

Falmouth Docks Redevelopment Marks Significant Progress

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Falmouth Docks has reached a pivotal stage in its ambitious redevelopment plans, with A&P Falmouth and Falmouth Docks and Engineering Company (FDEC) submitting a critical marine licence application to the Marine Management Organisation (MMO). This milestone, alongside a full planning application with Cornwall Council (PA25/01598), signals the most substantial overhaul of the port since the 1950s, when the Number 2 drydock and County/Duchy wharf complex were constructed to accommodate the super tanker era.

“The multimillion-pound project aims to secure the long-term viability of the docks, safeguard jobs, and boost economic activity across Cornwall and beyond.” The port’s ageing infrastructure, much of it in poor condition, struggles to meet the demands of a growing cruise industry, ship repair, cargo handling, and the emerging Floating Offshore Wind (FLOW) sector in the Celtic Sea.” In recent months, inefficiencies have become evident, with ships frequently shifting berths to maintain operations a logistical issue that hampers trade and underscores the urgency of modernisation.”

The redevelopment encompasses several key projects. The Western wharf, currently unsafe and at risk of collapse, will see its timber piles demolished and replaced with a new suspended deck structure to accommodate large cruise ships and FLOW installations. The removal of the 1930s King’s and Empire wooden jetties two decades ago left a spoil ground that now requires clearing to facilitate FLOW operations. “Additionally, the Western Wharf will extend 50 metres into the inner harbour with new decking, while the Duchy Wharf will be upgraded to support FLOW.” Strengthening works are also proposed for the County/Duchy wharves, alongside targeted pocket dredging to allow safe navigation for 184,000-tonne, 340-metre-long Excellence-class cruise ships and FLOW structures.

“Dredging, a central environmental consideration, will involve an estimated 640,000 cubic metres of spoil, with disposal planned at offshore sites including Falmouth Bay, approximately 9.4 km southeast of the docks.” To minimise environmental impact, dredging will take place during specific tidal stages using a lidded grab to reduce sediment dispersal.” A&P Falmouth/FDEC has engaged extensively with port stakeholders to refine these plans, ensuring their concerns are addressed.

Further works include removing a concrete appendage at the Northern Arm wharf’s eastern end to improve navigation to the new Western wharf, replacing the metal gangway system, and constructing a new 90-metre section to replace remaining timber piles. Demolition of outdated buildings is also planned. While the docks operate 24/7, noisy activities like demolition, piling, and compaction will be restricted to daytime hours to minimise disruption.

Falmouth Docks plays a vital role in the local economy, supporting defence contracts for the Royal Navy, Royal Fleet Auxiliary, and other naval vessels, alongside commercial shipping that drives revenue and employment. The redevelopment’s timeline, estimated at 3.5 years, depends on licensing, funding, and contractor availability. A detailed programme of works remains fluid to accommodate business priorities and financial constraints.

According to a report by consultants Ramboll, FDEC's current economic contribution is substantial, underscoring the docks' importance to Cornwall's prosperity. This project, while complex, promises to modernise a critical asset, ensuring it meets the demands of a dynamic maritime sector while preserving its economic and strategic value.