

# THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF EAST COWES SAILING CLUB

HELD ON – 20 FEBRUARY 2020

## Attendance

Fifty-two members attended the meeting and were welcomed by the Commodore, noting that this was the 108<sup>th</sup> AGM of the Club.

## Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from: -

Jane Bates, Chris Beazer, Linda Bird, Alan Blenkinsop, Judi Brachi, Jane Brand, Carol Casson, Susan Clarke, Andrew Cleeve, Judith Cleeve, Karen Denham, Trevor Evans, Julia Gorton, Peter Gunning, Veronica Gunning, Danny Hadfield, Michael Maguire, Andrea Molyneaux, Ian Molyneaux, Sarah Moore, Lorraine Nixon, Jane Paull, Bob Spendley, Barbara Trelford, John Urry, Patti Urry, Geoff Waterhouse, Peter Whitmarsh.

## Approval of the Minutes of the 2019 Meeting – held on 21<sup>st</sup> February 2019

Minutes of the 2019 meeting were agreed to be a true record of the meeting.

Acceptance of the above – Proposed - Andrew Buchanan; Seconded - Tony Cole.

## Election of Officers and members of the General Committee

The Commodore asked those standing for the contested posts to introduce themselves to the meeting.

Ballot slips having been issued to members on arrival, the latter were collected at this point.

## Commodore's Report

Conal Grier (**Commodore**) had submitted a report to members on 17 February 2020. He wanted the report kept as a record for the Club's archives, but said that he intended to précis that report now. He referred to the sad loss of Glyn Davis, our former President.

In connection with the election process in hand and in the context of the honorary positions of President and Vice Presidents he explained that under the Constitution of the Club, the General Committee were required to agree candidates and to recommend those persons to the Club in a General Meeting. The Commodore went on to say that, sadly, a number of former VPs were no longer with us (there were now only two) and that the Committee had, earlier in the year past, decided on the appointment of Tony Cole, as President and had decided to recommend the appointment of three new Vice Presidents, as notified. He stressed that all had done long service for the Club and each had undertaken various offices within and for the Club. He stressed that these were honorary roles, but that on occasions,

their experience of club matters could be called upon. The meeting confirmed the appointment of: -

Tony Cole     President

Dave Casson   Vice President

Paul Denham   Vice President

Paul Walker    Vice President

The Commodore continued his report by saying that the Club had enjoyed a busy and successful year within the various categories of its activities; the fishing section had put on a good number of competitions, the cruising fleet had enjoyed a number of events, where weather had allowed, racing had developed significantly in the summer of 2019, the Wednesday Club had been industrious and made a significant contribution and there had been some enjoyable and well attended social functions, all of which, he went on to say, were demonstrative of what he considered the Core Values of the Club – referring members to his reflections on such in his written report (p2).

However, there were problems, or issues, which the Club had first to recognise and then address. He specified as a principle, the desirability of transparency and openness, citing the example of the introduction of the Moorings Waiting List. Secondly, the issue of Equal Opportunities (the Club having, potentially, statutory obligations in this area); we had not solved the problems that this causes, but we are at least aware.

Then there were external pressures which were remorseless and unavoidable; the Club had shown resilience and adaptability in the past and needed to retain those qualities. There is the challenge of trying to encourage younger members to the Club; also, as with many clubs locally and probably nationally, the problem of falling membership, which creates a risk to the very viability of the Club in the long run.

We also had to identify other risks associated with the assets and property of the Club. We have a number of material assets which needed to be maintained and sometimes upgraded. Anticipating the Treasurer's report, he observed that potentially we would need to spend quite a lot of money over a period of years. Fortunately, much of such expenditure would arise over time. He listed a number of significant matters which would need to be anticipated. He mentioned in particular the underside of the Centenary Room, where we needed to deal with rust in both the short and the long term. The pontoons - which would come up again later in the meeting, would need to be considered. The walk ashore pontoon was of indeterminate age, but at least thirty-five years old; it had come from the East Cowes Marina, when they undertook refurbishment.

The Commodore observed that some jobs will be challenging and will need careful planning. In the case of the last above, to do any major work, we would have to move some forty boats, lift the finger berths and in the worst case scenario – replace the piles. It was realistic and necessary to consider the potential problems.

In addition to the logistics of the work itself, we had to consider the implications of Health and Safety protocols.

However, on a more optimistic note, the Commodore noted a thread of general improvements which had been made; the Club had established the new race box in the compound on the esplanade, we have a new tractor and the site was generally tidier.

His overarching concern was that that of Risk Management; we need to develop a habit of doing things properly and safely. He emphasised that in the course of renewing our insurance, this year had been the first time that we had been asked by the insurer as to whether we had a Risk Register – (we had not, but very quickly rectified the matter and the Risk Register is now on the Club’s website)!

He noted that, notwithstanding the requirement to pay more than £7K in premiums, our insurance agreement contained a clear caveat to the effect that in the event of any incident in which the insurers became involved, if there was any hint of negligence on the part of the Club (meaning essentially, its Officers) the insurers would be able to reject our claim.

Defending the apparent rise in the Club’s bureaucracy in the recent revision of forms, he narrated an incident in which the Club had been in dispute with a former member over liability for that owner’s abandoned boat. The incident cost the Club a substantial sum in legal fees and ultimately our case against the former owner failed over the ability (in this case our inability), to show, beyond reasonable doubt, that the boat had been the property of that former owner. While offering apologies for the increased bureaucracy, the Commodore noted that all the changes to the revised forms have been made in response to specific events.

He took the opportunity to thank the Vice Commodore and the Rear Commodores for the work they had done. He urged members to read the reports issued before this meeting and then returned to the subject of planning and budgeting for the future.

He referred again to the walk ashore pontoon and noted that we probably need to budget for its replacement. The Committee had listed a number of matters that would probably need attention and over the next 10 to 15 years, the Club would probably need to anticipate expenditure of over £100k. It had always been the club’s tradition to be self sufficient, but to remain so would be challenging.

The river is silting; this is not just a problem for the Club, but affects the whole river. We would have to look for assistance from the Harbour Master, but we would probably not be able to avoid all the financial implications of this particular problem.

The Commodore reflected on the sad demise of our former President, Glyn Davis and his contribution to the Club over many years. As a permanent memorial, we are planning to dedicate the race box to him, with a commemorative plaque.

In summary, he complimented those present for attending – a good number and called on members to be “part of the solution” (to the Club’s various problems), commenting that there is a category of member who are quick to criticise and slow to help. As an example of a dedicated “unsung heroine” he mentioned Karen Walker and the amount of work that she put in behind the scenes. He reminded the members that we are a club relying entirely on volunteers.

Finally, he advised the members that he was resigning.

## Treasurer's Report

David Casson began his Treasurer's report by saying that we continued to retain the external auditors Bright Brown Limited – a decision and appointment that we had made two years ago.

Asked to comment on the entry in respect of the sale of the beach hut it was explained that the Club had been presented with a problem by the landslide of several years ago, in response to which our insurers notified us that they would not continue to insure it. Serendipitously, we were able to sell it to a lady who was looking for a beach hut. We no longer had to rent the slab on which the hut had been based and were able to consolidate our esplanade assets within the confines of the tennis court with the building of the new race box. We had bought the hut for £800.00 some years ago.

The Treasurer went on to draw attention to the significant increase in cost of our dues to the Crown Estate – Harbour dues and Crown Commission dues being consolidated; they had appeared separately in the earlier year shown.

Partly in response to these uncontrollable increases the Committee had decided to increase mooring and storage charges by about 8%, but the Treasurer reminded the meeting that this was after two years, there having been no increase last year. In response to a comment from the floor to the effect that this seemed to be above the rate of inflation the Treasurer agreed, but countered by saying that unavoidable costs have gone up significantly and in many cases, more than the normal indexed increase.

Repeating the message of the Commodore, the Treasurer said that the number of jobs that needed doing, or would do in the future was considerable and the number of members electing to pay the levy rather than contribute their time, meant that we had to consider increased costs; also, the Commodore pointed out, there were some jobs that were beyond the skills and resources of the members and there were Health and Safety implications as well.

The Treasurer went on to list a number of major jobs which were in need of undertaking in the near future one of the most expensive of which would be the roof of the south store, which is leaking. The roof is asbestos! (Asbestos has to be removed from the Island for special disposal; the cost will be significant – possibly in the region of £15K.) The staircase to that store is also in need of major repair, or replacement; the gangway to the pontoon required replacement – the Treasurer said that he had quotes in the region of £7.5K; there was the need to replace the electrics to the South Store; the supports for the floor of the Centre Store needed addressing and security systems including CCTV, may need to be upgraded in the not too distant future.

The Club's bank account totals (spread across three accounts) amount to just over £102k – which would not cover all the projects identified. We obviously have to prioritise the work and decide realistically what we can undertake in house; certain jobs are subject to certification – electrical work being an obvious example.

The Treasurer then went on to explain how we calculated what the Club need from the hire of berths and moorings to cover the obvious fixed costs (the dues mentioned above, for example), the depreciation of the pontoons themselves and also to ensure that they make a

contribution to the funds needed to maintain the Club premises as a whole. A total of c £22k is needed from the moorings in general and then the process of categorising the berths (mud berths obviously being a lesser facility than a full tidal berth) in a zonal system takes place to arrive at the £/meter required.

The Commodore interposed at this point to say that he felt some disquiet among some members, in response to which he wanted to state his view that the charges that people pay, in the context of prices elsewhere locally were quite modest – especially given the range of resources and facilities available. He noted that Cowes Corinthian had outsourced the club’s management – undoubtedly at a cost to the membership. While the two clubs were not comparable in many ways, the fact that we were able to do as much as we did using, for the most part volunteers, we were probably not doing too badly and as a boat owning member himself, he did not feel cheated by the membership and rates he had to pay!

The Treasurer went on to point out the amount of work that the Stores Team does (backed up by Karen Walker’s contribution) to enable the prompt issue of bills. However, he observed, the response of some members did not show the same degree of urgency – for some, he commented, the paying of their dues was something of a blind spot! The “right” to pay late was assumed. To try to counter this, he said that we would issue a Timeline of critical dates, which he then went on to specify: -

<u>Category</u>	<u>From</u>	<u>To</u>	<u>Period (months)</u>
Annual Membership	1 <sup>st</sup> January	31 <sup>st</sup> December	12
Annual Mooring	1 <sup>st</sup> April	31 <sup>st</sup> March	12
Winter Storage	1 <sup>st</sup> November	31 <sup>st</sup> March	6
Duty Period	1 <sup>st</sup> November	31 <sup>st</sup> October	12

The first three above are payable in advance; the last is chargeable immediately after the period ended, if appropriate. He stressed that, the Levy being due and unpaid after the end of the Duty Period, membership would not be open for the following year.

He went on to say, in respect of our forms, we have now separated ‘mooring’ and ‘storage’; he said that the new information was required for insurance purposes, noting that for the haul-out of any of our larger boats, third party indemnity to the value of £2m was required.

He also explained how the Duty Waiver worked for the benefit of a member.

The Commodore called for a formal vote on the acceptance of the Accounts. Proposed – Torsten Richter; Seconded - Andrew Buchanan.

### **Interval**

During which the ballot sheets were collected and counted. Of the 68 issued five were not returned.

## Club Development

The Commodore opened by advising members present that the Commissioners have a plan for the River Medina, which they are in the process of executing through the agency of the Harbourmaster. The plan is intended to support sailing –recent developments should not be construed negatively – and those plans include the development of the pontoons in the river. He reminded members that, contrary to some opinion, we have no absolute rights to anything on the river; we are there with the consent of the Crown Commissioners, essentially.

Their provisional plan is to develop and lease back the pontoons around the Club's front. They have already commenced this process elsewhere in the river and that process will continue. To construct a continuous pontoon from D all the way north to the dolphin is their preferred plan and we would have concessions within this. Inevitably, the Club will be affected and this will apply particularly to tidal berths, but in discussions to date with the Harbourmaster, the latter have shown considerable willingness to be flexible. Hence, we do have some options, but members have to appreciate that if we reject all the Harbourmaster's proposals, we are likely to lose control of the hammerhead, which they can and would take over.

The essential point that the membership should grasp is that under the scheme the responsibility for the maintenance of the pontoons and the piles to which they are secured will fall to the CHC. We would seem to have all the benefit with none of the attendant liabilities of bearing responsibility for the piles, in particular, around our front.

The Commodore expressed his opinion that ideally the Club should press for a ten year agreement, with break clauses and the option to roll over the terms of an agreement for an indefinite period beyond that.

He went on to present our options (assuming that the Club will enter into an agreement with CHC) and going from the least ambitious: -

- a) To replace the Hammerhead under the terms of a lease;
- b) To include, with the hammerhead (two standard pontoon lengths in itself), three additional pontoons, (which we would then be responsible for letting);
- c) The most ambitious – to take on four or five of the intended pontoons.

In all cases, the Club would be able to set its own pricing regime on the additional spaces available, albeit, the sub-leases would have to reflect the same terms and conditions as those of our own lease with CHC.

There would be significant cost benefits; for example, the hammerhead (currently our responsibility) represents both a benefit (i.e. we have the sole right to its usage) and a burden (i.e. we have to maintain it at our own expense). If the latter becomes the responsibility of the Harbourmaster, the opportunities open up for the Club and we have to ask ourselves how we could use that opportunity. He thought that we could improve things for those with tidal berths; we could increase the scope for tidal stops and in the exercise of the other options, we would increase the number of club berths – allowing 10m per berth. Yachts, being inherently less manoeuvrable than motor boats, could generally be allocated the outer berths.

The provisional planning would ensure that security will not be compromised and discussions were ongoing regarding the siting of a security gate. In fact, suitably placed, the Club's security could be improved by the inclusion of a security gate.

Although the original plans envisaged a continuous run of pontoons as mentioned above, they have recently been amended to retain the current gap between D pontoon and the hammerhead.

Different opinions were expressed from the floor concerning the proposed connection and also the provision of services to the pontoons. Some said that they would be happy to pay significantly more for the benefit of being able to walk ashore and to have water and electricity; others clearly did not – preferring keep mooring fees as low as possible. Under the plans, there would be pontoons to the north of those of the Club and with facilities; these would probably be leased by the Harbourmaster at £260.00 per meter.

The Commodore was obliged to stress that the Club had not made a decision – we have not come to an agreement in discussions with the Harbourmaster. The option to have a continuous stretch from D to the hammerhead and northwards was still available. The Club would have to decide at an EGM in due course. If those currently on D or E wanted the facility of walk ashore, with the attendant increase in fees, we would have to assess the practicability of moving them – it cannot be guaranteed.

One or two further suggestions were made from the floor – one to connect D pontoon to the land west of GKN's front (obviously with their consent) and the other was to raise the link between D and the hammerhead to enable tenders to be rowed under it. The Commodore commented that CHC would reject the idea of the bridge.

An interrupted line of pontoons would have its inconveniences. In the original plan, the intention was to run power to all pontoons at a significant increase to the charges. Some people currently on D would have welcomed the walk ashore and although the plan would be (assuming the gap between D and the hammerhead is retained) to move those people to the north and the new pontoons, where they would have the walk-ashore facility; however, it was argued that the tidal effect would be more strongly felt on the more northerly pontoons. Concern was expressed that in the publicly available plans the continuous pontoon plan is still shown. The Commodore assured the meeting that the subject was not closed and that the Club's wishes would be respected. It was suggested that we could consider developing a Marina, but this would probably not receive planning permission and would involve a considerable sum of money outside the Club's resources. The Commodore admitted that the idea had not been considered, but repeated that he thought that the likelihood of the Crown Commission giving their consent to such a plan (given the manifest problems of silting in the river) was very small. The development would involve dredging in the first place and probably frequent subsequent dredging to maintain viability and dredging is very expensive.

The Club really needs more deep water berths and some dredging. In response to a question from the floor concerning E pontoon, the Commodore assured the members that nothing happens to that pontoon in the current phase of planning. Expanding on his view of the Club's general requirements, he said that we need a mix of low cost berths, with the availability of more expensive berths with better facilities, including walk ashore. He further

expressed the thought that, with the scheme in place, the Harbourmaster might act as a recruiting sergeant for us, by placing boats on the new pontoons, which would not have access to East Cowes – unless the owners became members of the Club. It is an absolute of our bargaining position that non-members will not have access to the shore through our premises.

The Commodore then went on to provide some figures from which minimum recovery rates can be calculated to ensure breakeven. Unlike our current situation, the amount we would be charged by CHC would be inclusive of both Harbour and Crown dues. For the fully serviced, walk ashore pontoons, he felt that we could charge £260.00/m/annum. Calculations of a standard berth length have been made – clearly there is a need to allow for manoeuvring in and out of spaces.

If the Club is willing to take on more pontoons, while the need to fill the additional berths would remain imperative, it is reasonable to assume that we could and he felt that at these rates, the expansion of the Clubs berthing facilities would be about cost neutral.

The money side is not the only consideration, provided the Club is more or less paying its way; we want a good deal from the proposed contract, but there is also the additional service facility to take into consideration. If our charges are pitched correctly the arrangement will not cost us anything while we stand to lose a lot of risk and uncertainty – the cost of material dilapidation to our properties and the piles for which we would otherwise have to provide in the future, as outlined above in both the Commodore's and the Treasurer's reports. We will still own the walk ashore pontoon, against the depreciation of which we will still have to make provision, but otherwise, we would be able to divert much of our pontoon replacement fund into the buildings etc.

Various ideas and objections were floated from the floor, including the idea of joining D Pontoon to the land. The comment was made that the new scheme would involve a lot of rowing for some CG thought that this was unlikely to pass muster with CHC because of the silting issue. Another idea to overcome the corridor effect of an uninterrupted line of pontoons was to have a bridge, effectively, under which dinghies could pass if bound for outer berths.

In answer to a question, CG said the E Pontoon would not be affected by the plans currently under discussion.

The Commodore said that the principal objectives were to gain access to more deep water berths; to have access to some dredging around the berths on our own pontoon to the east of the hammerhead, emphasising that the cost of dredging on a regular basis is considerable. We would have a range of berth, from the low cost mud berths to possibly fully serviced, deep water berths – the latter at a considerably greater cost. He thought the scheme might bring us new members as infill to the new sections. He stressed that under the scheme, there was no way that non-members would have walk-ashore access to the town through our club.

The Commodore outlined, in detail, financial details pertinent to the plan which had already been set out in his written report, which had been issued to the membership prior to the meeting. To avoid the need to repeat such detail here, the said Report should be deemed a

supplement to these Minutes and will be kept in the records of the Club accordingly. (The relevant report is headed –“East Cowes Sailing Club Pontoon Development proposals – ECSC in conjunction with Cowes Harbour Commission” and is held electronically as a pdf document with the title –“AGM-FV-appraisal-doc.2”)

At this point, the Commodore, having largely finished delivering his thoughts on the subject, Richard Davis urged members who had doubts, or who wanted to discuss the scheme, to approach the General Committee.

A straw poll (not in any way to be considered a formal vote) seemed to indicate a general approval of the broad proposals.

Discussions with the Harbourmaster will continue – leading up to the point at which a draft contract is prepared, at which point final approval or otherwise, will be given by the Club at a General Meeting.

In summing up, the Commodore said that he thought that he was confident that we could achieve a sound deal that would be to the long term benefit of the Club

## **Results**

Sixty-three ballot papers had been submitted and the following are duly elected: -

### General Committee places (unspecified roles)

Peter Mason 53

David Tebay 42

Paul Walker 28

### Rear Commodore – Social

Linda Richter 40

## **Item 8 – Proposed Rule Change**

This was in respect of the granting of exemption to members on health grounds; the current rule requires an annual re-application. The motion was to remove that stipulation by the deletion of the final sentence of sub-clause 21.5 – viz. “Exemption notices will be re-appraised annually by the General Committee”.

Proposed Dave Bonham

Seconded

Andrew Buchannan

Being approved unanimously by a show of hands, the Rule is accordingly amended.

## **Closing Matters**

Finally, the President, Tony Cole spoke to propose a vote of thanks to Conal Grier for his work as Commodore and to propose that he be seconded to the General Committee for the duration of the CHC negotiations. The proposal was seconded by David Nixon and carried.

Finally, David Nixon, the new Commodore, also gave an appreciation of Conal's contribution to the Club during his term, noting that we were in a period of significant change.

**The Meeting closed at 22:10 hours**