

**Draft Minutes of the Cowes Harbour Advisory Committee Meeting  
held at Cowes Corinthian Yacht Club on Wednesday 8 January 2025 at 1000**

**Present:** Mark Southwell (MS) – Chair (RNLI)  
John Corby (JC) – Waterside Property Owners and West Cowes Boatyards  
Simon Davies (SD) – Cowes Yacht Haven (Cowes Town Waterfront Trust)  
Ross Edmunds (RE) – Isle of Wight Council  
Leanne Lakes (LL) - Red Funnel  
Bob Holt (BH) - Cowes Water Taxis (Water taxi & commercial fishermen)  
Giles Peckham (GP) – Cowes Clubs and Classes  
Lee Rayment (LR) – Solent and Wightline Cruises  
Mark Scholes (MSc) – Cowes High Street Businesses  
Mary Scott-Jackson (MS-J) – Cowes Week Ltd  
Julian Shawyer (JS) – Williams Shipping (Commercial Vessel Operators)  
Mike Townsend (MT) – East Cowes Marina  
David Walters (DW) – Cowes Town Council  
Gary Hall (GH) – Chief Executive, Cowes Harbour Commission  
Clive Blount (CB) – Commissioner, Cowes Harbour Commission  
Capt. Jon Kidd (JK) – Harbour Master, Cowes Harbour Commission

**1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Dan Jehan (DJ), Lou Newlands (LN), Guy Shelbourne (GS) and Ben Willows (BW).

**2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 4 September 2024, having been previously circulated, were approved.

**3. CHIEF EXECUTIVE’S REPORT**

- a. **CHC Budget Position 2024** – GH reported that savings have been made across the organisation and CHC will finish the year on budget. There will be significant expenditure this year on new equipment and the new marina.
- b. **New marina** –
  - i. The Impact Assessment shows a £23m positive impact for Cowes in developing the new marina over a 20-year period.
  - ii. Sampling has been completed with results due imminently following which a full MMO Licence application will be submitted.
  - iii. JK has completed an extensive harbour safety risk assessment for traffic operations which has been signed off by the DP and is now in place.
  - iv. The planning application is being prepared to link the marina access walkway to Bells Landing. The old Guard House building is being converted to provide shower and toilet facilities. CHC will lease this property through UKSA who have the Head Lease with IWC.
  - v. The ABP Mer wave and tide report has been received and CHC will be liaising with Walcon Marine on how this impacts on the construction of the marina. Initial findings show that the flow of the tide is slowed down slightly.
- c. **Dredging** –
  - i. Dredging is due to commence in July/August and will need to be completed in sufficient time for the marina to be built by April 2026.
  - ii. MS said his understanding is that all the commercial users are comfortable with the ongoing dredging works which is currently around the moorings. LL confirmed that Red Funnel have an open, collaborative dialogue and they have no issue with the new marina plans.
  - iii. GH confirmed that those mooring holders who will be affected and have a main harbour south mooring location have already been notified that they will be relocated at the end of June to

various locations around the river during the dredging period. Once the marina is up and running, they will be offered a berth in the new marina. All the north moorings will be day boats only.

- iv. MS asked if there had been a proposal to move the marina closer to East Cowes. GH responded that originally it was going to be closer but they were strongly advised that if it was moved any closer it would entail dredging out more material and this would impact on the marine environment. The location now is the optimal location for it.
- d. **The season's regattas** – this year's regattas include the 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Royal Thames Yacht Club in June, the Round the Island Race, the return of the Admiral's Cup and the Fastnet Race.
- e. **Cowes200** – GH explained that it is the 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Cowes Week in 2026, and the new Cowes200 team will be exploring how to use this unique opportunity to change the way that regattas and events are managed in Cowes across the season. He reiterated that this is not about Cowes Week itself which will be planning their own anniversary celebrations, but they are an integral part of the Cowes200 team.
  - i. The Cowes200 team is made up of representatives from the town councils, yacht clubs, CHC and some independent positions, and the aim is to have 200 days of sailing in 2026 filling the schedule from April to October. Conversations are being held to entice old and new regattas into Cowes, including the J Class boats.
  - ii. Cowes200 aims to act as an umbrella organisation. GH chairs the group and discussions are already underway with very large companies such as PayPal and Mastercard. The ambition is to attract one or more of these major companies to look at sponsoring the whole season in 2026. If funding is secured, some of the funds would be used to manage Cowes200 but a good proportion would be put back into the yacht clubs and the town.
  - iii. Cowes200 will also need to appoint an event specialist with experience in putting together very large events. The assets available in Cowes will be assessed in order to plan how shoreside events can be wrapped around the various regattas across the season.
  - iv. A third appointment would be a strong marketing and PR person, again to be recruited externally. GH made it very clear that the group's job is not to manage any of the regattas but to provide umbrella support to help the regattas going forward and beyond 2026.
  - v. To get the project started, the group is looking to raise £170k seed funding. CB reiterated that Cowes200 is a completely separate organisation from Cowes Harbour Commission and whilst GH is part of both, CHC is a member of Cowes200. A recent advert for a marketing and PR specialist commissioner is not related to Cowes200.
  - vi. MS asked about the requirements of the big yachts and their containers and how this might be managed. GH is in conversations with organisers and early indications are that plans under discussion are acceptable.

#### 4. HARBOUR MASTER'S REPORT

JK reported that he has now completed his first year in post, which has flown by and which he continues to enjoy.

- a. **Audits and exercises** – these include the PMSC Audit, Trinity House Inspection and Audit, MCA Oil Spill Response Audit, Border Force ISPFs and internal audits. Exercises included the three yearly Tier 2 Oil Spill Response with the MCA in a joint exercise with Newport, and a successful large emergency exercise involving all blue-light agencies, IWC, environmental groups and Red Funnel. A separate report is available should committee members wish to see it. The harbour is PMSC compliant with 17 minor observations from the audit. A full review of the Harbour's legal powers has also been undertaken.
- b. **The HAZID working group** – this has been set up with stakeholders from the commercial, leisure and operational worlds to look at all the harbour's risk assessments and ensure that everything is covered from different viewpoints.
- c. **General Directions** – GDs have been reviewed and JK has had some discussions internally at Board level with CHC to look at three in particular, including speed over ground, a requirement for notification of towage in the harbour and a requirement for a licence from CHC to operate a taxi service. These proposed GDs will go out for consultation and there will be some educational pieces put in place as well.

- d. **The Waverley** – they are keen to visit and JK is in discussions with the CEO and Master and looking at Trinity Landing as a possible landing point. There is a slight discrepancy in the height although the decking is shortly to be replaced on Trinity Landing which will have a marginal effect on its height. He is also looking at fendering or an alternative landing site.
- e. **Abandoned boats** – DW asked about abandoned boats. JK confirmed there are two at The Folly and he is currently working through a list of those who have not renewed their mooring licence. A small, dumped crane in Medina Yard is also going to be removed. GH explained that terms and conditions of mooring licences introduced two years ago, require boat owners to keep their boats in a satisfactory condition and if they are not, then CHC has the right to remove the boat off the mooring if it is not rectified after fourteen days.
- f. **Incidents** – 168 in total in 2024 and the bulk of these were loss of propulsion. The campaign ran last year on making sure boats are fit for purpose and winterisation will be repeated again this year. Total number of incidents is 30% lower than in 2023 but this is mostly due to lower visitor numbers throughout the year which is around 10% lower.
- g. **Event risk assessments** – JK reviewed these and they will continue to run in their current format.
- h. **Dredging** – some dredging was completed for the RYS basin and part of CYH. The team will be back in late February/March to do Shepards, East Cowes Marina, Tides Reach, CCYC and Kingston. The work should be completed in around five weeks.
- i. **CCTV system** – this was reviewed and a rolling replacement programme with Trellis Works is in place with significant investment in the first two years.
- j. **Piles and pontoons** – six piles have been replaced in 2024 and another twelve will be replaced over the next two years. Budget has been allocated to replace Folly A pontoon, re-deck G pontoon and re-deck Trinity Landing. GH confirmed the maintenance of Trinity Landing is down to CHC. CHC has also submitted a Public Space Protection Order application to IWC for Trinity Landing as there have been 13 incidents of antisocial behaviour and swimming from there, but IWC have said there will be significant delay of three years due to their own backlog. CHC will therefore manage this as best it can through additional signage and patrols.
- k. **Recategorisation of waters** – a project is underway to recategorise waters for the outer harbour in Cowes, north of the breakwater, to Cat C to allow clubs, classes and operators to operate more freely in the area. Wave monitoring equipment has been purchased and deployed and data will be gathered over the coming winter months and then an application will be made to the MCA. JK will report on progress of this at the next meeting.
- l. **Trinity House mooring buoy** – a second attempt to move this is scheduled for late February. JK has contacted clubs to arrange a meeting to discuss start lines etc.
- m. **Cruise ships** – 12 ships will be visiting this year compared to 8 in 2024, and 14 are currently booked for 2026 with enquiries still coming in,
- n. **Flares** – JK reported that he is working on the possibility of putting in place an Island-based reception facility for time-expired pyrotechnics. A licence application has been submitted to the IWC and storage options are being considered. He will report further on this at the next meeting.
- o. **Harbour Awards** – Shepards Marina won a Highly Commended Award in the British Yachting Awards 2024. GH confirmed that the ambition is to work towards the Gold Anchor Award.

## 5. MARINE INDUSTRY

- a. MS gave congratulations to Peter Morton on his recent MBE.
- b. LL was asked about the reliability of Red Funnel ships until replacements are received. Reliability is currently at 95% and Red Funnel is frequently portrayed as an unreliable service but factually this is not true. The high-speed vessels are now at 98.2% reliability. The work on the raptors takes time because of their age and the need to find replacement parts. The confidential nature of the processes for fundraising mean that Red Funnel is not always in a position to offer more information. The design of the new raptors is slightly smaller in terms of CEUs (Car Equivalent Units) but this is because cars are now bigger. They will carry 150 cars, 600 passengers and are slightly wider (19m from 17.5m). The footprint is almost the same, as is the draft at 2.7m.
- c. The hydrofoil, being built by Artemis, is on track for delivery at the end of the year. Some small dredging just off of the Red Funnel berth may be needed or it may be marked with a buoy.

- d. Good feedback has been received on the explanations that are now given on the ferries for the delay and problems which occur, such as wave height etc.

## 6. COMMERCIAL VESSELS

- a. LR reported that they are booked in for the chain ferry refit will take place at the end of March.
- b. JS reported that Vectis Blades will now be shorter and so will not go beyond the stern of Blade Runner. They will also be picking up a radar for BAE Systems.

## 7. LEISURE ACTIVITY and PUBLIC USE / ACCESS

- a. **High Street Businesses** - MSc reported that it had been a very quiet summer and even more so in November and December. Salary increases are greatly affecting the hospitality industries with many struggling to survive and the challenge for the businesses will be to recruit and keep the number of staff that will be needed across the summer in order to deliver the very high standards expected by the visitors and crews. Failure to deliver on this could jeopardise the reputation of the town. He thinks Cowes retailers will welcome the input from Cowes200 and, despite the challenges which will come with having so many regattas and large events at the same time, businesses are looking forward to the summer
- b. **Marina visitor numbers** - these are down as they are for other marinas and reflects the poor weather and people choosing to holiday abroad. The shoulder season and mid-week numbers are lower too although dry-sail regatta fleet numbers remain popular.
- c. **East Cowes** – RE reported some levelling-up projects are continuing in East Cowes.
- d. **Cowes Week** - MS-J confirmed that the Notice of Race is in its final stages, and looking to open entries within the next two weeks. The Royal Navy guard ship will return this year, and the RNLI will continue to be one of the charities and an additional charity will be announced shortly. They are potentially looking at 450 entries for this year. The Swallows class is returning and other classes are being encouraged to return as well.
- e. **Promoting the town** – it was agreed that promotion of the town was key to ensuring visitor numbers increased. LR asked if a team is in place to greet cruise ship visitors. GH confirmed that CHC introduced a welcome ‘meet and greet service’ with a small team of two or three people two years ago as part of the initiative to attract more cruise ships. They are uniformed and provide passengers with visitor maps showing Cowes Town and the Island so many visitors now walk into the town. CHC communicates cruise ship arrivals in advance with the traders group so that they are informed and can prepare. GH reiterated that it is key for the town’s businesses to communicate with each other. LR asked how he can communicate to the town that he is bringing in 150 people on one of the Blue Funnel cruises. GH suggested he join the WhatsApp traders group and GH will also provide LR with the same maps.

## 8. MARINAS, MOORINGS and BERTHS

- a. JK reported that operational hours of patrol staff will be extended during the summer evenings from 1800hrs to 2100hrs on weekends and holidays.

## 9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will take place on 2 April 2025 at 10.00 at the RNLI Inshore Centre at East Cowes. MS will also arrange a tour of the building after the meeting for those who may be interested.

There being no more business, the meeting closed at 11.17am