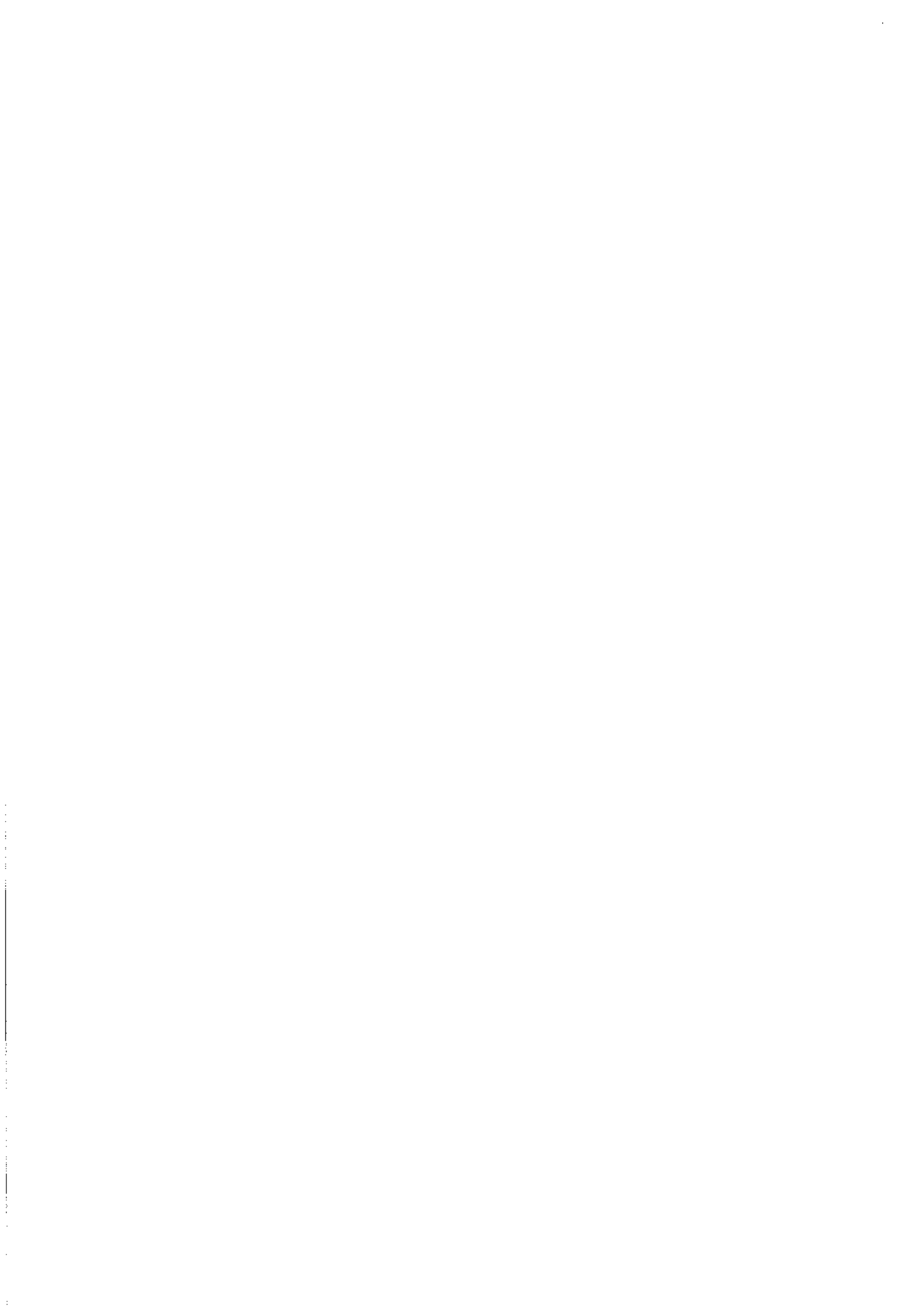


CASTLETOWN REGENERATION PROJECT





CASTLETOWN REGENERATION PROJECT

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Whilst Portland as a whole has a rich and diverse history, the history of Castletown is predominated by its link with the Royal Navy and the sea.
- 1.2 Even before the breakwater was formed between 1868 and 1879 using convict labour, there is evidence of naval and maritime usage of the natural topography of what we now call Portland Port going back to 780AD when the Vikings made their first raids on the English mainland. Portland is a Royal Manor, reflecting its continued maritime importance to the Crown since before the 1066 Conquest.
- 1.3 Portland Harbour and the Naval Base, incorporating defence research establishments such as the Admiralty Underwater Weapon Establishment (AUWE), Crystal (a floating research vessel located in the harbour), the Naval Helicopter station and various MOD and Royal Naval training facilities employed directly or indirectly over 2,500 (significantly more when the fleet was in!) people for whom many made the daily trek to work through Castletown.
- 1.4 Castletown thrived. There were 5 pubs, a handful of hotels, cafes, fish and chip shops, various small businesses, a sports facility of Olympic standards and purpose-built accommodation blocks to house hundreds of matelots.
- 1.5 Then it came to an abrupt end.
- 1.6 The Navy ceased operations on Portland on 21st July 1995, and the MOD AUWE closed in the same year too. RNAS Portland (HMS Opsrey) closed in 1999, transferring to RNAS Yeovilton (HMS Heron).
- 1.7 As a consequence, Castletown gradually lost a number of businesses. Some pubs, shops and cafes closed forever, others soldiered on but with little custom; lack of reinvestment for maintenance is clearly evident.
- 1.8 Today, if you take a stroll through Castletown from, say, the Portland Castle, down to the dockyard gates, you will see boarded-up pubs and shops, dilapidated houses and business facades, a poorly maintained public phone booth, permanently closed public toilets, a semi redundant and partly demolished warehouse, a (most often) empty public car park, a public slipway (the immediate area to which is covered with sheds and various nautical 'stuff') all of which is dominated and overshadowed by an enormous derelict ex-Naval apartment block.
- 1.9 It is not all bad of course. There is a thriving boat yard, an office block employing over 75 staff, 3 trading pubs, the Aqua Hotel does a lively trade and the Osprey Leisure Centre provides an excellent, if under-used, facility. The popular tourist destination, the Grade 1 listed Portland Castle

commissioned by Henry VIII in the 16th century received 27,370 visitors in 2012 in addition to regularly hosting private events, such as wedding receptions.

- 1.10 However, the fact remains that Castletown projects a generally run down impression despite the persistence of the remaining traders, many of whom have been there during the Navy days. Because of its history and the tenacity of the indigenous traders and inhabitants who remain, there is the sense of a presence of 'soul' in Castletown and, whilst this might be a 'lost soul' at present, with an injection of vitality, Castletown could once again have a purpose, direction and a healthy commercial future.

2. Castletown's Potential – the Vision

- 2.1 Castletown's commercial existence has, for over 100 years, relied on the existence of the Naval Base (now Portland Port). Its brief flirt with the diving tourist industry in the early part of this century occurred more by chance than design and without any serious planning or investment was never going to compete within an increasingly sophisticated and professional market for very long.
- 2.2 The Naval Base, these days, is an entirely different enterprise. Owned by Portland Port Ltd, a subsidiary of Langham Industries, and operated as a commercial enterprise, it will never offer the scale of transient business to the immediate area as when the fleet came in for a day or two and thousands of hungry and thirsty sailors disembarked.
- 2.3 Castletown will always benefit from its proximity to Portland Port, whatever commercial enterprises might be carried out there, but such benefit should be considered as supplementary as it is unlikely to be of sufficient volume to facilitate growth in Castletown.
- 2.4 Essentially, Castletown needs to re-invent itself and identify a purpose – a niche – in the market that it can focus on and pursue.
- 2.5 But what could Castletown's 'niche' or vision be?
- 2.6 As a support service or facility to the Naval Base (Portland Port) it is likely to be small scale.
- 2.7 Generally, it doesn't have much in the way of infrastructure or facilities to offer.
- 2.8 Or does it?
- 2.9 Let's consider (but with a positive attitude) what we do have and, with a little initiative, cooperation and investment what, additionally, we might have.
- 2.10 We have:

- (a) A variety of traditional pubs
- (b) Hotels and guest houses
- (c) A slipway to launch boats
- (d) A public car park
- (e) A vibrant café (in the Aqua Hotel)
- (f) A shellfish processing facility
- (g) A swimming pool and sports facilities
- (h) Hundreds of years history
- (i) A 16th century castle
- (j) An air filling facility (in the Aqua Hotel)
- (k) Proximity to the sea
- (l) A vibrant office block employing 75 people

We might have:

- (m) Public conveniences/diver changing facilities
- (n) Restored public phone
- (o) Boat trailer park
- (p) Convenience store
- (q) A regenerated wharf
- (r) Floating pontoon/landing facility
- (s) A museum
- (t) A cleaned up small beach (subject to tidal activity)
- (u) A new warehouse employing approximately 10 staff
- (v) Nine new purpose-designed marine apartments
- (w) Access to two 2nd World War mulberry harbours
- (x) A tourism hub for scuba divers

2.11 In fact it would appear that Castletown has a very solid foundation on which to build a tourism infrastructure.

2.12 The Vision for Castletown is to see it once again as a vibrant, busy little commercial centre offering 3 main attractions:

1. A scuba diving tourist facility
2. An American themed 'D-Day' attraction
3. Historical interest theme (Portland Castle, stone industry, museum)

3. Achieving the Vision – our Mission

3.1 Referring to the list of 'might haves' in paragraph 2.10 above, lets analyse how each might be achieved.

2.10 (m) – Public Conveniences/Diver Changing Facilities

Through cooperation and partnership between WPBC and the author (DL) this Mission is progressing well. DL has purchased and is currently obtaining estimates to modernise these facilities on a 'pay as you use' basis to the public.

2.10 (n) – Public Phone Box

DL has contacted BT to refurbish or replace this booth.

2.10 (o) – Boat Trailer Park

DL is currently in negotiations to purchase land suitable for this provision.

2.10 (p) – Convenience Store

DL has purchased a suitable located building (opposite the public car park) and has submitted a planning application to WPBC.

2.10 (q) – Regenerated Wharf

DL has purchased part of Stone Pier, previously known as Copines, but now re-named Crabbers' Wharf. The Wharf, which previously had disused crab storage tanks and a redundant and derelict warehouse, is currently being refurbished as part of the warehouse redevelopment on Crabbers' Wharf.

2.10 (r) – A Floating Pontoon/Landing Facility

1. As part of the Crabbers' Wharf redevelopment and general clean-up, the Portland stone blocks that have been dumped into the harbour off the stone pier, along with decades of scallop and crab shells and a miscellany of nautical rubbish, will be removed. Discussions concerning the process of this removal are already occurring with Portland Port authorities.
2. Once this debris has been removed from the stone pier immediately adjacent to Crabbers' Wharf, it is proposed to obtain the necessary permissions from Portland Port to install a floating pontoon approximately 25 metres long by two metres wide. Initial discussions with the appropriate authority indicate this should not be a problem.
3. Once there is a non tidal-reliant means of boarding boats, all sorts of opportunities are opened up:
 - (i) Efficient and easy loading of fishing gear and unloading the 'catch of the day' makes Crabbers' Wharf very attractive to commercial fishermen and guarantees its future commercial desirability, hence viability.
 - (ii) The seasonal Weymouth to Portland ferry service can resume. (It stopped several years ago when the Portland disembarkation pontoon was condemned and recently removed.) Initial talks have already taken place between DL and Coastline Cruises. There has been positive interest from Coastline Cruises to run a service using their 37' and 40' boats which will be operational this year. They would anticipate running a couple of services a day in the peak season.
 - (iii) A simple rowing ferry service to the Mulberry Harbours (similar to the Weymouth Pavilion to Nothe Quay ferry) could be established, subject, of course, to the necessary permissions and a certain financial investment in renovation and preparations.
 - (iv) Boat trips around the harbour and Weymouth bay could be available.
 - (v) Mackerel fishing boat trips could be organised to coincide with the arrival of cruise liners.

- (vi) Dive boats could load and unload their divers and diver gear with ease.

2.10 (s) – A Museum

1. Weymouth and Portland have not had a proper museum since it was moved to the closed Melcombe Regis School in 1978 adjacent to the old Westham bridge in Commercial Road and was demolished in 1989 to make way for the Royal Dorset Yacht Club.
2. Due to the lack of a suitable venue, the artefacts from the museum have been stored in various locations and a few have been exhibited publicly such as King George III's bathing machine at The Statue on the seafront and in the brewery complex in Hope Square.
3. Undeniable, however, considering Weymouth's rich history, it is a matter of public concern and embarrassment that Weymouth and Portland do not have a proper museum to display artefacts pertaining to its history.
4. DL is offering to provide a venue, comprising approximately 300 square metres over two floors, in the warehouse at his Admiralty Buildings in Castletown.
5. The terms of this arrangement are to be agreed between DL and WPBC but the principles of such an arrangement could be:
 - (i) DL grants WPBC an initial lease of 10 years
 - (ii) The rent of such lease would be peppercorn
 - (iii) The lease would be capable of extension under normal commercial terms and rental
 - (iv) The reasonable cost of providing the basic essential building infrastructure, ie internal walls, doors, electrical, plumbing, etc will be borne by DL
 - (v) WPBC arrange for the collection and display of the artefacts
 - (vi) WPBC would be responsible for 'running' the museum, ie charging and receiving entrance fees and paying utility bills.
 - (vii)

2.10 (t) – Small Beach - Located in the corner between Crabbers' Wharf and Admiralty Buildings this beach, which is subject to tidal activity, is covered with rubbish. It has been used as a public dump for decades and contains the usual shopping trolleys, old tyres, concrete blocks, bricks, pipe etc.

Needless to say, it is visually unappealing and just what one would expect to see in a run-down area. DL is organising a 'clean up' of this beach by his staff employed at Admiralty Buildings.

2.10 (u) – New Warehouse

In consultation and cooperation with WPBC, planning permission has been granted for the erection of a new commercial facility (warehouse) to replace the dilapidated 'Copines' crab and lobster processing plant which has stood redundant since the late 1990s. This new warehouse will provide up to 10 marine industrial units for use by local fishermen and crabbers and several units are already reserved by a local company breeding lump fish for the salmon farming industry.

It is expected that employment for 10 people will be facilitated through this provision.

2.10 (v) – Marine Apartments

As part of the Marine Warehouse redevelopment referred to at 2.10 (u) above, nine new purpose-designed holiday apartments will be built. They will have a nautical theme and be marketed through a local holiday letting agency (Dream Cottages). It is anticipated that each will be let, on average, 35 to 40 weeks a year and this will bring footfall and revenue to Castletown, as well employment associated with cleaning and maintaining them.

2.10 (w) – Access to two Mulberry Harbours

DL has approached Portland Port to open a dialogue on how the Mulberry Harbours might be opened to the public.

2.10 (x) – Create a Scuba Divers' Tourist Hub

1. Castletown has lost its attractiveness to the diving fraternity and the evidence of this is only too apparent by the closed down dive shops and dive training schools that have moved away.
2. Five years ago, Castletown was a thriving (if not chaotic) commercial diving hub in the summer. Hundreds of divers visited every day at its peak with the knock-on benefit of the pubs being full again (not seen since the Navy pulled out) and little businesses such as a convenience store, a dive gear shop, dive training school and others trading healthily.
3. So what happened?
4. The answer is not just one major occurrence, but more a combination of minor instances which, collectively, resulted in Castletown losing its appeal:
 - (i) HMS Hood, a very popular 'training dive', or a 'reserve' dive in inclement weather was declared out of bounds for health and safety reasons.
 - (ii) HMS Scylla was deliberately sunk at Whitsand Bay, Plymouth as a diving attraction and has attracted many divers away from Portland.
 - (iii) The Council of Plymouth Invested and encouraged private investment into its recreational diving industry which helped lure divers away from Portland.
 - (iv) The diving fraternity evolved into a more sophisticated consumer group expecting more tailored services and facilities. They were becoming less tolerant of second rate accommodation and services, infrequent and unreliable essential supply services (such as air refills, normal diving supply replenishments) and having nowhere to park their cars or to store their boat trailers.
5. In fact, there is much to criticise Castletown about if it were to be perceived as a holiday destination for any group of tourists, let alone a very specific group all with a common focus – to scuba dive. In addition to the remarks at (iv) above, Castletown, as a residential area, is clearly

'run down' with boarded up pubs, derelict shops, dilapidated hotels now being used as houses of multiple occupancy (with the attendant social problems) boarded up public toilets and a frequently vandalised BT phone box.

6. So what can be done?

7. The answer, I believe, is two-fold:

- (i) Regenerate Castletown village with particular focus on its core tourist consumer – the scuba diver. This is the general subject of this paper.
- (ii) Create a new competitive diving attraction – an Underwater Curiosity Park.

8. ***Creating an Underwater Curiosity Park***

- (i) Ironically Portland is recognised as one of the best diving locations in the country. It offers hundreds of shipwrecks and interesting dive sites, as well as its status as an area of nautical outstanding natural beauty being part of the Jurassic coastline.
- (ii) These attractions, however, have one common Achilles heel. They are susceptible to adverse weather conditions.
- (iii) It takes a lot of planning and then preparation of dive equipment, transportation to Portland, transporting your own boat or chartering others, booking guest houses/hotels, working out depths, tides, currents etc. only at the last minute to have all your plans frustrated because a south-westerly or easterly gale blows up.
- (iv) There is no contingency or alternative dive option.
- (v) Of course, inclement weather is accepted as a natural risk by divers and only too often, having made all the arrangements, divers go out anyway and dive in conditions that are unsafe.
- (vi) Imagine a dive area which is, whilst not exactly weatherproof, as resilient to adverse conditions as possible.
- (vii) There is an area adjacent to a wreck known as the 'Countess of Erne' located just inside the Portland harbour wall between the east and south entrances to Portland harbour. Its exact location is 50°35.11N; 02°25.09W.
- (viii) Here could be created an Underwater Curiosity Park which would appeal to divers of all abilities for, not only its curiosity value, its 'fall-back' attractiveness when other dive sites are off limits due to weather conditions.
- (ix) The depth of water around the Countess of Erne is 8-15 metres and it is protected from moderate winds from the north by the mainland, from easterly and southerly winds by the Portland breakwater and from westerly winds by the causeway and Portland itself. Being protected by the breakwater and situated within Portland harbour, waves are generally moderate at worst, currents non-threatening and hazards non-existent (although there are always risks associated with scuba diving).
- (x) These factors make this location perfect from a novice diver's perspective and a perfectly acceptable alternative for experienced divers in inclement weather.

- (xi) A chart showing the proposed area for an Underwater Curiosity Park is attached (Annex A)
- (xii) However, an ideal diving environment is pointless if there is nothing to dive down and see. The Countess of Erne is a good novice dive or back-up dive for experienced divers, but it is far from interesting in that it is simply an old barge without any real perspectives like a bridge or conning tower. There is nothing to explore – no adventure.
- (xiii) My plan (subject of course to receiving all the necessary permissions) is to sink a number of environmentally friendly curiosities in an area of approximately one acre – encompassing the Countess of Erne.
- (xiv) These curiosities could be:
 - Large anchor
 - Portland stone carving
 - Large diameter sewer pipe 20 feet long
 - Small tug/boat approx. 25 feet in length
 - Redundant tank from the MoD (engine removed and sanitized)
 - Old anti-aircraft gun
 - An old torpedo
 - Battery gun from Chequers Fort (relocated - one of the four that sit redundant on the breakwater)
 - The intention is that each of the curiosities has some link, actual or symbolic, with the history of Portland.

3.3 Referring to the list of '*we have*' in 2.10 (a) to (l) above, how can we improve them?

3.3.1 Castletown's generally run down state is a consequence of a lack of investment both privately (by the owners of the businesses there) and by the various Councils – Portland, WPBC and DCC.

3.3.2 Private investment will return as businesses begin to prosper from Castletown's envisaged new commercialisation, but the local authorities must recognise their responsibilities too.

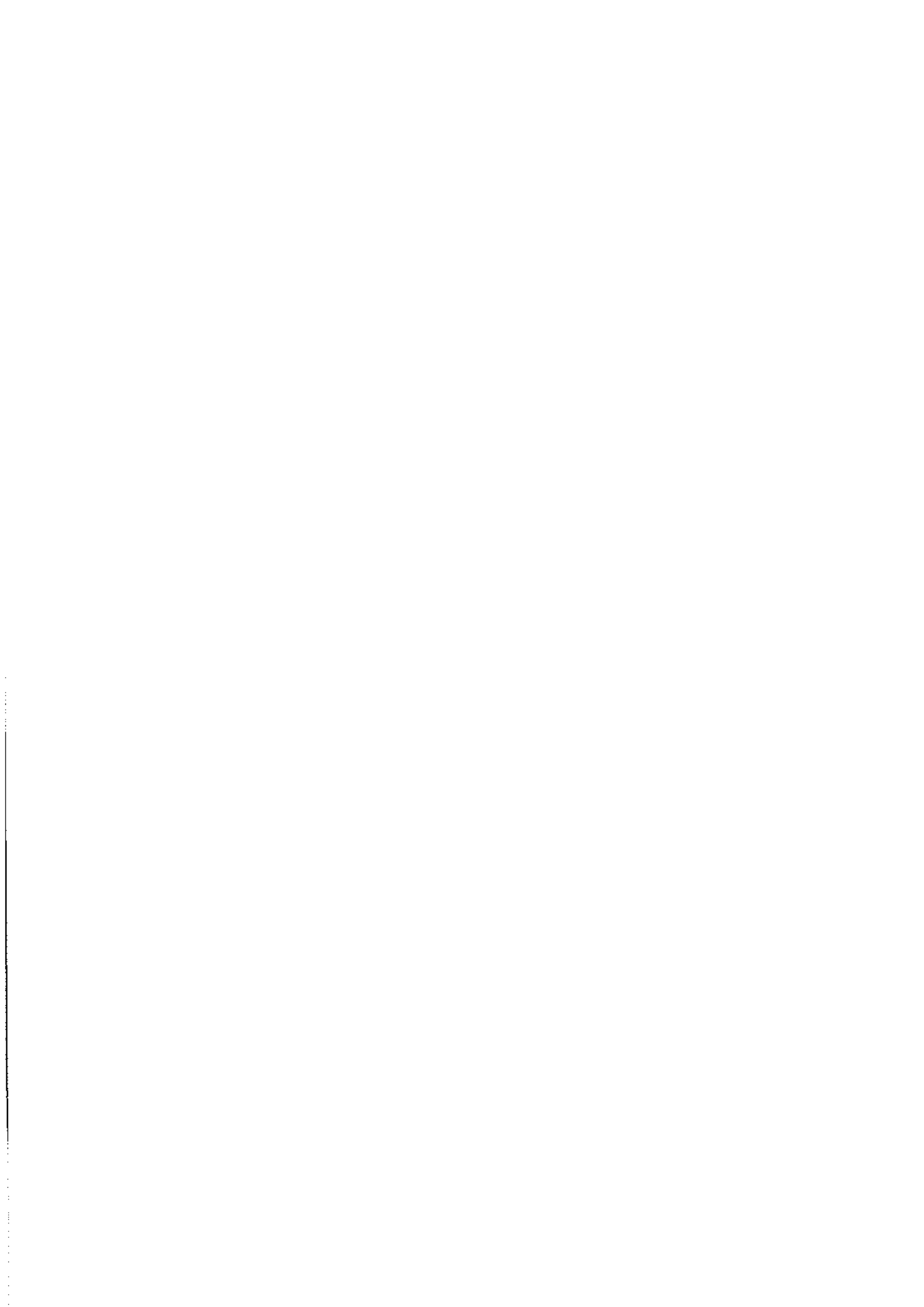
3.3.3 Parking will be a problem as Castletown receives more visitors and more road side provision could be made by, for example, reducing the width of the pavement adjacent to the Osprey Leisure Centre.

3.3.4 The slipway area needs sorting out if it is to operate efficient and facilitate the launching of numerous boats a day in busy periods. The slipway is managed by W&PBC and DL will be contacting them.

3.4 Recognising the historic link between Castletown and the Americans during the D-Day landings, and building upon the significant presence of the much neglected and undervalued mulberry harbours, it is believed that an American themed tribute to those who embarked from Castletown would prove to be a significant attraction.

- 3.5 The stone pier was where thousands of Americans departed for Normandy in June 1944 and where thousands of dead servicemen in body bags were deposited from France on their way back to the USA for final interment.
- 3.6 Presented correctly, it would be a great attraction to 'walking' tourists disembarking their cruise ships in Portland Port, particularly when coupled with Portland Castle only 5 minutes further walk away.
- 3.7 It is intended that, for commercial reasons, there be a focus on the American presence in Castletown in 1944 to attract as many American cruise ship passengers as possible. A Sherman tank located on the extra wide pavement adjacent to Admiralty Buildings perhaps?
- 3.8 And perpetuating the American military presence in 1944 theme, opening the Mulberry Harbours to the public (for access refer to para 2.10 (w)) and mounting some anti-aircraft guns or other 2nd World War paraphernalia on them. These Mulberry Harbours, as they are called, are actually giant concrete caissons codenamed 'Phoenix' in the war. They were designed to float and be towed over to Normandy after D-Day to be pieced together to create an operational harbour to allow stores and supplies to be landed. The two in Portland Port were spares or back-ups and were never used.
- 3.9 It is worth noting that of the 22 cruise ship scheduled to call in to Portland during 2015, 10 of them are American carrying 14,500 passengers. The remaining ships carry a further 12,000 passengers, many of them American.

D E Luckhurst
April 2015



ANNEX A

