

International trade



First the world, then Hull

Hull has managed to shake off negative perceptions in the past few years, but what could more international trade mean for the city? We brought together a panel of experts at the city's World Trade Centre to find out

Is Hull making the most of its location?

John Holmes I have been away for 20 years and it has been fascinating to see how the city looks now. The World Trade Centre is part of that. We have really strong sectors that could probably benefit from a more co-ordinated approach, which is what we are concentrating on as a new economic development company. Recent events present challenges and will continue to for the year ahead. But there is a strong business community and we need to make sure we are in the best position when the economy improves.

Andy Mowbray I am from Hull but started my career in London where the perception of the city was quite negative. But we have changed perceptions massively in the past five years. Retailers that would never take a second look at the city are now taking an interest in Hull. We have seen that with St Stephen's and will see it with future retail developments.

Rob Penrose I recently hosted a meeting in Hull with lawyers from all over the country and they were astounded at what they saw. We still have a challenge

of getting what we have to offer across to the outside world.

David Drewry We bring in 3,000 students every year and many of those – between 75 per cent and 80 per cent – come from outside the locality. And they become the strongest ambassadors for the city when they leave. We need to use people like that more to sell the city. The perceptions of Hull outside the UK are also completely different. In the Far East, the US, or other parts of Europe, they take what you are telling them on the merits of the case and not their own preconceptions. They see the investment and the opportunities.

Carolyn Burgess We moved our company to this part of the world from Slough. This is a far better place to be. I make people come here and visit us because once they have been they want to come back.

Mowbray Hull City being in the Premiership has done wonders for us, because for the first time the media profile has been in the area.

Mark Robson And it has all happened

PARTICIPANTS

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PROFESSOR DAVID DREWRY
vice chancellor, University of Hull

ROB PENROSE
managing partner, Andrew Jackson

just as Hull has started to look better. Two years ago, at a meeting with my board, I told them about how a World Trade Centre was to be set up in Hull and their only reaction was to laugh. Now people want to come and see.

What do you think about how international trade could be improved through the city, Gareth?



WORLD
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Gareth Russell It is the biggest shipping estuary in the country and it is growing. But we all face a challenging 2009. Hull is the largest timber-importing port in the country, but if people are not building as many houses we are not importing as much timber. On the flip side we have some exciting projects for Hull. Drax is to build three renewable biomass-fired power stations in this area. These guys wouldn't be coming to the Humber if there wasn't something about it, for its relatively uncongested infrastructure and the fact it is pointing the right way for trade with Europe.

Drewry In the 1960s and 1970s Britain looked to the North Sea as a source of energy, and it built much of cities such as Aberdeen on the back of servicing that industry. Now we are poised to look at a new boom in the North Sea, but this time it is to do with renewable energy – wind power, with offshore wind farms, and the use of the River Humber for tidal power. We have the biggest offshore windfarm just south of here. Like Aberdeen, which never actually produced the oil, Hull will be servicing that industry.

Russell And we have room to expand to do that. Ports further south are surrounded by the local hinterland.

Penrose Hull is also positioned in the centre of the country, and a huge section of the UK population is accessible by road and rail from here.

Russell In our marketing we try not to use the phrase "up north" because we are right in the middle with 40 million people within a four-hour drive.

Mowbray With the World Trade Centre we have the opportunity to market those benefits to a network of 334 world trade centres in 94 countries.

How does the World Trade Centre work, and why is it important for Hull?

Mowbray Hull is the first place in the UK to have a fully operational World Trade Centre. That shows our ambition. With this centre we can promote our key sectors to an international audience. And we can help smaller businesses, too. We have created a one-stop shop so local businesses that want to trade in overseas markets can access every service they need under one roof. We have UKTI, Language is Everything, the chambers and the university, and Andrew Jackson, all here. Through the World Trade Centre

we have enquiries coming in all the time. We have handled 264 since we opened in June. And it has taken us just over two years to go from concept to structure. The Belfast World Trade Centre is still in development after seven years.

Holmes While this is public sector-led, the private sector has bought into this in a very short time.

Robson International trade is something in itself. We have a meeting in a couple of weeks about possibly locating a national food association here. This would be a good place for them to be based because we have such a strong industry. And again that would put Hull on the map.

Mowbray Being first is fantastic, but there are challenges, such as creating awareness of what a World Trade Centre is. Slowly we are breaking down those communication barriers.

Penrose Being part of this has also

helped us get to know the university better. Now we are trying to put a package together to help its start-ups.

What is graduate retention like?

Drewry That is one of the big disappointments – there are not sufficient openings for graduates who want to stay.

Holmes But the supply has improved as well as quality control – the percentage of graduates who get firsts or upper seconds.

Penrose And the incubator units are unparalleled in the UK.

Burgess The problem is that when people come to the university they say: "Wow!" But you have to get them there. I see an opportunity in the World Trade Centre for people to do things they haven't thought of before.

Robson There is more we could do in the current circumstances to get people more orders, such as bringing



Burgess



Robson



Penrose



Holmes



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the catalyst that is
transforming Hull into a
global economic player**

Hull
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in more buyers, but we can also help them on such basics such as getting paid. That is hard if you are chasing someone in Spain where they only speak Spanish. But we have an in-house language department here, too.

Shaun Watts We see a tremendous amount of opportunity here. Over the past two years the type of business we have been doing in Hull has changed significantly. We want to bring people in to enhance the service, and show them what is happening.

What developments may happen to the port if more trade took off?

Russell There are many projects in the pipeline that are a few years off yet. To prevent ships always having to go to Rotterdam we want to see if we can bring them into the Humber. The container market is set to grow and we need to build facilities to capture that. We have permission for a container terminal. And we are also looking at bulk cargoes for biomass.

What other sectors is Hull Forward promoting?

Holmes We looked at what the real assets of Hull and the Humber were. Hull Citybuild commissioned a report from IBM that focuses on ports, healthcare and renewables. We have set up strong partnerships in all those areas and they are starting to produce real product and looking at three or four key deliverables. On healthcare we have had a meeting with consultants to see how you could bring together wound care with the technology required for instrumentation. This research would bring together the



Watts (left) and Drewry (right)

university and large companies such as Smith & Nephew, Reckitt Benckiser and Seven Seas. But we are not exclusively focusing on that sector. We also have a £200m project on renewables at Saltend – a partnership between BP, Du Pont, and Associated British Foods. We are finding transferable skills from industries that are harder hit. One of the great strengths of this area is the spread of sectors.

Drewry In healthcare we are also seeing huge investment through the NHS. We spun out a company last year that already had a £5m contract with the NHS to roll out virtual radiographer training in the UK. And we are looking at spin-outs with the NHS in other areas. Every major hospital around the world has a machine for measuring bone density that was

developed in Hull. The trouble is that it was developed at a time when retaining your intellectual property wasn't focused on. So we didn't get the capitalisation we should have.

So how well are the two sides of the Humber coming together? Is the Humber Bridge being used as much as intended?

Holmes Making it toll-free may help the integration of the sub-regional economy, but I'm not convinced the government has the appetite for that now. We need to take a more mature approach. It's the same with the boundary between Hull and the East Riding. Saltend is actually in the East Riding.

Drewry The boundary is bizarre. The single biggest factor that would change perceptions would be to have that boundary removed because we are an inner city. We have the same statistics as the inner part of Leeds, but Leeds is diluted by places such as Ilkley. We would look like a normal centre if we changed that boundary.

Holmes If you put the two authorities together we are bang on average in national statistics. We are also not polycentric as a sub-region. And we are slightly detached.

Penrose The World Trade Centre has a role to play in bringing the north and south bank closer together. There is still a degree of animosity, which goes back to when Hull and Grimsby competed in the fishing industry ▶



Mowbray



Russell