



King's Harbour Master Portsmouth

DIRECTION No 2/26

PORTSMOUTH HARBOUR ENTRANCE - APPROACH CHANNEL, SMALL BOAT CHANNEL, SWASHWAY AND INNER SWASHWAY

1. **Mariners are advised that the King's Harbour Master has made the following General Direction under the Dockyard Port of Portsmouth Order 2005;** that the Portsmouth Harbour entrance and main approach channel is considered a narrow channel in accordance with the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions and Sea (COLREGS) and as such, all mariners are reminded that in accordance with Rule 9(b) *"a vessel of less than 20 metres in length or a sailing vessel shall not impede the passage of a vessel that can safely navigate only within a narrow channel or fairway"*.

2. **Approach Channel.** The dredged limits of the approach channel from the harbour entrance to Outer Spit Buoy are marked by buoys, the positions of which are shown on chart BA 2625. Within the harbour entrance the main channel is bounded on both sides by the limits of the dredged channel as shown on chart BA 2629.

3. **Small Boat Channel.** To assist the safe passage of small craft to and from Portsmouth Harbour a Small Boat Channel for vessels less than 20 metres in length including Personal Watercraft (PWC) (hereafter referred to as small boats) has been created on the western side of the harbour entrance. The 50-metre-wide Small Boat Channel is shown on Admiralty charts. Its northern and southern extremities are at Ballast Pile (50 47.62N 001 06.83W) and No 4 Bar Buoy (50 46.97N 001 06.48W) respectively. Small boat skippers are reminded that they can be difficult to see and the harbour entrance is a blind bend to larger vessels and traffic leaving the camber.

The following rules apply:

- a. Small boats must enter and leave the harbour through the Small Boat Channel.
- b. All craft fitted with engines, when navigating in the approach channel to Portsmouth Harbour, are to proceed under power between No 4 Bar Buoy and the Ballast Pile.
- c. Vessels greater than 20 metres in length may only use the Small Boat Channel with the express permission of KHM on VHF Channel 11. Permission will only be granted if traffic levels are sufficiently low to allow safe passage for all vessels using the Small Boat Channel.
- d. The Small Boat Channel may only be entered or exited by vessels approaching from the east at its northern or southern ends.
- e. A traffic pattern is established around Ballast Pile; small boats entering the harbour are to pass close to the east of Ballast Pile and those exiting close to the west.
- f. Small boats crossing the harbour entrance may only do so to the north of Ballast Pile and may

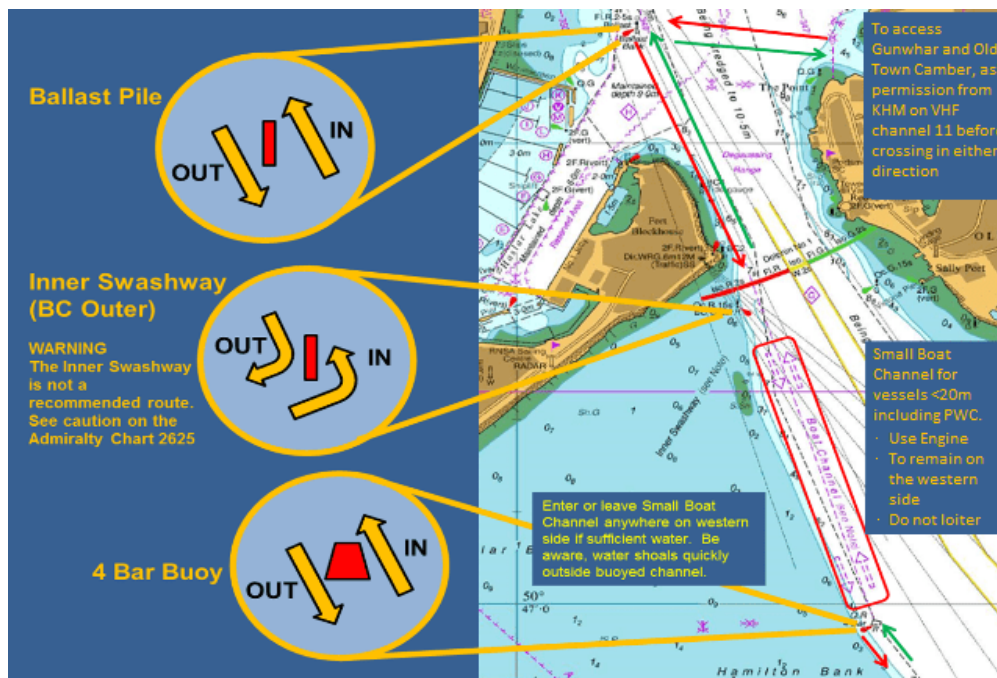
not cross the main channel until south of 4 Bar Buoy.

g. Small boats, save those listed at paragraph 5, are not to loiter in the Small Boat Channel.

h. Small boats should remain on the Starboard side of the Small Boat Channel and should adjust their speed to remain within the Small Boat Channel rather than overtake other craft and be forced into the main channel.

i. All vessels using the Small Boat Channel are to leave 4 Bar Buoy to port, whether heading inbound or outbound.

j. In vicinity of BC Outer (red beacon), all vessels are to pass to the east of the beacon except those joining or leaving the Small Boat Channel at the Inner Swashway who are to leave it to port. This area can become extremely busy, particularly during the summer months, and mariners joining here should converge with caution and avoid forcing others out into the middle of the harbour entrance. Similarly, all mariners should be alert to strong cross currents in this area which can sweep vessels into the main channel.



4. Vessels approaching or departing the Small Boat Channel to the south, particularly at low water, should follow the line of the port lateral buoys in order to avoid grounding on the south-east corner of Hamilton Bank, turning to follow the line of the channel in the vicinity of 4 Bar Buoy.

5. The following vessels under 20 metres in length are authorised to use the main channel and loiter in the Small Boat Channel when their duties require; pilot boats, police launches, KHM Harbour Patrol launches, Border Force craft, Royal Naval vessels, lifeboats, senior officers' boats flying official flags or discs and tugs engaged in towing operations or escorting a vessel.

6. Small boats may continue to use the Small Boat Channel when the main channel is closed for the passage of a large vessel other than a Queen Elizabeth Class (QEC) Aircraft Carrier. The Small Boat Channel will be shut to all traffic during QEC transits.

7. **Personal Watercraft.** PWC of all descriptions are prohibited from entering or operating in the Town Camber, (defined by the purple pecked "no anchoring or fishing" line shown on Admiralty

Chart 2629 joining the entrance to Gunwharf Quays and The Point) save with the permission in writing of KHM who will consult with Portsmouth International Port who are the Statutory Harbour Authority for this area.

8. Gunwharf Quays/Town Camber - Traffic Management. The following traffic management plan for craft under 20 metres in length (bound to/from Town Camber/Gunwharf Quays) is in force:

a. **Arrival.** In the interest of safety all Small Boats bound for Gunwharf Quays/Town Camber are to enter harbour through the Small Boat Channel. Vessels are only to cross the main channel when they are to the north of Ballast Pile, and permission has been obtained from KHM on VHF Channel 11. Vessels fitted with engines are to use them from entering the Small Boat Channel until arrival at Gunwharf Quays/Town Camber.

b. **Departure.** Small boats departing from Gunwharf Quays and the Town Camber are to obtain permission from Portsmouth VTS on VHF Channel 11 before crossing the main channel. All vessels are then to cross the main channel direct to Ballast Pile and leave harbour through the Small Boat Channel. Vessels fitted with engines are to use them until exiting the Small Boat Channel. If any of these vessels are not fitted with VHF radio, fixed or portable, then they are to be escorted by a marshalling craft or accompany another vessel so fitted.

c. Fishing vessels under 20 metres in length based in the Town Camber may enter and leave the harbour close inshore on the eastern side. They are nonetheless still to request approval to proceed from KHM on VHF Channel 11, giving their intended route.

d. Mariners are advised that visitor berths at Gunwharf Quays should be booked in advance prior to requesting to cross the harbour. Marina Guest Services can be contacted on VHF Ch80, by phone 02392 836732.

9. Swashway. The Swashway is an important channel for shallow draught vessels approaching and leaving Portsmouth Harbour. Hovercraft and high-speed catamaran ferries often transit the area en-route to and from Ryde at speeds in excess of 24 knots. Hovercraft, being non-displacement craft usually navigate outside the Swashway in areas where depths are shallow. The Spitbank area, as a whole, is often used for yacht racing and regattas. Mariners in yachts and slow-moving craft are advised to maintain a thorough all-round lookout for the possible approach of high-speed ferries and other fast craft. Particular care needs to be taken to check the appropriate quarter before making an alteration of course. Mariners in high-speed craft are cautioned not to assume that other mariners, particularly those whom they are overtaking, are aware of their presence, and are to give them a sufficiently wide berth.

10. Inner Swashway. The Inner Swashway is closed to vessels of over 20m in length. Vessels over this size are to remain in the approach channel between the entrance to the Harbour and No 4 Bar Buoy. They should not enter the Small Boat Channel at any time except that they may do so when taking action to avoid collision under the COLREGS. The BC Outer red beacon is sited 100 yards to the south of Fort Blockhouse. Small boats transiting between the Inner Swashway and the Small Boat Channel are to leave this to port.

11. The Harbour Entrance. Extra caution is to be taken in the harbour mouth to ensure that small boats are not swept into mid channel from the Small Boat Channel by the strong cross-tide which is often present.

12. Contravention of the rules contained within this General Direction is a criminal offence.

13. Cancel General Direction 02/23.

Thursday 01 Jan 2026

G W BISHOP
King's Harbour Master

Owners, Agents, Charterers, Marinas, Yacht Clubs and Recreational Sailing Organisations should ensure that the contents of this Notice are made known to the masters or persons in charge of their vessels or craft.