

## **Turnchapel Wharf NDS to PCC Planning Committee 18 June 2020**

### **19/01810/FUL | Demolition of Unit 38 and construction of a new industrial unit | Turnchapel Wharf Barton Road Plymouth PL9 9RQ Comments submitted on behalf of the Naval Dockyards Society**

Dear Members of the Planning Committee

The Naval Dockyards Society comments on the revised proposed plans for the following reasons:

Turnchapel Graving/Dry Dock survives as an infilled feature in Turnchapel Wharf. Dockyards are defined by dry docks, from which water can be drained or pumped out for repairing, whereas shipbuilding can be carried out on a slip. A dockyard was literally the yard that grew around the dock.

Turnchapel Dockyard is a crucial element of Plymouth's naval and defensive facilities since the seventeenth century, particularly the Civil War, the French and Napoleonic Wars and the Second World War, with occupation of the area since the late Bronze Age. Turnchapel's shipbuilding and repairing facilities were an important adjunct of Plymouth's naval dockyard, especially in wartime, when its own capability was overstretched. Nearby fortifications comprise the site of the seventeenth century Mount Stamford and the nineteenth century Ford Stamford. It therefore warrants protection as a key historic waterfront site.

From the seventeenth century, the navy was remodelled to meet its expanded functions of global protection for British trade and offensive operations to deny other nations control of sea routes. Warships from Plymouth could access the English Channel and the Atlantic more quickly than from the Thames and Medway. Turnchapel was one of the sites considered for Plymouth Dock's location in the 1690s. Expanded dockyard facilities were required during the French and Napoleonic Wars, and Turnchapel Dry Dock was a vital addition to aid the naval dockyard. This infrastructure provided potential for twentieth century utilisation. During the Second World War Plymouth was the 'worst blitzed city', with 59 raids and 1,172 civilians killed, totalling possibly 1,300 deaths including service personnel. Turnchapel bore its share of the damage, as well as playing a part in the D-Day campaign.

As the documents of Turnchapel Residents, Harriet Dismore, Robert Dixon and others demonstrate, Turnchapel Wharf adds significantly to the maritime heritage of Plymouth dating from the French and Napoleonic Wars, with many important ships built and repaired at Turnchapel Dockyard.

The Turnchapel History Group is actively researching and publicising the history of this important dockyard, which formed the core of Turnchapel's economic activity, giving employment to the neighbourhood and stimulating housebuilding when the Royal Navy was at its height in the eighteenth/nineteenth centuries. A focus on the surviving above-ground remains and the below-ground structures of Turnchapel Dockyard will enable this Group to interpret this key economic area for the education and enjoyment of residents and visitors,

developing the histories of the buildings through maps and illustrations and interconnected shipbuilding families through genealogical records and newspapers. They have also researched many ships built and repaired here, including HMS *Naiad*, *Armada* and *Clarence*.

The **Site Location Plan** does not show the site of the Graving Dock, so Robert Dixon's submission (604387) gives useful images of the site that the Group wishes to interpret for public knowledge and enjoyment. **Gent and Manning's (2014) archaeological assessment, Fig. 2** clearly shows that the proposed new units will cut through the infilled Dry/Graving Dock, thus destroying it.

Turnchapel is an important Conservation Area set between the cliffside and the Cattewater. Vistas from the whole Conservation Area, but particularly the Grade II listed Manor House and twelve large terraced Grade II listed dwellings in Boringdon Terrace, will be detrimentally affected by the intrusion of the proposed industrial units. It is the responsibility of the Planning Committee, having approved the Conservation Area, to safeguard it, rather than support its degradation. The **Heritage, Design and Access Statement** fully describes the reasons for creating the Conservation Area: the history of Turnchapel Wharf, Quay and Pier with its core development deriving from the French and Napoleonic Wars and continuing maritime connections through the twentieth century.

**Turnchapel Residents Association: Turnchapel Conservation Area Assessment of Character and Special Interest** identifies that a review of the Conservation Area boundary has taken place, recommending that the northern boundary should be extended to include the greater part of Turnchapel Wharf. This would enhance Turnchapel's maritime character and increase protection for historic structures within the Wharf. It notes that the Conservation Area is surrounded almost entirely by twentieth century urban and commercial development. It also gives details of direct Admiralty input when it purchased the Wharf in 1903 for coaling, the expansion of RAF Mount Batten and damage from Second World War bomb raids. This unique character should thus be conserved.

Harriet Dismore's submission (616385) includes **Gent and Manning's (2014) archaeological assessment** of the site. This traces comprehensively Lord Boringdon's encouragement of shipbuilder Isaac Blackburn's 1804 Dry Dock large enough to take frigates, of great benefit to the naval dockyard. It gives a chronology of naval ship repairing since the 1650s, with Lord Boringdon building two slips in 1793 and laying moorings in 1809 to improve commercial access and landing facilities. At its height the site possessed a dry dock, two slips, and engine house, a mould loft, reservoir, steam kiln, saw pits, a storehouse and a dwelling, its boundary marked by a limestone wall. It was connected to the railway and had internal tramways. By 1895 the wet and dry docks and slipways had been enclosed by a new quay wall, cutting off access to the sea and marking the decline of shipbuilding. The Admiralty purchased the wharf for a coaling, then oil facility and anti-submarine activities.

During the 1930s an MoD police office was added and in the Second World War large circular tanks were installed, probably associated with the D-Day embarkation.

Gent and Manning argued (para 11): 'Considering the relatively low level of recent development of the area, the survival of 19th century or earlier archaeological deposits and structure within the Site is considered likely.' Also: 'Excavations at other similar sites around

the Plymouth waterfront have shown that archaeological structures and deposits can survive directly below modern surfaces, even in areas of substantial subsequent development.'

### **Conclusion**

While the NDS appreciates that these proposed units would potentially increase and retain employment opportunities and continue maritime-related activities and industries in Turnchapel, demolition of the Dry Dock will cause substantial harm to Turnchapel's maritime significance, and the visual intrusion of these larger industrial units would impair the Conservation Area and its vistas.

The significance and setting of the village and wharf demonstrate consistent architectural and topographical character, materials and street furniture, giving group intimacy and scale, which will be detrimentally impaired by the intrusion of these larger warehouse units.

The NDS therefore considers that

- a) The current and potential value of the Dry Dock and other below-ground structures on Turnchapel Wharf to the Turnchapel and wider Plymouth communities contributes so much evidential, historical, aesthetic and communal value that total loss will be caused to its significance by its demolition.
- b) The integrity and vistas of Turnchapel Conservation Area will be caused substantial harm by the visual intrusion of these larger units.

The NDS therefore calls for rejection of this application.