

PORT CHANGES

Together we can create a more positive town future

New Conservative parliamentary candidate CHARLIE ELPHICKE recently paid a visit to the Port of Dover to discuss its future with harbour board chief executive Bob Goldfield. Writing exclusively for the Express, Mr Elphicke outlines his vision for the port, arguing that the days of nationalisation versus privatisation are over and that it can be made to be more accountable.

LAST year, 2,324,598 lorries, 2,647,390 cars and 13,796,098 passengers made their way across the Channel to and from Dover. That's enough lorries to stretch all the way round the equator. So it is not hard to see why the Port of Dover is the town's greatest asset. It is the gateway to Britain. It is UK plc on the move.

So it makes sense to ask how we can get the most out of the port, to the benefit of the port and community as a whole. The relationship between the town and Port of Dover has not always been a happy one, but recently there is a sense that this is changing.

The port is playing an important role in the renewal of the town and in Dover Pride. And there is a consensus that the district council, under the leadership of Cllr Paul Watkins, has made more strides forward in four years than were made in the previous 20. The district council's activism has drawn together business and government agencies that have collectively transformed the landscape.

With the people of Dover, we can do more. The port wants to develop the western docks.

Everyone I speak to sees this as a good job-creating idea. Yet the harbour board is hampered by existing HM Treasury controls.

Meanwhile, people tell me they want more accountability for the harbour board without privatisation, and something done about Townwall Street.

Central Government can make a real difference here. We can make the port more independent. We can change things so that there is a stronger accountability link with the community and we don't need to get stuck in the tired old rows of yesterday about privatisation vs nationalisation.

This is why I have put the case to the Conservative shadow transport ministers and persuaded them to support a Harbour Revision Order for Dover. This will free the harbour board to develop the western docks as quickly as may be.

It will make privatisation effectively impossible, so port profits will be reinvested in further development.

We are also making the case for two harbour board directors to be jointly appointed by Dover and Kent County Councils.

This will help deepen the partnership between the community and the port, as well as build in greater accountability.

Shadow transport ministers have agreed to support these proposals. It seems to me that if these proposals are accepted by the Government in full, the community's priorities can be delivered. Yet there is much more that can be done.

Let's be clear that Dover is a town with a port, not a port with a town.

For years people have talked about finishing the dualing of the A2 and sorting out the A20. For years there have been complaints about Dover's Townwall "Street of Steel", the pollution that is chuffed up and the way it cuts off the town from the port.

Not enough has been done in the past. With the development of the western docks, positive changes can be made.

An absolute priority must be sorting out the A2 and A20. This has been identified as a national priority in the Government's Edgington Report. I'll be working to try to make sure the Government delivers on the recommendations in that report. That in turn offers the possibility of tackling the Townwall Street problem.

Think how different Dover could be. Imagine travelling on a dualled A2 all the way into the Eastern Docks, seeing below a Townwall Street that is no longer a wall of steel and a western docks bustling with traffic arriving via a fit-for-purpose A20. Imagine the extra prosperity that could be realised in a port and town that works together.

Together seeing through the western docks expansion, increased cruise ship calls and more successful tourism.

With town and port working together and central Government doing its bit, we can make it happen.



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Herald Express

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