

**Revised
Supplementary Planning Guidance**

Portland Beach Huts

**Weymouth & Portland Borough Council
February 2006**

Preface

Draft Supplementary Planning Guidance for Beach Huts was approved for consultation by Weymouth & Portland Borough Council at the meeting of the Environment & Conservation Committee on 2 September 2002. That consultation elicited fears that the Borough Council was attempting to relocate some of the prominent coastal huts to less prominent locations. The document was consequently amended to delete references to the removal of huts, though an exception from the general policy of restraint was retained to enable the re-location of huts to less sensitive locations should the opportunity arise. The amended Supplementary Planning Guidance was formally adopted by the Borough Council on 3 March 2003.

The Inspector's Report on the Public Local Inquiry held into the Weymouth & Portland Local Plan Review over February to June 2004 included a recommendation to delete Policy TO8 Recreational Beach Huts, on the grounds that it was too restrictive and that adequate controls were available in other policies. The report also noted in passing that it may be necessary to change the wording of the Supplementary Planning Guidance on Beach Huts to take account of that recommendation. This revised guidance has consequently been prepared to take account of changes incorporated into the final adopted Local Plan Review.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Fishermen's Huts have historically been a feature of the rugged Portland coastline, though in more recent times the function of such huts has become recreational in nature, and interest in them is no longer restricted to Portland residents. Beach Huts have become established at West Weares, Church Ope Cove, the Portland Bill Coast and the Portland Bill Hut Fields (See Map 1). By their nature these huts are located on the open coastline in sensitive areas. It is important that future developments are controlled to prevent damage to the open landscape, nature conservation interest and recreational value of these sites, both for the benefit of existing hut owners and for the wider local community and visiting public who enjoy these precious landscapes.
- 1.2 The alteration, extension, replacement and change of use of these huts requires planning consent from Weymouth & Portland Borough Council. The purpose of this Supplementary Planning Guidance is to provide detail on the special planning circumstances that relate to beach huts on Portland and indicate the specific types of proposal that are likely to be acceptable in planning terms.

2. Important Issues for Beach Huts

- 2.1 Beach huts have become established at several discrete locations around the Portland coastline (see Map 1). Nevertheless, all of these sites are subject to similar concerns:

2.2 Landscape

- 2.2.1 The Portland Coastline has been identified by Dorset County Council as being of equivalent value to the West Dorset Heritage Coast. This respects its unique coastal landscape of undeveloped cliffs, historic coastal quarry workings, coastal defence features etc. Weymouth & Portland Borough Council have likewise designated it as an Area of Local Landscape Importance. Though to a degree traditional Fishermen's Huts are part of this unique landscape character, larger huts with less traditional features could damage this landscape. Likewise, more permanent methods of construction could cause lasting damage to the undeveloped nature of the coastal landscape and preclude future improvements to the arrangement of huts.
- 2.2.2 The round island footpath, which is part of the South West Coast Path National Trail, gives public access to the length of the coastline and, along with the rest of the footpath network and stretches of Common Land, allows intimate exploration of this coastal landscape.

2.3 Nature Conservation

- 2.3.1 Virtually the whole Portland Coastline from the high water mark to the cliff tops, and in some cases beyond, is designated as part of the Isle of Portland Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) by English Nature. This designation recognises the national importance of both the unique geological exposures along the coastline and in historic quarries, and the wildlife importance of Portland's limestone fauna and flora. In addition, the European importance of the maritime flora and fauna of the coastal cliffs has resulted in most of the cliffs being further designated as part of the Isle of Portland to Studland Cliffs Special Area of Conservation by English Nature. The outstanding geological importance of the Portland cliff exposures as part of the

Jurassic sequence of the coastline is recognised internationally by inclusion in the Dorset & East Devon Coast World Heritage Site. Though beach huts are unlikely to have a detrimental effect on the geology itself, it is important that further building does not cover or shade important species rich grasslands and that the intensity of the associated use of the grasslands does not significantly increase.

2.4 Recreation

- 2.4.1 Beach huts are an important recreational resource in their own right. They have a long history of local use, enabling relaxed day-time enjoyment of local beauty spots, bathing and angling waters, some beach huts staying in the same family for generations. With improvements in transport and leisure-time over the last century these same locations are now accessible for the enjoyment of the wider population and for additional pastimes including diving, rock climbing and bird watching. The open nature of the coastline underpins the viability of all these uses. In particular, it is important that the redevelopment of beach huts does not damage the setting of other beach huts and so reduce their recreational value, as well as damaging the wider landscape and amenity value of the area.

3. Criteria for the Replacement, Extension and Alteration of Portland Beach Huts

3.1 General Criteria

- 3.1.1 In all cases it is helpful for beach hut owners to bear in mind that their beach hut is a day-time recreational hut of a particular limited size. Proposals to fundamentally alter the function, character and size of huts are likely to be detrimental to the character of beach hut areas and will not be considered favourably. The variety in size, orientation and set-back of huts adds to the character of the beach hut sites and proposals to copy larger neighbouring huts that would eliminate this diversity will not be encouraged.
- 3.1.2 It is important that beach huts retain the appearance of temporary timber built structures without permanent foundations in order to preserve their essential character, enable future siting improvements and avoid the incremental development of inappropriate buildings in these sensitive locations. Likewise, huts should remain as single storey structures without loft storage and should not develop further patio, decking or veranda areas or 'garden' enclosures. These would fundamentally alter the character of the huts, the development of outdoor structures or gardens being additionally damaging to nature conservation interests.
- 3.1.3 In design terms, any extension or adaptation should match the existing hut in materials, roof height and pitch or provide an overall improvement through the wholesale rebuilding of the hut with improved materials. This will avoid the additional clutter of off-shots, lean-to stores etc. Extensions that replace such features will normally be supported. However, cumulative extensions will be taken into account so that a hut that has previously been significantly extended would not receive permission for further extensions. This is to prevent the incremental loss of hut character and nature conservation habitat via successive extensions.

3.2 Criteria for West Weares, Church Ope Cove & Portland Bill Coastline

- 3.2.1 At West Weares, Church Ope Cove and outside the hut fields at Portland Bill, additional beach huts, extensions to beach huts and the replacement of beach huts with larger structures are most unlikely to be appropriate due to the critical landscape, nature conservation and recreational interests in these areas. However, replacement huts that match the footprint of existing huts may be permissible.

3.3 Criteria for Portland Bill Hut Fields

- 3.3.1 The hut fields at Portland Bill (see Map 2) are marginally less sensitive in landscape and nature conservation interest terms than other locations at Portland Bill and elsewhere on Portland. Though the relocation of beach huts to appropriate locations in the hut fields from elsewhere on Portland Bill is likely to damage the features of interest in the hut fields, this damage is likely to be outweighed by the benefit of their removal from the more sensitive locations. Consequently, such relocations may be acceptable.
- 3.3.2 In the hut fields at Portland Bill, minor extensions to Beach Huts in non-sensitive locations might be acceptable. Such extensions should normally be to the rear of existing huts, towards the nearest field boundary. Extensions to the sides of huts will rarely be acceptable, as they would increase the enclosure of the fields. Likewise, extensions towards the centre of the fields are unlikely to be acceptable, as these would reduce the important openness of the fields and affect the grassland of most nature conservation interest. As a consequence, huts that are poorly related to field boundaries and tend to project towards the centre of hut fields will rarely prove to be appropriate subjects for extension in any direction. Additionally, extensions that would impinge on vistas from the coast path are most unlikely to be acceptable, as these would increase the influence of hut development on the open character of Portland Bill and the coastline.

Appendix 1 – Appraisal of Beach Hut Sites

A1.1 West Weares

A1.1.1 The beach huts at West Weares are more or less randomly scattered across the vegetated toe of the boulder-strewn scree slope formed from the discarded stone from the C19th workings at Tout and other quarries. The difficulties posed by the terrain have prevented the development of consolidated groups or rows of huts, though most huts are located in hollows or on intermittent terraces. The lack of any common orientation and the exposure of the site to views from the sea, Chiswell Sea Wall, the cliff foot path, the cliff top path and the footpath along the edge of the built development of Portland Underhill would render any extensions extremely prominent in this otherwise open coastal landscape.

A1.1.2 The whole area from the cliff top to the high water mark is part of the Isle of Portland to Studland Cliffs SAC and the Isle of Portland SSSI. The habitat protected in this area includes successional vegetation on the scree slope which is vulnerable to disturbance such as would occur from the increased activity associated with larger huts.

A1.1.3 Chesil Cove is locally valued as a recreational area and as a refuge from the busier tourist beaches. Increased disturbance and overlooking of this beach from larger beach huts would erode this special character.

A1.2 Church Ope Cove

A1.2.1 The beach huts at Church Ope Cove are mostly tucked against the foot of the cliff at the back of the cove, with some huts crammed onto parallel terraces above. Many have low dry-stone walls defining limited curtilages. The white crescent of the cove's pebble beach is enjoyed from view points on the cliff top and is an essential part of the setting of both the Cove and the ruins of Rufus Castle that overlook it. The beach huts are likewise exposed to public view from these vantage points and any further intrusion through additional extensions or clutter associated with the beach huts would damage the unique character of this special area.

A1.2.2 The whole area from the cliff top to the high water mark is part of the Isle of Portland to Studland Cliffs SAC and the Isle of Portland SSSI. Any loss of the cliff vegetation in particular from hut extensions would be detrimental to the conservation interest of this area, as would the increased disturbance associated with larger beach huts.

A1.2.3 The coast path winds down the cliff at Church Ope Cove, running along the backs of the lines of beach huts. Extensions to the rear or side or increases in hut ridge height would make these beach huts more prominent from this path, reducing the enjoyment of the unique coastal scene.

A1.3 Portland Bill Coastline

A1.3.1 A number of beach huts at Portland Bill are located along the coastline but outside the hut fields. Some of these are in small groups along the coast path, others are isolated in the corners of otherwise agricultural fields. The overall impression is of sporadic huts in the open landscape or perched above the coastal ledges. For the purposes of this guidance, the section of Hut Field 765 on the sea-ward side of the coastal footpath falls into this category. Any extension in these exposed locations is likely to detract from the unique exposure experienced at Portland Bill.

A1.3.2 This whole area is designated as part of the Isle of Portland SSSI, the cliff tops themselves also being designated as part of the Isle of Portland to Studland Cliffs SAC. The cliffs and cliff tops support a distinctive maritime vegetation that is only viable in this narrow transitional strip. Further loss of this habitat by beach hut encroachment or disturbance from the intensified use associated with larger beach huts would therefore be detrimental to the integrity of the SAC. The open fields at Portland Bill are notable for their calcareous grassland habitat and a series of raised beach features. The undisturbed grassland of the open fields is of a high quality which would be degraded by further beach hut development.

A1.3.3 Portland Bill itself, the lighthouse and visitor centre form a major tourist attraction, facilitated by the associated car park, bus stop, café and public conveniences. The provision and co-ordination of these facilities has been enabled by the Portland Bill Management Plan, developed in partnership by Weymouth & Portland Borough Council and The Crown Estate who own much of the land here. Importantly, this plan secured the relocation of beach huts formerly along the coastline immediately NE of the lighthouse to a more inland location backing onto the hut fields. The essential character of the lighthouse is that of a relatively isolated building at the tip of the island and any intensification of existing coastal beach huts would detract from this setting. The coastal path in this location is very heavily used and actually winds between some of the coastal huts. Any extension to these huts would detract from the coastal character of this route and of the area as a whole. Likewise, any extension to isolated huts in open fields would be very prominent and detract from the openness of Portland Bill as a whole.

A1.4 Portland Bill Hut Fields

A1.4.1 The fields south of Coastguard Cottages and the Old Lower Lighthouse have a long history of beach hut use. The huts are arranged along the field boundaries, forming nearly complete squares in some cases. The arrangement of huts, low dry-stone wall and earth bank field boundaries and patches of scrub have created an intimate landscape. Crucially, the privacy and shelter of partial enclosure is finely balanced with the high degree of visual links to the open landscape and coast beyond. Great care is required to preserve this sensitive balance and to avoid the character of the hut fields tipping over into one of consolidated development.

A1.4.2 The hut fields lie wholly within the Isle of Portland SSSI, but are outside of the actual boundary of the Isle of Portland to Studland Cliffs SAC which follows the coastline closely in this location. The nature conservation interest has persisted despite the level of hut development. However, further incremental loss of good calcareous grassland habitat is a cause of concern to English Nature who will use their role as a statutory consultee on planning applications to safeguard the integrity of the SSSI. The scrub cover in these areas is also valued by English Nature for providing roosts for migrating birds. Loss or disturbance of this habitat is also a cause for concern.

A1.4.3 The hut fields are an important focus of recreational activity for Portland and contribute to the rich community life of the Island. Loss of the recreational amenity of the beach huts themselves through further enclosure of the hut squares impinging on sight lines in existing gaps between huts to the coastline and landscape surroundings would be detrimental to their essential character and wider community value. The influence of beach hut development on the popular coastal path and other open areas at Portland Bill is also an important consideration.

Appendix 2 – Planning Policy Relevant to Beach Huts

A2.1 The landscape, nature conservation and recreational value of beach hut sites are reflected in the Weymouth & Portland Local Plan Review. The policies in the Local Plan are used to determine planning applications, and key policies relevant to beach hut applications include the following:

A2.2 Policy D1 Development Boundaries

A2.2.1 Development Boundaries are designated around established areas of built development. Within Development Boundaries, general development is encouraged. However, outside Development Boundaries new development is strictly controlled to prevent urban creep and damage to the open landscape. All the beach hut sites lie outside Development Boundaries, so new huts there are unlikely to be acceptable.

A2.3 Policy N11 Conversion of Buildings Outside the Development Boundary

A2.3.1 This policy requires that any conversion of a building outside the Development Boundary must, amongst other things, not involve its substantial reconstruction or extension or change its essential character. For these reasons, the conversion of day-time recreational huts to alternative uses, or their substantial extension or replacement with more permanent constructions, is unlikely to be acceptable.

A2.4 Policy N12 Areas of Local Landscape Importance

A2.4.1 All the beach hut sites lie in Areas of Local Landscape Importance. Policy N12 requires proposals in these areas to be designed to minimise their impact on the landscape and not to cause significant harm to the intrinsic landscape quality of the area. Though at beach hut sites the beach huts themselves are part of the intrinsic landscape, proposals for huts out of keeping with their neighbours e.g. due to their size, materials or design, are unlikely to be acceptable.

A2.5 Policy N13 Heritage Coast and Portland Coastline

A2.5.1 All the beach hut sites lie within the N13 Portland Coastline designation. This policy protects the natural beauty of the coast and resists development that would be visually intrusive in views of the foreshore, skyline or along the coast. The effect on beach hut development is similar to Policy N12 with the added consideration that development that would reduce views of the coast, such as by closing the gaps between beach huts, is unlikely to be acceptable.

A2.6 Policy N15 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)

A2.6.1 All the beach hut sites lie within Sites of Special Scientific Interest designated nationally for their ecological and geological importance. Development that would have an adverse impact on the special interest of the relevant areas is only permissible if the reasons for development clearly outweigh the need to protect the interest. As the need for an enlarged or repositioned beach hut is most unlikely to match the national importance of the nature conservation interest here, the policy effectively emphasises the need to avoid damage to the protected habitats.

A2.7 N14 European Nature Conservation Sites

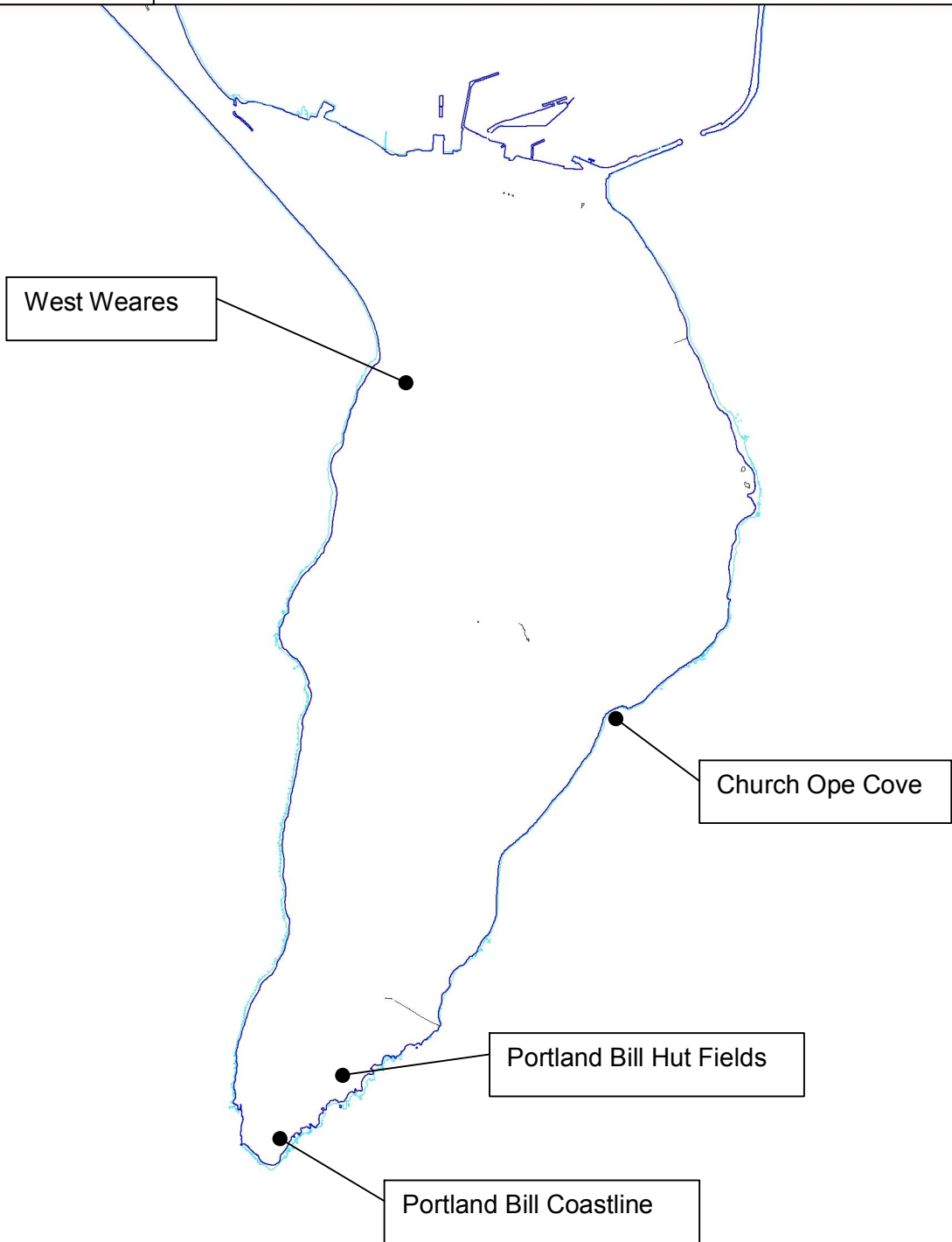
A2.7.1 In addition to their SSSI status, the beach hut sites at West Weares and Church Ope Cove lie within the Portland to Studland Cliffs Special Area of Conservation protected under European law. These areas attract an even higher level of protection than SSSIs, and any further development likely to harm the protected habitat is only permissible for imperative reasons of over-riding public interest, e.g. to protect human life.

A2.8 TO8 Development at Portland Bill

A2.8.1 This policy area applies to both the coastal and hut field sites at Portland Bill. The policy controls development in this important tourist / recreational area, requiring any new build tourism to consolidate existing uses and promote visual / environmental improvement. The replacement of lean-to extensions with larger huts of a more simple profile in the hut fields may be in accordance with this policy.

Map 1

Beach Hut Sites on Portland

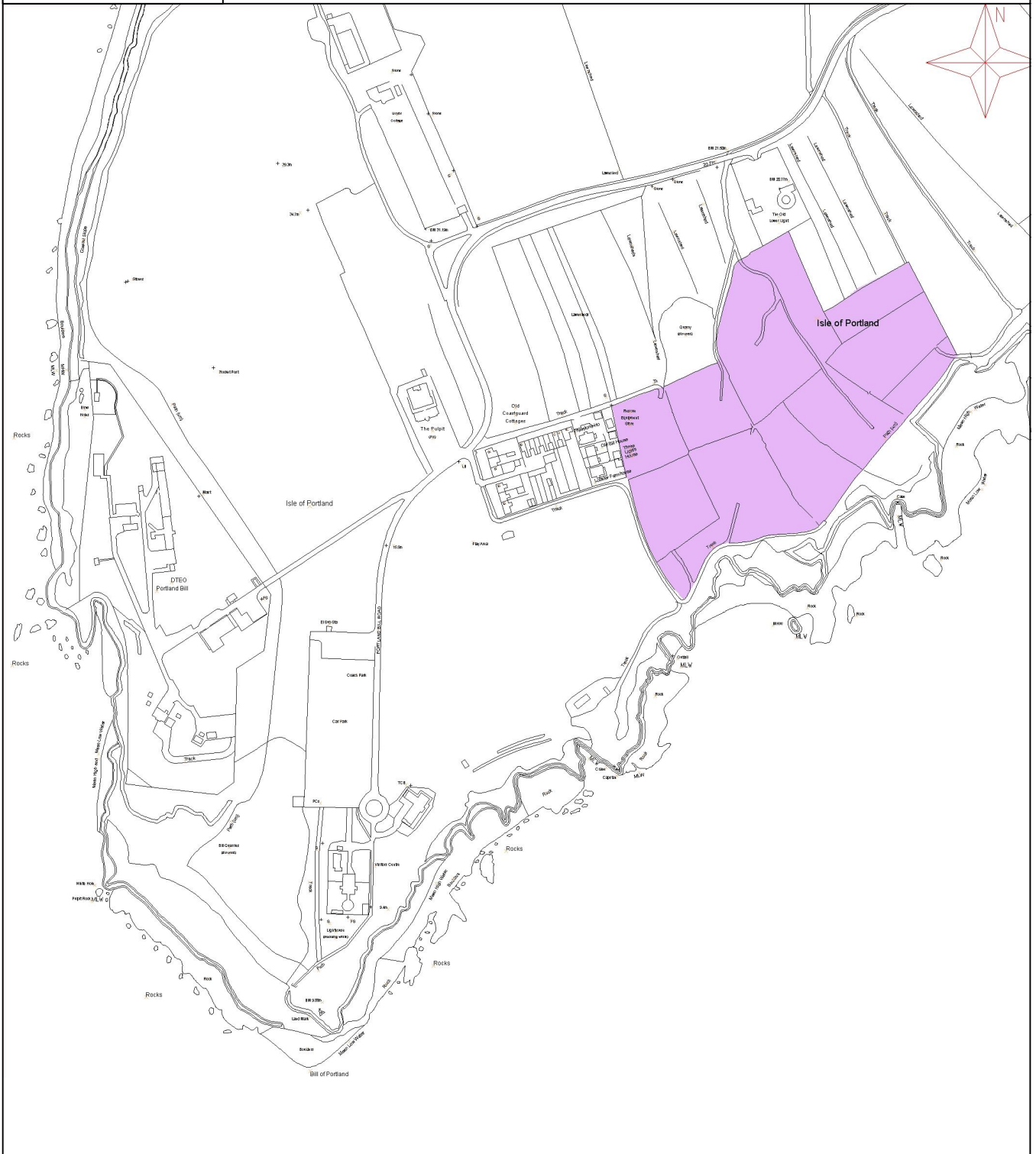
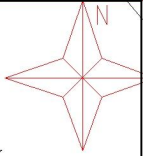


Scale 1: 40 000

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Map 2

Portland Bill Hut Fields



Scale 1:5 000

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