

BEMBRIDGE HARBOUR USERS GROUP

We understand you may have received a note dated 11th June and entitled a STATEMENT from Mr and Mrs Thorpe, owners of Bembridge Harbour, setting out their position regarding the project to repair the groyne at the entrance to the Harbour in order to reduce the rate that it is silting up.

The Bembridge Harbour Users Group, (BHUG), to whom the email with the Statement attached was addressed, wish to make a number of comments and observations in connection with the Statement.

In it, Mr and Mrs Thorpe state they are supportive of the groyne project, and give examples of the progress to date, and the part they have played. We do not contest that. What they don't say is that since August 2019 they have been preventing any further progress to get the groyne repaired, when they made a statement which included:

".... whilst BHT continue such unwarranted interventions thru' the planning department, Harbour matters will be in limbo. Thank you."

– Mr Malcolm Thorpe 9/08/2019.

Please note that – "*harbour matters*"- refers specifically to the repair of the groyne. BHT refers to the Bembridge Harbour Trust.

Whilst the owners have repeatedly said they are supportive of the groyne, they also say they are not "as convinced" that the groyne would have as much effect as others believe. Of course, they are entitled to that view but we challenge the reasons they have given for holding that opinion.

They refer to reports prepared by an advisor, Dr Tosswell of LTS (Lymington Technical Services) who has written various reports on the subject. However, so far as we are able to ascertain his comments on the groyne relate to its role as a sediment control measure for the maintenance of the size and shape of the sand spit outside the Harbour. He variously comments that the existing (residual groyne) is ineffective and that exploration of the groyne's effect as a training wall is worthy of investigation. Indeed, the LTS report acknowledges that "*The groyne is however capable of assisting (controlling) the direction of both the ebb and the floodtide.*"

None of Dr Tosswell's reports cover the egress of sand and shingle into the Harbour past the collapsed groyne which is the main cause of the siltation. Therefore, the conclusion outlined in the owners Statement that the groyne repair would only offer limited help does not relate to the benefits afforded to the inner Harbour by a repaired groyne.

We have never ignored LTS's reports as is suggested by the owners but we wish to point out that there have been other professional inputs to the debate over the groyne which the owners seem to dismiss. The overriding FACT is that the Harbour is silting up at the rate of about 10 cms per year or ONE METRE OVER 10 YEARS and it is vital that this is tackled without delay.

It is this accelerating increase that was identified in the audited LIDAR ((Light Detection and Ranging) survey data produced by the Channel Coastal Observatory based at Southampton University.

Reflecting on the Lidar report, Dr Malcom Bray, visiting fellow at Portsmouth University commented: *I think that it's a most interesting and valuable report that fills a clear gap in local knowledge. It clearly documents the recent accretion of sediment; it shows the accretion hotspots and points to a very recent increase in the rate of accretion...*

As further evidence of the need for a repaired groyne in a report commissioned by BHUG, Professor Robin McInnes, when considering the "do nothing option" said

If this option is implemented, the problems faced as a result of sedimentation within the harbour and in its main channel will increase steadily over time. This will necessitate increased dredging at both these locations with a resulting increase in revenue costs. Most of the creeks and harbours of the Solent are facing similar problems so any measures that can be taken to help alleviate the problem and reduce on-going maintenance would be beneficial.

Finally, Professor McInnes concluded. *The refurbishment of the groyne is likely to reduce the volume of sediment transported into the Harbour and the main channel.*

Some people are wondering why the owners are not more supportive when it was made clear to them by BHUG that this is a community project, where the cost of approx. £250k will be spread over a wide base of contributors. If this initiative had not been launched then the whole cost of reducing the egress of sand into the Harbour would potentially have fallen on to the owners. The delay they have forced on the project, which so far has been for 10 months, is leading to the costs rising for each period of delay.

It seems paradoxical in the extreme that the owners talk of the intervention of others as causing damage to the whole local community when it's they who are holding up the repair of the groyne thus risking the future of the Harbour.

The imposition of the ban they have implemented is attributed by the Thorpes to differences between themselves and the Bembridge Harbour Trust (BHT) which is a completely different organisation from BHUG. The differences are over the owners' plans for an associated company of theirs (Bembridge Investments Ltd) to build 13 houses, erect a new office block and new visitors' facilities around the Harbour. These plans have absolutely nothing at all to do with the groyne repair project yet the owners choose to link the two and, as a consequence, put the future viability of the Harbour at risk.

BHUG has been dragged in to this conflict because the owners mistakenly believe BHUG should be able to force BHT to abandon its efforts to raise certain issues relating to the above-mentioned building plans. BHUG has no such powers to influence BHT or anyone else. There is some overlap of trustees and committee members but this is very limited. Of the 18 strong committee members of BHUG (5 officers and 13 committee members) only two are also trustees of BHT. Indeed, you may well ask what is the relevance of trying to link the two organisations. In our view there is none.

But the situation is getting even worse! BHUG is now concerned that the Harbour is at even more serious risk as a result of the withdrawal of Mr Nigel Bennett's business, which had a contract to remove sand and silt from the entrance channel to the Harbour. In our view, this will cause further silting of the inner harbour. The yard used by Mr Bennett has been decommissioned, and there appears to be no clear plan to retain this vital function, unless of course the owners carry out future work themselves. The longer this remains an issue, potentially the greater the damage to the Harbour. We note that the urgent need for a replacement dredging company to take over Mr Bennett's contract was not mentioned in Mr and Mrs Thorpe's Statement.

We have attempted on numerous occasions since Limbo was imposed in August last year to join in constructive discussions with the owners but to no avail. We are still hoping such an opportunity will arise.

In conclusion, BHUG decided to produce this response to the owners' Statement so as to ensure a full understanding of the situation for everyone.

On behalf of BHUG

M J Samuelson (Hon Sec, BHUG)