

**Draft Minutes of the Cowes Harbour Advisory Committee Meeting
held at the Island Sailing Club, Cowes on Wednesday 10 September 2025 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
Ross Edmunds (RE) – Isle of Wight Council
Chris Frisby (CF) – UKSA
Miles Hamer (MH) – East Cowes Marina
Dan Jehen (DJ) – Cowes Yacht Haven
Bob Milner (BM) – Cowes Clubs and Classes
Julian Shawyer (JS) – Williams Shipping (Commercial Vessel Operators)
Guy Shelbourne (GS) – East Cowes Sailing Clubs /Medina Clubs
Rob Stewart (RS) – AMC (East Cowes Boatyards)
Bob Trimble (BT) – Cowes Week Ltd
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 Lee Rayment, Cllr. Paul Fuller, Julian Sawyer, Mary Scott-Jackson, Mike Townshend, Jess Olden and Cllr. David Walters. MS welcomed Ann Cromie and Charles Egerton-Warburton to the meeting, who provided updates as outlined below.

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting held on 2 April 2025, having been previously circulated, were approved.

3. CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

- a. **General Update** – Cowes has been busy with various activities and events, and visitor numbers have increased. Work is being planned for a CCTV system upgrade over the coming months. The Folly A pontoons are being replaced shortly and over the winter. Fuel supply issues became a problem for all, including Lallows and Yarmouth Harbour, due to the closure of two refineries on the mainland. Certas Energy has confirmed that the issues are now resolved. GH has also met with a potential new supplier looking to open a facility on the island, so hopefully, there will be two fuel suppliers in the future.
- b. **Kingston** – the new hoist is now in use, and Cowes Yacht Haven is in the process of building theirs. There is also a new customer lounge and viewing area for customers having their boats lifted, which is proving very popular and also beneficial in terms of health and safety.
- c. **Cruise ships** – there have been seven visits so far, two visits were cancelled due to poor weather, and there are three more to come. The team are working hard to attract more cruise ships for repeat visits and new customers. There are 14 ships booked for next year, three of which are new to Cowes. Last week saw the team host an ultra-high-end luxury cruise ship company who are keen to visit and have booked two slots for 2027. Anchoring has become easier, and Cowes can now accept larger ships. The passengers are met by CHC's Meeters and Greeters, and business and shop retailers know they are coming as they are informed in advance through the town retail WhatsApp group.
- d. **New Marina Dredging** – this has been delayed due to equipment availability and waiting for the results of the pre-dredge surveys. It is expected to start in approximately one month, taking 16 weeks to complete.
- e. **New Marina** – CHC have been asked to submit some unexpected details for licensing requirements, which has resulted in having to pull together several extensive environmental

reports. Unfortunately, this has delayed the project by four months. CHC will therefore not submit a planning application until January 2026 now.

- f. **Wave Modelling** - Extensive wave modelling work has been undertaken and completed relating to the marina and the effect of wind, weather and tides to ensure that when the marina is built it meets industry standards. That data has resulted in a need for large, 6m-wide pontoons. This size of pontoon is not made locally, so manufacturing them will take longer than anticipated. The delivery will also take longer. GH confirmed that the project is still going ahead and moving forward but as there are some unfortunate delays, it is unlikely the marina will be completed in time for Cowes Week 2026.

4. HARBOUR MASTER'S REPORT

- a. **General Directions** – the two new proposed GDs have now been through the consultation process and will come into force this week:
 - i. Towing a vessel over 20m - written permission is required and a call on VHF69 to warn other vessels of towing operations. JK has drafted a risk assessment, drawn up in collaboration with clubs, which will be reviewed annually, and provides a manageable solution for the sailing clubs.
 - ii. Water taxis - Any taxi operator will need a licence from CHC, in addition to the Licence required from the IOW Council. There is no charge for this licence.
- b. **Patrol officers** – these were increased for the season, including extended operating hours, which has resulted in an upturn in incident reports and responses. Propulsion failure continues to be the biggest problem, a common issue across the South Coast.
- c. **Incidents** – there has been a total of 108 incidents, 31 were propulsion failure and speeding, accounting for 21 of these. Larger and additional signage is being installed in and around the harbour to address this issue.
- d. **PMSC** - There are some changes to the Code, particularly focusing on facilities, and the CHC audit is about 60% complete. There are no concerns at this stage, and JK will update further at the next meeting. CHC has identified 35 stakeholders who have access to the water and facilities, and so it will ensure they are aware of the Code.
- e. **Hazard ID Group** – this did not meet over the summer, and the next meeting is 22 September 2025. JK confirmed that it is useful and valuable to have input from around the harbour and suggested that anyone who may like to join the group or would like more information should contact him.
- f. **Trinity House Audit** – this will take place on 2 October 2025, and JK is not expecting any issues with the buoys or lights, which are regularly checked and maintained.
- g. **Fishing on public landings** – it is permitted under General Directions, but people are asked to bring their lines in when necessary. Recycling facilities are now located at Trinity Landing and Town Quay, allowing used fishing tackle to be stored in a safe place.
- h. **Flare disposal** – this is close to completion, although there had been some delays with the Council inspection. A contractor is setting up storage, and it is hoped to have this open soon. There is a cost of around £6 per flare, which covers expenses, and there is no profit to CHC.
- i. **Dredging** - this will commence in October/November for Shepards, CYH, CCYC and Tides Reach, which is in addition to the marina dredging.
- j. **Dredging spoil** – CHC continue to work with Lymington Harbour in using the dredging spoil to build up their bank on the western side of the entrance to Lymington. It is hoped that this reduces Cowes dredging stakeholders' cost of disposing of spoil.
- k. **Merchant Navy Officer cadet** – CHC have sponsored this, and the successful candidate has now commenced, having been through the interview process. JK has full confidence in him.

5. COWES 200 – Charles Egerton-Warburton of Cowes Combined Clubs

CEW gave a recap on how he came to be involved in Cowes200. Although Cowes Week entries had increased this year by 11%, over the past decade and since COVID in particular it had suffered from reduced entry levels as seen in race entries across the UK, and at the same time there had been a contraction in sponsorship. Last year, Cowes200, now renamed as Experience Cowes, had been formed by Cowes Combined Clubs in conjunction with the Harbour Commission, Waterfront Trust, East and West Councils and the powerboat associations in order to address this. The key objective of

Experience Cowes is to bring together the communities afloat and ashore, ensuring that both Cowes and East Cowes benefit from the joint promotion that Experience Cowes can deliver, building on the milestone of the 200th Anniversary of Cowes Week in 2026. Experience Cowes is a private not-for-profit company limited by guarantee, with a multi-disciplinary Board and rooted in both the local community and the strategic marine economy of Cowes. It will be compliant with the Companies Act 2006, will uphold a clear commitment to stewardship and community benefit, and all income will be reinvested in its key objectives.

The overarching objective is to create a season of activity beyond a focus on merely one week in the year, spanning from April to October. It has multiple aspirations of re-establishing Cowes as a leading event destination, not only for sail and power events but showcasing the many onshore events and attractions which Cowes has to offer, to the mutual benefit of all parties involved, and utilising this approach as a blueprint for future years. There will be a comprehensive marketing, PR, and communications strategy that includes an App bringing together all the websites and Apps already in existence around Cowes. With increased footfall as a result, there will come not only increased high street prosperity but also point of sale data which should be attractive to big brand sponsors.

CEW is asking for support and assistance in taking advantage of the Cowes Week Bicentenary celebration. He asked for feedback on the type and form of a reinvigorated shoreside programme that can be envisaged over the longer season and in particular opportunities for young people on the Island. Experience Cowes would very much like input into compiling the most comprehensive calendar possible of cultural, creative and community events planned for next year.

MS asked CEW to explain how it will work. CEW explained that, in conjunction with the App, which it is envisaged could be white labelled for any on water or onshore event, allowing multiple sponsorship and advertisement over the course of the anticipated season, an underlying payment and data platform is being developed in order to capture point of sale data which can then be monetised. The platform will be accessible by QR code and could appear on shopfronts, ferries, trains, stations etc. It will run alongside a payments provider so there will be no need for retail merchants and users to change terminals and no charge for accessing the platform. It is envisaged the platform will be able to charge third parties a licence fee to gain access to the data and all such money would then be reinvested in the promotion of Cowes.

CEW reported that both local Councils, as well as that of the Isle of Wight, are supportive. CEW has already met with a huge array of people across the many facets of the Cowes community, and confirmed that he is willing to go anywhere to listen and absorb ideas. There will certainly be a need for recruitment on the PR and Comms front, as to date there had been a lack of proactive comms around the Bicentenary and Experience Cowes .

BT commented that he would like to see more coverage in the yachting press, and there are some things that cannot be controlled but the programme will develop. For Cowes Week there will be an extra minimum baseline of activities and an extended programme of events in 2026 which will be added subject to sponsorship. He is aiming for the Red Arrows, fireworks, a midweek ball, high profile celebration events and special visitors. Moreover, CEW is keen to create a youth zone on the two Parades, populated by such entities as the Navy, RNLI, Sea Cadets, UKSA, the Model Yachting Association, and featuring for example the dinghy simulator from the Classic Boat Museum, to reinforce Cowes' marine heritage and seafaring history and to engage with youngsters.

CB asked if he was liaising with the sailing clubs, as most events for next year are fixed from under their own initiatives. He is also concerned that it is largely volunteers and clubs are struggling with this. CEW explained that the yacht clubs are very much engaged via CCCL and that the collaboration he had described as essential was in part needed to address the very concerns CB was raising about a shortage of volunteers.

MH felt 2026 is a short lead time and asked when the time will be to bring people together for a working title group. CEW responded that there will be a shoreside committee, which had been approved by both CCCL and Experience Cowes, and it was in his view important that this comprised individuals across the community beyond this. He is looking for volunteers within clubs and the community to help find people who are willing to give their own time to make it all happen.

CEW asked people to let him know who he should talk to. AA shared the idea of young people shadowing race officers, for example, possibly identifying them through a competition for young people showing that on-water experience is not necessary in order to participate in the events.

6. CHC QUALITY ASSURANCE & ENVIRONMENTAL OFFICER - Ann Cromie

GH introduced Ann Cromie, CHC's new environmental and sustainability officer. Ann gave an overview of her work and highlighted the following:

- a. **Green Impact** - this is facilitated by the IWC and open to any IW business. It consists of an online toolkit that provides actions a business can take to help the environment.
- b. **Fishing lines** – recycling bins are now in place for used fishing tackle.
- c. **Litter** – the Marina Conservation Society are undertaking a beach clean in September. CF advised that UKSA students also do regular beach cleans for both Cowes and East Cowes.
- d. **Sea Bin** – Ann explained that the intention is to receive a sea bin from the Hampshire & IW Wildlife Trust. It is a floating bin which sits below the waterline, sucking in water and collecting microplastics.
- e. **Seagrass** – Ann is in conversation with the Hampshire and IW Wildlife Trust and their seagrass project. They did a survey which showed that a large percentage of people wanted to know more about it and if they knew more they would make different choices. The survey also suggests that the yachting community and boaters are likely to take more notice of their harbour commission than of charities.
- f. **Environmental accreditation** – CHC are looking to achieve environmental accreditation with an end goal of achieving ISO 14001. While this will take time, CHC knows what needs to be done and what needs to be put in place.
- g. **EcoPorts** – Ann explained that this is a European accreditation with two levels – self-diagnosis method (SDM) to self-assess environmental management by self-certifying against the checklist, and PERS which is a port environmental review system.
- h. **Litter bins** – CF raised his concerns about the constant overflowing of the Council's litter bins which is clearly not good for the environment. Ann will make enquiries and investigate this issue further.

7. MARINE INDUSTRY

RS reported that he is working with the MOD regarding autonomy. The marine industry has to protect the North Atlantic and he working closely with the MOD to try and protect. A new 8 m fireboat is being launched this week, destined for the marina in Dubai. It is too expensive for the UK market. RS reported that it is a good time for manufacturing in the marine industry. AMC has built 15 autonomous boats, some working on the other side of the world and operated from Essex. MOD procurement is changing, and they are liaising and wanting to liaise with SMEs. There is £400m in the defence budget to be spent and £2b to be spent on electronic warfare and comms. RS said we are the forefront worldwide with what is happening with autonomy on the Island.

8. COMMERCIAL VESSELS

There were no representatives, but it was reported that it had been a good summer.

9. LEISURE ACTIVITY and PUBLIC ACCESS

There were no representatives, but MS highlighted that given what had been shared at the meeting from Charles-Egerton-Warburton, this is something that people need to keep on top of and how it is impacting on people.

10. MARINAS, MOORINGS and BERTHING

- a. DJ reported that CYH had a good year particularly with having the Royal Thames Regatta and the Admiral's Cup. The new hoist is a good investment for Cowes. He has been having conversations about regattas outside of Cowes Week and it is looking positive.

- b. MH reported a busy year which included the powerboats as well. Visitor numbers were good and there are a number of boats for sale. There had also been an increase in the number of rallies and Cowes Week numbers were up although he noted that Cowes Parade appeared to be quiet.
- c. BT reported that competitor feedback was positive about the atmosphere ashore in Cowes for this year's regatta, and the feedback was better than expected. He also felt that the Parade needs to be improved and integrated with the town to make it more of a showcase for the Island with Island representation on the Parade. The Parade does not make money for Cowes Week and he confirmed that he was not wedded to there being the requirement for a bar and music. Many local residents feel the Parade during Cowes Week has gone downhill.
- d. CB highlighted that Northwood House was buzzing and is becoming the big event, not the Yacht Haven or the Parade. BT said his main priority is to work with everyone in Cowes as Cowes Week cannot exist without its partnerships with others. It is now gaining momentum, and he strongly supports Experience Cowes.
- e. RE confirmed that Cowes Town Council had a stall, to give the council a presence and to ask people why they thought, and it showed that people agreed that the Parade needs to be more representative and informative. He suggested that it could be a showcase for what goes on the Island in the defence industry.
- f. BM said he had seen some decline in racing but they had had a good year although he would like to see the sonars out more often. The Royal Thames have gone into a partnership with the Royal London, but they will need to see how it develops for the 200th Cowes Week anniversary.
- g. JC said he was pleased the numbers are up but IRC is down, and his understanding is that with the cruiser racing classes, there are now two categories, so the implication is that there is far more casual yacht racing. BT said they analysed the numbers, but there is a Fastnet effect and the trend this year was that the rating shifted downwards in IRC, and larger numbers were in the lower rated boats which presented a problem in trying to draw lines between the upper end of the IRC boats. He will look at trying to alleviate this for next year and encourage cruiser racers.
- h. BT said that the intention is for Cowes Week to remain as a one-week regatta, but there is a need to give customers what they want, so a long weekend competition or five days of racing is also popular. The Cape 31s had a three-day mini-series, so they will try to be flexible for each class of customer and will try and deliver the racing they want. It is not in the Strategy to come down from seven days but offer regattas within it.

11. CHAIR'S UPDATES

There were no updates other than MS highlighted the requirement to look at the CHAC Constitution, but he will pick this up before the meeting in January and is not expecting it to change.

12. DATE AND LOCATION OF NEXT MEETING – 14 JANUARY 2026 at Cowes RNLI.

There being no more business, the meeting closed at 1130am.