

Minutes of the sixtieth meeting of the Bembridge Harbour Advisory Group (BHAG) held on Thursday 11th September 2025 at 0930 at the Bembridge Harbour Office

In attendance: Malcolm Thorpe (MT - BHA – Chairman), Fiona Thorpe (FT - BHA), Mike Samuelson (MS - BHUG), Martin Groom (MG - BPC), Laurence Blackburn (BSC), Jim Robinson (JR - local boatyards), Nigel Van Nuffelen (NVN - BHYC), Bella Hewitt (St Helens PC - BH), Jack Miskin (JM - BHA).

1. Apologies and welcome

Apologies from Alan Doe and John Keyworth and a written RNLI report received from JK. A new representative from St Helens Parish Council, Bella Hewitt, was welcomed to the meeting. Apologies from Andrew Phillips (St Helens PC).

2. Minutes of the meeting held on 17th June 2025 and Matters Arising

No matters arising that are not included in Agenda items or covered under AOB.

3. Harbour Report by Jack Miskin

1. Safety & PMSC Compliance

1.1 During the period from the last meeting to date, it can be reported that BHA continues to demonstrate compliance with the PMSC and its associated guidance.

1.2 The PMSC Internal Audit took place on Friday 29th August 2025, where BHA have identified winter maintenance requirements.

1.3 The Port Marine Safety Code has information as relevant.

2. Channel Navigation and Safety

2.1 On the recent low tides BHA staff have mapped out the Channel, together with photos and video, identifying areas needing more attention. This information will be relayed to John Smith for further improvements. *It was suggested and agreed that JS be invited to join BHAG* **Action: MT**

3. Incidents

3.1 Since the previous meeting we have seen an increase in the number of allisions, mainly caused by inclement weather conditions. No significant damage or injuries have resulted.

4. Rallies and Visitors

4.1 The harbour has had good success with the number of visiting rallies for 2025.

4.2 Rally bookings for the 2026 season are now being booked.

5. Improvement and Maintenance

5.1 Maintenance is ongoing and is being completed as highlighted in the internal audit, with works being completed in priority order throughout the autumn and winter.

6. Staffing

6.1 Some of our summer seasonal staff have returned to university, with others finishing at the end of September. We have kept on 2 of the summer staff for the winter season to assist the permanent staff.

End of HM report

4. Dredging

As reported at the previous meeting, Van Oord have offered a more competitive quote for dredging but are unable to schedule until next April. MT is also talking to 2 other companies, one using a similar method to VO and one using cutter suction (which necessitates removal, via barge or truck).

5. Safer Harbour Partnership

It had proved impossible to have a meeting during July/August as everyone was too busy. Potential dates in September and October have been circulated and a date is to be confirmed: **Action: FT**

6. Harbour events

Bembridge Harbour Family Fun Weekend 25th to 27th July - another great FFW event, much enjoyed by all who attended. A brief summary:

At the Paper Boat Building Workshop at The Duver Marina on the Friday afternoon, 56 paper boats were created (a record!) for Saturday's Great Bembridge Paper Boat Race, organised and hosted by Brading Haven Yacht Club, which saw 68 boats take to the water over 4 races (7 and under, 8 and 9 year olds, 10 and over and Adults), the 7 and Under race being a photo finish which created much excitement, enthusiasm and noise from the spectators!

Saturday's Beach Activities were supported by Bembridge Sailing Club, providing a group of wonderful volunteers, and with BSC's Commodore judging the Sandcastle and Sand Sculpture Competitions. The Club also kindly provided free tea, coffee and cake from their Horsebox in front of the clubhouse! The Commodores of both clubs later judged the Best Decorated Boat Competition.

The Bembridge RNLI Lifeboat was in the harbour offering tours and Alan Doe and the RNLI Sea Safety Team offered free lifejacket checks and general sea safety advice. The Marine Police, who had been due to bring in their RIB, had to cancel for operational reasons. Bembridge Village Regatta took place, albeit with modest entry numbers. There was a disco, live music and a Fancy Dress Competition on Saturday evening, and on Sunday morning, the staff Wake Up pontoon walk was followed by the Crabbing Competition as the event finale.

2026 Harbour event dates – unconfirmed provisional dates are Rock the Boat - Saturday 13th June, Friday 31st July to Sunday 2nd August - Bembridge Harbour Family Fun Weekend. Bembridge Gig Fest - 3 possible dates under consideration - TBC.

7. Members' Reports

Brading Haven Yacht Club (NVN) - numbers of people sailing were well down over the summer – NVN felt the 2 clubs could look at working together more to make the sailing/racing more varied. LB agreed - many clubs are struggling, competing with the many other interests on offer. The gig rowing at BHYC is very popular - Puffin, which was on hire, is due to be returned, which will leave 2 gigs, Nertherk and Seahorse. The Summer Rowing Regatta in July had included Seahorse and a Yarmouth Gig Rowing Club boat, Spirit - both traditional 30' wooden boats, being sailed through the Harbour - a spectacular sight.

The Club has hosted a number of rally suppers, including from Newbury the previous weekend. All agreed that this season's good weather has helped things generally. Next year's regatta (traditionally held over August Bank Holiday) will include paddleboards, kayaks, and gigs.

Bembridge Sailing Club (LB) - The Club has had a good summer, with keelboats well supported over the main break, many being sailed every weekend. Of note is the J70 event in August, which was combined with the Seaview and BSC regatta weekend. The Illusions start racing on 4th October –

their new Class Captain is Mike Toogood, with whom BHA will liaise re the trot moorings being removed for the winter. There will be a change of BSC Commodore in October when Susie Beard steps down having completed her 2-year term, to be replaced by Nick Rowton-Lee.

Bembridge Angling Club - no replacement representative has yet been nominated.

Bembridge RNLI (JK) - An update sent by JK on things at the station:

We are currently matching the number of call-outs this year to last with 71 completed by yesterday.

The winch problem which resulted in us having to use a berth in the harbour and our own mooring finally has been sorted. With the offshore boat having been afloat for several months she was taken to Diverse Marine for a scrub and whilst out of the water two large cracks were found in her keel which has meant a major repair. During the time and whilst she still is at Diverse while a new keel section has been engineered and now being fitted we have been using a relief Tamar on station.

The currently plan is to re launch our boat on the 17th of September and providing the sea trials are successful we should have our boat back by the end of September and back in the boat house which she has been out of for some 7 months.

MS added that a knock-on effect of the boat not being available for visitors to look around, was a drop of approx. £15,000 in donations over the period. Also noted, as previously, that mental health / welfare issues continue to be a significant factor in call outs.

Bembridge Harbour Users Group, BHUG (MS Caretaker Chair) - at the AGM MS is due to be elected as Chair. BHAG continues to be an "honest broker", passing on information supplied at BHAG meetings to its members (numbering about 60, who have an amnesty on their annual subscription of £10 this year). BHUG has no projects on as at now.

Bembridge Parish Council (MG) - no council meeting since the last BHAG. Beach Cleans continue (next one 13th Sept), and Harbour View continue to kindly provide free coffee/tea to volunteers.

St Helens Parish Council (BH) - St Helens beach huts - Andrew Palmer (owner) attended the June PC meeting and reported that half the beach huts are to be replaced and planning permission had been sought to upgrade the present caravans.

Priory Bay Hotel is in an increasingly poor state of disrepair, which is causing much distress and upset within the local community. The PC are writing a formal letter to the IoW Council, drawing attention to this, and invited other groups to do the same. A potential sale to a boutique hotel/restaurant chain had failed in the final stages and it is now understood to be owned by a Swiss Watch Company. A small wedding business is being run on the beach, including yurts.

Coastal path - not recently discussed by the PC - MS explained the issue of mud rescues by the emergency services on the path between St Helens and Priory Bay. The official path goes inland but people still walk along the coastal section. Extra safety warning signage would be useful. MG reported that Bembridge PC had funded signage at Whitecliff Bay which seemed to have been effective (but very dry conditions over the summer!).

6 new members are recently elected. The Council meets on 2nd Monday of the month, comprises: Jonathan Bacon (Chair), Andrew Bradstock (Vice-Chair), Charity Garnett, Olivier Boelman, Stephen Dyer, Bella Hewitt, Andy Phillips, Ian Thompson.

A Village Consultation, recently conducted, was well supported and highlighted issues such as traffic on the Green, toilets, a youth club, dogs, etc

Local Boatyards (JR) - A good season for Bembridge Marine, who have discontinued their RIB hire business (insurance for which would have been problematic had they wanted to renew). Staff numbers have gradually been reduced - now 6. They have 3 existing boats for sale, and 3 new orders have been received for new boats in specific colours. There are a number of new customers in the Seagrove Bay area and potential interest in building an industrial style boat. Not attending the Southampton boat Show in favour of smaller powerboat / trailers shows, which are being held in Basingstoke, Portsmouth and Exeter).

Some maintenance work coming from Seaview Yacht Club who have set up a separate charity to run sailing lessons for local primary schools (batches of 5 with a Saturday morning session thereafter for a nominal fee).

Noted that several RIB/boat storage businesses on the Island have closed recently. Not good for the industry as a whole, but perhaps beneficial to Bembridge.

8. Any other business

The Point Bembridge: space has been leased to a number of local businesses including the Wight Knuckle Brewery on the car park area at Bembridge Point, now owned by John Smith. The area of ownership is basically the car park and does not include the beach area. The Point has been generally well received by the local community, although it does affect some businesses nearby.

BBS planning approval: for an extension – currently no timescale for construction to commence.

Nurdles: *(Tiny pre-production plastic pellets (less than 5 mm) universally used in the plastics industry for the manufacture of products such as water bottles, containers, bags. Birds and fish can mistake them for eggs and eat them. Creatures poisoned by toxins adsorbed by the plastic can enter the human food chain.)*

Widely found on beaches everywhere. MG reported recently collecting a sieve-load weighing ½ kg. As well as micro-plastics, plastic sticks from cotton buds still regularly wash up on beaches.

Water quality: The issue of sewage spills resulting from Southern Water overflow was raised. MS and MT sit on the Island River Partnership group, which includes Southern Water and the Environment Agency. At a recent IRP meeting (MS) it was noted that “action was being taken on Bembridge” in relation to the sluice gates which open into the Harbour from the Eastern Yar, the EA emphasis being to prevent flooding further up-river in Sandown.

Water quality was raised at previous meetings. Further research had found that a lot of information is available, including as below:

DEFRA data from samples collected monthly from a BSC pontoon (obtained by LB), lists various measurements of such things as copper, zinc, salinity etc. DEFRA also publishes more user-friendly information giving star ratings (excellent, good, sufficient/poor). For live information: <https://environment.data.gov.uk/bwq/profiles/profile.html?search=Isle%20of%20Wight&site=ukj3400-18200>

A number of Apps are available eg Surfers Against Sewage’s Safer Seas and Rivers Service, which gives real time sewage discharges and pollution risk alerts for 550 locations around the uk, including the Bembridge area and across the Island. <https://datahq.sas.org.uk/sewage-data-hq/is-it-safe-to-swim/>

It had been suggested that a working party might be set up to review and promote the information for the benefit of visitors, but with so much information readily available to the public, including live updates on discharges and local swimming water quality, it was felt this was not needed at the current time.

The Harbour is in full support, as everyone must be, of raising awareness of pollution from whatever source, holding the water companies to account, and encouraging everyone to do their bit towards safeguarding the environment. Information and links to some of the relevant sites will be added to the Harbour website under Local Information. **Action: FT**

Sea Buckthorn: MS reported that Mark Larter (Natural England) had attended the IRP meeting and had confirmed to MS that sea buckthorn at Bembridge Beach was “on his agenda”. MG intends to do some maintenance clearing.

9. Next Meeting

The next meeting is provisionally scheduled for **Thursday 27th November 2025 at 09:30** at Bembridge Harbour Office. The meeting closed at 11:10.