



ANNUAL PUBLIC MEETING 2020

ANNUAL PUBLIC MEETING 2020

Port of Blyth held its first online Annual Public Meeting as a result of COVID-19 on Wednesday 20th May 2020 at 5.30pm, with more than 100 registered attendees.

Purpose

As an independent statutory Trust Port, the Port of Blyth's Annual Public Meeting is a key feature of the Port's year as it forms an important part of the engagement process with all stakeholder groups.

The meeting enables the Port to officially report to all interested parties on the performance of the Port in the previous year and share its plans for the future. It also provides an important opportunity for stakeholders to ask questions of senior management and feedback on any issues or concerns.

Presentations

Attendees were welcomed to the meeting by Chair of Commissioners Geoff Hodgson, who explained the format of the meeting, outlined the Port's major achievements in 2019 and his projections for future growth and development.

Port of Blyth Chief Executive Martin Lawlor made a presentation on the Port's financial and operational performance during 2019, reporting a group turnover of £21.67m and an adjusted operating profit of £0.8m. He also reviewed the performance of individual departments at the Port, provided information on key projects carried out throughout the year on behalf of clients and outlined future plans for investment within the Port estate.

Question & Answer Session

A number of stakeholders put questions to Martin Lawlor, Chief Executive of Port of Blyth, all of which are summarised here:

Eileen Cartie, County Councillor – Wensleydale ward Blyth

Please can you give an update of how your training projects and apprenticeships are going and give details of how many young people from Blyth have secured employment? In addition, has anyone who joined the port as a trainee progressed up the ladder within the port?

Answer: We currently have nine apprentices employed at the Port, with five in the Port itself and four with the Blyth Tall Ship charity which we are closely involved

with. Generally speaking we try to have four or five apprenticeships on stream at any one time and the vast majority of those end up getting full-time employment with us or moving on elsewhere into good positions.

We set away a really active apprenticeship programme over the last few years because we really wanted to grow our own because while it's great to bring in experience from outside from time to time, it's also important to see some of those trainees come through into leading roles. In terms of some of the positions that trainees have reached, we have one of our operations managers who was a trainee, we have one of the supervisors who was an apprentice and some of our best crane drivers were apprentices with us four or five years ago - so there definitely are career opportunities there for those trainees who shows promise.

I'd also like to add that since we developed the diploma for post 16 education, we are now creating opportunities for those young people with our tenant base as well as the Port itself.

Ben Moore, Offshore Renewable Energy Catapult

As part of the post COVID-19 economic recovery, there has been a lot of publicity around the opportunity presented by a 'Green Economic Recovery'. What role would the Port hope to play in such a process and what would the benefits be?

Answer: I covered a little bit of this in the presentation earlier. Blyth has been a green port for many years with the first offshore turbines in the UK located here and a lot of our trade being green related – in renewables etc - and we look forward to working with the Catapult and others to continue this trend to help drive the green economy forward. From our own point of view, we are very much looking forward to attracting inward investment to our sites in the coming years, most of which will be focused on the green economy which is where our strength lies. What is also interesting to us is the development of initiatives like the mine water heating scheme in Blyth as they will help us to be at the forefront of the Government's Maritime 2050 agenda and help develop a carbon neutral future.

Ian Levy, Member of Parliament for Blyth Valley

I appreciate that the port plays a key role in supporting both the regional economy and the local community through the generation of jobs and opportunities. Does the Port have any plans to continue or indeed increase this commitment to the town of Blyth and its residents?

Answer: We're absolutely focused on the community of Blyth because we are a Trust Port and therefore they are a key stakeholder. As well as all the current things that we're doing around education and training, supporting local events etc, we are now getting more heavily involved in regional planning with things like the Town Deal and looking at the strategic planning for the whole of South East Northumberland and we want to play a part in all of that. Would also like to see one or two buildings in the town including our old head office, brought back into community use and we're actually looking at affectively gifting that building to the town if we can get that

project going. We will always benefit from a vibrant Blyth Valley and Wansbeck on the north side because ultimately there is going to be a lot of activity and economic growth here and we'd like to see that local people are able to come along with that through the creation of jobs as well as it being a really nice place to live.

Steve Gillie, Gillie & Blair

In view of the COVID-19 pandemic, does the Port of Blyth have a protocol prepared in case a vessel arrives off the Port with a crew member displaying symptoms of COVID-19? For example, will a pilot board the vessel and will the vessel have to be quarantined?

Answer: Yes we do have procedures in place. Clearly we are following all guidance from central Government including the Marine department wearing all the correct PPE and taking many steps to protect themselves and their department from the virus. In terms of a specific outbreak on a vessel we do have a protocol to follow including isolating any individual, sanitising all areas affected and making sure that crews don't come into contact with the pilot. Depending on the circumstances the individual might isolate themselves on board or taken off the vessel to elsewhere. If the vessel needed to continue operating we would then take additional measures such as keeping stevedores off the vessel to ensure safety. We have had one potential case on a vessel when a crewmember began showing symptoms and he was quarantined and in the end him and two or three colleagues were actually sent home to self-isolate. So the processes worked perfectly in that situation.

John Hildreth, Advance Northumberland

You mentioned the redevelopment of the Bates terminal, what is timeline for the opening of the wind turbine training facility on site?

Answer: The wind turbine training facility hasn't yet been commissioned although the turbine has been erected and the classroom facilities have been completed to a very high standard. We're expecting commissioning to take place over the next couple of months and the idea is very much that the facility will be open for the next academic year depending on when that may be.

Steve Rutland, Public Value Ltd

How important is it that the young people of Blyth and South East Northumberland understand the employment and skills needs of the businesses operating at the Port?

Answer: I think it's even more important than normal given the current circumstances that young people in the area understand the opportunities that are available at the Port of Blyth. The marine industry and the offshore energy sector in particular offer really good career opportunities and it's one of the few growth areas out there. Our aim is always to connect with young people as early as possible

through STEM activity and if we can point them in the right direction and inspire them, they'll hopefully have the opportunity to make a good career.

James Armstrong, Northumberland County Council

Please could you give an update on the progress of Blyth's Energy Central programme?

Answer: Energy Central as a partnership is in place and we mentioned a little bit of this earlier. Energy Central is doing a whole host of things including involvement with education, the development of infrastructure in Blyth and is looking particularly at attracting major inward investment around the estuary. The largest site is Phases 1, 2 and 3 of the Northumberland Energy Park on the old power station site with nearly 200 ha available, and with strong interest in that we are hopeful of some positive news in the next couple of months. We're also looking as a partnership to bid for free port status.

Anonymous

What does the Port of Blyth think of the Government's free ports initiative?

Answer: The old model of free ports used an old way of measuring productivity and wasn't necessarily very popular but I think the new modern type of free port model alongside tax incentives and fast track planning benefits for example is something that could prove useful to this area. There is also the possible opportunity to link across the whole of the north-east so that as well as a number of standalone free ports you might have a regional set up with a series of interconnected sites working together as a larger free port. Overall I think it's a really positive thing and will help to create jobs and opportunities and we would welcome it in Blyth.

Richard Ballantyne, British Ports Association

I know that the Port of Blyth is one of the key gateways for the importation of finished toilet rolls into the region - how has that business fared during Coronavirus? Has Government done enough to support ports like Blyth during the Coronavirus pandemic?

Answer: Yes you're right. We have a strong trade in paper products which includes toilet rolls and as you can imagine we have been very busy on the container line service in general. In terms of toilet rolls we have been moving in excess of 2 million products a day at the peak of the pandemic and that's one of the reasons why we've had real pressure on warehousing space. In terms of Government support in general during the pandemic, I think they're in a very difficult position with the need to support all areas of the economy but generally speaking they haven't been doing too badly. One thing I would say is I think they maybe need to think about how we push on once we come out of lockdown with many ports not approaching the government up to now for much financial support because we've been open throughout the situation, so if there were one or two opportunities around infrastructure development for example and they put the ports at the centre of a strategy to

recover from coronavirus I think we could see some really good opportunities in the sector.

Sean Donkin, Inn Collection Group

The Port clearly contributes heavily into the local community, what could we, as local and regional business operators do to support the Port in its growth?

Answer: We certainly are very much into partnerships and the strength of the Port is not just us ourselves but our tenants and suppliers around the estuary who are a real key feature of the town now - with a huge supply chain now in place and proving to be a real attraction to our clients and customers. So all businesses that have a connection with the Port whether it's offshore energy related or other trades, or supplying equipment or services, we would very much like to work with them to create further opportunities.

Alex Wallace, East Bedlington Parish Council

You mentioned the need for warehousing off site. Do you have any sites in mind that could be used in the estuary area?

Answer: The site we used was at Seaton Delaval and although we're not in there at the moment we are looking at what opportunities may exist including capacity within the Port as obviously external storage is more costly. There is nowhere specific we are looking at around the estuary but would be happy to support warehouse opportunities further afield as and when we need them.

Adeniyi Aje, Tony Gee & Partners LLP

Are you able to advise of a timeline for the redevelopment of the heavy lift quay at the Bates terminal?

Answer: Land reclamation at the site is underway with work on the quay set to taken place over the next couple of months with the heavy lift quay hopefully in place by the end of the year.

Ryan Rogan, Farrans

Are there any plans for the Port in terms of marine infrastructure development over the next couple of years?

Answer: The main focus at present is the developments that we've already mentioned – including the redevelopment of the power station site on the north side of the river, the heavy lift quay redevelopment at Bates terminal and some work to do on layby berths elsewhere in the port and some dredging work as well. Also worth mentioning is the decommissioning site that we've developed at Battleship Wharf which is ongoing at present and should provide some really good opportunities in the future.

Informal networking & feedback

Due to the meeting taking place online unfortunately there wasn't an opportunity for networking following the closure of the event this year.

Following the meeting attendees were asked to rate the event via a feedback form which presented some very positive results. 86% of respondents rated the organisation of the event at 9 out of 10 or more while 89% of respondents rated the content of the meeting at 9 out of 10 or more. The Port received many positive comments regarding the hosting of the meeting online and the value that offered stakeholders from across the UK.

Annual Review

The Port's Annual Review for 2019 has now been published and contains full details of its financial performance during the year as well as introductions to the Board of Commissioners and senior management and information on each department's achievements. A PDF version of this document is available to download from the Port's website [here](#).