



Norfolk company designs new vessel for offshore wind sector

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A Norfolk-based firm has designed a new boat that it hopes will transform the way offshore wind firms operate in the construction and maintenance of turbines.



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Design drawings of the new Tidal Transit vessel designed to serve the offshore wind energy sector

Tidal Transit Limited, also plan to run the fleet of 20m fibreglass catamarans – which are purpose-designed to meet the specific needs of the offshore wind sector – once they are operational later this year.

The first boat is currently being constructed in Spain and will hopefully be operational at the end of 2011, with a second vessel launched early in 2012.

The vessels, operating from harbours such as Wells, will offer the offshore sector new ways of operating more efficiently.

They are significantly larger than vessels currently in use and have the advantage that they have longer range, can stay out at sea for several days at a time with workers sleeping on board and can operate in heavier sea conditions.

The venture is the brainchild of commercial director Leo Hambro and operations director Adam Wright.

For the past few years, Mr Wright has been running fishing trips through his Norfolk Fishing Trips business using 12m Gemini Catamarans, but also doing survey work for some of the firms involved in the offshore wind sector.

What he realised was that similar vessels used by the wind energy firms were restricted in their operations by the weather, had to return to port at night with their crews and the offshore workforce and were limited in their ability to carry supplies and parts to the offshore turbines.

Mr Wright said: "The issue is tides and weather.

“We are in the process of building boats that can accommodate 12 passengers and three crew in comfortable berths in a hull designed for stability in the short frequency waves of the North Sea.”

While existing vessels sit some nine feet out of the water, the new boat will have a platform nearing 20 feet above the sea, making access to the turbine structure easier and safer for workers.

Mr Wright designed the vessel and Dersingham-based TTL has placed the order with Spanish boat builder Mercurio Plastics. The new vessel can operate in conditions of 2.5m wave height, travel at 25 knots fully loaded, carry 10 tonnes of spare parts and kit, 10,000 litres of fuel and 6,000 litres of fresh water.

A model of the vessel will be unveiled this week at the Southampton Seaworks event, with the boat due to be delivered to TTL for trials and demonstrations to the offshore wind firms at the end of October before going operational soon after.

Mr Hambro said: “We have had initial discussions with the wind farm operators about what we can offer. We also plan to be a Norfolk-based business running from Norfolk, employing local people and with our boats registered in King’s Lynn.”

They hope to serve fields such as Sheringham Shoal and other offshore wind farm sites and sees potential in announcements such as those made by RWE npower this month, which has unveiled plans for the multi-billion pound Triton Knoll wind farm with as many as 333 turbines 28 miles north of Wells.