

Buses vital for cruise ship visits



Portland Port has set out the importance of shuttle buses for its cruise ship business and the £10m it brings to south Dorset.

Its complimentary service – upon which the port spends hundreds of thousands of pounds each year - takes passengers directly from the port quayside to Weymouth town centre where they are dropped off behind Hope Square.

The port – which supports circa 300 jobs through its own business and tenants - has carefully considered multiple options for the transfer location and continues to keep these under review.

It has offered a financial contribution for Dorset Council to make highways improvements at the drop-off point in Spring Road, including changes to a mini roundabout.

This comes after the port welcomed its first cruise ship of the season in February and as it prepares to welcome 45 more vessels carrying 110,000 passengers from April to December.

Ian McQuade, general manager commercial and chair of Cruise Britain, said: “There has been a lot of talk about the shuttle buses.

“I would like to reassure the local community that discussions with the council have been ongoing since we first started growing our cruise business

“All aspects of the shuttle bus service have been reviewed; including timings, locations, logistics, costs, congestion, as well as what the implications would be for each alternative site.

“We actively review our operations and continue to consider other options. We have recently brainstormed ideas with our transport operator. We will obviously keep all stakeholders informed should an alternative option prove viable.

“We recognise that we don’t operate in a vacuum and genuinely remain committed to identifying workable solutions to ensure our shuttle bus service runs in the best way possible.”



Portland Port has contracted a professional traffic management company for all cruise calls, which includes the provision of traffic marshals. It has also worked with the bus operator to stagger the arrival of vehicles and limit the number on the road at any one time.

Each year the port makes road space bookings with Dorset Council for the route its shuttle buses take for every cruise call.

At an early-stage Spring Road was considered the best location for access, bus travel times and timetables, traffic congestion and first impressions for visitors. This decision has subsequently been regularly reviewed with Dorset Council.

Numerous alternative options have been considered. Some are unworkable due to timings and logistics, others due to traffic flows and potential congestion issues.

The £10m that cruise calls bring into the local economy are based on statistics from the Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) trade body for spend per head of passenger. The figure includes expenditure in shops, bars, cafes, tourism attractions along with transport and tours.

In addition, further expenditure comes from the crew that are given time off when in port along with berthing revenues through the port itself and businesses in the local supply chain.

Typically, about 50% of visiting cruise guests go on organised excursions, the majority of which stay in Dorset.

Most of the remaining passengers explore the local area using the port's complimentary shuttle bus service, either choosing to stay on Portland or travel into Weymouth. Some also use taxis to travel to and from Portland to Weymouth and local destinations.

A variety of businesses benefit from cruise visits throughout the year, including off-peak calls in the autumn and winter.

Paul Appleby, president of Weymouth and Portland Chamber of Commerce, said: "The Chamber of Commerce is very grateful for the hard work of Portland Port to attract cruise ships and their respective visitors to Weymouth and Portland."

Dennis Spurr, of the Fantastic Sausage Factory in St Mary Street, Weymouth, said: "The cruise ships are absolutely fabulous.

"The number of people they bring into town results in a great a deal business for some people, so they have to been seen as a great plus.

"I always make the effort to chat with passengers and they are all happy because they are on holiday and love it in Weymouth. We're a resort town so I can't see any minuses."

Josephine Parker, owner of the EBIKE Cafe on Custom House Quay, said: "We look forward to welcoming all the international visitors for the 2024 cruise season.

"Every time a cruise ship comes to Portland, we are inundated with visitors. They love it here, and we love them visiting us. Because of this, we now employ more team members."

Ali Record, owner of the George Bar and Grill on Custom House Quay, said: "We really appreciate the business the cruise ships bring in. They definitely make the town busier, especially outside of the summer."

Zack Phillips, manager of the Marlboro restaurant and take away next to the town bridge in St Thomas Street, said they keep track of cruise calls so they can prepare for the extra visitors.



"The cruise ships are great for business. The Americans particularly come in for their fish and chips. The restaurant is pretty much full the whole time they are here."

Rosie Lawlor, owner of Rosies Retro Closet in St Alban Street, said: “There is a noticeable difference when the cruise ships come in.

“It is nice seeing more people in St Alban Street, which is so pretty and appeals to visitors. Many like going to local small independent businesses where they can buy things that they wouldn’t get anywhere else.”



Ian Ferguson, managing director of Weyline Taxis, said: “Portland Port is a significant source of work for our drivers, whom it has to be stated are local people both in terms of work, residency and socially. This year our average job count is around ten journeys per day, either to or from the port.

“During the summer we see an exponential increase in work, including tours to local landmarks and localities, bringing in much appreciated patronage and income for a wide variety of businesses.”

“The port itself employs a number of people over a range of skills and professions and we believe should be viewed as a positive for both Portland and Weymouth.”

A Facebook post by a German passenger has hailed the delights of Weymouth, following her visit on the AIDASol in February of this year.

She described Weymouth as a ‘pretty town with a beach, lots of small shops and pubs’ and described how her group enjoyed drinks in a pub as a ‘nice farewell at the last port of our trip’.

She added: “Back on the ship, the beautiful evening sky managed to get me out of my cabin again. Because this was our inaugural call, we were given a worthy send off with three cannon blasts, which I couldn’t possibly miss.”

The AIDASol was the first call of 2024 when she arrived with more than 2,000 passengers plus more than 600 crew.

Her visit marked the start of an 11-month long season with 47 vessel visits and 110,000 passengers due from February to December.

Cruise visits will continue throughout the spring and summer and into autumn with calls scheduled in September, October and November before the final ship arrives on December 10.



Ian said: “A great deal of time, work and investment goes into winning cruise business, preparing for the calls and encouraging return calls.

“Cruise calls create and support local jobs and the economy, but also generate significant exposure for the area and help to encourage further tourism.

“Our complimentary shuttle buses are a key component of this success and we really want this to continue to bring benefits for our community and economy.”

Portland Port has invested heavily in its infrastructure over several years, the largest investment being £26m on its deep-water-berth, to increase capacity and capability.

This has allowed the port to welcome larger vessels, including ships up to 350m in length on opposite berths on the same day.

The Portland Port estate provides employment for circa 300 people in non-seasonal work. The port itself directly employs 57 in this total. About half of the people employed live on Portland and the rest in Weymouth, or very close by.

There are also indirect employees - such as hauliers and suppliers - as a consequence of direct employment.

ENDS

Notes to reporters: Portland Port:

Portland Port is based in South Dorset and has operated on a commercial basis since 1996.

Prior to this, the port operated as a naval base. It employs 57 staff and lets space to a number of tenants, including dry and liquid bulk cargo businesses, which provide employment for about 300 people.

The port also provides maritime and marine related services, including berthing facilities for visiting vessels.

The port is operated and privately owned by the Portland Port Group.

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