



Prime Minister

Prime Minister

CHATHAM DOCKYARD

D. Harrison

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You told me of the concern expressed during your visit to the National Maritime Museum for the future of the historic dockyard at Chatham and asked about the present position.

The Naval Dockyard is in two adjacent parts; the upstream historic area where, although still part of the operational establishment, many of the buildings are as they were when built in the 18th century and are scheduled as ancient monuments, and the modern area. Following the decision that the Navy should quit Chatham in 1984, PSA commissioned consultants to study the opportunities that will exist for each part.

Norman Lamont announced on 14 March that the modern dockyard is to be purchased by the English Industrial Estates Corporation and developed for industrial and commercial uses.

For the historic dockyard, the consultants recommended that it should become a "living dockyard" to preserve its historic importance whilst bringing it to life by a mix of complementary uses - housing, offices and leisure and tourist activities and be run by a Trust. They suggested that the Trust would need financial support - probably £7m over the first 5 years and thereafter £½m pa, though these figures may be optimistic.



I have discussed the recommendations with Michael Heseltine, and agreed that officials should work up detailed proposals on the lines recommended by the consultants. Other colleagues have signified their general support. I hope to be able to put detailed proposals to the Treasury shortly after Easter. (A copy of my letter of 11 February outlining the proposals is attached for ease).

The consultants saw the National Maritime Museum having a considerable role in the dockyard – using some buildings for displays and providing expertise. As you know the Museum hold similar views and support the idea of a Trust. I met Mr Cayzer, Dr Greenhill and Dr Cossons last month to discuss progress and I visited them last week. Their main concern was that the Trust should be set up as quickly as possible, and I entirely agree. I am planning to involve Dr Greenhill in the preparatory work of setting up a shadow Trust so that when we have reached firm decisions, particularly on the financing, we have an effective body with whom to negotiate the future of the historic dockyard.

I am copying this note to Leon Brittan, Arthur Cockfield, Michael Heseltine and Patrick Jenkin.

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My ref:

Your ref:

// February 1983

*Dear Michael,*

#### CHATHAM HISTORIC DOCKYARD

I have now had an opportunity to consider the report you received last Autumn from the consultants commissioned jointly by PSA and the Kent County Council on the future environmental and economic opportunities in the historic dockyard. I have also seen the note of the meeting you held with a group of individuals with experience of running heritage museums here and in America or with other associated knowledge. As a result I have come to the conclusion that we should proceed broadly on the lines advocated by the consultants. I understand you formed a similar view, and in the light of the limited amount of time before the Navy vacate the historic area I would like to proceed with some urgency.

#### Consultants general concept

/ I enclose a copy of the consultants' report and you will recollect that they recommend that a Trust should be set up to direct and finance the operation of a 'living dockyard' through a mixture of complementary uses - housing, offices, light industry, leisure activities and most importantly tourism. I understand this view was strongly endorsed at your meeting. How the mixture turns out will be a matter for the Trust to settle as they go along but whilst there are some buildings of great historical significance such as the Ropery, and Mold Loft which will have to be retained for their original purpose, there are others such as Medway House or the Anchor Wharf Store which could be adapted to modern usage. In addition there are areas of unused land on which new buildings could be erected. Altogether there is I feel a rich collection of opportunities for the future.

#### Type of Museum

Varying advice has been offered about the form of museum that would provide the biggest tourist attraction. Some have advocated that the theme should be that of the only Georgian dockyard in the World. Others have argued that a more diversified approach including examples of ships of more recent periods would be more successful. In view of the unique collection of buildings it has been suggested that Chatham should concentrate on the historic land aspects of the Navy in contrast to Portsmouth which, with



the Victory and the other old ships it has, is dealing with the sea going aspects. These again would be matters for the Trust to develop a policy on as a result of further detailed deliberations.

#### Co-ordination of Maritime Museums

However this leads on to the matter of overall co-ordination on which I wrote to you recently. A great deal of excellent effort is now being put into creating Maritime Museums at a series of centres. In addition to the major activities at Portsmouth and Chatham there are initiatives at Bristol (in relation to merchant ships) and Ellesmere Port (Narrow Boats), and the National Maritime Museum at Greenwich is seeking some means of satisfying several additional requirements. I hope you agree that the officials of our two Departments should urgently advise us on what needs to be done. I understand the Prince of Wales mentioned to you on several occasions that he is very interested in such issues. I agree His Royal Highness would be an excellent person to lead such an overall effort and I am very willing to follow the matter up with him.

#### The Trust

The membership of the Trust will require careful thought and will need to represent a wide diversity of interests. In addition to the living museum, maritime and building conservation aspects there should be someone from the estate management and development field if the Trust is to successfully attract private investment, the local interests will need to be represented through such a body as the County Council and the tourist industry both nationally and locally should be involved. The choice of the Chairman will be a particularly critical issue, and one to which I am now giving thought, since a great deal of the success of the Trust is likely to depend on the amount of time and energy he is able to devote to its promotion.

#### Finance

In their report the Consultants do not envisage that it will be possible to find uses for all the scheduled buildings but where a property is leased from the Trust the intention is that the occupant will be responsible for its subsequent care. This approach should reduce the need for public funds but even so the consultants estimate that the Trust will need support to the extent of about £7m over the first five years and thereafter around £0.5m per annum. Prudence suggests however that these figures might rise to over £9.0m and £1.0m respectively if the Trust runs into unforeseen difficulties. Equally if the development of the dockyard catches the public's imagination the cost could be less than the consultants figures.



On page 44 of the Report these costs are set out as a cash flow arrangement for the first five years. From these figures it is possible to see what sort of annual deficit may have to be met. I am sure this is the right basis on which to assess the problem but it will be for consideration how that deficit will be met and by whom. The Trust may be able to obtain assistance from the National Heritage Fund and we shall need to examine whether regional aid or grants for tourism might assist, but it seems probable that Central Government will have to contribute a major share of the deficit at least in the early years. The responsible Department or Departments will have to be determined but yours or mine seem to be the primary candidates. The dockyard is of course part of the Defence estate and it would be helpful for me to know your views on this question of ownership in the future.

#### Kent County Council

As the County Council collaborated with us in the preparation of the Consultants Report I shall be meeting the leader, Councillor Neame to discuss the report with him. He will no doubt seek an assurance that the Government will provide financial support to the Trust but at the same time I hope to persuade him that the County Council should also contribute.

#### Implementation

I commend the recommendations to you and other colleagues as offering an imaginative and viable way forward. I am satisfied that they will enable us to preserve the major features and character of this significant part of our National Heritage and to give the area a good environmental character and a liveliness that many people will find attractive to either visit, live or work in.

There is not a great deal of time in which to resolve the details if the Trust is to be set up and be capable of taking over as the Navy pulls out (I understand the Historic Dockyard will be largely vacated before the end of this year). I am therefore asking my officials to work up outline proposals for the Trust and to consider further on an inter-departmental basis the means of providing financial support.

I should be grateful to know that you, Patrick Jenkin, Arthur Cockfield and Leon Brittan to whom I am sending copies

of this letter (and a copy of the Consultants' report) are content with these initial proposals and are able to authorise officials to participate in the necessary discussions. I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister for information.

I hope these can be concluded in time for me to circulate firm proposals before Easter.

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TOM KING





10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Private Secretary*

28 March, 1983.

The Prime Minister has now seen your Secretary of State's minute of 23 March about Chatham Dockyard. She was grateful to be kept informed of the position.

Timothy Flesher

Mrs. Helen Ghosh,  
Department of the Environment.

OK.  
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