

## UK Ports

# Portland targets offshore windfarm sector

**Harbour Revision Order will enable the UK port to add 130,000 sq m of reclaimed land and extra berthing space**



ROGER HAILEY

PORTLAND Port, on the UK south coast, stepped into the spotlight when it became the reception base for more than 2,000 containers washed ashore or removed from the stricken *MSC Napoli* boxship in January 2007.

In the summer of 2012, the former Royal Navy port will have a grandstand seat — with a good pair of binoculars — for the Olympic Games' sailing competition events, although port operations will not be affected.

Following its closure as a naval base after 150 years in the senior service, Portland Port was privatised in 1996 and is now part of the Langham Industries Group.

The first thing you notice on

arrival, apart from the three Royal Fleet Auxiliary vessels and a cable layer at berth, is the extensive breakwater, built by Victorian convict labour — an enduring testament to the public benefits of penal servitude.

But Portland is determined to live not on its past but to embrace the commercial opportunities of the very modern offshore windfarm and gas storage industries. Hence the successful application for a Harbour Revision Order from the Department for Transport, which provides for a substantial expansion at the port.

Commercial manager Ian McQuade makes the point that Portland's harbour area covers 4,500 acres of water, both inner and outer areas, and that the port has more than 2 km of berthing.

"We have very good quality water here, which is deep and clear," he says. "There are anchorages with depths of up to 20 m in the outer harbour and 16 m in the inner harbour, plus a depth alongside of up to 11.6 m. That is a very strong asset, particularly on the UK south coast."

Apart from its RFA contract with the Ministry of Defence, Portland also acts as the homeport for Global Marine Systems, whose undersea cable laying activities include the onsite storage of sufficient fibre optic cabling to go once round the



Portland: the clarity of its water, created by natural scouring and gentle currents, make it a favoured hub for commercial divers carrying out underwater surveys.

world at the equator. GMS is moving into the market for offshore power cabling, a business strategy that fits in well with the port management's own long-term plans to exploit the same sector.

***"What is essential here, not just from a Portland Port point of view, but from a UK plc point of view, is that we cannot allow this business to spill overseas"***

***Ian McQuade, Portland commercial manager***

The port is also the home hub for Portland Bunkers International, part of the Aegean Marine Petroleum Network, whose facility consists of four underground storage tanks of around 10,000

tonnes each, located in the hillside within the port estate.

"Ships come into the outer harbour and a bunker barge goes out to meet them. It is a bit like a service station on the English Channel," said Mr McQuade.

"A large number of ships go up and down the English Channel every day, and PBI is tapping into that market."

The clarity of the water at Portland, a phenomenon to do with natural scouring and gentle currents, make it a favoured hub for commercial divers performing underwater surveys as part of sale and purchase agreements.

Other than the passing boxship breaking up and shedding its load, there is little opportunity for utilised traffic at Portland. The future, said Mr McQuade, is in energy. Hence the decision to host an offshore and renewables conference in November.

First stop on the port's business plan is the Zone 7 West of Isle of Wight wind park being developed by Dutch energy firm Eneco.

"It is right on our doorstep, only 17 km from the port. We have been in discussion with Eneco for 18 months to see how we might service their needs," said Mr McQuade.

Management wants to move into the offshore and renewables market on a wider scale, which may include the construction phase of the Atlantic Array in the Bristol Channel. "Maybe it is too far, but we have started discussions on that level as well," he said.

The HRO will enable Portland to add 130,000 sq m of reclaimed land and extra berthing space. "That moves us a long way round the curve because no one port in the UK has all of what the offshore developers want, which is a lovely big bit of flat land, about 70,000 sq m or 80,000 sq m, with 7 m-8 m water depth, quayside space and storage space, all next to the water. It does not exist.

"So, there needs to be a certain amount of development work to give the offshore industry what it wants, and we already have the permissions in place.

"It is a major advantage for us, because other ports do not have those permissions and have got to start from scratch, get their application in and do the environmental assessments. It is a long list, so you are talking two or three years, even before you get going."

In terms of funding, Mr McQuade says: "We have always viewed the investment here with the HRO as a phased development, and we have a rough figure of around £25m [\$38.8m] for phase one. It is a

## Underground caverns will plug gas shortfall

HISTORIC Portland was protected by two castles built on the orders of King Henry VIII, writes Roger Hailey.

Today, other than acting as a base for the Royal Fleet Auxiliary, midway between Plymouth and Portsmouth naval bases, Portland is now also targeting the gas sector.

The Portland Gas project, under consideration by Infrastrata, will use the geology of the port to store natural gas in 14 caverns some 2.5 km underground.

Reacting to concerns about a lack of strategic gas reserves, the idea is that natural gas will be pumped from the grid during the summer months and then pumped back during the winter, as demand warrants. The facility has the capacity to handle 20m cu m of natural gas per day, 5% of the national requirement.

Port management hopes that one lasting legacy of the 2012 Olympics, other than putting Portland "on the map", will be improved road links that will make talk of a ferry service to

France feasible. Commercial manager Ian McQuade said: "There have been discussions on and off with various parties regarding potential ferry services, either to France or further afield.

"Better road links will open up the whole concept of a ferry service. The market in the southwest for ferry traffic is quite a strong one."

There is also an *MSC Napoli* legacy. The quay areas, which were churned up during by the container storage activities, have been resurfaced to a higher specification and container handling equipment in place.

The port's towage capacity has also increased and last winter Portland took delivery of the 60-tonne bollard pull tug *Maiden Castle*. "It allows us to get heavily involved if there is a major salvage in our area. Our previous tugs were all inshore harbour tugs. This one has the capability to go offshore. It is an area we will be exploring in the future," said Mr McQuade. ■

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## Strategy envisions long-term support role for up to 50 years

PORTLAND is not alone in targeting the offshore windfarm and renewables energy sector, with most UK ports looking for their fair share of a multibillion pound business, writes Roger Hailey.

Portland knows competition will be tough, but is looking beyond the construction phase — which is land-intensive — to supporting the offshore windfarm sector over a longer-time period. "The construction phase is short-term, but our key interest is in the operational and maintenance support thereafter, which will last for between 25 and 50 years," said Portland commercial manager Ian McQuade.

Mr McQuade believes it unlikely that the offshore industry will want to put all its eggs in one basket, preferring instead a multiport approach to ports, which would require less capital expenditure overall.

Portland, although it has the Harbour Revision Order in place, is thinking creatively about making better use of its own offshore asset, the available water space within the harbour.

"If the industry takes a multiport approach to construction, one of the biggest



McQuade: better use of water space.

assets we have is the harbour, which we can use for on-water storage with barges, or maybe floating quayside systems. There are a number of options out there for using the water as temporary storage.

"You build up storage during the construction phase and then you get rid of the barges as demand drops, so you do not have to make any heavy capital investment in quayside, which may only be utilised for three to five years."

He adds: "It is a big-scale operation and huge areas are needed, but we have a huge amount of water out there and we

can flex the storage area to their needs.

"During the peak of construction phase you may need a multitude of barges. We see heavy lift barges in here from time to time, so they already exist and we are thinking about adding a large flat open workspace. You are not talking about hi-tech bits of kit.

"There are solutions where people are looking at floating pontoon structures, which means a temporary floating quay space."

Ironically, military history points to the answer. Portland is host to two pieces of the Second World War Mulberry Harbour in its harbour. Although these Mulberry 'temporary harbours' never made the trip to Normandy in June 1944, they are protected as listed structures and act today as an effective windbreak.

But the windfarm industry also requires readily available maritime engineering expertise. Portland, as the home port for Global Marine and commercial diving services, argues that it already possesses the technical knowledge and skill base that the offshore windfarm industry needs. ■

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