting and boating customers.

"I have offered to work where I can to assist both harbour organisations in taking forward their proposals for Cowes waterfront and with their important communications with the local community and also, if helpful, with other organisations and authorities."

Four questions.

- [What will the merger achieve that a Joint Liaison Committee can't.](#)
- The CYH was primarily established in its present form with the substantial support of Sir Maurice Laing. Can more effort be made to ascertain his wishes and to honour them.
- [The proposal creates a monopoly of Marinas in W Cowes. The concern is that it will push up berthing fees. It is not enough to say this is not "our intent". That has no effect at all if it subsequently becomes the intention. Will you give an undertaking that berthing fees won't rise more than inflation.](#)
- [Isn't quoting the three Trust Ports who have become charities misleading. They are much smaller and their primary objective is sustainability. Only one has a marina which it doesn't own or manage. We will be creating a](#)

significantly larger organisation whose primary objective is financial enhancement.

The Island Sailing Club is extremely supportive of the strategic objectives that have been cited in support of the merger and in particular:

To open the waterfront to the public.

To make Cowes a year-round tourist destination by broadening the appeal of the town beyond sailing and Cowes Week.

To have the town run world renowned regattas and sailing events.

To get all town stakeholders working together to create a synergy of effect.

However, this support must remain conditional until more evidence has been provided to illustrate how the organisational structure, the corporate terms of reference and associated priorities and projects have been defined and developed in support of these objectives.

Elsewhere, there are two areas of concern. The first centres on the creation of a town-wide marina monopoly and how the commercial objectives of this organisation could conflict with the needs of the ISC to provide plentiful and value for money facilities when the Club is hosting major events and regattas. The second concerns the intention to create a professional organisation to run events on the water and to help Clubs run events that are renowned worldwide. The need to improve the quality and stature of all water-based activities is of course acknowledged; but we suggest that the new organisation must work in support of the Clubs to achieve this goal and not in place of them.

We are grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the consultation and are keen to keep abreast of plans as they develop and would hope that our input would be requested during this period. We also note that this consultation process has had the positive result of getting the town's stakeholders talking to each other and in so doing, has help spotlight where there is opportunity and where there remains work to be done.

This response, to the initial stage of the consultation process, is jointly made by the Town Councils of Cowes and East Cowes. It is intended that, following the publication of the responses to the initial consultation, a further response will be made to the second round of consultation ending on Monday 19th October.

The overriding consensus of both Councils was that the consultation was being rushed and that there had been insufficient information made available regarding the ongoing aims of the new group. We are, therefore, extremely pleased that this has been recognised by you and that you are now extending the final phase of the consultation period to October. This will provide an opportunity for more detailed questions to be answered about the proposed merger.

It was noted that [East Cowes was not even mentioned](#) in the documentation and both Councils consider that this should be rectified at the earliest opportunity, if only to confirm that the people of East Cowes have been considered in this process by you. Clearly, new ways of creating an improved visitor experience is of paramount importance to both sides of the River and our Councils are keen that this should be achieved to maximum potential, we concede that change can be a good thing but only if that change can demonstrate distinct benefits to all stakeholders and, it should be remembered, that the public are key stakeholders.

Following a number of joint meetings, Town Councillors have concluded that there may be some merit in a merger of the two organisations but that, if this were to go ahead, the CHC and CTWT would need to clarify exactly how it would improve the prosperity and long-term interests of their towns and communities. Further, it would need to satisfy the Town Councils, that [at the heart of the new group would be a governing body that would be inclusive, diverse and representative of all interests of both Towns; and not just a carefully chosen, elite group which would in no way serve community interests, but rather, solely benefit the newly formed group's own strategic aims](#). The Town Councils are very

concerned that there can be no erosion of the demarcation between land and sea and of the responsibility for which each body is elected to serve; but rather a mutual respect and regard for each other. It is hoped that a willingness to work together may emerge from this proposal and that there will be openness and transparency at all times.

Councillors are resolute that *if* the merger goes ahead, for the [newly formed group to have any credibility, the governing body must include representation from both Town Councils](#) and this must be at the highest, decision making level. Therefore, unless the newly merged CHC and CTWT can guarantee that both of our councils, who are, after all, the democratically elected representatives of the respective communities, will have seats on the governing body, with full voting rights, and play an active role in the development of the strategic aims of the group, then they would be unable to support this merger.

We look forward to hearing from you when you have had an opportunity to consider these points.

We are very pleased to hear that there is an extension of the consultation period. We are [not able to support the proposal due to lack of clarity](#) on the projected outcomes and what the perceived benefits of the proposal will be to Cowes, the ordinary stakeholders, and to our Club (CCYC).

The vision seems to have many strands. More clarity of the vision would be beneficial. For example, we assume there is an aim to change/upgrade the

appearance of the Yacht Haven, the gateway as it is referred to. Whilst we realise this is just a concept it would be helpful to know what the initial thoughts are. As a club (CCYC) we are particularly interested in the eventing part of the Cowes Offer. Could more detail be provided on how a future relationship between the new Charitable Body and the Cowes yacht clubs would work? Would it be part of the charitable aims to provide sponsorship for sailing events because as we all know sponsorship has been in decline in recent years (and since Covid there will presumably be much less)?

It would help us to make a decision whether or not to support the proposal if we [could be given a detailed picture of the projected financial advantages for us and for Cowes](#) generally if the merger goes ahead. In particular we are concerned, as are many others, on the monopoly the new organisation would have on marina berthing in Cowes.

Provision of a plan of how the combined venture would work in practice and a [financial plan showing whether it is projected to be more profitable than the two separate entities](#), what its projected surplus will be, and how it is proposed to plough that surplus back into the Community. As examples:

(a) [Is it proposed to provide practical or financial assistance to waterfront premises with the dredging required to keep their pontoons workable?](#)

(b) [Is it envisaged that support will be given to small businesses, the training establishments and so on all of which are the backbone of Cowes on both sides of the river and still incredibly important to the prosperity of both Cowes and East Cowes? Would a grant system could be set up so that stakeholders could bid for financial support?](#) This would be something that might make the scheme attractive.

Our group of companies, which includes Berthon Boat Co, Berthon International yacht brokers, Berthon Lymington Marina, Express Cruisers, BHG Marine and Marine IP relies on continued competition in the industry, with yacht and motor boat owners having a wide choice of berthing, boat sales and after-sales service, and boat maintenance. Competition in itself is good and helps the leisure marine industry to thrive. We therefore strongly object to the proposal because:

1. there will a [reduction in competition in West Cowes](#), with all facilities under the control of CHC;
2. it is [indistinguishable from nationalisation by a statutory regulatory organisation](#);
3. [private enterprise is more likely to make a success](#) of the Cowes marine facilities than dead hand of the committee of a statutory regulatory organisation;

4. a statutory regulatory organisation should not be in competition with private enterprise, effectively having the advantage of its regulatory income to lower its overheads;
5. it is not appropriate for a statutory regulatory organisation to be a charity.

Many thanks for your time and discussion regarding the proposals for Cowes Harbour, including the merger between CTWT and CHC and the potential application to the Charities Commission. At this early stage, and notwithstanding further questions particularly regarding the allocation of funds, resources and responsibilities, we are unopposed to the merger as recently discussed.