

Monday 16 April, 2018

## **Museum's Building Ambition**

Four years after the Royal opening of the Pembroke Dock Heritage Centre by The Queen, the charity which runs the Centre is planning the next exciting stages in the development of a unique museum in one of Wales' most significant military buildings.

The volunteer-led Heritage Centre has now applied to Pembrokeshire County Council, the current owners of the Chapel, for a Community Asset Transfer, which would see the operation of the building pass into the hands of the charity. This move is seen as being a major step in the plan to realise its ambitions of becoming a world-class heritage attraction and community facility for Pembroke Dock.

Pembroke Dock Sunderland Trust, which operates the Heritage Centre, is a registered charity with the purpose of collecting and interpreting the significant and important heritage of Pembroke Dock and the surrounding area. Chairman of the Trust, Gareth Mills, said: "The Royal Dockyard Chapel is one of the most important and impressive buildings in the town, an iconic part of its heritage, and is an ideal setting to tell the unique and internationally significant history of this community.

"This is a Grade II\* listed building with many original features. Whilst this is admirable, it brings major challenges in ongoing repair and maintenance. As a heritage charity we are one of the few organisations that can access grant funding to ensure the building continues to be preserved as part of the heritage of the town."

"Local Authorities are facing huge pressures on funding local services", added Mr Mills, "and in the current climate, museums, libraries and other services are under severe pressures."

"We respect the Local Authority's position and now feel the time is right for the Trust to take control of the building, easing the financial pressures on the council, and allowing us to tell this town's unique story, with the high calibre museum and community facility that Pembroke Dock's important heritage deserves."

The Heritage Centre has, year on year, increased its visitor numbers and has become a meeting place for many local groups and community organisations. It also attracts visitors from a further afield, with approximately 6,000 people each year visiting from outside of Pembrokeshire. The Centre is also a popular destination for coach travel companies, and is well used by local schools which use the resources there to enhance their curriculum in learning about local history. The Heritage

Centre is also a hub of volunteering in the town, with over 60 individuals regularly attending to volunteer each week, fulfilling a number of functions and roles.

“The Heritage Centre plays a critical role in the town's regeneration, in education, and for the health and well-being agenda in this community. All of which are other areas of concern for the Local Authority in the challenging financial climate at present,” Mr Mills added.

“We have a very good relationship with both the Town Council in Pembroke Dock and with the County Council, and are so pleased that councillors and staff at both are so supportive of what we want to achieve for this community.”

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### **Pictures with captions:**



*The Queen opened Pembroke Dock Heritage Centre in April 2014.*



*The Heritage Centre's latest exhibition celebrates 100years of the RAF, looking at the stories of the men and women who served at Pembroke Dock.*



*Pembroke Dock Heritage Centre is housed in the Royal Dockyard Chapel, a Grade II\* listed building, built in the 1830s.*

**Editors notes:**

- For further comment on this story, please contact Sunderland Trust Chairman, Gareth Mills ([chairman@sunderlandtrust.com](mailto:chairman@sunderlandtrust.com)), or Heritage Centre Manager, Stuart Berry ([stuart.berry@sunderlandtrust.com](mailto:stuart.berry@sunderlandtrust.com)).
- The Heritage Centre is open to visitors, Monday to Saturday, 10.00am to 4.00pm. Admission fees apply.
- The Heritage Centre displays interpret the maritime, aviation and military heritage of the town, as well as the social and community heritage of Pembroke Dock
- Pembroke Dock was Wales' only Royal Dockyard, and during World War II was home to the largest flying boat station in the world.
- Dockyard Chapel historical notes:
  - The Chapel was built in the 1830s as the Royal Dockyard Chapel.
  - When the RAF took over the dockyard in the 1930s it became the RAF Church and garrison theatre.
  - After the Second World War the building was sold and went on to house a cinema and later a motor museum.
  - After the motor museum closed in the mid-1980s, the building fell into disuse and gradually became vandalised and derelict.
  - Shortly after the turn of the millennium, following a compulsory purchase by the council and an injection of European grant funding for the purpose, the building was renovated and restored to its full Georgian glory.
  - Following its restoration, the council were unable to find a tenant to use the building, and it again lay empty for nine years.
  - The Trust were given a tenancy at will and allowed to move into the Chapel just weeks before the Royal Opening in April 2014.
- Pembroke Dock Sunderland Trust is registered as a charity in England and Wales, number: 1120476. Company registration no: 05920931.

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