



Portsmouth
CITY COUNCIL

Portsmouth City Council Planning Service Student Information Sheet

GUNWHARF QUAYS (FORMER HMS VERNON)

Introduction

This factsheet covers the history and recent re-development of the 12.2 ha “Gunwharf Quays” site, concentrating especially on the proposals progress through the planning system. Separate factsheets are available covering the wider “Renaissance of Portsmouth Harbour” project and the “Spinnaker Tower”.

Background

Early History

The site was established as a naval ordnance yard in the late 17th century. Additional land was purchased to create further storage areas, eventually expanding the site to its present boundary wall in the 1870s. Gunwharf (known as HMS Vernon) was later to become the home of the Royal Navy’s Mine Countermeasures ships and training facilities, and the Captain Weapons Trials Unit.

Although many of the buildings on the site prior to redevelopment dated from the twentieth century, a number of older buildings have survived and been retained on the site. These include the Vulcan Building, Infirmary Building and the Board of Ordnance Offices, all listed buildings and Scheduled Ancient Monuments. The Boundary Wall and Main Gate are also listed, and the whole site was designated a conservation area in 1992.

Impact of the UK Defence Review

The White Paper “The UK Defence Programme - The Way Forward”, announced in June 1981, suggested the closure of a number of sites in Portsmouth, including HMS Vernon by 1986. Portsmouth’s role in the Falklands Conflict in 1982 led to a review of this strategy, the Royal Navy considering options to prolong the naval life of HMS Vernon by relocating other units to Gunwharf. These were never pursued and it was eventually decided that the site be put on the open market by 1991 at the earliest.

In April 1982 a report by the City Planning Officer highlighted the opportunities Gunwharf offered for the regeneration of this area. A number of uses were proposed including; commercial uses requiring water front (e.g. Ferry Port), expansion of the fish quay facilities, a mixed use of mainly residential and commercial office/workshop uses. The site was identified in the consultation draft of the City Local Plan in 1990 as a site available for future disposal. The uses proposed at this early stage were a mix of housing, employment uses (including offices, shops, restaurants, etc.) and waterfront hotel. The general principle of mixed use was carried forward to the adopted City Local Plan in 1995.

The Gunwharf Development Brief

In 1995 Portsmouth City Council prepared a development brief to provide detailed guidance, supplementary to the Local Plan, for the redevelopment of the site. This gave prospective purchasers a clear indication of what was expected in their bid to the MOD and in the subsequent planning application.

The development brief envisaged an attractive waterfront development incorporating a maritime theme. The provision of public open spaces and good public access with linkages to, from and within the site were strongly encouraged. A mixed-use development with residential, retail, leisure and office uses was required, in order to promote activity and diversity, attracting a wide range of people and making the development successful.

The elements to mark the Millennium (see the factsheet on “The Renaissance of Portsmouth Harbour) are a key feature of this development. The development brief makes it a requirement to allow for the incorporation of the following elements into the design of the scheme:

- 170m Tower (for which a separate development brief was also prepared),
- The Millennium Promenade,
- The Millennium Boulevard (to link with the City Centre),
- The City Quay.

The developer was also required to restore the site’s listed buildings for appropriate uses, as well as to retain the original gateway and the 1870s boundary wall. The development brief sought a high standard of design throughout the development, particularly in relation to the historical buildings and on the waterfront. The developer would have to overcome a variety of problems associated with the site, such as the run-down nature of the dock area and contamination from its previous use. The tall ships and waterbus berths were to require a Harbour Revision Order. Access to the site was also an important consideration, complicated by the need to retain the listed boundary walls.

Wind from the sea, noise from the Hard, the location of the listed buildings and the Millennium elements, all contributed to setting a framework of constraints within which the designers and architects had to work.

The “Gunwharf Quays” Proposal

The MoD sold the site to the Berkeley Group in 1996, who submitted an outline planning application in January 1997 to establish the principle of development. Matters such as the layout of the development, the siting and design of all buildings, spaces and structures and landscaping were to be the subject of future reserved matters submissions. The submission also included retail, traffic and environmental impact studies.

The scheme was subject to extensive public consultation due to the importance and significance of the project to the City of Portsmouth. Exhibitions to approve the general design were held in both Portsmouth and

Gosport, and the proposals were advertised in "Flagship", Portsmouth City Council's magazine.

The main features of the scheme included:

- Retail; speciality shopping, craft & antiques market (17,000 sq.m).
- Leisure; restaurants, taverns and a multiplex cinema (17,000 sq.m)
- Up to 310 residential units; new build and conversions
- Ariadne building retained for University of Portsmouth, linked with conference facilities (2100 sq. m.)
- Two new hotels
- 2340 car parking spaces (1475 related to the retail / leisure centre)
- Bars, cafes & restaurants (8,300 sq.m.)
- Offices (1,000 sq.m.)
- Common areas, Tower access etc.
- Open air theatre & City quays, etc. (1,100 sq.m.)
- Tourist Information centre

Berkeley/Landlord had commissioned an investigation into the retail market, which concluded that a mixture of speciality shopping, designer outlets and bars/restaurants would be popular in this location. This mixture also corresponded to the type of operators who had followed up initial publicity of the project.

As required by Planning Policy Guidance Note 6 for retail development over 2500m² gross floorspace, a retail impact study accompanied the planning application. Specialist retail consultants Littman & Robeson produced a report ("Gunwharf, Portsmouth – An assessment of the likely effect on the vitality and viability of surrounding shopping centres", 1996). Amongst other things the study concluded that the nature of the centre would limit its competition with existing centres, particularly Portsmouth City Centre. Although the analysis was based on a worst case scenario assumption (that all turnover would be drawn from existing retailers), it was estimated that total diversion of expenditure on comparison and durable goods would be no more than 6% of the total anticipated growth of expenditure to 2001. Finally, it was deemed that Gunwharf Quays would meet part of the need for new floorspace over that period and would substantially enhance the quality of retailing in Portsmouth by improving specialist provision and potentially attracting retailers who might not otherwise be attracted to the city.

The application was presented to a special City Council Planning Committee meeting on 4th June 1997 where it was resolved to grant *conditional outline permission* subject to the developer entering into two legal agreements with the City Council. One was a *Section 106 agreement* on details such as pedestrian/vehicular access, parking provision, siting of the Millennium Tower, provision of Millennium Promenade and Boulevard (within the site). The other was a *Section 278 Highways Agreement* for off-site highway works to a number of junctions (including the Park Road/Anglesea Road junction).

“Reserved Matters” Proposals

On 20 May 1998 the City Council's Planning Committee determined nine applications for planning permission linked to the *reserved matters* required by the outline permission of June 1997. These permissions were for;

- Construction of buildings in the northern area for retail/food & drink/office/leisure/cinema with underground parking;
- Construction in the southern area of 3/4/5-storey blocks to provide flats, with restaurant/public house/office use in part of ground floor, three-storey dwelling-houses/integral garages and underground parking;
- in central, western and southern areas construction of quays, promenades and boulevards with associated structures;
- Construction of two-storey extension to Vulcan building with rooms in the roof forming new wing for restaurant/bar and 12 flats, new clock tower;
- Re-form openings in boundary wall and Nelson gate, new cycle store adjacent to old main gate;
- Conservation Area Consent for demolition of part of wall south of Nelson gate; Demolition of Battery Room and Generator House (Building 26);
- Demolition of Acetaeon and Defiance Buildings.

Part of the housing area on the waterfront had been excluded from these approvals due to concerns about the relationship of the proposed scheme to the Vulcan building to the east. A design brief was subsequently prepared by the applicant and a limited architectural competition held. Consequently, a further reserved matters approval was granted on this part of the site in May 1999 for the construction of two 4, 5 & 6 storey blocks to provide 126 flats, plus a ground floor restaurant and basement parking for 254 cars (architects John Thompson & Partners).

Ariadne Building

This building was formerly listed due largely to its internal fittings, which included elements from frigates stationed in Portsmouth in the 1870's. Many of these fittings have now been transferred to other establishments, and the building was “de-listed” in 1996. Although it had been intended to retain this building (possibly for use as offices or by the University of Portsmouth), subsequent examination showed it to be in a poor state of repair with some significant problems, such as wall tie failure, bulging brickwork and roof spreading, putting it beyond economic repair.

Approval was granted by the City Council Planning Committee on 6th April 2000 to demolish of the Ariadne building. In June 2004 an application submitted by Barton Willmore Planning on behalf of Berkeley Festival Waterfront Company Ltd., Berkeley Homes PLC, The Gunwharf Quays Partnership and Gunwharf Quays GP Ltd was granted. The development approved here is mainly residential, consisting of 176 dwellings (126 of which will be affordable units in the form of key worker housing), a day nursery, cycle and parking facilities including decked car park, landscaping and new brick walls. The new Ariadne building will be of a more conventional design than the neighbouring East Side Plaza and will provide a transition down to

existing lower rise buildings. The listed Donegal Lodge will be demolished to make way for this development.

Details of Retail

The original retail element consisted of 72 units in a range of sizes from 50-500m². The shops are aligned along two parallel glazed routes, linked by an atrium at ground floor level and leading to the Central Square. The foyers to the leisure activities on the upper floors overlook this public space.

Arrivals on foot or via public transport use The Hard Interchange or the Main Gate for access, as well as the Millennium Promenade leading around the front of the housing element (once this has been completed). A coach and taxi set down is accommodated adjacent to the proposed Craft Square.

The Spinnaker Tower

Adjacent to the bars on the waterfront and the Wightlink Pier is the Spinnaker Tower. The tower, designed as a prominent landmark and the centrepiece of the Renaissance of Harbour project, provides stunning views of Portsmouth Harbour and beyond from its 100m high viewing platforms.

More information can be found on the 'Spinnaker Tower' information sheet.

East Side Plaza

In December 2003, the City Council received a planning application to develop the eastern section of the Gunwharf Quays site. The application was submitted by Barton Willmore Planning Partnership on behalf of Berkeley Festival Waterfront Company Ltd., Berkeley Homes PLC, The Gunwharf Quays Partnership and Gunwharf Quays GP Ltd. The proposal is to create 307 dwelling units in blocks 6, 8, 11, and 29 storeys high, connected by a ground floor link which will contain retail units. The development will also include basement and decked parking, a service road, associated landscaping and alterations onto Gunwharf Road.

Planning permission was granted in June 2004 with minor conditions. The development is acceptable in land use terms and is in a sustainable location with excellent public transport links. Also the tallest tower at 29 storeys would provide a quality landmark building on this prominent site. This part of the development will be the tallest building in Portsmouth bar the Spinnaker Tower.

In February 2005, a new application for the East Side Plaza was received, this time from CGMS Ltd on behalf of Berkley Homes (Hampshire) Ltd. It sought the same 3 blocks comprising a 29 storey residential tower linked (by a single storey structure at ground level) to the other two blocks predominantly 6 to 13 storeys. The principal change was an increase of 17 units to 324 residential dwellings (served by 366 parking spaces). No significant external alterations were planned. As a result of progress on site however the number of additional dwellings was reduced from 17 units to 8 units. Conditional permission was given at committee in October 2005 subject to the applicants

first entering into a Section 106 Planning Agreement / Deed of Variation to secure the commuted sum for 'affordable housing'.

Summary

The Gunwharf development demonstrates the complexity and level of commitment needed to bring large "brownfield" sites back into productive use, and shows how careful planning of such redevelopment can result in good quality successful places. Attracting over 3 million visitors in the first 9 months after its Easter 2001 opening, Gunwharf has created a stimulating new environment on a site closed to the public for over 300 years, providing an important facility for both residents and visitors alike.

The start of work on the Ariadne and East Side Plaza sites means that most of the Gunwharf site land is now developed or being developed. When the Gunwharf Plaza site is completed it will provide a public focus within the Gunwharf Quays development. It is expected that the plaza at the eastern end of the canal will hold a range of events including concerts, shows, theatre performances and specialist markets in front of a landmark building representing the success of the entire Gunwharf project.



Above – Shoppers in Gunwharf Quays