



“The port sector has come through in great shape due to the incredible job of the workforce and key strategic decisions throughout the pandemic”. These were the words of the Minister for Shipping Robert Courts MP recently, demonstrating the deep-rooted resilience of the sector in the face of a once in a generation pandemic and a once in a generation change to trade – simultaneously.

But what is particularly remarkable is that our ports have also maintained a focus on the future, with significant commitments to investment, connectivity improvements and environmental sustainability. Maintaining a focus on the long-term is critical in ensuring the ports sector’s long-term success as both the UK’s largest gateways for trade and catalysts for sustainable jobs and prosperity.

Although ports have recently experienced their fair share of operational disruption and economic pain investment in crucial infrastructure has continued unabated. Ambitious future plans have been announced in both resilience and infrastructure development. For example, Peel Ports and Associated British Ports on the Humber have recently completed their upgrades to container terminals worth £200 million and £50 million respectively. Forth Ports announced a £40 million facility at Leith for a new offshore green energy facility. Ports such as Felixstowe, Belfast and Peel Ports Medway have announced new freight ferry infrastructure investments, with Forth Ports Tilbury bringing its recently completed £250 million Tilbury2 freight ferry terminal up to full operation.

UK ports have also acted as key players in the development of other crucial infrastructure – notably in the energy and construction sectors. PD Ports in Teesside attracted nearly £700 million of investment in new energy from waste plants, while Bristol Port is a crucial modular construction base for the

Hinckley C nuclear power plant. Meanwhile, the Tilbury2 development incorporates the UK's largest construction materials aggregates terminal, enabled by an expanded rail infrastructure connecting the port to the rest of the country.

More broadly, ports are at the centre of wider economic growth. The most talked about investment initiative of the year so far has been Freeports; a status granted to an impressive seven coastal locations in England. The initiative, if delivered to its fullest, should provide one of the best opportunities for investment in coastal areas in years, with options for development both at sea and inland. This is not least in logistics and warehousing development – previously unloved but currently one of the most attractive asset class in recent months – where the ‘port-centric’ model is showing its value.

With 95% of physical imports and exports passing through our seaports, they are essential for our trade connectivity with the world. The ports sector has continued to be the bow of the ‘Global Britain’ ship, with significant growth in connections and services to both EU and non-EU countries. Ports like Tilbury, Medway, Immingham, Hull, Teesside and Liverpool for example have seen new EU freight ferry services – enhancing trade resilience when it is needed most. Bumper consumer spending has kept key gateways for Asian trade like Felixstowe, Southampton and London Gateway busy despite the pandemic with new services calling at ports such as Liverpool.

Good landside connectivity is crucial to the country maximising the value of its ports. Ports have made good strides to increase freight connections, whilst also delivering green and ‘levelling up’ initiatives in one. UKMPG members have been expanding their rail connections network with, for example, both PD Ports and Peel Ports having recently extended their Scottish rail freight services to allow for increased intermodal traffic to support customer demand. Of course, in the digital age connectivity is not just physical. Belfast led the technological charge in 2020, partnering with BT to build the UK's first 5G private network while 2021 has seen ABP Southampton, Felixstowe and Bristol all announce plans and agreements for ground-breaking 5G applications.

“Building back greener” is another consistent theme, with green investment set to revolutionise the sector. For example, ABP has invested significantly in electric charging for cruise vessels, energy-efficient lighting and port equipment. Other ports likewise have woven the target for Net Zero into their investments. Belfast Harbour is part of a local consortium

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building zero emissions hydrogen powered ferries, while the Port of London Authority is currently trialling energy-generating green tech. Ports also serve as hubs for off-shore renewable energy development and places such as Grimsby, Lowestoft and Great Yarmouth continue to support offshore wind installations in the North Sea. This demonstrates not only a commitment to sustainable technology, but also prove that the transition to Net Zero can be economically, as well as environmentally, viable.

So, we have in ports a sector that is committed to developing its rightful place at the heart of Britain's post-Brexit, post-Pandemic growth. As the sector recovers from one of the most demanding periods in its history, it has proven itself to be one of the most vital sectors to the British economy, literally keeping the country fed and moving through hard times. The Government can play a supportive role in encouraging further investment – fuelling growth for ports and coastal communities and helping expand resilience in an ever-changing world. The Shipping Minister's acknowledgment of our crucial role in the UK's present is very welcome and ports look forward to working with him and all politicians as continue in plotting the course for prosperous (and green) future horizons for the UK.