

## **Bembridge Harbour Advisory Group – update 23rd April 2020**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

To comply with the Government's guidelines on social distancing and cancelling our meeting, here are some notes on a variety of issues that are currently relevant and no doubt would have been discussed – in no particular order.

### **a. Overview:**

The past 4 weeks have been an experience we would not want to be part of again. Decision making has been made on the hoof – some decisions have had subsequent changes – the true impact on the Harbour and community will not really be felt for several months, if not years.

There appears to be a misconception that the Harbour is closed; this is incorrect and also is impossible to manage as such. What is important is how everyone manages their affairs within the Government's guidelines and social distancing.

Already most rallies to the Harbour till the end of June have been cancelled – some have rebooked for late summer / early autumn [more in hope we think].

The timing of lockdown coincided with our interview process for summer seasonal staff; hence we have put on hold our annual increase of summer staff as at now. Our permanent staff are in lockdown mode and we have regular discussions with them.

In business, timing is everything; our project of taking apart and totally refurbishing the Duver shower and toilet facilities was completed at the same time as lockdown was announced! – still, they are such an improvement on the previous equipment, ready and waiting for visiting yachts to arrive. It is to be noted that these are a temporary uplift until the new facilities complex is built.

We have our concerns for the long term future and harm to local businesses such as all boatyards, sailing clubs, restaurants, shops, angling club and all local businesses especially during the main summer period; this is definitely a period for the community as a whole to work together.

### **b. Dredging:**

The marina pontoons were dismantled ready for the dredging program to commence on 01/04/2020 post winter ecology period. Lockdown was announced just before this date and hence stopped our plans whilst the construction industry re-organised itself to manage social distancing. It is only in the past few days that I believe we can comply with these new rules and waiting for further guidance as to when lockdown may be partially lifted allowing visiting boats to the Harbour. In the meantime we are reviewing how we will manage this process that will be commenced as soon as it is feasible.

I am sorry to announce that Jane and Nigel Bennett have decided to retire and close down the aggregates business in May; their family have been part and parcel of Bembridge Harbour for I believe three generations and they have proved strong allies to me over the years - I will miss Nigel's advice and views in the future.

Nigel has attended training on our own dredging barge with the intention to be involved with dredging the marina; this will not happen now. However it appears that we have an alternative candidate to step in and discussions are proceeding.

As regards the entrance channel dredging previously carried out by Nigel, we are currently considering two business options – both will include a channel south of St Helens' Fort. The commercial dredging opportunity is also being marketed.

**c. Events:**

As you will be aware from April's *On the wind*, our first event of the season - the Duver Dash on 24th May, has been cancelled, as has the IoW Festival Running of which it is now part. Next year's date is Sunday 30th May (Bank holiday and start of 1/2 term).

June events: Bembridge Gig Fest on 20th/21st and Rock the Boat on 27th - a decision on whether they are able to go ahead (either in their current form or on a scaled down basis) will be made after the end of the currently extended lockdown period and will be based on Government guidelines.

All other events will be reviewed as we get closer to their time.

**d. Groyne:**

Whilst I note the interest being shown by both BHUG and BHT, I would like to repeat that I am not totally convinced as to the benefits of this project, where the reports from the Harbour's retained consultants have not formed part of either groups' due diligence processes.

Also I have made it very clear over several months that this project has equal importance to the new Duver facilities complex for visiting boats; yet BHT continue to slow the planning process down on this regeneration project despite the six year planning debate – despite two local authority resolutions to grant consent – and their public campaign aimed to undermine the Harbour's management.

More so than in the past few years, it is crucial that the community work together during Covid-19 to survive as best it can; hence this is a request that BHT take a step backwards with their public campaign and constant attacks on the Harbour and cease all such actions.

**e. Houseboats:**

In moving forwards with the new houseboats' association management, we asked them for nominations for two houseboats that would accept FOC sewage treatment plants or holding tanks to be installed by the Harbour as part of our undertaking 3 years ago.

We are now working with the owners of houseboats Seahorse and Heyvon to take this initiative forwards - being the first phase of more additional investment and commitment into the Harbour.

**Conclusion:**

Nobody is immune from Covid-19 – it is a shocking virus the impact of which is likely to touch us all. However we will come out of this era and the sooner we can, the better for everyone.

Please stay well and healthy – bear with us and we will do our best we can in the circumstances.

All the very best  
Fiona and Malcolm

**Malcolm P Thorpe**  
**Bembridge Harbour Authority - Bembridge Boat Storage Ltd - Bembridge Investments Ltd**  
**Harbour Office**  
**The Duver St Helens**  
**Isle of Wight**  
**PO33 1YB**

**Tel: 0044 (0) 1983 872 828**  
**Mobile: 0044 (0) 7973 256 248**  
**Email: [thorpemalcolm@btconnect.com](mailto:thorpemalcolm@btconnect.com)**  
**Web: [www.bembridgeharbour.co.uk](http://www.bembridgeharbour.co.uk)**  
**[www.bembridgeboatstorage.co.uk](http://www.bembridgeboatstorage.co.uk)**

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