

Fleet Helicopter Support Unit HMNB Dockyard



The Fleet Helicopter Support Unit (FHSU) provides a new facility for Royal Navy helicopter operations, fulfilling the need to maintain effective flight operations in close proximity to Devonport Naval Base. Specifically, the new unit makes Plymouth the hub for world-class helicopter training, both for the Royal Navy and navies from other nations.

- **Date of completion: Dec 2020**
- **Cost: £4.5m**
- **Location: Bull Point, Plymouth**

Challenges and solutions

The project comprised a broad range of requirements, including the demolition of existing disused buildings to make way for the new helicopter landing site; providing a safe and secure location for the storage of aviation fuel; repurposing of an existing disused storage facility into a new Forward Operating Base; construction of a new storage facility; and new security features.

The constraints and complexity of the project encouraged innovative ways of working throughout, using emerging project management techniques to structure the approach and creating the best possible teamworking culture. To achieve this, the entire project team, including stakeholders, were engaged in the project management process through a series of workshops utilising Lean Construction techniques.

The defence estate is a busy, complex and sensitive place to develop new infrastructure. Constraints included Scheduled Ancient Monuments and other historical finds, ecological habitats, contaminated land, national security restrictions and building in a brownfield site. The project required a huge range of skills sets to meet regulations and standards and continuous engagement with the many stakeholders within the Naval Base.



Benefits and achievements

The project has brought £6m of capital expenditure into the area, supporting local businesses and jobs in the construction sector, while further enhancing the capability of the Royal Navy locally. Many local people have benefitted from working on this project, including apprentices and industrial placement students.

Helicopter transits to operational and training ships at sea were being delivered from HMS Raleigh at Torpoint with personnel being regularly transported between there and HMNB Devonport. This project has reduced the amount of traffic on local roads, with the associated reductions in carbon emissions and air pollution. The new facility has also enhanced the natural environment, through improved water quality discharges, increased tree canopy cover, and has protected heritage assets.

The project achieved an excellent rating under the Defence Related Environmental Assessment Methodology (the defence equivalent of BREEAM). There were no recorded accidents or injuries throughout 22 months of works.

COVID restrictions meant that a public opening of the new facility could not happen as planned, instead the team pulled together to raise £600 for a local charity.



Fascinating facts

- 1000 helicopter flights per year will be conducted at the new facility.
- The unit will deliver training staff to British and NATO Aircraft Carrier and Warship conducting training exercises.
- A new meteorological weather station on the site has also improved weather forecasting in the area.

People who made it happen:

- Client: Defence Infrastructure Organisation
- Customer: Fleet Operational Sea Training, Royal Navy
- Client's Project Manager and other multidisciplinary support services: AECOM
- Principal Designer and Contractor: Morgan Sindall

More about this project:

royalnavy.mod.uk/news-and-latest-activity/news/2020/december/22/201222-devonport-opens-helipad-after-tenyear-gap