

Ambitious plans for old Austin and Pickerskill yard

Go-ahead for business park



NEW START: Artist's impression of what the area will look like once it has been redeveloped and, below, the shipyard the way it used to be.

By JOHN HOWE

john.howe@northeast-press.co.uk

IT'S FULL steam ahead for an £18million business park on the site of Sunderland's most famous shipyard.

Developers Adderstone Group got the go-ahead from council planners last night to create a 42-office development at the former Austin and Pickersgill yard in Southwick.

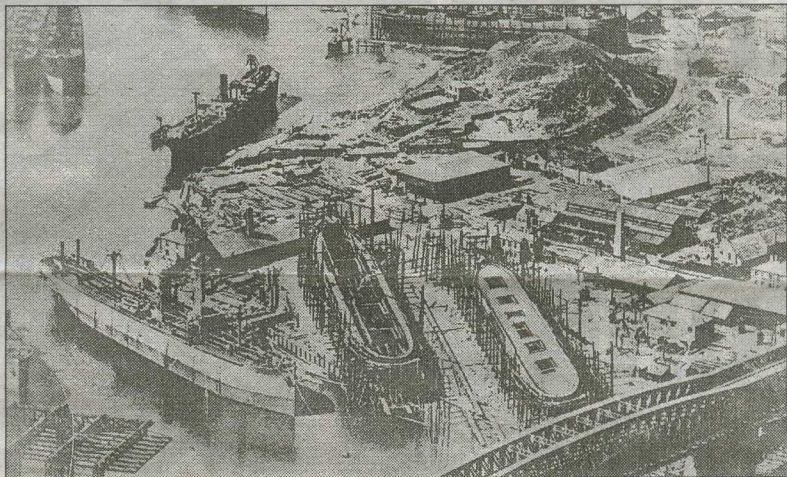
Work is expected to start on clearing the land, in the shadow of the Queen Alexandra Bridge, before construction begins on the 1000,000 sq ft park, expected to boost jobs in the city.

Adderstone managing director Ian Baggett said: "We have been working for three years to get to this stage and now we are raring to go and are very excited by it. This is a very ambitious scheme for a private company to take on."

Business bosses hope to lure firms from Durham and South Tyneside to the riverside location, while offering medium-sized companies Sunderland's first "own front door" office park.

Mr Baggett said: "We anticipate people locating themselves in Sunderland on the back of this scheme as there is a lot of demand for this kind of office space.

"We believe there is scope for growth as similar developments elsewhere in the North East have been very successful."



The company won outline planning consent last year and has been working on clearing the site, including bringing down the site's landmark 400 tonne crane last April, which had stood there since 1955.

The Austin and Pickersgill yard, which closed in 1988, was world-famous for its SD14 designs which replaced the old Liberty ships and were first launched from Southwick in 1967.

Adderstone has plans to honour the site's heritage with plaques, artwork and also by naming buildings and streets after ships that were built at the yard and famous characters from the yard's history.

Mr Baggett added: "We believe by paying tribute to the site's heritage

it will give the development an extra dimension."

The West Quay site sits in an area facing major, long-term development, including a new Wear bridge, a roads revamp and a 1,000 homes riverside village on the former Groves cranes site at Pallion.

The park is aimed at smaller businesses with the majority of offices being from 1,200 sq ft and 2,500 sq ft for companies with between 12 to 30 staff.

Tyneside-based Adderstone has built up a reputation rebuilding historic locations, such as Newcastle's Victorian Tyne Theatre.

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