Draft Minutes of the Cowes Harbour Advisory Committee Meeting held at East Cowes Sailing Club, on Wednesday 9 September 2026 at 1000

Present: Mark Southwell (MS) – Chair (RNLI)
Gary Hall (GH) – Chief Executive, Cowes Harbour Commission
Capt. Jon Kidd (JK) – Harbour Master, Cowes Harbour Commission
Bob Milner (BL) – Cowes Clubs and Classes
Chris Frisby (CF) – UKSA/Leisure sailing
Guy Shelbourne (GS) – East Cowes Sailing Clubs /Medina Clubs
Miles Hamer (MH) – East Cowes Marina (Deputy)
Julian Shawyer (JS) – Williams Shipping/ Commercial Vessel Operators
Lee Rayment (LR) – Solent and Wight Line Cruises/ CHC Commissioner
Leigh Pragnell (Cllr) (LP) – East Cowes Town Council
Mark Scholes (MSc) – Cowes High Street Businesses/Traders
Ross Edmunds (RE) – Isle of Wight Council Officer
Sarah Preston (SP) – Cowes Town Council (Admin - Comms & Funding)
Simon Davies (SD) – Cowes Yacht Haven/Cowes Town Waterfront Trust
Sue Matthews (SM) – Minute-taker

Also in attendance: John Corby and Tracy Reardon

1. NEW CONSTITUTION AND APOLOGIES

i. MS opened the meeting, and following the acceptance of the new constitution at the last meeting, he welcomed new members.
ii. Thanks were given to John Corby for his long service both as a member and Chairman over twelve years, and to Tracy Reardon, Mike Townshend, Bob Holt, Karl Love and Daniel Jehan for their continuous presence and representations over the years.
iii. Representatives will be sought for regattas, racing and major events in the town, and also for those with waterside properties. If there are any areas still lacking representation, then they will be advertised.
iv. MS explained that once the Minutes are circulated, members are requested to let him know within seven days of any changes or amendments they would like made, following which the Minutes will be made public and can be shared. He requested members share the information as widely as possible, as the meeting is a public meeting. The Minutes will also appear on the CHC website.
v. Apologies were received from Jock Rafferty, Jess Olden and Rob Stewart

Apologies for the meeting were received from Jess Olden, Cllr Jock Rafferty, Neil Chapman and Rob Stewart.

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting held on 15 April 2026, having been previously circulated, were approved. Due to this process there will no longer be a need to confirm the approval at the following meeting.

3. CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

a. **Marina update** –
   i. Dredging is now around 80% complete, and recent scans show that the eastern slope is stable. GH referred to rumours circulating that CHC have dredged without a licence. This is untrue, as CHC received the MMO licence in Feb 2025 to do the current dredging. The MMO licence that is currently being applied for is a development licence so the marina can

be built. The MMO are currently consulting with the EA, CEFAS, Natural England and others to seek their views.

ii. CHC have responded to various questions and comments from the MMO, so the application is now at the review stage. The MMO response is required by the Isle of Wight Council to finish its HRA for the planning application. Consequently, the application did not go before the September planning committee, but it is hoped that it will do so either in October or November. The lateness will impact on the building of the marina, which has a build programme of around 35 weeks, but this is dependent on the timing of the start

iii. In response to questions, GH confirmed that the design and planning application has not changed since the application was submitted. He also confirmed that the very large pontoons are needed to protect the marina from wind and tide and, due to their size, are bespoke items that are on a long lead time.

b. **Annual Report and Video** – This has now been distributed, and GH encouraged members to view it as it gives an insight into how CHC performed as an organisation in 2025 and the financial performance. The production of the video was delayed this year as a new film company was used, and they wanted to ensure good video content from this year's events could be used. The video can be found on the CHC website under 'About Us, Annual Report'.

c. **Events** – All events have been successful, and in particular the Round the Island Race and Cowes Week. However, general visitor numbers are down around 20 per cent, which is similar to other harbours and marinas across the industry. Noticeably, CHC has noted that maintenance of boats has also been less this year, indicating that boat owners are not spending as much to maintain their boats, which is thought to be mainly attributed to the world economy.

d. **Fuel** – CHC, Lallows and Yarmouth Harbour all had supply issues this year, and CHC are aware of the problems that it caused. Diesel can be stored on the island, but not petrol, so if there is a big run on petrol sales elsewhere, the island's fuel facilities cannot always get what they want. There was an issue during Cowes Week when both CHC and Lallows ran out of petrol for 24hrs, but supplies were retained for use by the emergency services. GH is in conversation with Lallows and Yarmouth to see if the situation can be improved.

e. **CHC Water taxi service** – Feedback on this service has been extremely good, and it is well used. Three new people have been employed by CHC who are all doing a great job. It is a stakeholder benefit this year and has operated extended hours. Two offers were also launched: a bulk ticket, which was very popular during Cowes Week, of £60 worth of taxi fares for £50 pounds, and a return fare.

f. **Email from Cllr J Rafferty** – GH referred to an email sent to MS from Cllr Rafferty that raised two specific points. The first relating to the Southern Water outfall and its proximity to the marina. The second regarding the feasibility study and financial business case for building the marina in the first place. GH responded to both:

i. **Southern Water Outfall** – The East Cowes outflow is located 55m away from the new marina. For the planning application and the MMO development licence, numerous reports have been produced relating to the proposed marina. As part of this process, many environmental and marine assessments have been carried out by ABPMer, looking at the impact of the marina and building it in the proposed location. It has always been known that the outlet is there, but Southern Water's data shows that it is considerably less than the outfalls in West Cowes. East Cowes is good, and in terms of Southern Water's action plan, they see no need to carry out any improvement works. They have acknowledged, however, that improvement work is required on the Cowes side.

ii. Cllr Raffery's email referred to nine records of incidents in East Cowes – This is Southern Water's data, but on drilling down, only five of those impacted East Cowes. The impact is measured at the bathing area north of the Shrape and not where the marina will be. The data shows four potential outlets that can have an impact on the East Cowes bathing area, but the data does not specify which of the five impacts were created by East Cowes outfall or West Cowes outfalls.

iii. **Business Case and Economic Impact Study**. These are two distinct documents serving different purposes.

For a number of years, CHC received repeated requests from stakeholders for a new marina, reflecting the shortage of available berths in Cowes for both annual mooring holders and visiting yachts, particularly during major regattas. Before developing the marina proposals, CHC commissioned an Economic Impact Assessment to establish the wider economic benefits that a new marina could generate.

The assessment demonstrated a significant economic benefit, with the proposed marina expected to generate approximately £23 million of economic benefit to the local economy over 20 years.

Following this, CHC developed an initial Business Case to determine whether the marina would be financially viable for the Commission. This was considered and approved by the Board. Since then, several iterations of the Business Case have been undertaken as more detailed information and actual supplier costs have become available. Cllr Rafferty was involved in this process during his employment with CHC.

The updated Business Cases have continued to demonstrate that the project is financially viable and makes sound commercial sense. If that were no longer the case, CHC would not be proceeding with the development.

There is also clear evidence of strong demand. There are currently more than 100 people on the waiting list for a residential berth, compared with an available capacity of around 75 residential berths. A significant proportion of those registered are based on the mainland, demonstrating demand beyond the existing Cowes market.

CHC has also received enquiries from a number of regatta organisers seeking to understand when the marina will be available and when they can begin making bookings. This provides further evidence of the demand for additional marina capacity and its potential to support and strengthen Cowes' position as a leading sailing and regatta destination.

g. **Seahorses** - MS also received a query via email on the question of seahorses in the area that the marina is going to be built. GH referred again to the ABPmer report mentioned above. Their studies confirmed that there is no seagrass in the area being dredged, and following a survey that was undertaken that extended to 20m from the marina pontoons and walkway, no seagrass was found.

h. GS asked what the impact on the marina could be if there is a discharge. GH responded that key information from Southern Water is that when there is an outflow, it is minor in terms of public health. The marina is 55m away from the outflow, and it will disperse. Two pump-out facilities will also be put into the new marina, which customers will be encouraged to use.

4. HARBOUR MASTER'S REPORT

a. **Safety** – JK reported it has been busy since the last meeting with 110 incidents reported on the HAZMAN system, and of these, one third were due to propulsion failure. This is a huge issue in Cowes and across the wider Solent. There were 18 speed and wash incidents and 12 reports of close quarters, with vessels having to take action to avoid a collision. The total number is down, with fewer incidents in Cowes Week, this is mainly due to proactive support from the CHC team.

b. **Vessel 'Salutay'** – JK reported on the 57-foot fishing vessel which was taking on water rapidly at Trinity Landing. Using CHC, RNLI and Fire & Rescue pumps, the vessel was raised enough to find there was significant damage to the port quarter, just above the water line. The vessel was taken under close escort and beached at Silo Creek with a boom rigged around it. A plan is being developed with the insurers and Arctic Shipyard for salvage and repair, and there was no major pollution. A significant incident was avoided due to the outstanding teamwork of all those involved.

c. **2025 PMSC Audi**t – CHC is compliant, and there were 19 observations stemming from a new issue of the Code so most of these were around wording in the CHC MSMS, and all have been addressed. The revised MSMS will go to the Board for approval and then will be available on the website.

d. **Hazard ID grou**p – The group last met in June and consists of stakeholders from different elements in Cowes and looks at harbour risk assessments to obtain different viewpoints to ensure the harbour is safe. It will meet again in September. There are 45 large risk assessments, and the group reviews five or six at a time. The Deputy Harbourmaster will be in touch with the members.

e. **Safety and Regulatory Compliance Group** – this is a higher-level group which looks at improving health and safety on the river and harbour and meets every three to four months. The next meeting will be looking at ISO standards for health and safety, environmental management and management systems, and training is underway.

f. **ISPS Audit by the DfT** – JK explained the audit, which is required because of cruise ship calls and the need to have temporary restricted areas that CHC have to maintain. This audit took place on 14 August 2026. There was one improvement notice relating to internal audit, as this was delayed and took CHC outside of the six-month audit programme, but this has now been completed.

g. **Flare disposal** – This is going well with a second full load of out-of-date or damaged flares sent to Southampton. The facility can store 300 at any one time. There is a small charge, but it is proving popular.

h. **Change of rules with dredging licences** – The MMO has changed the rules slightly when applying for a licence with a marine facility, in that it now requires Environmental Impact Assessment screening. Reports must be submitted to them, and they will assess whether a full EIA report is required. There is an additional cost and probably around eight weeks' work for the MMO, so factor this time and spend into your reapplication plans.

i. **Propulsion failure campaign** – This has been running for five years now, but the main difficulty is in reaching people who do not read the Notices or the safety advice on maintenance of boats on the website and so are difficult to reach. JK is working with other authorities on devising a campaign, together with the RYA, to try and reach a wider audience.

j. **Cruise ships**- There have been sixteen visits from cruise ships this year. One ship cancelled four calls because of a change to their itinerary and cited that it was a lack of interest in the tours happening on the Island. However, LR and his team did bring over those passengers who wanted to visit the Island. The CHC cruise ship team are aware of this and will be attending cruise shows to try and encourage the cruise market to come to Cowes. In response to a question, JK confirmed that cruise ships' tenders could potentially come to East Cowes, and he is in talks with Border Force. CHC would need to deal with a temporary restricted area, the same as Trinity Landing, and a reception facility for passport and bag checks. Small cruise ships could go safely along the new marina.

k. **Events** – The Round the Island Race and Cowes Week were very successful events with good numbers and few incidents, and the excellent weather helped. Shoreside activities seemed to be less popular although East Cowes did well.

l. **Pilotage** – This is very quiet, with nothing since early July. There is a small shipping market, but the requirement for bulk to come to the Island has dramatically reduced. There is nothing that can be done about this, but JK is working with PD Ports.

m. **Safe swimming pool idea** – JK is working with Sarah Preston from Cowes Town Council, and there is support from both town councils. However, funding needs to be sourced, and SP has been working hard on this. If the idea proves to be successful, then it could be extended to other areas, but the driver for CHC is the safety of those who try and swim off Trinity Landing where there have been some recent significant dangerous incidents. There was some discussion on access to Trinity Landing, but JK explained that this is a public pontoon, where people are allowed to fish or walk, and it is a designated emergency landing pontoon. The Police do sometimes undertake some extra patrols in the evenings around the area.

5. MARINE INDUSTRY and COMMERCIAL VESSELS

i. MS referred to the upcoming closure of the RNLI factory, and there are ongoing discussions on trying to find someone who might take it on.
ii. JS confirmed it is very busy across the company. There have been a few incidents with Blade Runner, with too many yacht owners not listening to the radio or not being mindful of what is happening in front of or behind them, resulting in occasions when Blade Runner has needed to blow the horn and forcing Blade Runner to a standstill.
iii. LR reported Solent Cruises has been very busy. They started a new cruise to the Needles, and this has brought people into the town by car, not coaches. They have been allowed to park their cars in the Solent Cruises yard and encouraged to walk into and around the town. The Parade is still very busy.
iv. LR also reported that Diverse Marina is launching another two boats, and so there is a continuous flow with lots of orders coming in for them. Wight Shipyard are also doing well.
v. The chain ferry is due out of service soon for the chains to be done, during which the river will be closed for a short while.

6. LEISURE ACTIVITY and PUBLIC ACCESS

There were some good events, noticeably Cowes Week and the Round the Island Race, with lots of smaller boats this year. Next year will see some big events including the Admiral's Cup, the Fastnet and the Royal Thames 250 Regatta.

BM referred to the annual Cowes Clubs and Classes Booklet and he thanked those companies that took space in the booklet especially the marinas. If any members know of any other companies that might like to take space in the booklet next year to get in touch. Copies can be picked up from the marinas.

Cowes Week classes - JC observed that Cowes Week IRC classes are down, but the cruising classes numbers are way up and very noticeable. That fleet is growing, as are the day boats and Flying 15s. These visitors are generally families on holiday, and so it is a market to encourage.

East Cowes Marina - MH reported that the marina was very busy on overnight and short stays generally and had to turn boats away. East Cowes is now a Premier Marina, and so super busy.

Cowes Yacht Haven - SD reported that during the summer's events, Cowes Yacht Haven was very busy and they are now starting to plan for next year. There are still a number of regattas running through September and October.

Trading – MSc is working on getting together a group of traders to think about events such as Christmas lights and late night shopping and is in conversation with Red Funnel regarding Red Jet timetables, to try and keep visitors in Cowes during the day and into the late evening. The area around Sainsbury's still needs to be upgraded. MSc reported that traders are saying Cowes Week was amazing and the atmosphere really good, and it has been a long time since that has happened. However, the weeks either side Cowes Week

were difficult, and it has generally been a hard summer and likely to be a harsh winter, with several shops now closing down and the town much quieter earlier in the season.

7. CHAIR'S UPDATES

None.

8. DATE AND LOCATION OF NEXT MEEETING

The next meeting will take place on Wednesday 13th January 2027,10:00 and the venue of East Cowes Sailing Club was again offered. MS gave thanks to ECSC for hosting this meeting.

There being no more business, the meeting closed at 1123.