



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

31 October 2016

Dear Philip,

DIBDEN BAY IN NEW FOREST EAST

It came as a most unwelcome surprise to learn, via the media, that, on your recent visit to Associated British Ports in Southampton, you endorsed their so-called Master Plan reviving the prospect of building a container port on reclaimed land (part of which is protected by an SSSI and by other designations) at Dibden Bay in my constituency on the opposite side of Southampton Water.

I understand that you may have been giving an unscripted answer to a question put to you during the visit. In that case, you may have had no knowledge of the fact that for six long years this horrifying prospect was the dominant issue in New Forest East and there was huge relief and jubilation when, after a year-long public enquiry, ABP's plan was blocked in April 2004.

Apart from its foreshore being heavily-protected by environmental designations, the reclaimed land at Dibden Bay adjoins the large villages of Marchwood to the north and Dibden to the south. All three locations lie along the A326, which is not a dual carriageway in the vicinity of Dibden Bay, although there is a short stretch of dual carriageway further north.

The effect of having a huge container port in this location on the edge of the New Forest would be intolerable for large numbers of my constituents – not only those living on either side of Dibden Bay but also everyone who relies on the A326, which would rapidly become a nightmare for thousands of road-users. It goes without saying that the noise, congestion and light pollution of a 24-hour port operation on their doorsteps would be devastating for the quality of life of the communities sited adjacent to this piece of reclaimed land.

To give you an idea of the magnitude of the controversy, I enclose three full pages – including the front page – of the coverage in the *Southern Daily Echo* caused by your apparent endorsement of bringing this notorious scheme back to life. I also enclose just five short items of the 22 currently in the dossier on Dibden Bay, which comprise a special section of my website devoted exclusively to this issue and its potential catastrophic impact on my constituency.

I have not included the lengthy presentations to the Public Inquiry, which are also on the website and which set out the saga in detail. Instead, I wish to draw your attention particularly to the *Echo's* Report and Editorial of late September 2006, when it was announced that ABP would be hugely expanding its container capacity on its existing land in Southampton. The Editor of the newspaper rightly pointed out that, as a former strong supporter of the failed Dibden Bay proposal, he had disbelieved those of us who had claimed all along that this was what should be done, in the face of ABP's denials. Now he felt it necessary to "eat a slice of humble pie", because ABP were going to do exactly what we had advocated.

As a new MP in 1997, I had quickly concluded that ABP could not be relied upon to tell the truth about Dibden Bay. Two examples will suffice. At first, they sought to convince me that

there was insufficient container trade for all the existing ports; that only a few hubs would be selected by the container shipping companies; and that Southampton must expand or it would "begin to die" as container shipments went elsewhere. Yet, when it later appeared that Thames Gateway was going to be built as a huge container port on the old Shell Haven Refinery site, ABP immediately changed their tune and airily asserted that there would be more than enough trade both for a container port at Shell Haven *and* for a new one at Dibden Bay.

Secondly, as indicated already, our consistent argument that ABP could greatly expand its capacity for container trade on its existing land in Southampton was strenuously denied. Yet, only two years after Dibden Bay was blocked, that is exactly what they did. As the *Echo* observed on 27 September 2006:

"Barely two years ago ABP was arguing that development of Dibden Bay was essential if the port was to survive and prosper. Without a massive new port development on land across the water, the port of Southampton would become second class.

As everyone knows that argument was lost and the Dibden Bay development was consigned to history, at least for now. There was much champagne popping among conservationists and those residents who live in luxury homes on the Hythe waterside.

In Southampton there was much shaking of heads.

Now it appears arguments put forward by opponents to the Dibden scheme have been justified. ABP can indeed build its new super dock facilities capable of taking the largest of container ships along what is already dock development on the city side of Southampton Water."

Nobody in New Forest East wishes Southampton Port anything other than prosperity. Despite the ferocity of this long battle with ABP, when the company asked for my support for its efforts to develop container berths in Southampton and in its battle with the Port of Liverpool over cruise liner terminal conditions, my help was readily given – as the enclosed extract from *Hansard* of 18 January 2012 clearly demonstrates.

When the Infrastructure Bill was going through Parliament, I repeatedly sought assurances that, whilst the process might be speedier, the degree of protection for places like Dibden Bay would not be lessened. Such assurances were given to me privately by John Hayes and publicly by the relevant Minister at the despatch box, Stephen Williams, on 26 January 2015. My constituents and I expect them to be honoured for the simple reason that some areas are simply inappropriate locations for a huge container port – and one such area is Dibden Bay in New Forest East.

Your ever,
Tulian

Rt Hon Philip Hammond MP
Chancellor of the Exchequer