

**Draft Minutes of the Cowes Harbour Advisory Committee Meeting
held at the RNLI Lifeboat Station, Cowes on Wednesday 14 January 2026 at 1000**

Present: Mark Southwell (MS) – Chair (RNLI)
Cllr. Annie Adams (AA) – Cowes Town Council
John Corby (JC) – Waterside Property Owners and West Cowes Boatyards
Chris Frisby (CF) – UKSA
Cllr. Paul Fuller (PF) - IWC
Bob Holt (BH) – Cowes Water Taxis and Commercial Fishermen
Dan Jehen (DJ) – Cowes Yacht Haven
Cllr. Karl Love (KL) - IWC
Bob Milner (BM) – Cowes Clubs and Classes
Lee Rayment (LR) – Solent and Wight Line Cruises
Cllr. Tracey Reardon (TR) – East Cowes Town Council
Guy Shelbourne (GS) – East Cowes Sailing Clubs /Medina Clubs
Gary Hall (GH) – Chief Executive, Cowes Harbour Commission
Capt. Jon Kidd (JK) – Harbour Master, Cowes Harbour Commission
Sue Matthews (SM)– Minute-taker

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Bob Trimble, Mary Scott-Jackson, Julian Shawyer, Stuart Tan, Miles Hamer and Mike Townsend. The Chair welcomed Cllr Paul Fuller, the Isle of Wight Council representative, to his first meeting of the CHAC.

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting held on 10 September 2025, having been previously circulated, were approved subject to the amendment to the list of attendees to include Bob Holt.

3. CHIEF EXECUTIVE’S REPORT

- a. **Marina Update** – Dredging has commenced and whilst there have been some weather delays, progress is good. The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) report has been received. Submissions will shortly be made for planning permission to the IWC and the MMO licence for the development of the marina. Both organisations have indicated a 13-week turnaround. Details are being finalised with cost effective options regarding the shipment of pontoons, which are coming from Ireland and for the electrical works for the marina. Planning permission will also be submitted for the toilet and shower block.
- b. **Marina layout** - This has been altered slightly, with the northern end now more open than on the original plans but the southern end remains the same. There will still be 145 berths but this gives more scope and flexibility to moor boats with rafting if needed, and there is some early interest from the superyacht world. JC asked about the allocation of resident berths and GH advised that there is an open list, and interest must be registered for the new marina - 94 people are already on the waiting list. They will be informed when the berths will be available which is likely to be for the 2027 season. CHC map where the enquiries are coming from which shows a good spread across the southern half of the UK, and a mixture of current and new customers.
- c. **Commissioner vacancy** - Clive Blount’s term comes to an end in April and CHC are looking to fill the vacancy. Ideally, this will be someone with the knowledge of the river, and the ‘ear and voice’ of the harbour. Those interested can discuss further with GH and JK and applications must be submitted before the closing date 31 January 2026. Following an interview process, the successful candidate will be invited as a guest to the March Board Meeting of CHC and officially appointed from 1 May. It will be initially for a three-year term.
- d. **CHC 2025 season** – GH reported that CHC will end the year on budget with the exception of some additional costs of the marina.

- e. **Visitor figures** - These are slightly down by about 2% across the season with bad weather having an overall impact on visitor numbers. PF asked how this compares nationally and GH responded that some ports and harbours have been down by as much as 10% so the Island has done very well. This was confirmed by DJ.
- f. **Fuel pontoon at the new marina** – GH confirmed there will not be a fuel pontoon but there will be two pump-out stations within the marina.
- g. **Annual Review and Report** – GH confirmed that a video for the annual review will be produced as has been done previously, as this gets significantly more engagement. As usual, there is an opportunity to submit questions through the website or contact directly. The review covers such areas as strategic plans and financial performance and PF suggested sending the link to the Council websites.

4. HARBOUR MASTER'S REPORT

- a. **Shetland Trader incident** – JK gave details of the incident and reported that the commercial vessel in ballast lost its engines and made contact with two vessels and pontoons causing damage. The MCA and MAIB were notified, and the MCA inspected the ship the following day, detaining the vessel until evidence could be provided that the engines had been satisfactorily repaired. A full investigation was completed by CHC and the ship's insurers are dealing directly with the claims. JC asked for clarification on CHC's role in allowing the ship into the harbour and felt the amount of damage done to one of the boats was underplayed. JK responded that a risk assessment was recorded and he spoke with the pilot who had more than 20 years' experience. The pilot had 45 minutes to make an assessment and was told not to enter if he was not confident. All tests were undertaken and the pilot was happy and committed to coming in, and it was only when the vessel passed the chain ferry that the engine failed. JK agreed that significant damage had been incurred by one yacht, but he was not aware of the likely cost of repairs until JC reported it at the meeting.
- c. **Incidents** – there have been a total of 146 incidents, 44 with propulsion failure and 21 were speed and wash. Propulsion failure is endemic across the leisure industry so the campaign will be re-run to educate boat owners on what can go wrong and the impact. DHM is undertaking an end of year review and will discuss further with other authorities what the next stages are. DHM is also exploring RYA funded videos to sit alongside existing social media content for 2026 and beyond. The only commercial incident was the Shetland Trader and a couple of near misses with Red Funnel.
- d. **PMSC** – this was reissued last year and focuses on facilities within port areas. JK is writing to all facilities in Cowes to explain what this is and the requirements on the facilities around the harbour together with a bridging document allowing facilities to see what responsibilities they have and the Harbour has. Workshops will be set up, and details will be given in the letters. The area covered is anything with access to the water with a commercial operation and includes facilities on the river as well.
- e. **Hazard ID Group** – this is made up of stakeholders around the harbour and used to check risk assessments. It has been very successful, meets four times a year and the next meeting will take place in February.
- f. **Safety and Regulatory Compliance Group** – this group has been reviewing health and safety policies and discussing industry wide incidents that may provide lessons for the benefit of CHC.
- g. **Trinity House audit** – this took place on 2 October 2025 with only one issue found, which was the red light on the north east pontoon on Venture Quays which has now been replaced.
- h. **Flare disposal** – this is now open and 260 flares have been received since October. Flares can be dropped off at Kingston or Shepards. There is a small charge to cover costs, and they are disposed of in Southampton. This is the only facility now on the island.
- i. **Training** – CHC staff are trained to the highest level and Fire Extinguisher, MOB and Oil Spill training have all been conducted with the teams. In addition, the Chief Executive, management teams and Commissioners have also undertaken some IOSH safety awareness training.
- j. **Cruise ships** – there are 16 booked for this year and it is looking good for 2027 and 2028, as cruise ship itineraries are put together three or four years in advance. Ten of the ships are high level expedition/explorer type ships, with smaller passenger numbers of around 300 but high spenders. LR asked for the list for this season to be sent to him, and whether the welcome team would be in place again this year. GH confirmed the 'meet and greet' was programmed in. The marketing team at CHC

are trying to highlight other opportunities on the Island for the cruise ship visitors and talking to the cruise itinerary planners and is focussing on the expedition class. JC referred to large vessels tying up on the outer wall of the new marina and asked about turning the boats around. JK advised that the traffic would need to be stopped in the harbour as superyachts are so large. JC also commented that superyachts will expect harbour launches and staff to help with ropes and asked if staff will be trained in this area. JK confirmed that a new rib is coming for use with the new marina and staff will be trained to tug the boats around. JK also advised that the first pontoon is 25m off the main channel. The maximum length of boat on the pontoon is around 120m and there would be minimum disruption to the chain ferry. CF also agreed that training will be important and to look at the risk assessments. JK has also had a discussion with Master of the Waverley with a visit hopefully on the cards, but he is waiting for berthing trials to be signed off. She will probably go on Trinity Landing or maybe the new marina, but will be tugged in and not turned around herself.

- k. **Pilotage** - this is very quiet with just 33 ships and has been in a steady decline since 2017 when the figure was 160 ships. It is unlikely to change as freight is now offered from Wightlink and Red Funnel. It is handled by PDPorts and small ships are no longer being used, so there is some concern. It was noted however that there are now more small ships and barges being used on the Thames for transport of goods, so hopefully a trend that will be picked on the Solent.
- l. **Swimming pool** – An ongoing issue has been people swimming off Trinity Landing. CHC have been looking into whether a safe place can be provided for people to swim in Cowes, from the public slipway just off the Parade. The plan is to have a robust temporary structure giving protection from tide and wash, 25m x 50m with access from the slipway and the next stage is to look at funding. Costs are likely to be around £100k. The project is likely to attract sports and community funding so JK and MHB will seek funding opportunities and discuss further with AA and the Councils.
- m. **Trinity Buoy and Snowden** – JK confirmed that there will be no change to these.

5. MARINE INDUSTRY

- a. MS confirmed that JS was not able to attend the meeting but he had reported that all was good.
- b. MS gave an update on the RNLI Lifeboat factory in East Cowes which is likely to shut in 2028. KL gave details of a current campaign and asked whether the CHAC felt able to write a letter of support to the RNLI chief executive outlining the reasons why it should be kept on and asking why it is being closed. After discussion, the CHAC agreed a letter of support could be written collectively making it clear that CHAC is representing the group of stakeholders around the harbour. MS will draft the letter and circulate. TR confirmed that East Cowes town council have also written collectively.

6. COMMERCIAL VESSELS

- a. **Red Funnel** - MS reported that ST from Red Funnel was not available for the meeting but he had reported that things were going well under the new ownership and the planning application for the East Cowes port area has gone ahead. TR has met and reported they were helpful but did not say much about the marshalling yard. It is reported that the Artemis is slightly delayed but on track. JK will be meeting next week with Neil Chapman to discuss depths and may get more information then.

7. LEISURE ACTIVITY and PUBLIC ACCESS

- a. LR confirmed that it has been a good year on the seafront although numbers are down overall. In addition, the itineraries of coaches are changing and more coaches are now dropping people on the seafront at Cowes which is beneficial for the town as well.
- b. **East Cowes Sailing Club** - GS gave an update on ECSC plans re the slipways. The problems with the various slipways came to light recently and in particular when the Club helped the blind Catalanian athlete Dani Pich, in his ambition to sail solo around the Island. Currently UKSA are using the tennis courts to store picos but cannot launch as the slipway is covered in shingle. Access to the Shrape provides a good area for dingy sailing, so any way to get access would be welcomed. Discussions have taken place at ECSC to see how this might be achieved. A report has been drawn up explaining how

the shingle moves around the Shrape area - the shingle is being fed from Norris Castle wave action and deposited between the groyne and the Shrape breakwater. The recommendation is to move the shingle from the slipway to the western side. This would not increase the amount of shingle at the breakwater but will have the advantage of protecting the sea wall foundations. The proposal is that ECSC will clear enough of the shingle, so the slipway becomes useable up the point of mean high water springs, and the shingle periodically moved onto the side. The costings will be managed by the club or volunteers and it is proposed to reuse and reopen the slipway but because it has been in disrepair ECSC believe they are required to get permission. The plan is to allow access to sailing dinghies, paddleboarders etc but not motorboats or jet skis as access goes along the sea wall so it is not easy access for them.

Some CHAC members suggested approaching Coastal Defence and the Isle of Wight Council as the process should be easy and is undertaken by others regularly. The question of where the shingle should be moved to was also unclear, and CF offered to discuss this and advise further with GS and ECSC.

c. Cowes Week – RT was unable to attend the meeting but provided the following update:

Cowes Week Ltd is still looking for sponsorship.

AA confirmed that Cowes Town Council will be involved in providing family entertainment on the Green as an extension to the activities on the Parade and East Cowes Town Council are also looking at hosting events. JK confirmed that there will be two big ships in for Cowes Week, the Trinity House vessel and a RN vessel to the east. There will be no cruise ships.

8. MARINAS, MOORINGS and BERTHING

a. East Cowes Marina 2025 – MT was unable to be at the meeting but provided the following update:

We had a really successful 2025 season. The marina was essentially full of annual bertholders, and then with the great weather we had for most of the summer we welcomed nearly 5,000 visiting boat nights.

With the successful sale of boatfolk to Premier Marinas we look forward to welcoming even more boats from our sister marinas on the mainland and to renewed investment in our marina.

I'm sure the coming season will bring more visitors to Cowes and the whole Medina river with all the events planned on the water, and as and when the new Cowes Harbour Marina comes on-line we will be able to welcome even more visitors and events to our harbour.

b. Floating bridge – KL reported that the IWC have agreed to purchase a replacement. Expressions of interest are going out for building a new floating bridge. JK confirmed that there is no impact on the floating bridge from the marina dredging.

9. REVIEW OF CHAC CONSTITUTION

MS referred to the previously circulated Constitution paper. It was agreed that it was fit for purpose although committees and names needed to be updated. It will be reviewed annually and changed to reflect who is on the committees at that time.

10. CHAIR'S UPDATES

There were no updates.

11. DATE AND LOCATION OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will take place on Wednesday 15 April 2026 at 1000. CF kindly offered to host the meeting at UKSA, Arctic Road, Cowes.

There being no more business, the meeting closed at 1140.