

PROJECT CONTEXT

- **Site and Occupier**
- **Existing Buildings**
- **Planning Policy Context**
- **Planning History**

Gravesham Borough Council

Existing Site

Gravesend is situated 20 miles East of London just before the Thames Estuary. The PLA manage the watercourse from the North Sea all the way to Teddington Lock in West London

An aerial photograph of the River Thames and surrounding landscape. A red line traces the course of the river from the North Sea in the east towards Teddington Lock in the west. The river is a light brownish-green color, contrasting with the surrounding green fields and grey urban areas. A red dot marks Teddington Lock on the left, and a red dashed circle marks Gravesend on the right.

Teddington Lock

Gravesend

Existing Site

The site itself sits a small walk from Gravesend town centre with good rail and road links. Although close in its proximity the site itself feels a little apart from the town with a relationship that could be improved.



Existing Site and Buildings

The site is located along Royal Pier Road to the North East of Gravesend town centre and faces north onto the River Thames. The overall site is within the Gravesend Riverside Conservation Area and the collection of PLA buildings stretch out along the river edge with an uninterrupted north facing view over the Tidal Thames.

Fronting the buildings on its south side are a number of mature trees which screen the buildings from the road. Opposite there is a mixture of Victorian and Edwardian houses and nearby the recently refurbished Clarendon Royal Hotel.

The PLA's site is divided into 4 buildings all adjacent to one other:

1. London River House, on the west, built in 1992 and refurbished between 2019-2021. This includes the building known as the Link which connects London River House to the PCC.

2. Port Control Centre (PCC) with its array of rooftop radars.

3. Royal Terrace Pier, Grade II Listed, constructed in 1844.

4. Alexandra House on the east side, built in the 1970's.



Of these buildings the primary focus of this application for refurbishment is the Port Control Centre (PCC) as shown in the image adjacent:

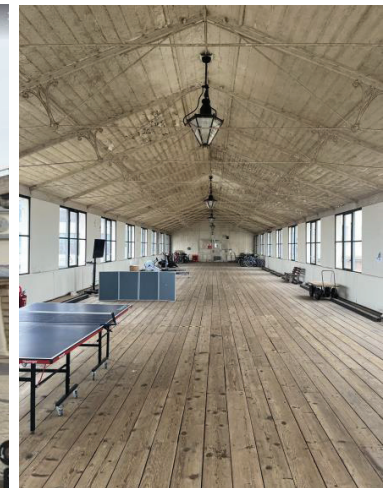
Existing Site and Buildings

The existing building comprises a ground floor plus 3 storey building over a single level basement with a rooftop structure above the 3rd floor. The building houses the PLA's Vessel Traffic Services (VTS) and radar equipment for the PLA and ancillary office areas. The basement is occupied by plant serving the building. The PCC building is bounded by The 'Link' building to the west, the Grade II listed Royal Terrace Pier to the east, the river front to the north and Royal Pier Road to the south.

As highlighted in the introduction, currently located within the PCC is the PLA's Vessel Traffic Services (VTS) department whom oversee safety of navigation of some 600 square miles of waterway spanning 95 miles from Teddington to the North Sea on a 24 hour basis 365 days a year.

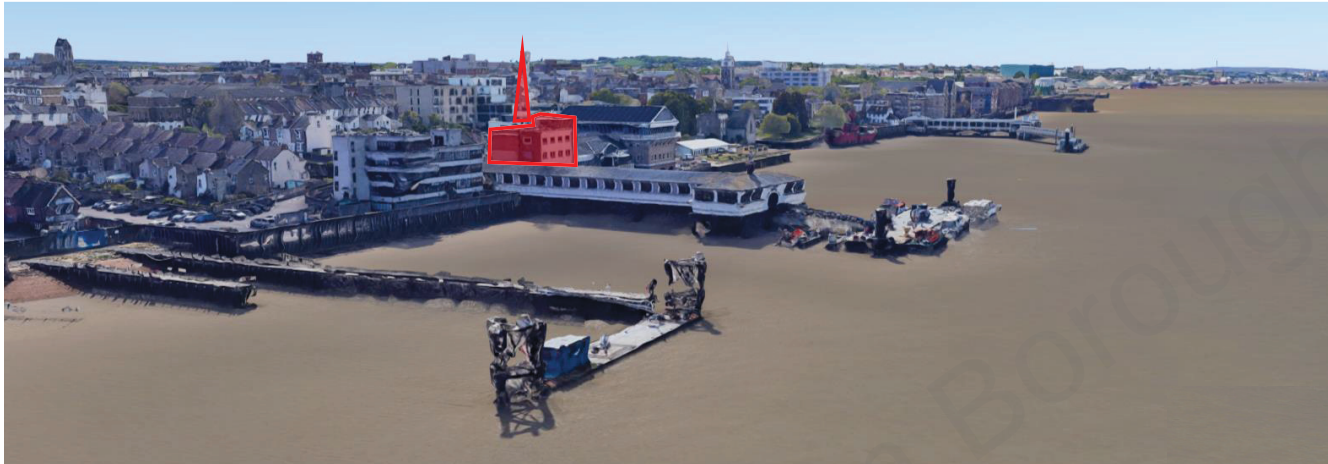
All VTS personnel are fully trained to the International Association of Lighthouse Authorities (IALA) and Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) standards. The infrastructure utilised by VTS is rapidly evolving and the need for the PLA to ensure its VTS operations can continue to operate effectively forms a key part of the need to modernise and ensure the PLA's PCC building can continue to act as the main base of operations for the PLA both now and in the long term.

The PLA currently have a VTS site at the Thames Barrier Navigation Centre (TBNC) in Woolwich. As part of these consolidation proposals VTS staff will move from TBNC to PCC. This will involve an increase of 10 VTS officers at Gravesend.



Existing Site and Buildings – River and town visibility

The PLA sits on a unique place on the Banks of the River Thames at the point it becomes the Thames Estuary. The PCC building and its communications tower could become a marker on the river and the project offers the opportunity to better reflect the key service provided within.



View along Thames from eastern approach. The PCC and comms tower is visible above the pier and offers an opportunity for visual impact.



View from town centre showing potential impact of new forms on the approach experience. Silhouette also visible on river approach from the west.

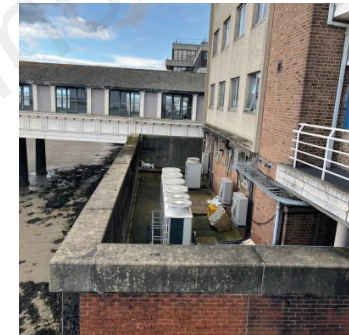
Existing Site and Buildings – Town side



Images showing the various buildings that make up the PLA, its connection to the river and the mix of architectural styles and eras.

Whilst the existing PLA Gravesend site includes a number of characterful buildings and has an amazing relationship to the river, the site presents a cluttered and confusing face to the town. Within the Gravesend Riverside Conservation Area Appraised for this area, other than the Grade II listed Royal Terrace Pier, the PLA's collection of buildings are shown as 'neutral' buildings. Furthermore it is stated that the buildings within the Conservation Area have different scales, materials and designs and create an interesting mix of structures that sometimes create a visual clash with their neighbours with the PLA buildings and Royal Pier Road residences are given as an example of this. Access to the main door is compromised by steps whilst carparking, service entrances and bins stores dominate the frontage.

Existing Site and Buildings – River side



The position of the PCC allows for long panoramic views along the Thames in both directions.