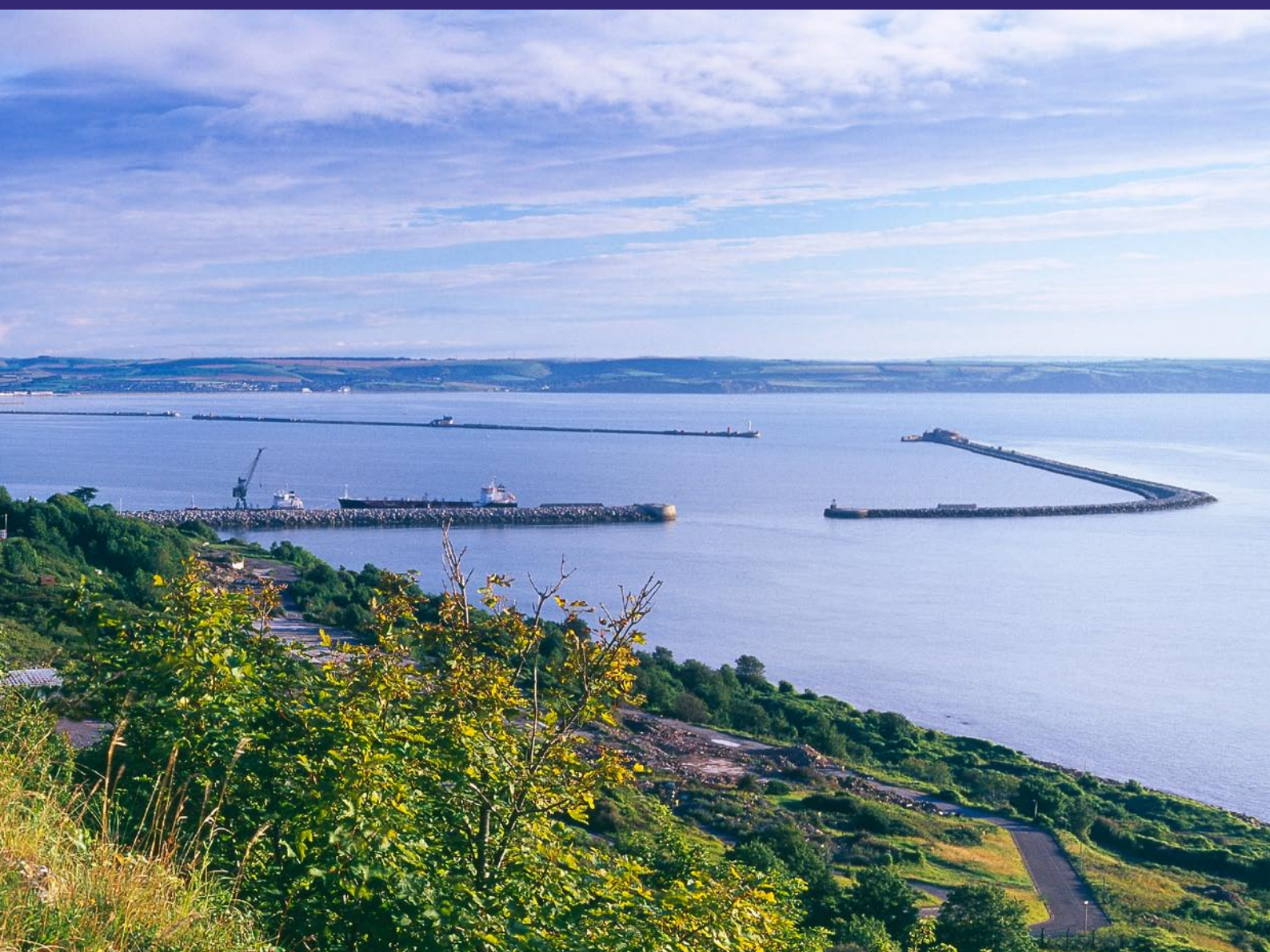
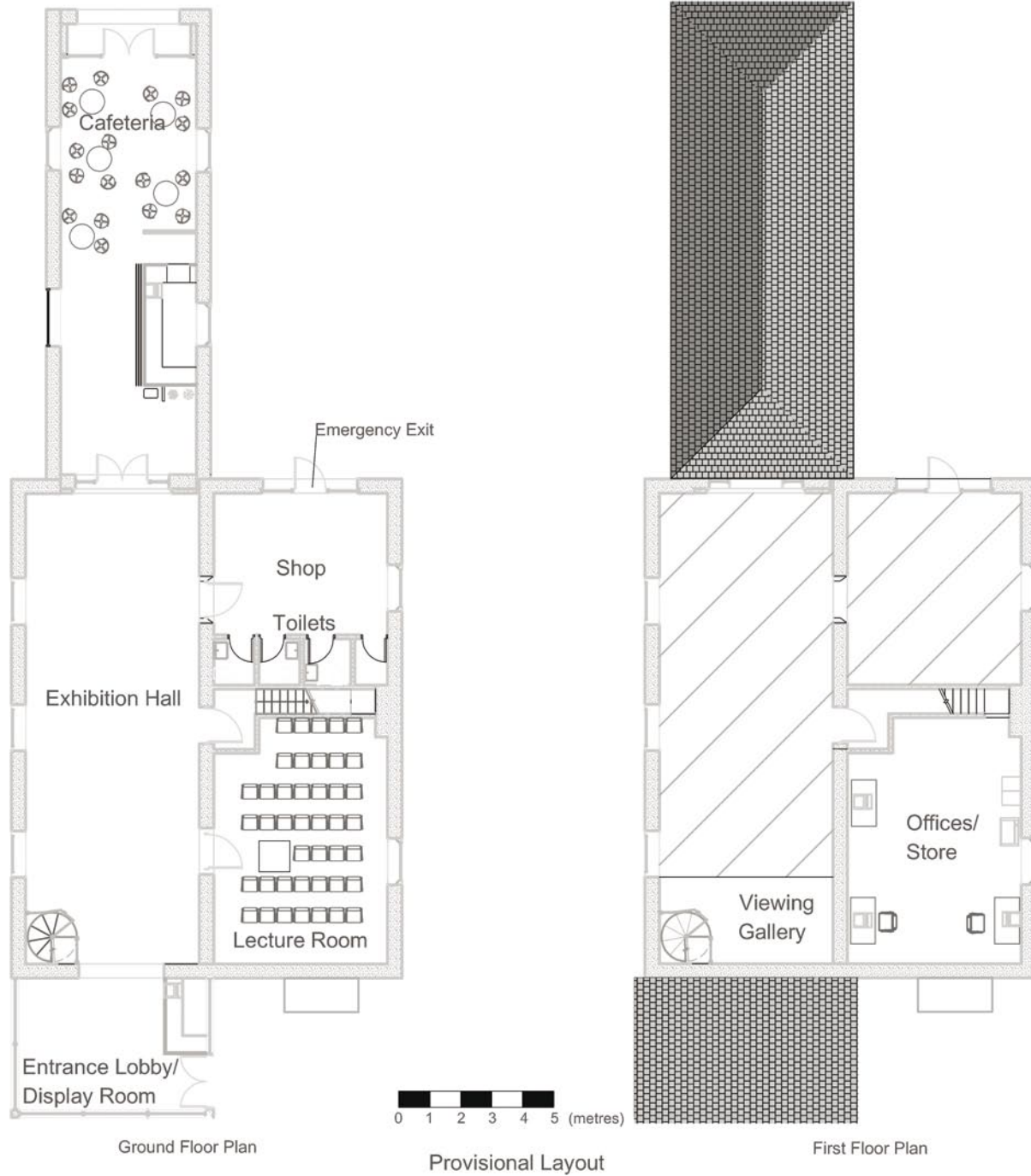


# The Old Engine Shed: Interpretation Centre For Portland







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# Introduction

For too long Portland has been the neglected jewel in the beautiful necklace that is the Dorset Coast. Most visitors spend a brief two hours on the island. Typically, they drive to the Bill, have a cup of tea, gaze at the sea, and go home again. They are losing out, and so is Portland.

Portlanders agree there is a strong need for an interpretation centre on the island to illustrate the hugely diverse range of interests that Portland has to offer. The right kind of centre in the right location would be invaluable in promoting sustainable tourism and stimulating the local economy. It would link into, and support, other initiatives currently in development.

The idea of an interpretation centre on Portland is not new. Over the years various projects have been mooted, some of them focusing on some connecting buildings known as the 'old engine shed' on the East Cliffs. This building would provide a superb setting, as local historian Stuart Morris explains:

"There is so much more to Portland than the Bill, and this is a setting that can show the Island's other side. The panoramic views over the Weares and the Breakwaters to the distant cliffs of East Dorset are priceless, yet few visitors know they even exist. This side of Portland has enormous potential for tourism, and for the appreciation of the historic and natural environment of the East Weares, cliffs and hinterland."

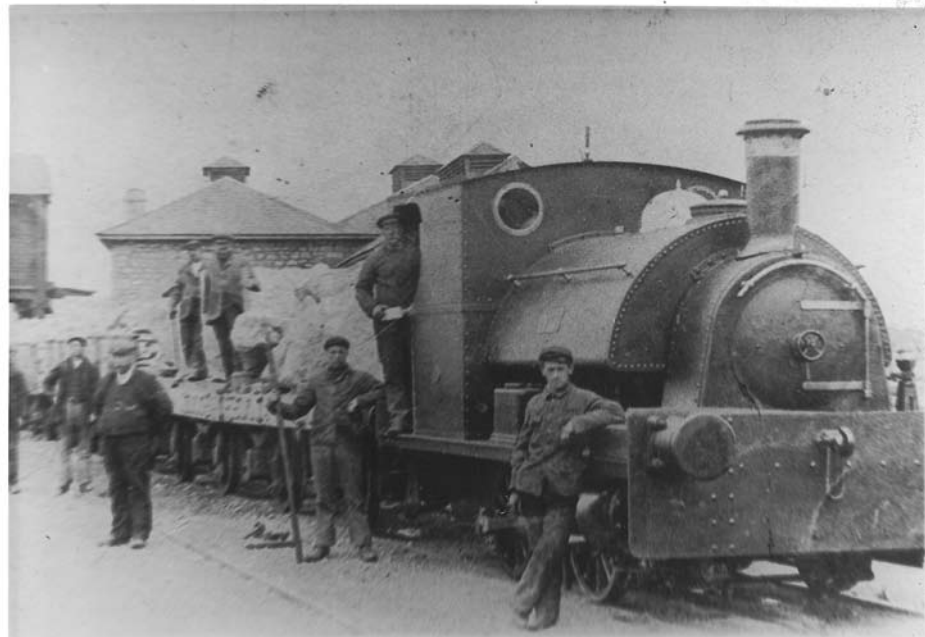
This eastern corner of the island is rich in rare wildlife – it has several SSSIs (sites of special scientific interest) – but they have been under-managed for many years. The engine shed is Grade II listed and of unique importance to Portland, yet it is in danger of being damaged beyond repair without further investment. The shed and the surrounding environment would benefit enormously from being conserved and managed in an appropriate way.



# The History Of The Old Engine Shed

Constructed in the mid-19th century, this engine shed is of great historical significance to Portland. It was built originally in connection with the network of temporary railways used for hauling stone during the construction of the harbour breakwaters. The railways linked the convict quarries, Verne Ditch and the cliffside construction line with the head of the Admiralty Incline.

The old engine shed has been used for various purposes over the last 150 years. At one point it provided stabling for heavy horses used in the quarries. In recent years it has suffered badly from vandalism and neglect. The refurbishment plans for the shed and the surrounding area would preserve a significant aspect of Portland's heritage.



A Bagnall 0-4-0 tank poses with a train of stone wagons before shunting them back under the top drum of the Admiralty Incline seen to the extreme left of the photograph.

In the background behind the engine is the engine shed used to house the locomotives in the Admiralty quarries at the top of the incline.

Photo reproduced courtesy of Brian Jackson.

## THE ENGINE SHED LINKS WITH OTHER LOCAL SITES/EDUCATIONAL ESTABLISHMENTS

### PORTLAND

Portland Museum, Wakeham  
Tourist Information centre, Portland Bill  
Mesolithic site Portland Bill  
Tout Quarry - (Sculptures)  
Kingbarrow Quarry (Dorset Wildlife Trust)  
Portland Castle, Castletown  
PQST - Independent

### WALKS

Round island walk  
Merchant's railway  
Quarry Trails

### OFF ISLAND

Chesil Beach Centre  
Lulworth Heritage centre  
Charmouth HC  
Swanage HC  
Durlston HC  
Beer quarry caves

### SCHOOLS

#### PORTLAND

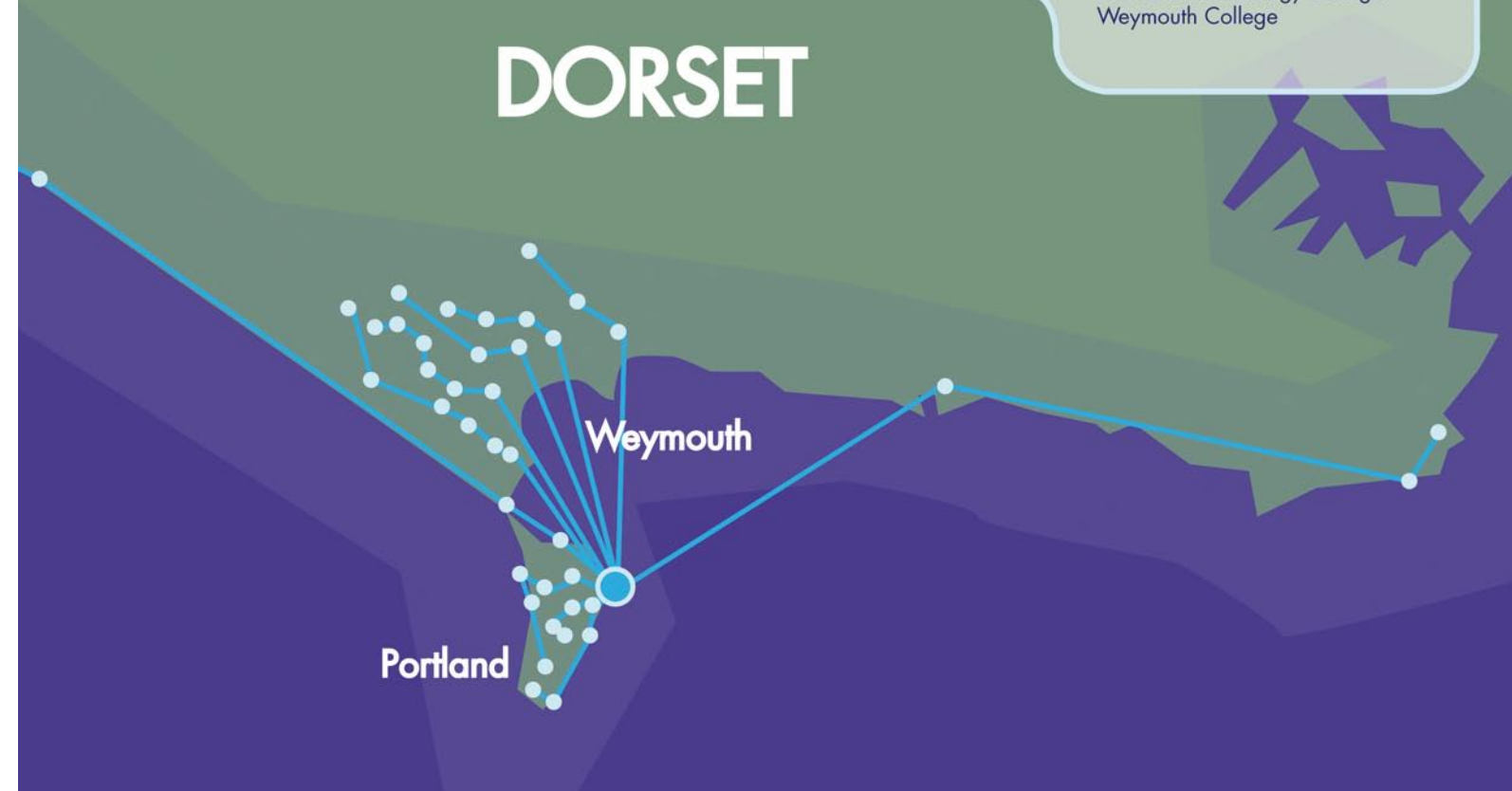
Brackenbury Grove  
Southwell  
St. George's  
Underhill  
Royal Manor Arts College

#### WEYMOUTH

Beach Croft County Infant School  
Holy Trinity C Of E Infant School  
Holy Trinity C Of E Junior School  
Chickerell Primary School

Littlemoor County Primary School  
Portesham C Of E Primary School  
St. Augustines R C Primary School  
All Saints C Of E School  
Radipole County Primary School  
Southill County Primary School  
St. Andrews C Of E Primary School  
St. Johns C Of E Primary School  
St. Nicholas And St. Laurence Primary  
Thornlow Prep. School  
Westfield Special School  
Westhaven Infant School  
Wey Valley School  
Wyke Regis C Of E Junior School  
Westhaven Junior School  
Wyke Regis County Infant School  
Budmouth Technology College  
Weymouth College

## DORSET



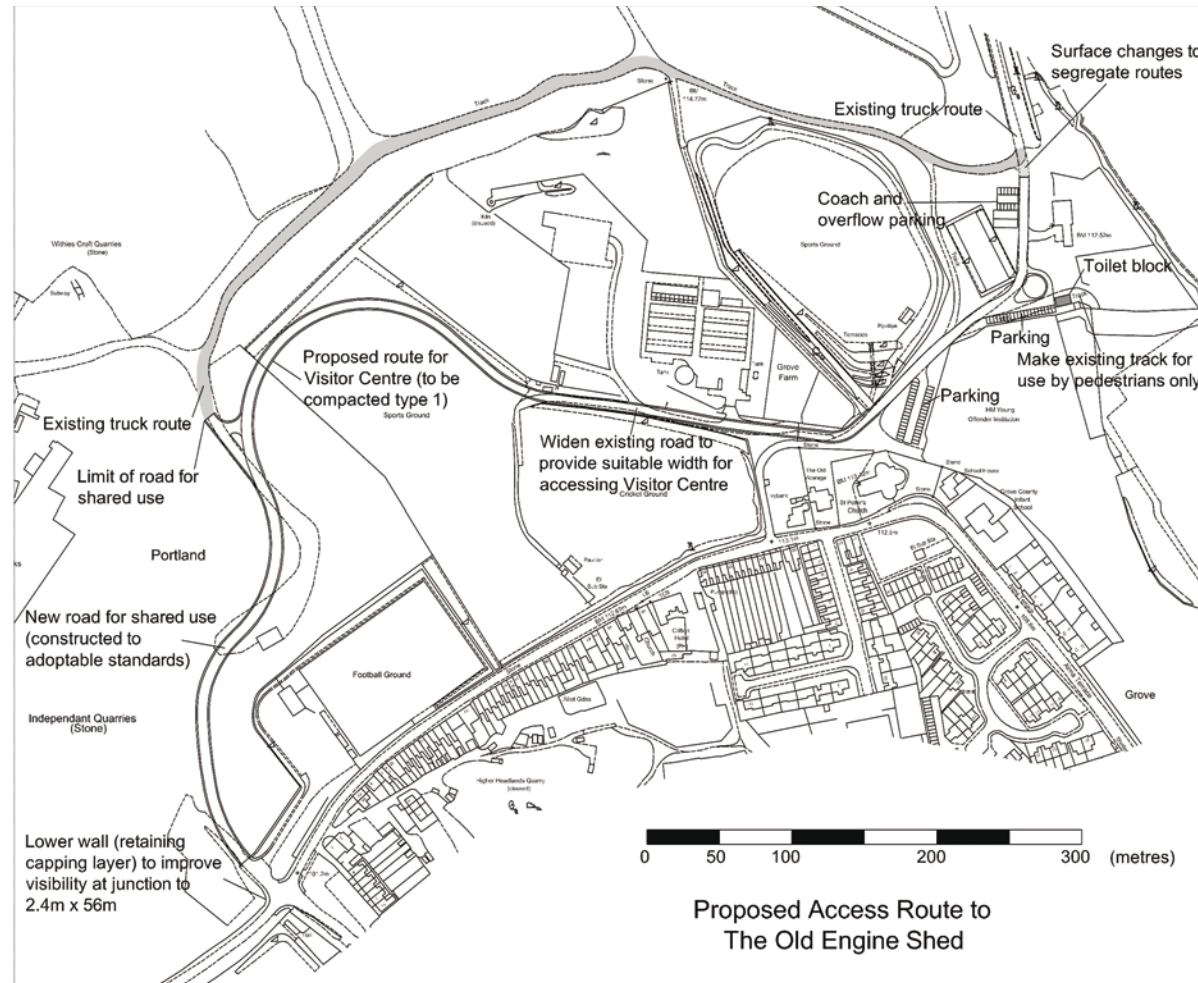
# Project Outline

Portland Gas, the company behind the gas storage project on Portland, is offering to oversee and fund the renovation of the engine shed.

This would be a substantial investment costing somewhere in the region of £1.5M. Portland Gas is committed to supporting Portland and the people who live there.

The engine shed centre would have three main elements:

- 1 - An interpretative display showing Portland's unique geology, the area's natural environment and its social history, the prisons, and the construction of the breakwater as a major feat of Victorian engineering.
- 2 - A classroom space equipped with the latest audiovisual technology for hire by educational groups of all ages.
- 3 - A walkers' café serving sandwiches and simple snacks.



# Access

The vehicle access to the centre would be provided by a safe, private road off The Grove, entering at the edge of Independent Quarry and then running alongside the playing fields. Plans include an access gate, which would be closed at dusk to secure the site and prevent nuisances such as fly tipping. The sightlines for drivers coming out on to the Grove would be improved, benefiting Portland United Football Club as well as the visitor centre.

The Engine Shed is located in an area of rough grassland and scrub on the cliff above the Upper Osprey Site. The site is not designated as a statutory or non-statutory site of nature conservation importance but is adjacent to the Isle of Portland Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and the Isle of Portland to Studland Cliffs Special Area of Conservation (SAC). The SAC is designated for its vegetated sea cliffs, which support species-rich calcareous grassland with species that are rare in the UK, such as wild cabbage, early spider orchid and Nottingham catchfly. The SSSI is designated both as a result of the geological interest of the area and for the rich assemblage of plants and animals associated with limestone grassland, scrub and coastal habitats. The rough grassland and scrub around the Engine Shed site is of limited ecological interest, as it is not particularly species-rich. However, it provides habitat for reptiles, including slow-worms, and provides shelter for nesting and migratory birds.

The building itself has been checked for evidence of roosting bats but no evidence of these protected species using the building has been found.

The route to the engine shed passes through an active quarry, and then across playing fields before joining an existing track. It does not pass through any statutory or non-statutory sites of nature conservation importance, and the habitats along the route are mostly of low ecological interest, being primarily existing bare ground, within the quarry and along the track, or improved grassland mown short, on the playing fields. One area of more species-rich shorter turf limestone grasslands occurs along the route but it is not considered to be of any great ecological significance as it is very small.



# Future Management

Once the building has been restored and converted, Portland Gas intends to form a trust with local people as the trustees and a salaried manager in charge of day-to-day issues. Portland Gas would guarantee that the centre is economically viable for the early years.

The centre would generate a cash income through the café/shop and by hiring out the audiovisual area – educational groups have been identified as a key market for this resource. In addition, Portland Gas would occasionally use the centre's audiovisual resources, paying a fee to do so.

The centre would also apply for grants to assist with management of the site and surrounding area.

# Local Support

The support from local people for the project has been very positive, especially from islanders themselves. Portland Community Partnership has written an official letter of support, as have Island Volunteers for You. The centre could have a team of environmental volunteers based there, which would be a real benefit to the centre and to the community.

It is important to see the centre as a complementary part of a wider network of community groups and visitor initiatives on Portland. This proposal aims to add to the facilities provided by existing projects and Portland Gas is keen to work with other organisations for the benefit of Portland where appropriate. For example, it is supporting Portland Community Partnership in managing the playing fields next to the proposed access route.

The project relies on the support of the Portland Port, Albion Stone and The Crown Estate which is gratefully acknowledged.

# Visitor Numbers

Research published in 2001 by Dorset County Council indicates that return visitors are very important to Portland, with 64 per cent having been before. 'Sightseeing', including 'views' and 'lighthouse', were by far the most popular reason for visiting (57 per cent) with the next nearest being walking (12 per cent).

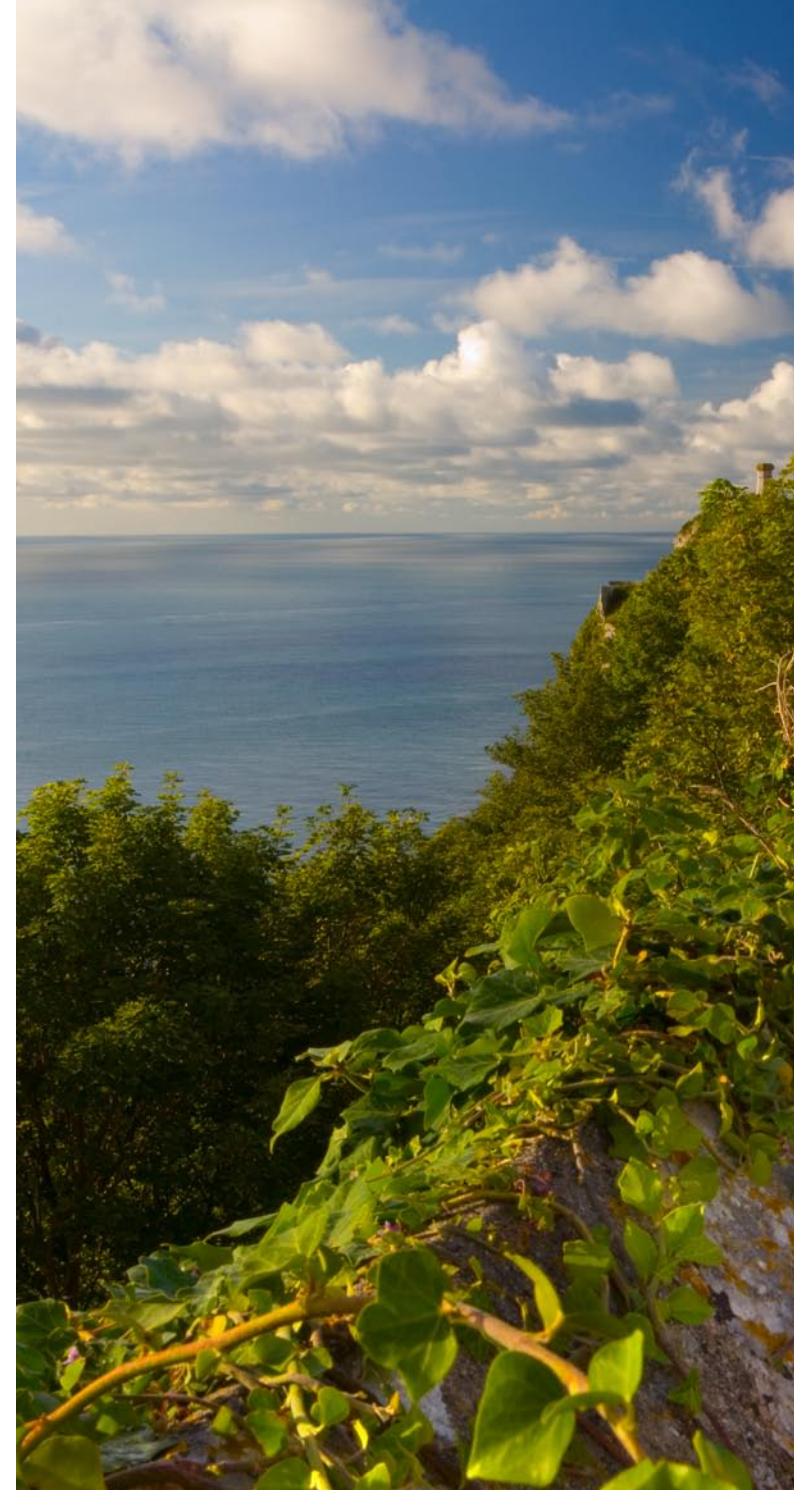
The report found that what people value most about Portland is the scenery, cleanliness and lack of pollution, the unspoilt nature of the island and its peace and tranquility. The magnificent site of the old engine shed with its peaceful surroundings and wonderful views supplies all these qualities in abundance.

Current visitor figures for the Portland Bill Centre are 300,000 while the Chesil Beach Centre stands at around 30,000 per annum. Portland Castle attracts 25,000, even though it has limited opening hours and is located away from the main roads. Taking these as a guide, and having spoken informally to hoteliers and those involved in tourism businesses on Portland, 15-20,000 visitors would be a realistic aim for the first year. The centre would aim to raise numbers to somewhere in the region of 30-35,000. The schools market has great potential; a notable example is the Lyme Regis Fossil Festival, which attracts 5,000 young people in a week, mostly school groups. Running activities on site for people of all ages, such as guided walks and historical theme days, would help increase numbers.

Free parking would be an added attraction to tourists and Portland residents as most of Dorset's tourist sites have high parking charges.

# Market

The centre would position itself to attract cultural tourism of the kind that is beneficial to local economies and less harmful to the environment. In essence this would mean building-up visits from educational groups studying the Jurassic Coast, and promoting the centre to walkers and others interested in wildlife, the geology of the World Heritage coast and social history.





# Local Priorities

THE ENGINE SHED PROJECT ADDRESSES PRIORITIES ACROSS MANY LOCAL AREA PLANS AND STRATEGIES.

## WPBC - Corporate plan 2007-2012

### CORPORATE PRIORITY 1:

#### Promote Improvement in the Local Economy.

*"We aim to diversify the local visitor economy – extending visitor season, diversifying into new niche market – capitalising on outdoor activities available in area – the World Heritage coastline – Raise the quality of the product offered to visitors."*

#### Meets Objectives 1.5

*(Increasing tourism contribution to island) – 1.6 (celebrate 2012. Heritage activities hosting in partnership annual community event).*

As a resource centre in the centre of the World Heritage Coast, the site has enormous potential for tourists and could attract many visitors to Portland and Weymouth.

This type of educational/visitor facility will help to encourage year-round visitors to the area, diversifying into new niche markets offering specialist breaks and educational trips. It will promote the World Heritage Site and the Jurassic Coastline. It is ideally situated to view the panoramic Purbeck cliffs and stunning coastline as well as Portland Harbour.

It would provide a valuable educational resource for schools and colleges, both visiting and local, and universities. The centre will be able to provide a classroom facility so students will benefit from being able to visit the site and work there as well. Feedback from local educationalists, including Royal Manor School and the Chesil Education Partnership, suggests that it would be an ideal addition to existing facilities for school parties spending the day on Portland. Such groups could start at the Chesil Beach Centre, visit the Portland Sculpture & Quarry Trust and finish at the Old Engine Shed.

Because it covers a wide range of curriculum areas (e.g. geography, geology, science, history) the centre would provide scope for educational bodies to organise longer breaks and to stay on Portland itself.

The centre is ideally situated to promote Portland's real heritage. It would welcome joint initiatives with partners including WPBC's tourism team and existing local groups in organising interactive events with a heritage theme. These could be held in and around the centre and appeal to tourists and locals alike. Examples might include staging plays about the Romans and reconstructions of aspects of convict life.





### CORPORATE PRIORITY 3:

#### Protect and improve the Natural and Built Environment.

*"We want all residents and visitors to enjoy and appreciate the improvements we make to our environment. Safe and pleasant open spaces to enjoy."*

#### Meets Objective 3.1

*(Programme of environmental education).*

#### Meets Objective 3.3

*(Maintain and improve the condition of SSSIs with Natural England and Dorset Countryside Service by 2008).*

#### Meets Objective 3.8

*(Encourage global environmental awareness – developing environmental education and awareness).*

The project would restore a historic building that has great significance to Portland, one that, although listed, is in grave danger of being damaged beyond repair through lack of use, neglect and vandalism.

The centre would interpret and explain Portland's unique and diverse aspects, and is ideally located to explain the geology of the island (from the deep salt deposits to the surface layers).

The Old Engine Shed Centre would manage the surrounding land and bring it back into community use – making the area accessible, safe and pleasant for all to enjoy. It would achieve this by having a land management plan agreed with Natural England and supported by the World Heritage Team and the Island Ranger.

This would restore proper management to SSSI/SNCI sites that are currently sadly neglected. It would work closely with a wide range of partners to promote volunteer involvement and understanding the benefits of caring for the natural environment.

### WEYMOUTH AND PORTLAND BOROUGH COUNCIL LOCAL PLAN DECEMBER 2005

#### Chapter 4 - Environment

*Policy N12 - Areas of local Landscape Importance*

*4.7.1*

*4.7.2*

#### Chapter 8 - Tourism

*Policy N13 Heritage Coast and Portland Coastline*

*4.8*

*4.8.1*

### PORTLAND TOWN COUNCIL - THE PORTLAND TOWN PLAN 2006

#### 1. The Economy – C

#### 2. The Local Environment – B - C - E - F - I

*World Heritage Site - Jurassic Coast*

### DORSET STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP - DORSET COMMUNITY STRATEGY

#### Environment Theme Group:

*"Positive and effective nature, landscape and heritage conservation. Sustainable use of rural land, natural resources and waste."*

*"Improving the quality of access to Dorset's coast, countryside, heritage and culture."*

#### Culture Theme Group:

*"Develop the contribution and productivity of the creative industries to the local community and tourism."*

*"Develop cultural tourism to increase contribution to the local economy with particular regard to building on local community identity and sense of place."*

### JURASSIC COAST - STATEMENT OF SITE CONDITION AND CONSERVATION WORK PROGRAMME – JANUARY 2007.

*Page 11/12/13 - WHS Action:*

*"Continue to work with DCC Minerals Planning Authority, the ANOB Teams on wider landscape, quarrying and local stone issues and initiatives."*

#### WHS Research Strategy

*Vision: "Inspire people to celebrate, appreciate and enjoy the WHS – to safeguard for future generations – We aspire to be a leading example of how achieving the conservation, understanding, enjoyment and sustainable use of the environment can also lead to economic and social development."*

### WEYMOUTH AND PORTLAND PARTNERSHIP 2002-2007

#### OUR COMMUNITY OUR HEALTH – Key targets to support and encourage exercise and leisure opportunities.

The Old Engine Shed Centre would be a focal point for the quarry park trail walks around Portland, encouraging local people to enjoy the area and keep healthy.

Our Neighbourhood Our Environment – key targets to improve environment, encourage community involvement and tackle fly tipping.

The positive effect that the centre will have on the area will encourage local involvement, by working with the Ranger and Island Volunteers for You, the centre will get its own team of volunteers. If an area appears cared for, fly-tipping and similar nuisances decrease.

#### PROPOSED TIMELINE

- DECEMBER 2007: Planning application submitted plus application for listed building consent.
- SPRING 2008: Planning decision and start work on site.





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