

Victoria Dock Berth Holders Association (VDBHA) Chair's Report, AGM 2024

Following the disruptive effects of Covid in 2020, we had a relatively calm year in 2022-23, and the Executive Committee had anticipated that 2023-24 would be much the same. But, as Prime Minister Macmillan had it "Events, dear boy, events!". And there have been at least two significant VDBHA events in the last twelve months.

The first, of course, was the catastrophic failure of the Victoria Dock gate in June. The gleaming expanse of mud across the Dock was a very gloomy sight, as were the boats that were half keeled over along the west wall. Fortunately, Iwan, Dave and their colleagues worked tirelessly, including overnight sessions, and managed to get a temporary repair carried out very promptly. It was the first time most of us had seen the dock drained of water, and it was surprising to see how far out into the dock the slipway extends. The Harbourmaster has informed us that Gwynedd Council are aware of the situation concerning Victoria Dock generally and the gate in particular, and that they are committed to a longer term service plan, including a defence mechanism system.

The second point was the departure of our Dockmaster, Iwan Rees-Jones who had succeeded the late Mark Shackleton. In his relatively short tenure, Iwan had become a much liked figure, not least because of his approachability and willingness to help out whenever problems arose, as witnessed by his sterling work during the gate failure. I'm sure we all wish him well for the future. As you all probably know, Iwan has been succeeded by Robert Coulon. Several berth holders have already meet Rob, and we all look forward to a cooperative and productive relationship with him.

The Executive Committee met in May, July and October, 2023, and has also discussed issues in around 50 emails in the course of 2024. Previous VDBHA committees chaired successively, and successfully, by John O'Sullivan, Pam Wrench and Chris Jones had addressed the rules and regulations governing relations between berth holders and the CHT. The last two years have largely focussed on implementing the benefits of their work, focussing on practical issues such as the delivery of car park permits, and toilet reconstruction, together with compensation for berth holders under certain circumstances.

As regards the current Committee's meetings, a concern raised by a few members over the last year has been the presence of the then Dock Master Iwan Rees-Jones, the Harbourmaster (Dave O'Neil), and the Gwynedd Council representative (Gerwyn Owen) - the last two as observers - in some of our Committee meetings. According to my records this occurred in the meetings on 19th May (Dock Master) and 7th July (Dock Master, Harbour Master, Council representative).

It should be noted that at this time the Dock Master, Iwan, was also in fact the Membership Secretary. He had been proposed, seconded and accepted in the 2023 AGM, when no objections had been raised. The advantage of this was that, not only had no one else offered to stand for the position, but that Iwan had up-to-date contacts for all berth holders in the Dock. Another advantage is that Dave and Gerwyn were able to provide on-the-spot answers to questions of information,

thereby contributing to the efficiency of our proceedings. I can assure members that their presence in no way influenced the views of the Committee members. Nevertheless, this may be a matter for discussion by any future committee.

Over the year members have raised the issue of compensation with regard to two sets of circumstances. First for the lack of facilities on two occasions, namely the gate failure in June and the Power Boat event in August. I have written to the Dockmaster and Gwynedd Council on a number of occasions in the last 12 months. I have been told that there is appreciation of our position on the part of the authorities, but we still await a decision.

Second, and this is a perpetual complaint, compensation for berth holders whose boats are not in their berth for long periods (e.g. hauled out over winter, or on a trip round the Med in summer) and where the empty berth has been rented out to another boat owner. To date we have not received a positive response from the authorities.

Another point where we await positive response is that of effluent in the Dock: one source is the Cadnant River inflow on the east wall of the dock. This is primarily caused by overflows triggered by Welsh Water when there is heavy rain – and there's been a lot of heavy rain in the last year. I have written to Welsh Water but so far received only a holding reply. There is also a certain amount of effluent brought in through the inflow in the north east corner of the dock (near Yr Harbwr restaurant). According to the Council this comes from drains that collect surface water. I have also raised this matter with Welsh Water. We were also informed last July that a marine biology company was being contacted to test the water in the dock, with costs to be borne by the CHT/Council, but to date we have no further information on this.

In terms of reaching out to the local community, and in order to encourage young people in Caernarfon to take up sailing it has been suggested that, funds allowing, the VDBHA should fund two local schoolchildren to do a short sailing course at Plas Menai National Outdoor Centre. Short courses currently cost £145.00. There are obviously a host of practical questions implied in such a move, but the VDBHA may wish to make a decision in principle. This may be discussed at our 2024 AGM, or failing that, by email among members.

By the time you read this, most berth holders will have submitted the annual VDBHA Survey. The Council had suggested that we tweak the survey to make it more similar to that of the Pwllheli Berthholders Association, possibly even amalgamating the two. I looked at the Pwllheli survey, but in the event the two marinas were so different that the resulting amalgamation would be unwieldy, so this suggestion was not pursued on this occasion. Currently, our survey questions are objective, with selections from a choice of options, and also subjective, with a comments section for most questions. However, we do consult with the authorities to see if they have any significant points they would like included. To date our surveys have consisted entirely of issues raised by members.

Finally, in terms of departures we should mention that John McDonald the CHT administrator retired in April 2023. The committee thanked John at the time, but I'd

like to record the AGM's thanks to John for his efficient work over many years. John has been replaced by Jennifer Jones. Jennifer has proved very capable, and I trust she will find the post fulfilling.

Another significant departure this year is that of our Treasurer, Keith Elford. Keith has been the treasurer ever since the inception of the VDBHA, and has been exceptionally effective. He really will be very much missed. I will be standing down as Chair, since I'll be 80 in a few weeks; keener minds need to take over. By complete and unfortunate coincidence, both our Secretary, Lisa Sparkes, and her partner, Dan Farrimond, who is Vice Chair, will be standing down due to domestic circumstances. A welcome initiative by Lisa was organising a Christmas get-together for berth holders in the Anglesey pub in December. Lisa had in mind other initiatives for other gatherings which would have added an interesting social dimension to VDBHA activities. She too will be missed.

Our keen hope is that a fresh batch of berth holders, possibly with other priorities, will step up to replace the outgoing team. If you have any particular problems or improvements to put forward, do consider joining the Executive Committee. If no one steps up, the VDBHA will of course be dissolved, along the lines suggested in Section 6 of the Constitution "Dissolution of the Association".

Before I sign off, sincere thanks again to Dave, Rob and their team for keeping an eye on things in the Dock, and for always being on hand to help out – in particular Dave's manning the gate voluntarily on Christmas Day was to my mind beyond the call of duty, and a true example of his commitment to berth holders.

As far as I am concerned, this is, I hope, goodbye, farewell and da bo chi from me. I look forward to a fresh hand being on the VDBHA tiller very soon!

Eddie Williams
Chair, VDBHA
20th March, 2024