

**Draft Minutes of the Cowes Harbour Advisory Committee Meeting
held at Cowes Yacht Haven, on Wednesday 7 September 2022 at 1000**

Present: Mark Southwell (MS) – Chair (RNLI)
Ben Willows (BW) – Deputy Chair (UKSA)
Cllr Michael Paler (MP) – Cowes Town Council
Cllr Tracey Reardon (TR) – East Cowes Town Council
Dave Casson – East Cowes Sailing Club
John Corby (JC) – Waterside Property Owners and West Cowes Boatyards
Peter Jackson (PJ) – Medina Combined Clubs
Dan Jehan (DJ) – Cowes Yacht Haven (Cowes Town Waterfront Trust)
Laurence Mead (LM) – Cowes Week Ltd
Bob Milner (BM) – Cowes Clubs and Classes
Lee Rayment (MR) – Solent & Wightline Cruises Cruises
Julian Shawyer (JS) – Williams Shipping (Commercial Vessel Operators)
Emma Stevens (ES) – Cowes High Street Businesses
Rob Stewart (RS) – AMC (East Cowes Boatyards)
Mike Townsend (MT) – Boatfolk
Leanna Lakes (LL) – Red Funnel
Ed Walker (EW) – Harbourmaster, Cowes Harbour Commission
Phil Hagen (PH) – Chair, Cowes Harbour Commission
Gary Hall (GH) – Chief Executive, Cowes Harbour Commission
Capt Martin Phipps, MBE – Harbour's Designated person

In attendance:

Fiona Fitzherbert-Brockholes (FF-B) – Commissioner, Cowes Harbour Commission
Sue Matthews - Minute taker

Introduction

MS welcomed and introduced new members of the Committee, Emma Stevens and Dave Casson. Capt. Martin Phipps outlined his role as Cowes Harbour's Designated Person. Under the Port Marine Safety Code (PMSC), the Harbour is required to appoint a Designated Person. He provides independent assurance about the operation and effectiveness of the Commission's Marine Safety Management System and compliance with the PMSC. He undertakes audits to ensure that the Port and marinas follow the code.

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Lora Peacey-Wilcox (LPW), Bob Holt (BH) and Giles Peckham. Bob Milner will be attending meetings in his place.

2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting held on 5 May 2022 were approved.

3 MATTERS NOT COVERED ELSEWHERE

Regarding the categorisation of waters, EW reported that he is still waiting for a response from the MCA.

4 CHC SUSTAINABILITY & ENVIRONMENT PRESENTATION

MS introduced Cowes Harbour Commissioner Fiona Fitzherbert-Brockholes (FF-B) who gave a presentation on sustainability and environment (*PowerPoint presentation attached*).

FF-B updated the committee on the Carbon Management Assessment which is under way, and the carbon management commitment, which is aiming to reduce the carbon footprint by 15% but the question is how. Larger projects will look at fuel and storage, site development, future fleets and fuels, and sustainable dredging. Using HVO30 is a key target to reduce carbon emissions but the withdrawal of the tax subsidy has now made it too expensive.

FF-B shared a video on the Solent Seascape Project, a Solent-wide project, which covers many areas including saltmarsh protection, oyster restoration and seagrass protection and explained the role of the Island Estuaries partnership, which includes harbours, and the work that is undertaken by the Island Estuaries Officer, Sue Hawley.

It has been noted that the seagrass has moved in quickly, starting just before lockdown, which has been helped by more easterly winds, more stable water and better water quality from Southampton but what is there will now need to be protected. JC asked if there is a danger that if the seagrass migrates to the harbour, that there will be environmental pressure to not put moorings down. FF-B responded this would not be the case as most swinging moorings and the ferry do not scour the seabed. It was also explained that if, for example, rare birds decided to nest on the breakwater, this would not be subject to any protection as the birds would be nesting on existing land whereas if a nesting area was specifically created, then that would be subject to protection.

In response to a question of developments at Kingston, GH confirmed that work is in progress to review the possible use of renewable energy and constant improvements are being made in health and safety

MS remarked on Wightlink's current information panel outlining their work on the environment and what they are trying to achieve. FF-B agreed that infographics can be enormously helpful. It was suggested that 'louder' publicity on what is being achieved would be helpful and GH responded that with the Carbon Management Plan in place, a baseline has been created and CHC will therefore revisit the parameters at the beginning of next year and report back as part of the Annual Review.

In response to a question on educating younger people, BW explained that every child at UKSA works on a module on water environment and sustainability, including interactive work, and there is a more structured model for those working on vessels.

RS reported that work was being undertaken on emissions and fuel efficiencies but things were not at a level yet to put on older boats. BW asked if there is anything that CHC can do regarding water quality as he has concerns that parents will not bring their children to UKSA because of damaging news headlines regarding the water quality. He is aware that the Environment Agency (EA) is responsible for testing water quality, not CHC, but that the information is sporadic, usually only twice a year, so if EA reports show the water quality is excellent, then the water companies will go by what the EA say. JS said we should be taking a stronger stance and that CHC can have a voice.

In response to a query on where we are going as an industry with electric boats, RS reported they are taking crew transfer vehicles (CTVs) all electric by charging out in the field, which is possible to do now, and building a launch for Shoreham, designed by Olesinski. AMC will be building the prototype so are massively involved. Offshore wind instruments put one million tons of CO2 into the atmosphere – Siemens Gamesa CTVs will start within a year and they can do twelve in a year.

MS gave thanks to FF-B for her presentation and GH confirmed an update will be given in the Annual Review.

5 CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

GH reported that it has been a busy year with events and visitor numbers nearer to 2019 levels. Some events that have done well will not be seen next year, such as the Flying Fifteens European Championship and the Uffa Fox Regatta. The Cowes Week team had a quietish year and it will be interesting to see what happens next year.

Installation work has started on installing two electric chargers on Trinity Landing and finalising the location of one charging unit at Shepards Marina. Unfortunately, the electricity supplier does not yet have a date as to when they can connect the chargers.

GH also reported that CHC will be working on a number of actions following a Carbon Management Plan meeting. The recent anonymous Stakeholder survey received 210 responses and the results are being finalised. An initial review shows nothing startling that is coming out and confirms what is already known. The details will be published as soon as possible.

Regarding Kingston, CHC is still awaiting the decision on the planning applications, but a decision is expected within the next month or so.

GH informed the Committee of the 125 Year Anniversary for CHC. The first CHC meeting was held on 7 December 1897, so plans are being put together to commemorate this. CHC intends to launch an apprenticeship scheme focussing on the marine sector, and, subject to Board approval, it is intended to launch some bursaries which will enable young people to attend the UKSA Sea.Change Programme. It is hoped it will spark interest in further education through UKSA or others. They are looking initially to support 10 students on 5-day course, to be launched in December.

Regarding the Harrison site, the planning application is still live. MS asked if any further conversations had taken place but none have.

5 HARBOUR MASTER'S REPORT

EW reported it had been a busy summer season with safety about on par with last year. The highest number of incidents relate to speeding and wash, failure of engines and towing. Commercially, there have been the usual CQS, and not many incidents with racing, so the clubs have got the message across to racers. Propulsion failure generally relates to boat owners just not knowing what to do or maintaining boats. Repeat enforcement issues are not there, it is mostly about one-stop education although they will be heavy handed with warnings that people have not taken on board. Where there have been written warnings, there have been no repeats. Jet ski incidents are nowhere near 2020 numbers and are on par for last year so this is a good reduction.

On the question of a dredging policy and measures being taken to address the situation in smaller areas, EW reported they are getting closer and are trying to get one provider and sharing the cost where possible. The stakeholder group is where we wanted to end this year with, which is about harmonising but the longer-term goal of trying to work out alternative use will take time. We need to get to a point where the MMO will issue licences and are happy. MS asked if it will be possible for the spoil to go up the river, and EW thought the amount was small really and probably one barge load. PJ asked who is on the dredging stakeholder group and EW responded that all marina operators and property owners, anyone owning a slipway or a place to launch a boat on the river. He has historic records and has tried to include these.

DC gave details of a major problem of siltation on the east bank affecting East Cowes Marina and boatyard. EW replied that there was no accelerated siltation in this area. DC said the level has gone up at East Cowes Sailing Club by at least two feet and that soon they will not be able to use the slipway.

EW responded that he understood but said that whereas in the past most of the slipways were used and maintained, many are not used now. CHC factor in maintenance dredging as they know it silts but within the river, businesses have closed down and siltation has occurred because if they are not maintained it will naturally build up.

DC said the club maintains the causeway but at the end it is not possible to get near it as it is probably 20 feet from the edge with mud at waist height. He said it will make the slipway unusable. EW responded that they commission an annual report and knows that over the last two years there is more mud transported into the Harbour but it is driven by weather and strong easterlies. He is currently waiting for this report and see whether this is a trend going forward, in which case they can explore whether anything can be done. The residuals allow them to see where it is being shipped in and shows it is not the main part of the river, but more towards the Newport area and the existing mud banks there and the Shrape. The Chain ferry and Kingston are the same as the last 10 years but EW said they need to identify if this is going to become an issue.

EW was asked by BM if he was aware of rigging issues on some of the Darings and whether the theft of a spinnaker from a swinging mooring had been reported. He was also asked if it is possible to have infrared or improved cctv coverage over more sites in the harbour. EW said he would look at this and infrared in terms of area of coverage although the cost could be quite high.

6 MARINE INDUSTRY

MS asked RS whether he had made any progress with trying to establish marine industry training that he had highlighted at the previous meeting. He wants to train his own people and has lost confidence in training providers - he would want to employ his own teachers and could probably take on 100 people if he had the people willing to come to train. He is not necessarily looking for 16-17 year olds but 21-25 year olds which is why he feels apprenticeships do not work for them. He said he needs welders and metal workers and the business is there but he is unable to get the workers.

7 COMMERCIAL VESSELS

JS reported they are still in the development stage for 115m blade and have started on new 85m blade. This replaces the 80m blade. He confirmed that the blades still go across the Solent on the blade runner and have an escort out of the river. MS asked what happens if they get even bigger and asked EW if he would close the harbour or have an exclusion zone. EW responded that as they are only getting longer there is no different risk to that which they have now, but that would be different if they became wider. JS said the biggest problem is the chain ferry turn. PJ asked about manoeuvrability and JS confirmed they are in constant communication with other commercial vessels. The chain ferry is their main problem, or strong southwesterlies can also be a problem. All have PECs in place.

8 LEISURE ACTIVITY

Regarding the development of Norris, whilst it is thought it will still have an affect it might not come to fruition. TR confirmed there is no progress or change at the moment and there is an extension until December for planning.

LM reported it had been a good Cowes Week with a good reaction from competitors. Racing went well and 496 competitors paid for four days or more. Last year the figure was 535 and he acknowledged that numbers under 500 is a worry, and certainly if it is around 400 it would not be anything like the Cowes Weeks we used to have. There are two issues, no capacity and moorings, and the need for a headline way of remarketing the event. However, the balance is that the sailors do like it being quieter at the marina. He is proposing to try and put together a Cowes Town 20% discount, although this has not been discussed at Board level yet, but if they can say to the town that they will lower entry fees by 20% as a one-off to competitors, it could be funded by the town. £50k is the entry income, so he is thinking of putting this together and see if the town would be prepared to put money in according to

their means and therefore try and market it as a town event. There is no full plan yet but will be discussed in ten days' time. If there is no willingness to finance then they will need to go to sponsorship but the principal aim is to try and get the town to agree to the £50k.

MS reminded Committee members that they are there to represent their different groups so should cascade information back and also get ideas from the people they represent. LM said that the town underestimates what sailors spend during Cowes Week.

Other regattas have also been successful this summer and the sailing has gone well. JC raised the business of moorings again as LM had highlighted the shortage of moorings for little boats. JC's view is that swinging moorings should not have boats with engines and should be reserved for boats without engines but MS responded that this discussion has taken place before. More moorings are needed for bigger regattas and LM pointed out that although we now have the breakwater, some of the moorings were not comfortable. In response to a question from MS, EW said boats could not be moored straight off the green as that is too rough. He does look at this problem every year but there is just not a viable option financially. The moorings are a commercial return but must be viable somewhere along the line.

LM said 150 moorings were out but many new people will not use them because they want walkashore and people no longer want to raft and sleep on their boats. They are capped at 500 boats if a solution cannot be found.

9 MARINAS, MOORINGS AND BERTHS

MT reported that it had been a successful year but largely with residential berths and their issue is that there are not many visitor berths. The figures are good but it is the same issue of not enough capacity although the number of visitors is tremendous. DJ said their figures were good, regattas are coming back, club cruising is coming back and foreign cruising too. They have good itineraries, sometimes eating on boats, sometimes in the High Street and have organised days. GH also reported that Shepards has been good too and they are pleased with how the year has gone. The events centre does well around events although is usually quieter mid-week.

10 PUBLIC USE

MS explained that this is a general heading for those not in business. We need good publicity but more general activity and must make sure slipways and access are maintained. IWC maintain some better than others. EW confirmed that there no incidents or worries with the way beaches and the harbour are used.

11 CHAIR'S UPDATES

In May, MS informed the committee that he had replied to a harbour user's concerns about the way the taxi bid was handled and of the service itself but has heard nothing since. MS outlined the background, in that a concern had been raised with him about the water taxi concession which they thought had been done underhandedly. The other concern raised was that the operator was not operating safely. MS explained that CHAC are not a regulatory body or a complaints body and do not carry out investigation but he needed to understand this more. MS therefore met with GH and they talked through how it works. MS reported to the Committee that it is clear that the process is open, in that if you feel you can do it then you bid. It is not very profitable on its own and the Commission can make stakeholder benefits to help. There was only one bidder and he was successful. MS was concerned about safety allegations and EW said it is licensed by IWC and it would be for them to investigate, and therefore advised MS to write to the complainant advising this and copying in EW. MS did this and has had no reply. MS has since watched the water taxi and has seen that they run according to the licence they are issued with. The person making the complaint had not put in a bid for

the taxi service, and the message is clear that if you have good evidence, then you must go to the appropriate authority with it but the complainant has not.

There being no other matters for discussion, the meeting closed at 1120am.

Date of next meeting: Wednesday 11th January at 1000 at Cowes Yacht Haven.

It was agreed that the meeting after January's meeting will now take place on 19th April 2022, possibly at the Royal London Yacht Club. UKSA have also kindly offered to host at any point, as has the Regatta centre.

Thanks were given to PJ who has been associated with the advisory committee since its beginning. PJ said it makes a huge difference to communication and is a huge success. The key has to be that those privileged to sit around the table must make sure the information is cascaded down and in return people should find out who their rep is and make sure issues get on the agenda. GH confirmed that he reports back to CHC from the meetings which he attends, and not just through the Minutes.