



ANNUAL PUBLIC MEETING 2022

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Port of Blyth held its Annual Public Meeting on Monday 25 April 2022 at 5.30pm, in person and online, with more than 90 registered attendees.

Purpose

As an independent statutory Trust Port (formally Blyth Harbour Commission), 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 Board members and feedback on any issues or concerns.

Presentations

Attendees were welcomed to the meeting by Chair of the Commission, Geoff Hodgson, who explained the format of the meeting, outlined the Port's major achievements in 2021 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 2021, reporting a record group turnover of £25.5m and an adjusted operating profit of £2.1m. 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:

Colin Bassam, Port Training Services

Decarbonisation is a huge issue for the port and marine sector, how do you see the great strides that are required practically being made?

Answer: The honest answer is that decarbonisation of the port and marine sector is a huge issue, one which goes way further than just the actions of one individual port, and I do believe there needs to be a lot of joined up thinking on this. For example, shore to ship power makes a lot of sense in terms of reducing emissions and saving energy but only in the context of what that ship then does when it's out

at sea. If that vessel simply burns diesel all the way from here to the continent, then that good work on land reducing emissions, whilst important, is all largely immaterial in the wider context of shipping in general. So, we'll be pushing as hard as we can for both support and collaboration on all our decarbonisation plans to ensure that they are highly effective. Of course, we continue to support the Maritime 2050 proposals and intend to do everything we can to support government net zero targets. That includes electrification of port plant, use of renewable energy sources and other measures across all of our facilities.

Norman Jackson, Former Commissioner

Following the successful completion of a paper titled Legacies of Mineral Extraction & Sustainability Opportunities for IM3 Conference 2021, I would like to thank the Port for its significant contribution to the paper and its support for the conference. I'd also like to congratulate it on the fantastic financial results.

Answer: It was our pleasure and important in the context of supporting our wide stakeholder base.

Tony Platten, Blyth Spartans AFC

For many years Blyth has suffered from chronic under funding of its road network, especially in terms of the relief road that is required and the proposed bridge at South Newsham. Does the Port have a view on this?

Answer: Whilst the Port understands the challenges and issues surrounding the relief road solution, we remain keen to work with our partners across the public sector to find a solution as soon as possible. Although a lot of our trade comes in and out by ship as a result of our involvement in the offshore energy sector, clearly good routes in and out of Blyth remain vitally important to us and when you see significant investments of this type in other areas it can be frustrating, but we will remain committed to finding a solution as fast as possible and providing any support we can to move any scheme forward. We have had some consultation on the new bridge but need to see the full detail to ensure it meets the requirements of port traffic.

Anonymous webinar attendee

What is floating wind and is the Port of Blyth involved?

Answer: Current offshore wind farms are limited by water depth as they are fixed structures that cannot be installed in very deep locations, whereas floating wind turbines can now be installed on platforms that are then anchored to the seabed by chains or cables. As you may or may not know, the second array on the EDF's Blyth Offshore Demonstrator Wind Farm is to be constructed using floating wind solutions as a way of testing the technology surrounding this. As a result, it's great to be playing our part in the continuation of this advancement as we'll no doubt be supporting the project. We also hope that the Port can support future commercial

development of floating wind depending upon which areas of UK Waters are developed.

Ian Levy, Blyth Valley MP

Fantastic to see such great results, many congratulations. With future growth in mind, what do you see as the biggest challenges going forwards.

Answer: Covid and Brexit are obvious ongoing challenges, albeit hopefully with issues linked to the pandemic reducing going forward. Clearly, given our recent results we have coped with these issues well to date. Other current challenges include attracting and retaining an adequately skilled workforce, not just in the Port but also in the numerous port related companies around the Blyth Estuary. Our focus on developing skills around the estuary is therefore very important. As mentioned earlier decarbonisation is a challenge both in terms of cost and control of factors outside of our control (e.g. electrical grid capacity). Despite this, decarbonisation will continue to progress (e.g. the arrival of our first electric heavy lift crane next month) but it is difficult to accurately predict when we might approach carbon neutral operations. Finally, inflationary pressures are a challenge, particularly in terms of energy and construction costs. We can mitigate to some degree with investment in renewable energy generation (e.g. installing solar panels) and by continuing to undertake most construction in-house without outsourcing to primary contractors.

Richard Ballantyne, British Ports Association

Two questions: If the Prime Minister were to visit Port of Blyth tomorrow, what would be your top 3 "asks" of Government? Does the Port feel it gets enough support from the local LEP?

Answer: In terms of the Prime Minister, I would ask that the important role of the port sector in the UK economy is fully acknowledged and with appropriate Government support. This needs to be on a "level playing field" basis and not focused purely on a selection of ports (e.g. Freeports). It also needs to focus on inland infrastructure (e.g. road connections), not just within individual ports. Secondly, I would ask that the commitment to 60% UK content for offshore wind farm development is more strictly applied. This process has started but needs to continue for the benefit of all ports involved in this important sector including Blyth. And finally, I would ask him to ensure that Government fully resources their decarbonisation plan for ports and the wider maritime sector. This could involve investment in the electrical grid, providing funding support for port developments (e.g. shore to ship power etc).

I would say we have received good support from NELEP although we would obviously encourage additional support where appropriate. They have supported a number of key projects here at the Port, not least the important redevelopment works at our Bates Clean Energy Terminal including quay strengthening works. We work incredibly closely with colleagues at the LEP (and NTCA) and greatly value the support and expertise that they offer.

Anonymous webinar attendee

How did the other major Trust Ports in England manage in the last year and do they hold annual public meetings as the Port of Blyth does for its stakeholders?

Answer: Whilst it wouldn't be my place to comment on other port's performance, I will say that everyone in sector is working incredibly hard to get through the challenges of the last few years. Some have obviously fared better than others but often external factors beyond the control of individual ports come in to play. In terms of Annual Public Meetings like this, it is an important element of being a Trust Port, so most of our fellow Trust Port's do hold meetings such as these to ensure good communications between management and the full range of stakeholders. I am biased, but I do believe we do it better than most and believe a well-advised event, open to all, is important together with a transparent Q & A session.

A number of questions were submitted but not answered at the event due to time constraints. Martin Lawlor has answered those here:

Richard Ballantyne, British Ports Association

How has the port dealt with the UK Government rules that ports need to ban Russian ships from arriving at the port. Have there been any issues?

Answer: We are obviously well aware of all the sanctions currently in place and have been following all Government guidelines/guidance on the issue. We have queried one or two vessels/cargoes since the sanction came into place but to date have not turned any vessels away for this reason. Our Marine Department carry out due diligence on all vessels arriving in Blyth, which would flag any vessels who could be subject to the sanctions, and also refer to regular Department for Transport updates relating to Russian owned vessels.

Mike Gilfillan, Blyth Development Trust

Question 1: there have been some significant issues in relation to jet skis operating on South Beach and the safety risk to other users. Has the Port been involved/does it have a view on the safety of such activity?

Answer: We are aware of a number of issues relating to water safety outside the harbour limits, particularly in relation to powered vessels such as jet skis. We are very clear that these vessels are not to be used on the river and would ask all the users to display extreme caution when in the sea. Should any further steps need to be taken to protect the public, the Port would fully support any research or investigations and participate fully if requested.

Question 2: Given the job opportunities on the north side of the river, does the Port have a view on the potential of an electric passenger ferry across the river that has had some backing from Newcastle University?

Answer: We know that the reinstatement as a ferry across the river could be popular for several reasons, not least the movement of workers between Blyth the proposed facilities of Britishvolt and JDR Cables on the north side of the river. If a viable solution could be found, the Port would be happy to support the development of such a solution.

Anonymous webinar attendee

Does the Port have a gender diversity policy for its employees and its board?

Answer: Yes. As part of a wider diversity policy the Port actively seeks to support gender diversity across working conditions, career development and employment. The Port is also signed up to Maritime UK's "Women in Maritime" programme which seeks to drive forward opportunities for women in the port and marine sector, given that historically it has been a male dominated environment.

John Owen, Bernicia Marine

How far do you expect to develop the current/future waterfront and depth of water (dredging) to support the decommissioning sector?

Answer: As our work in the decommissioning sector continues to develop, we will of course review all requirements in terms of the service we offer to our growing customer base. The decommissioning yard at Battleship Wharf is serviced by flexible, deep-water quays whilst regular dredging ensures that the river is that workable and manageable depths, and obviously a lot of the materials delivered for decommissioning arrive via shallow draft barges which helps. Naturally, there are always going to be challenges in terms of river parameters relating to vessel sizes or operating depth and we cannot reduce the channel depth significantly as it is down to rock levels. However, we're confident that we will continue to provide competitive tenders for work in the sector going forwards alongside our decom partner Thompsons of Prudhoe.

Anonymous webinar attendee

Would the Port consider giving help and advice to businesses and other ports in the region that need help, and is there an economic assessment of how the Port impacts/benefits the community and the region?

Answer: In terms of supporting other ports in the region, it's fair to say that there are plenty of instances where ports work together to find solutions to certain challenges or opportunities, as highlighted by the ports of Blyth and Tyne working

effectively together on the North East Freeport proposal along with other partners or sharing best practice on marine and Health and Safety issues.

Another example of collaboration is the fact that Port of Blyth provides Tier 2 Oil Spill Response services to Warkworth Harbour Commission in relation to the commercial fishing port in the town of Amble at the mouth of the river Coquet.

In terms of economic assessment, this has not been formally undertaken but we are aware of the number of jobs on our land and the positive impact that has for the wider supply chain. Northumberland County Council also acknowledge the importance of the Port of Blyth as a key economic driver in the recently adopted Local Plan.

Informal networking & feedback

Following the end of the formal presentations, in person attendees were able to make the most of an informal networking session with access to senior management and Board members from the Port.

After the meeting, attendees were asked to rate the event via a feedback form which presented some very positive results relating to the hybrid style of the meeting, the clarity of the presentations and the networking opportunity for stakeholders to meet senior management at the Port. One hundred percent of responses found the meeting useful and said they would attend again, whilst the quality of the presentations was rated at an average of 8.5 out of 10. Meanwhile, 65% of responders said they would prefer to attend in person (as opposed to online) wherever possible.

Annual Review

The Port's Annual Review for 2021 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](#).