

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust Celebrates Fitted Rigging House Completion

On Friday, February 28, The Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust celebrated the completion of its £8.2m Fitted Rigging House Project, unlocking the financial sustainability of the charity on a revenue basis and providing much enhanced facilities for visitors, volunteers and the Trust's nationally significant collection.

Built 1793-1805 the Fitted Rigging House (Grade I listed, Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM), 9,000m²) traditionally provided accommodation for dockyard riggers to make warships' standing rigging and acted as a storehouse for new equipment. In recent years it became increasingly at risk and was the Dockyard's last (and largest) underutilised building.

Thanks to the generous support of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF), South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP) and a range of other charitable Trusts and Foundations, The Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust embarked on a landmark restoration project to transform the building from a heritage liability into an asset that would unlock the financial sustainability of both the building itself and the wider Historic Dockyard site.

Through creating new rental spaces for commercial tenancy, the project aimed to significantly increase the Trust's rental income and bring self-generated income into balance with the revenue costs of operating the site and the Trust's charitable activities for the first time in its history.

Following a 2 year development period, the Fitted Rigging House, was officially opened in October 2018 by Michael Ellis MP, DCMS Minister for Arts, Tourism and Culture, with two anchor tenants: Dovetail Games and Ward Security. With the restoration complete and the

building fully occupied, the Fitted Rigging House is now generating c.£350k income per annum.

Following this official opening, the Trust has worked tirelessly to create a whole range of facilities for public benefit to compliment the already highly successful commercial tenancy spaces. The Fitted Rigging House Project has enhanced the visitor experience in the 19th and 20th Century galleries (Steam, Steel and Submarines); created a new Volunteer Centre to greatly improve the work and rest facilities for 300 + volunteers; and enabled the Dockyard's library and archive to be rehoused in appropriate conditions, improving accessibility for researchers and visitors.

A new Volunteer Centre marks an important step forward in enhancing facilities for the Trust's volunteer workforce, who undertake a wide range of activities including operating the historic railway, maintenance of the historic warships, archive research, visitor support and a whole host of other activities. This centre creates a space for social interaction as well as practical facilities such as computer facilities, changing rooms and conferencing and meeting spaces.

The Reading Room allows improved flexibility for documents and more sensitive material to be shown on a programmed basis and the relocation of the Conservation Lab enables wider involvement in more practical sides of preventive conservation and collections management.

A Changing Places facility has been designed to support those with challenging physical needs, forming part of the Trust's ongoing commitment improving physical access across a challenging site.

The completion of this project sees most of the Trust's buildings in productive use, either as gallery spaces or to generate income from a range of diverse uses. It is the culmination of the Historic Dockyard's 32-year journey to financial self-sustainability built on its strategy of 'preservation through reuse'. The site has been transformed from a dilapidated, empty, post-industrial site into a thriving, well-restored, world-class heritage location where people live, work and visit. The Economic Impact Assessment of the Historic Dockyard site has now been estimated to be in the region of £30m per annum to the local economy.

Bill Ferris OBE, DL, Chief Executive of Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust said: *“The completion of this project is a pivotal point in The Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust’s history. Not only has this project allowed us an exceptional opportunity to improve our visitor and volunteer facilities, enabling people to both engage with and benefit from the site’s heritage, it has allowed us to move into a position of financial sustainability on a revenue level. We are now able, for the first time, to make decisions that determine the optimum charitable return rather than simply meeting our core charitable commitments. As a charity this gives us an exciting strategic opportunity to lay the ground for a sustainable future. All of this would not be possible without the significant contributions from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, DCMS and a wide range of Charitable Trusts and Foundations who have generously supported us.”*

Stuart McLeod, Director of the National Lottery Heritage Fund for London and the South, said: *“Financial sustainability is one of the most important parts of investing in heritage, but it can be one of the most difficult things to achieve. The team at Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust have managed this and deserve a great deal of credit for having the vision and dedication needed to reach this impressive milestone.”*

“This is a good moment to reflect on the breadth of positive change that can be achieved through National Lottery investment. Tourism, jobs, volunteering opportunities, accessibility, learning about our history, contributing to the local economy and a sense of local pride – this can all be found at the Fitting Rigging House and the wider Chatham Historic Dockyard and I urge anyone who can to visit, enjoy and learn from this amazing heritage success story.”

The completion of the Fitted Rigging House importantly marks the completion of the Trust’s Corporate Plan 2016-2021. Recognising this achievement, the Trust has taken the opportunity to write a new Corporate Plan for the period 2020-25. This is a plan that is built on an ethos of ‘evolution not revolution’ and sets out ambitions for the next 5 years and how the Trust will best meet its charitable objectives for years to come.

For further information about The Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust and to download a copy of the Corporate Plan 2020-25 see thedockyard.co.uk/our-charity/

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MORE PRESS INFORMATION

Please contact Lynnette Crisp for further information 01634 823800 or email lcrisp@chdt.org.uk

NOTES FOR EDITORS

The Historic Dockyard Chatham

thedockyard.co.uk

The Historic Dockyard Chatham is the only place in the world that lets you explore a complete dockyard from the age of sail. It's a unique destination that celebrates Great Britain's magnificent maritime past and unmatched contribution to the Royal Navy's shipbuilding excellence that led to worldwide command of the oceans.

Chatham offers unrivalled access to the ships that shaped the world, from a Victorian anti-slavery sailing ship, to a Second World War Destroyer or a Cold War submarine and the stories of the people who made them. From Chatham's historic buildings, The Commissioner's House and officers' quarters to the remarkable Victorian ropery, where the rigging for HMS Victory was made, to its collection of maritime archaeology, the Dockyard forms an indispensable part of Britain's naval history and its national heritage.

As a fully accredited museum, The Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust collects, preserves, researches and exhibits objects and materials connected with the history of the dockyard and its people. It studies the development of Royal Navy warship design, construction and the use of the River Medway by the Royal Navy.

Visitors to and users of The Historic Dockyard Chatham are fundamental to its purpose and the economic reuse of the site and its buildings. Its staff and volunteers play a vital role in providing a high level of service and customer care. The Trust is also involved in the on-going regeneration of Medway and The Thames Gateway, with Culture and Heritage at its heart.

As part of the Trust's strategy of "Preservation through re-use" recent projects have secured the long-term financial sustainability (on a revenue basis) of the wider Historic Dockyard site. The economic outputs from the new uses of the recently opened Fitted Rigging House as well as other activities across the site will bring the total annual contribution made to Medway's economy to £26.3m in 2019, building on the 2012 estimate of £16m (64% growth).