

## Sheerness Port

### Overview

1. Sheerness has a long maritime history. Its port began as a shipbuilding yard and military position protecting the river Medway and the British naval fleet. Positioned at a strategic point at the mouths of the rivers Thames and Medway, Sheerness has long played an important role in the naval defences of south east England. Remnants of the Ports military tradition can be seen through the disbanded gun placements, fort, bastion and moat toward the north of the site encompassing two Scheduled Ancient Monuments along the sea front. The importance of conserving this key heritage site is echoed through its listing on the international World Monuments Fund record of threatened sites for 2010.

2. Through its history the port has evolved, not just in character but also in function. The task of modernising the port, associated with its growing redundancy as a naval base and expansion for trade, was accepted by John Rennie and took place from 1808 to 1823. Although Renee died before the completion of the port a number of the buildings that formed part of the original Renee port model still stand to this day. The heritage of the site is now a key consideration as Sheerness Naval Dockyard boasts one Grade I, more than twenty Grade II\* and eleven Grade II listed structures.

3. Today the port extends over 1.5 million square meters is regarded as one of the UK's most important trading arteries handling a diverse range of cargoes - from fruit and trade cars to steel and forest products. Now managed by Peel Holding Group, it is a major driver within the local and regional economy and is an important source of employment through port related activities and logistical operations in Swale and particularly on the Isle of Sheppey.

4. During 2009-10, further modernisation was proposed by the Peel Group. These are illustrated on Figure 1 below. They comprised reorganisation and intensification of the commercial and industrial activities along the west flank of the port site, complemented by the creation of a new operational area (zone 5) on reclaimed land to the north of zone 2. Peel Ports had intended to produce a masterplan for the port area and expected the proposals to progress through a 15 – 20 year development program.

5. The Port proposals included:

- a 40ha port expansion on reclaimed land, providing new deep water, high capacity berths for the port;
- a new 2,390 dwelling community (partially on land currently within an operational port and also on 140 acres of reclaimed land);
- around 12,100sq m of retail; 18,600sq m of leisure and hotel uses (including marina facilities) a new promenade and flood defences;
- and a landmark marina totalling some 68.28ha of development land.

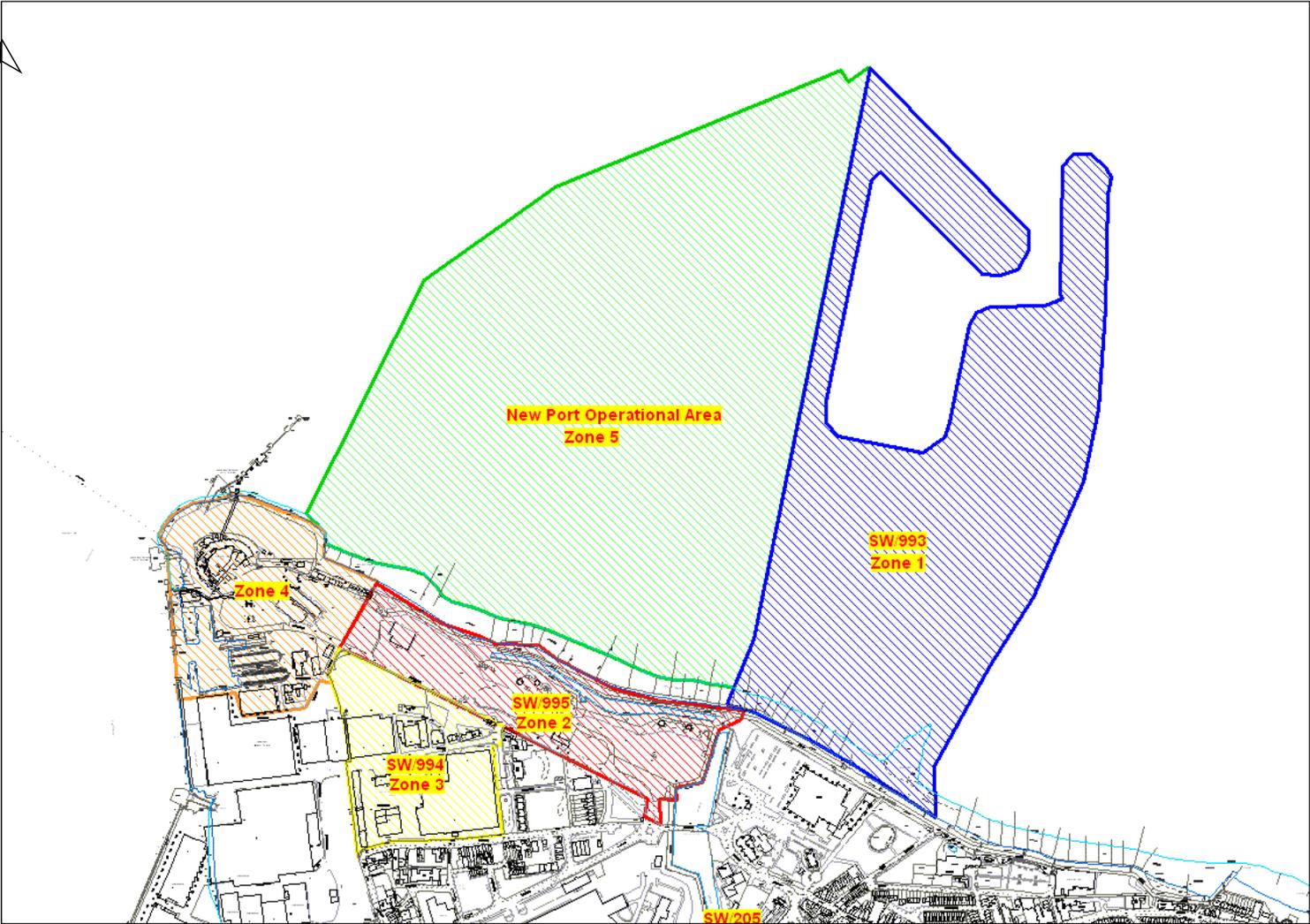
6. The proposals were intended not only to benefit the port itself but it will provide wider regeneration impetus for the Bluetown, Sheerness and the Isle of Sheppey as a whole. In particular regeneration was advocated as having the ability to contribute toward addressing deprivation issues in Sheerness and Bluetown which represent some of England's most deprived wards.

7. Although evidence has been prepared across a variety of issues and was submitted to the Council in 2009 no further progress has been made. However, this evidence has informed the Council's decision in the developability of the site.

8. Considering the complexities of the scheme, for clarity in the SHLAA, the site has been divided into five distinct development zones. Zone 4 and zone 5 have been identified for uses other than housing - heritage purposes and a commercial uses, respectively. Zone 1 (Land Reclamation – SW/993), Zone 2 (Garrison Road – SW/995) and Zone 3 (Heritage Area – SW/994) complete the housing element of the Port scheme.

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Figure 1 Site location plan and delineation of the proposed development zones.



## Developers proposed phasing structure

9. Peel Holdings submitted a proposed phasing structure for consideration which is reproduced below for information.

	<b>Zone 1 SW/993</b>	<b>Zone 2 SW/995</b>	<b>Zone 3 SW994</b>	<b>Zone 4</b>	<b>Zone 5</b>	<b>Total</b>
0-5 Years (2009 – 2014)	0	0	0	No Housing Proposed	No Housing Proposed	<b>0</b>
6-10 Years (2014 – 2019)	0	240	350			<b>590</b>
11-15 Years (2019 – 2024)	600	0	0			<b>600</b>
Post 15 Years (2024 onwards)	1,200	0	0			<b>1,200</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,800</b>	<b>240</b>	<b>350</b>	-	-	<b>2,390</b>

10. Since the previous 2008-09 SHLAA, Peel Holdings has not progressed the project in any meaningful way. Given this lack of progress a single report is provided. Although it can be seen that the project essentially 'fails' at step 2, it should be noted that there are other aspects of the scheme that are more related to its availability/achievability that are not discussed in any detail:

- the time needed to address the complicated consents regime;
- timescales needed before reclaimed land can be developed;
- timescales of landfill becoming available; and
- the removal of existing employment uses from within zone 2.

**Step 1 Overall Policy Constraints**      Should site progress to step 2?      Yes

To bring a site of the scale and complexity forward would require its identification in some form within the development plan as part of the Local Plan. In light of the anticipated timeframe of adoption of the Local Plan the site could not be brought forward before this date, regardless of any other constraint.

Of the Port, the ELR notes that this large employment site as being long-established, of good quality and performing reasonably well for employment needs. The scope for future development of the employment site is highlighted as depending upon the operational needs of the Port. The ELR acknowledges some surplus port land, highlighting its potential to accommodate a range of other B1-B8 uses. Having regard to the land owner's aspirations, it should be noted that whilst a considerable area of employment land maybe lost through redevelopment, any potential loss is offset by the provision of 71ha of new reclaimed operational land to the north of this site, together opportunities for other forms of employment development such as leisure and retail.

The granting of planning permission for off-shore wind turbine manufacture on the adjacent Lappel Bank site appears not to physically affect the regeneration project directly, but it potentially changes the dynamics of the Port and its existing and future markets. However, at this stage it is assumed that the projects are compatible with the reclamation project.

Proposals have implications for the existing and proposed SPAs in the area and will need to be assessed under the European Habitats Regulations; this is considered further under step 2.

## Step 2 – Suitability

Should site progress to step 3?

No

A wide range of issues are present that have a bearing upon the suitability of this project. Some of these can be assumed as being capable of resolution whilst others present more fundamental constraints until such times as further evidence suggests otherwise.

Dealing with the potentially resolvable constraints first:

(1) *Flood risk*: Aspects of the proposals (the reclamation) would require significant coastal defences beyond those already at Sheerness; however, it is assumed that adequate coastal defences could be implemented to effectively mitigate this risk. A supplementary strategic flood risk assessment will be required from the developer.

(2) *Services*: There are also concerns raised over the distance of the site to essential services and facilities, however, a development of this magnitude would generate its own need and these services/facilities would be expected to be provided as part of the scheme, this would also have benefits for the wider area especially at Bluetown.

(3) *Local Transport issues*: The increased population will impact on the wider road network although without a compressive Transport Impact Assessment the site cannot be considered to be a suitable housing development option. Improvements to local roads and public transport provision are also likely to be necessary, although it is assumed that a development of this scale is capable of resolving these issues.

(4) *The historic environment*: Aspects of the project are adjacent to a SAM and would require Scheduled Monument Consent application to assess the potential impact development may impose on these important historic sites. In particular achieving access to the new reclaimed area would raise particular concern.

A key objective of the project is to free up the sites' historic building assets. This would be of particular benefit, however, beneficial uses would need to be found for these buildings that would best preserve and enhance their features and settings.

(5) *Living environments*. This issue affects all the zones except zone 4 and relates to the need to ensure that the amenity of new residents is safeguarded from business activity, some of which would be 24hr operations. It is assumed that to a large degree this can be addressed, although this would appear to be a particular issue for the relationship between zones 1 & 5. These issues would also have a bearing upon 'achievability'. Allied to this would be the type of environment for residents that would be achieved close to the sea and in particular on a highly exposed reclaimed land area.

(6) *The Sir Richard Montgomery*: This maritime wreck dating from WWII is located some considerable distance to the north of the proposed reclamation area and is clearly marked on naval charts for its hazard to navigation. The wreck is regularly monitored as it contains a considerable amount of live munitions with a potentially extensive explosive capability. Assurances would need to be sought from the relevant regulatory authorities that neither the building operations nor the presence of new housing or port activity would present an 'in principle' objection.

Turning now to potentially critical constraints:

(1) *Biodiversity*: The location is close to the Medway/Swale SPA, together with the new

marine SPA in the estuary to the north of Sheppey. The Port proposals do not fall within these areas, but both the physical reclamation proposals and the marina element of them would need to be assessed for their impacts under the European Habitats Regulations, both via the preparation of an Appropriate Assessment and a likely Environmental Impact Assessment. There has been no demonstration since the previous SHLAA that these proposals would not produce 'in-principle' objections from environmental organisations. As part of its Local Plan consultations, environmental bodies have signalled their concern that evidence on the project is insufficiently advanced and that it would be unsafe to assume that there would be no harm to biodiversity interests.

(2) *Strategic level transportation issues:* Constraints have been identified by Kent Highways Services in so far as a development of this magnitude will be require to provide at least two access points opening onto separate parts of the wider road network. As the site is currently arranged the only access route is via the east end of the port along Garrison Road. Creating an access further east in the vicinity of Tesco and Beach Street Recreation ground is restricted by third party land ownership. Providing a separate access route further west is constrained by the listed Garrison Wall that separates the port from Bluetown (although a smaller gated entrance does exist). The port is actively pursuing a secondary access point and has highlighted the potential for a new access onto the Trunk Road at Brielle Way further to the south, although it is currently entirely unclear as to how this would be achieved and whether it would be acceptable to the Highways Agency. Further afield the impacts upon Jnc 5 of the M2 would need to be further assessed. At the present time, there is considered to be insufficient progress in studies to provide a sufficient level of confidence that these constraints can be overcome. Specifically, no evidence has been submitted that would enable the project to be tested as part of the LDF transport model.

Given these more critical issues, the sites are not considered suitable to move onto the next steps.

**Step 5 – Overall Achievability  
developable**

**Not currently**

Whilst acknowledging the potential regenerative benefits of the projects, there has been little or no progress on addressing the key constraints identified – transport and European wildlife habitats. Assuming these could be addressed, this would be a long term project – at best commencing toward the end of the SHLAA period. Future SHLAA will need to keep progress under review and it will be necessary for the landowners to produce a more realistic assessment of availability and achievability should be made having regard to the logistical issues needed to reconfigure this major landholdings.

0-5 years	12-13		6-10 years	17-18		11-15 years	22-23		16-19 years	27-28		20-29 years	31-36		Not currently developable
	13-14			18-19			23-24			28-29			36-42		
Yield	14-15		Yield	19-20		Yield	24-25		Yield	29-30		Yield			Yield
	15-16			20-21			25-26			30-31					<b>2390</b>
	16-17			21-22			26-27								