

**Minutes of the Cowes Harbour Advisory Committee Meeting  
held at the Royal London Yacht Club, Cowes  
on Wednesday 6 September 2023 at 1000**

**Present:** Mark Southwell (MS) – Chair (RNLI)  
Cllr Anni Adams (AA) – Cowes Town Council  
Cllr Michal Paler (MP) – Cowes Town Council  
Cllr Tracey Reardon (TR) – East Cowes Town Council  
Cllr Dave Priddle (DP) – East Cowes Town Council  
Cllr Karl Love (KL) - Isle of Wight Council  
John Corby (JC) – Waterside Property Owners and West Cowes Boatyards  
Bob Holt (BH) - Cowes Water Taxis (Water taxis and commercial fishermen)  
Dan Jehan (DJ) – Cowes Yacht Haven (Cowes Town Waterfront Trust)  
Bob Milner (BM) – Cowes Clubs and Classes  
Lou Newlands (LN) – Cowes High Street Businesses  
Julian Shawyer (JS) - Williams Shipping (Commercial Vessel Operators)  
Rob Stewart (RS) – AMC (East Cowes Boatyards)  
Stuart Tan (ST) - Red Funnel  
Mike Townsend (MT) - East Cowes Marina  
Phil Hagen (PH) - Chair, Cowes Harbour Commission  
Gary Hall (GH) – Chief Executive, Cowes Harbour Commission  
Jennie Smith (JS) – Deputy Harbour Master, Cowes Harbour Commission  
Capt. Martin Phipps (MP) – Designated Person, Cowes Harbour

**Guests:** Bob Trimble, Chair of Cowes Week Ltd  
Ross Edmunds, IWC

**In attendance:**

Sue Matthews - Minute taker

MS gave thanks to the Royal London Yacht Club for hosting the meeting and welcomed Ross Edmunds (Isle of Wight Council) and Bob Trimble (Chair Cowes Week Ltd) to the meeting.

**1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Ben Willows, Lee Rayment, Dave Casson, Clive Blount, Giles Peckham and Leanna Lakes.

**2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 19 April 2023, having been previously circulated, were approved.

**3 COWES TRADERS ASSOCIATION**

Lou Newlands gave an update on the Cowes Traders Association, formed in April 2023, with the main objective being to keep the High Street thriving and generate footfall. The previous Cowes Business Association (CBA) has now been wound up and LN's understanding is that any remaining funds will be transferred to Cowes Town Council to be used for the good of Cowes. The Cowes Traders Association (CTA) are keen to work with other organisations and successfully organised several activities during Cowes Week. LN extended an invitation to talk to her, Emma Davies or Linda at Rosalie's for more information and all are welcome to join any of their meetings. As there is currently no funding or website, they will be looking to collaborate more with the Council. Uptake by businesses is around 50% but this is expected to increase, and people are supportive. In response to a query from JC about the future of the flags and banners, LN reported that the License is now with Cowes Town

Council and is their responsibility. DP asked if the CTA included all businesses. LN advised the businesses were on the High Street mainly, including cafes and restaurants.

#### **4 CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT**

- a) GH reported that Capt. Shane Wood had stepped down as CHC's Harbour Master. Jennie Smith has stepped up into this role and will be supported by Capt. Martin Phipps, Phil Hagen and Jason Losty (CHC Commissioner) to ensure that Cowes Harbour is compliant with the Port Marine Safety Code.
- b) Regarding dredging, GH reported there may be a risk of some dredging not being undertaken next year because of licences and sampling and any queries should be directed to GH after the meeting.
- c) A number of stakeholders have approached CHC regarding increasing the number of berths in the river. GH is taking a fresh look at this to see whether there is the potential to have more berths and, if feasible, it would then be costed. He reiterated that the CHAC meetings are about two-way communication and those who would like to put forward any ideas should contact him directly.
- d) A new payment system is now in place at Trinity Landing and Town Quay and feedback has been very positive.
- e) CHC has funded the re-introduction of oysters into the harbour. UKSA students will be involved in the habitat, monitoring progress and taking measurements.
- f) GH described the new CHC website, promoting Cowes Harbour and encouraging people to visit Cowes, and gave a presentation of the new Cowes web-app which has also just been launched ([app.cowes.co.uk](http://app.cowes.co.uk)) with a focus on the water and the town. There will be a small, printed version of the Cowes Handbook giving tides and buoy locations. This can only be updated yearly, whereas the app allows for immediate updates. Each business in Cowes has been placed in the bronze level, with silver, gold and platinum levels providing more paid options. For those paid options, there is an annual fee although if businesses sign up for one of these levels now, they will be listed until the end of 2024.

#### **5 HARBOUR MASTER'S REPORT**

There was no report available for this meeting.

#### **6 MARINE INDUSTRY**

RS reported he has taken on six apprenticeships recently. He discussed how he is promoting zero carbon and green corridors for shipping, by posting vessels offshore, windfarms and modular battery systems. AMC own and lease the batteries and he has a solution but described the continuing challenges with Whitehall. Neither CHC or Fawley received a Clean Marine grant and yet £34m is being spent by Clean Marine on ammonia. He described how the Department for Transport has wasted £204m in the past two years but grants are given by Innovate UK and the standard is low. There is no investment from DfT and National Shipbuilding Office for the lower end and it is all going to big shipbuilders. There is a marketplace for the offshore wind industry and more support is needed. MP also thought there are similar frustrations with other harbours who are having to come up with solutions. ST shared that Red Funnel will be looking to bring in a new ferry in 2028 and will need to consider which type of fuel to use. RS went on to explain how AMC are currently making pontoons with paddles, an Isle of Wight invention and he has one in the yard now. GH expressed an interest in seeing these and will contact RS.

#### **7 COMMERCIAL VESSELS**

- a) ST reported that there have been no real issues but there needs to be more communication prior to Cowes Week with Red Funnel.
- b) MS has received further comments from the same individual raising concerns about the water taxi service. The previous reply given by MS still stands in that concerns should be raised with the IWC who licence the service. Commercial decisions on pricing are a matter for the operator because the

taxi service is not run by CHC who only provide a subsidy to support it. He said that in the recent survey undertaken by CHC, there were very few comments about the water taxi service.

## **8 LEISURE ACTIVITIES**

a) MS introduced Bob Trimble, Chair of Cowes Week Ltd who gave an update and summary on this year's Cowes Week. Laurence Mead has now stepped down as Regatta Director and whilst no decision has yet been made, it is likely the role will not be replaced. LM's role covered sponsorship, recruitment and liaison with competitors and general admin. Mary Scott-Jackson will continue in an admin role and the sailing committee will take on most of the work to liaise with competitors. The Board's view is that the regatta should concentrate on being a one-week Club-run regatta, be self-supporting and have good relations with all stakeholders in the town. BT will do all he can to foster the partnerships. He is Chairman of Cowes Week Ltd and Cowes Combined Clubs and has been working with the Royal Yacht Squadron to invite the J-Class and 12m yachts to the Solent in 2026 as part of 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Cowes Week, although this will not be held during Cowes Week itself. The J-Class will be the first week in June and the 12m boats have expressed strong interest.

BT sees the Clubs, through the sailing committee, taking much more of a role in organising the event, and that it needs to be a club event. He reiterated that the prestigious name, profile and heritage of Cowes Week must be protected. It is now on an upward curve, and it will make a profit this year, and it is intended that information will be shared more openly than in the past. It must also be careful of not making it too expensive as this is a major issue – not just entry but participation, eating out etc.

MS asked about boats returning to the mainland for Cowes Week parties. BT replied that racing has improved substantially in the last five years, but it must focus and work in partnership to make sure spectators and visitors have the best time ashore here. He gave an open invitation for people to meet with him and is on the Island every other Wednesday at Regatta House. His email address is [chair@cowesweek.co.uk](mailto:chair@cowesweek.co.uk)

JC remarked that he had heard that numbers are down and suggested that if that is not the case then the rumour needs to be nailed down. BT responded that whilst in the past the norm was closer to 800, last year it was 487 and this year 479 but he did not want to focus on numbers of boats per se. In the seventies and eighties there were more berths, but it was now difficult to find berths for 500 boats. He felt it was important to go with trends in racing and that IRC participation has gone down generally in the Solent. Discussion took place on the difficulties with sponsorship with many sponsors wanting coverage over a season, not for just one week. BH asked if regattas nationally are declining, and BT thought racing participation is down generally. LN shared that feedback from traders was that trading was down on Cowes Week this year, but asked if there will still be an onshore presence to keep people in the town. Following discussion, it was agreed that MS will circulate BT's email address and BT will seek to set up a whole group meeting. The invitation will come from Cowes Week Ltd.

In response to a question from BM on how important the 2010 Bribery Act, the fireworks and air displays were, BT felt the Bribery Act rules might be relaxed but fireworks are less popular now and being replaced by drone displays and that the Regatta does not see it as its principal responsibility.

b) MS noted there has been a large spread of events this year, which has helped to keep the season going, and GH reported that the cruise ship visits were good, with CHC providing a 'meet and greet' service for passengers and working with the cruise lines to inform them of the numerous activities and places of interest across the whole Island.

## **9 MARINAS, MOORINGS AND BERTHS**

a) Congratulations were given to Cowes Yacht Haven on receiving the Five Gold Anchors Award by the British Marine and Yacht Harbour Association. DJ reported that they are constantly being

monitored and are reassessed every five years. They have also received the Clean Marine Award which relates to environmental initiatives and are the only marina on the Island to receive this award. DJ said he is seeing more World and European regattas attracting many people into the Marina, and in particular the French, and feedback from them has been that they were surprised and pleased with the town, and in particular about everything being accessible and close.

b) MT reported a good summer for East Cowes marina with visitors every night, and GH reported it had been a good year with Shepards being particularly busy.

c) BH raised an issue that anglers are obstructing pontoons along the river and asked whether anglers are allowed to fish at Whitegates and the Grid Iron. It was thought that they are allowed to fish but must give way to vessels, but BH thinks this causes conflict as the wires get wrapped around propellers. GH will check on this as it was unclear, and it was suggested that if they are allowed to fish, then suitable signage should be installed.

## **10 PUBLIC USE / ACCESS**

A discussion on progress regarding the East Cowes Slipway was due to take place following the CHAC meeting. MS asked if anyone was aware of any other developments plans. GH updated the meeting on the Kingston development, and CHC are currently working with IWC on their planning conditions. It is hoped to commence a tendering process shortly with a view to completion by the end of next summer. Regarding the proposed film studio, no further information was available although it was thought the company involved have until the end of the year to raise funds. In response to a question from KL regarding the old fuel depot, GH confirmed that nothing further was known about this land and it is not owned by CHC.

## **10 CHAIR'S UPDATES**

There were no further updates from the Chair.

There being no other matters for discussion, the meeting closed at 1130.

## **11 DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS**

10 January 2024 – 1000 – Regatta House, Bath Road.

17 April 2024 – 1000 – Regatta House, Bath Road.