

Portland Harbour, Wreck of HMS Hood

PORTLAND HARBOUR AUTHORITY LIMITED - PRESS STATEMENT - DIVING ON THE HOOD

In a Statement issued on 13th January 2004, the Portland Harbour Authority (PHAL) set out the background to Local Notice to Mariners (LNTM) 05/2004 which announced that no permits would be granted to dive on the former HMS HOOD, sunk as a blockship in the South Ship Channel in 1914, until the condition of the collapsing structure, its effect on waves, swell and tidal flow and the risks to divers had been assessed.

Following delays by weather and high sea states a diver survey has now been completed. In addition, work has commenced on a hydrological study of Portland Harbour and a report is expected by July. The diver survey has confirmed that the state of the wreck gives cause for concern and that it is continuing to deteriorate in ways and to an extent which cannot be predicted. The increased depth of water over the HOOD allows more and larger craft to use the South Ship Channel, further adding to the risk to divers and their support craft, as does the increasing number of divers on the wreck at peak times. These findings have been discussed with PHAL's independent Safety Auditor (the Designated Person appointed under the Port Marine Safety Code) and collectively with the Chairman of the British Sub-Aqua Club (also representing the Chairman of the Professional Association of Diving Instructors UK), the Sub-Aqua Association Archaeology Co-ordinator and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA). The findings were placed before the Portland Harbour Consultancy Committee at its meeting on 10th March and separate discussions have also been held with local dive boat operators.

PHAL is mindful of its statutory and common law responsibilities for safety within the harbour limits and recognises it has additional responsibilities as the owner of the wreck. Diving within the harbour is forbidden under the terms of the Harbour Revision Order, except in certain specified areas and when authorised by the Harbour Authority. PHAL issues permits, for which a charge is levied to cover administration costs, but is in no position to exercise direct control over the conduct of individual divers.

In the light of the diver survey, which reaffirms the concerns of the Harbour Authority, and in the interests of the safety of all divers, support craft and craft using the South Ship Channel, the Board of PHAL, having taken advice from its Safety Auditor, has concluded that it has no option but to confirm that it will not issue any written permission to dive on the wreck of the HOOD.

The next task is to identify the long-term solution to the problems of wave and swell, resulting from the changing condition of the HOOD and much will depend on the results of the hydrological study. Once the Board has assessed all the options, PHAL will consult with interested parties on the way ahead. At the same time, PHAL is very aware of the importance of Portland to the recreational diving community and to the local businesses that provide for it. For that reason, the Harbour Authority will actively explore with the BSAC, SAA, PADI and the MCA a variety of options, including the feasibility of new opportunities for diving provision within the harbour limits.

Information provided by:
Portland Harbourn authority
Tel: 01308-488765 Fax: 01308-488764 Mobile: 07785-507099
Portland Port: Tel: 01305-824044 Fax: 01305-824055
e-mail: r.best.cd@portland-port.co.uk

Information last updated:

Wednesday, March 17, 2004