



**ANNUAL PUBLIC MEETING
2023**

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Port of Blyth held its Annual Public Meeting on Monday 24 April 2023 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 event for the Port 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 (commissioners) 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 2022 and its 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 2022, reporting a record group turnover of £30.4m and an adjusted operating profit of £3.9m. He also reviewed the performance of individual departments at the Port, provided information on key projects conducted throughout the year on behalf of clients and outlined 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, Wensleydale Labour Councillor

Thank you for supporting Friends of Crofton Fields and other community groups within my ward, it's fantastic to see the Port supporting the local community. How many good causes has the Port supported this past year?

Answer: We supported several great causes in 2022, we are in the process of further formalising our community sponsorship programme, Olivia is working on developing the website further to ensure we can track all applications more effectively from one

place. Following this, I will look to provide that statistic within next year's APM presentation.

Richard Ballantyne, British Ports Association

Congratulations on another fantastic year, my question is a national one relating to the Government's Levelling Up Agenda, I know Blyth was subject to a recent Deep Dive by DLUHC, how was the Port involved and what does it mean for the Port?

Answer: Ports do have an important role to play in Levelling Up, a lot of the regions that need it are coastal communities so often have Ports within. Blyth is a really good example as we have a large cluster of companies around the estuary collectively providing over 500 jobs. We also have the likes of JDR Cables and the proposed battery factory to come which will provide further significant job opportunities as well as the Energy Central Campus development which will ensure the local community have access to clean energy related skills and training facilities. We were involved in a lot of the discussions around the recent Levelling Up funding and Blyth was allocated a substantial amount of money, whilst the majority of the money was dedicated to housing and repurposing buildings in the town centre etc, there was a significant commitment of almost £1.5m for equipment for the new Energy Central Campus. This was to ensure Blyth as a community can exploit the job opportunities with the right skill base for the clean energy sector. Overall, it's a good policy and I believe all Ports should play their part as we do.

Lizzie Lunn, North of Tyne Combined Authority

You mentioned your decarbonisation target of 2040, could you elaborate on that and are you working with your customers and other Ports to support them with their decarbonisation goals as well?

Answer: In 2022 The Port's carbon emissions have been more accurately defined and 2022 has now been established as a base year from which decarbonisation can be further monitored and progressed. This process is closely aligned with the Government's Maritime 2050 strategy and with the Port's target to be carbon neutral by 2040. Initiatives are already underway to achieve this goal, with the largest electric heavy lift crane of its kind received at the redeveloped Bates Clean Energy Terminal in 2022 and investment in solar technology. In line with our investment strategy, we believe 2040 is a realistic target. This aligns with several of the larger ports, although some are targeting 2050 and some are targeting 2030. We believed 2030 is too ambitious of a target for the Port of Blyth in terms of electrification, particularly due to some of the issues with grid capacity. For example, if all of our cranes were electric and we plugged all of our cranes in at once, all the lights in Blyth would go out! On your last point, we are very much collaborating, there is talk of a Green Super Port partnership which would be a collaboration with ourselves, Tyne, Sunderland, and others to attract inward investment and further advance decarbonisation and clean energy targets.

Ian Levy, Blyth Valley MP

In light of the Port's ambitions for the future, what do you see as the biggest challenge going forward and is there anything I can help with from a Government perspective?

Answer: In terms of challenges, like most businesses, the cost of energy has been a challenge and will be for another year or two perhaps. Obviously the support from the Government has been welcomed but it is a volatile situation. I think looking at the great example of Ports helping with levelling up etc. it's important to make sure investment zones are in Port areas to supplement the Free Ports that have already been designated. Beyond that, I guess it's looking at the sector we see as our core trade sector for the next 10/20 years, Offshore Wind, and ensuring from a government perspective there is a continued focus on UK content. The UK is one of the world's largest markets for offshore wind, but the majority of that benefit goes to companies based abroad, I think that if we could take that world-leading position and turn our supply chain into a world-leading supply chain as well, that would be a big step forward.

Alex Wallace, Sleekburn Labour Councillor

Is it possible to restart the bi-annual meeting with residents on the Cambois side of the river?

Answer: Absolutely, we previously scheduled these twice a year on both sides of the river, during covid this was paused, we have had informal discussions about reinstating these meetings but not made any formal decisions as of yet so take this as a commitment that we will get these going again.

Graham Young, Newcastle University

It is great to see an increase in imports via the twice-weekly container service but what are your observations relating to UK exports via this service?

Answer: We bring in around 100 boxes per week and we export back a lot of fresh air because as a nation never mind a region, the balance of trade in physical goods is very much in one direction. It is something we're looking at with our logistics division, Transped, to see how we can increase the number of exports.

Colin Bassam, Port Training Services

Has the change in transport infrastructure had any impact on the Port?

Answer: A lot is happening in terms of regional transport infrastructure, I think getting the passenger service back into this area will be a hugely beneficial thing. We did have concerns about the impact on commercial traffic on the line itself and road issues coming in and out of Blyth, but now the bridge is underway it will hopefully alleviate that potential issue. During the Levelling Up discussions, we raised a point regarding one of the key restricting factors for this area which is the Moor farm roundabout. Whenever there is new inward investment planned for southeast Northumberland, there is a routine objection from Highways England to any further developments unless we can prove it won't add a significant amount of additional vehicles to the roads around the roundabout. It is an issue which we have raised with various Government departments including the Department for Transport. There are traffic issues in and around Blyth which are partially caused due to the success of the port and its customers, so we want to play our part moving forward but it will require investment way beyond the bounds of the port for example the relief road in Blyth.

Lizzie Lunn, North of Tyne Combined Authority

My question is about skills and in particular the Wind Turbine Training Facility and the other courses you provide, how does this impact local employment and what do you see in terms of the impact on Blyth and the wider northeast?

Answer: Certainly the Energy Central Learning Hub development will have a large impact on local employment. Starting with providing STEM learning for school children as well as digital and engineering-focused T Levels, clean energy related apprenticeships and shared apprenticeship models. This is to get people inspired and showcase the vast amount of opportunities in this region, the real drive is making sure the local population have the skills to access the growing clean energy sector to ensure they are the workforce of the future. The Wind Turbine Training Facility will be part of the skills development initiative to equip the region with the right skills needed to access opportunities within sector.

Richard Ballantyne, British Ports Association

What are the key benefits of being a Trust Port and are there any challenges that come with this statute?

Answer (Geoff Hodgson): The enormous benefit compared to other businesses I am involved in is the ability to invest heavily without constraints to achieve a common goal shared by all. An important consideration is that as a Trust Port we have a duty to serve a large variety of stakeholders, not just our customers, therefore we need to continue to talk to the community as much as possible. Overall, I think it is a fantastic model and long may it continue.

It's worth also acknowledging the support of the Northeast LEP, North of Tyne Combined Authority, Northumberland County Council and Lloyd's Bank who have enabled us to invest heavily in the Port.

Claire Young, Friends of Ridley Park and Blyth Tall Ship

What is your relationship with Groundwork and what might the future relationship look like around improving the habitat and quality of the river?

Answer: As of tomorrow, we will be helping Groundwork to install fish refugia along the Commissioner's Quay and we will be helping them with future projects, we meet every couple of months and have recently been utilising our work boats to help them install the fish refugia.

Mark Stoner, Port of Tyne

What must the northeast region as a whole do better to maximise its share of the green renewable markets, associated investment and jobs?

Answer: I think we need to collaborate more; I mentioned earlier the Green Super Ports concept as part of the devolution deal, we will be working together with the Port of Tyne and Sunderland on that. We also worked closely with our neighbouring Ports on the unfortunately unsuccessful freeport bid. I do think there are opportunities for further collaborations and for sharing best practices and we will certainly be working as one through the devolution deal to draw in investment.

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 communications prior to the meeting and the clarity of the presentation. The quality of the presentation was rated at an average of 9.7 out of ten with positive feedback such as:

'Great chance to hear in person what is going on in the port and how well the port is doing. The live Question and Answer session is an excellent opportunity to ask for any additional information that was missing from the presentation.'

'This was a very informative and interesting meeting. I don't feel any improvements to the meeting format are needed. Thank you for the opportunity to attend.'

Annual Review

The Port's Annual Review for 2022 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](#).