

# BRIDGE

Issue 06

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Working together for a brighter future

Making Waves  
Tees Maritime

Maritime Minister  
Mike Kane

My Tees Valley  
Joanne Fryett

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**Credits**  
Words\*: Vicki Henderson  
Images\*: Michael Sreenan  
Front cover image: Andrew Oxby  
Design: Better

\*Words and image for Mike Kane MP supplied by his office.

Foreword from **Vicki Henderson**, Editor.



Welcome to the latest edition of Bridge, PD Ports’ bi-annual stakeholder publication celebrating the very best of industry, individuals and communities on the River Tees.

Our contributors to this Spring edition are all leaders, across a diverse range of sectors and backgrounds, united by a shared pride in being ambassadors for Teesside and the remarkable organisations they each head.

Being an ambassador is about more than just turning up to the occasional event and saying a few words. An ambassador embodies the values of those they represent and uses their platform to influence and drive positive change.

As Teesside continues to assert itself nationally, ambassadors in both business and in our communities are vital to highlighting our shared strengths and purpose.

Our lead feature introduces Richard Booth and Joanne Vinton-Bullwinkel of the newly-formed Tees Maritime, an organisation created to promote and lobby on behalf of one of the region’s most important sectors.

Despite being at the heart of Teesside’s economy, supporting thousands of jobs, the scale of industry on the River Tees is largely hidden from view, with many of the local population completely unaware that the UK’s sixth largest port sits on their doorstep.

Together, Richard and Joanne will act as a voice for the sector, both locally and nationally, linking with Government and the education sector to raise awareness about the investment and skills Teesside needs if it is to thrive, now and in the future.

Other ambassadors featured in this edition include Paul Brooks, Teesport’s Harbour Master, who shines a light on the team who work day and night to keep the river safe; Matt Stilwell, leader of community heroes the South Gare Litter Pickers and the chief executive of Nepic, Joanne Fryett, who talks about her career journey and love for the region in our regular My Tees Valley feature.

We are also pleased to welcome a thought-leadership contribution from Maritime Minister Mike Kane, who writes about the importance of the UK’s ports to the country’s economy and in the push for net zero.

Having enjoyed writing for Bridge for the last couple of years, I’m proud to say this is my first edition as editor – it was a pleasure spending time with each our contributors to hear more about what makes them tick, their passion for Teesside and to see their pride in the achievements of those they represent.



Tees Maritime, the new private sector initiative that aims to boost the region's maritime economy, is officially up and running after a successful bid to Government in 2024, supported by Maritime UK. Bridge speaks to strategic director **Richard Booth** and operational delivery manager **Joanne Vinton-Bullwinkel** about the aims and aspirations of the new industry organisation and why collaboration is key.



# Making waves – introducing Tees Maritime

“As a sector, Teesside’s maritime community needs one, cohesive, long-term plan with everyone pulling in one direction, to really make a difference to the region’s future.

“With Tees Maritime providing that collaborative drive and serving as a single voice for the region on the broader stage, I believe we can achieve that,” says Joanne Vinton-Bullwinkel.

Teesside’s maritime sector is the foundation for its many industrial success stories, contributing millions of pounds to the local economy annually and providing quality employment to thousands.

But to many, the strength and complexity of the River Tees is a mystery, hidden from view and leaving many young people unaware of the array of career opportunities it presents.

And, despite local collaboration and partnership working, efforts to speak up on behalf of the region and drive home the messages about inward investment for river-based industrial developments and the need to bridge the growing skills gap between education and industry have sometimes fallen short in recent years.

To tackle those issues, providing leadership and a single voice for Teesside’s maritime community, a new partnership – formally named Tees Maritime – was announced late last year by the Department for Transport.

Part of the maritime cluster initiative backed by Government and spearheaded by national industry body Maritime UK, the partnership has been founded to champion and grow Teesside’s maritime sector.

Led by strategic director Richard Booth and operational delivery manager Joanne Vinton-Bullwinkel, Tees Maritime is a not-for-profit company tasked with raising awareness of the industry in the local area and beyond and championing efforts for Teesside to become a leading hub for the UK’s net zero ambitions.

It will also work with education providers to ensure young people know about the careers available to them on the river and are armed with the skills to succeed.

Richard, whose part-time role is shared with his existing role as chartering manager at shipping agency Cockfield Knight & Co, has more than 40 years of shipping expertise both on Teesside and around the globe.

He is joined by Joanne, who has 20 years of managerial experience in technology and finance, who holds responsibility for managing the day-to-day operations of the cluster.

Having taken up their roles in January, the pair have spent their first weeks meeting people across Teesside – both within the maritime sector and outside, making links with education leaders and providers, as well as the general public.





Richard says: “We’ve come a very long way in a short period of time. Although we have start up funding from Government and some financial support from key businesses in the region, we must become a self-financing membership organisation by next March.

“Our main aims are to promote the maritime industry in Teesside; gather insight into the needs of the sector in the region, to feed back to Government, and to work with education providers, from primary schools to universities, to ensure maritime careers are front and centre of their thinking.

“We will work with industry to find out what they need to develop and progress in the years to come and join everyone together to find a path forward.”

One of the key issues facing the maritime sector is the difficulties of recruiting young people to junior roles or finding people with the right skillset.

Richard sums up the issue following a number of conversations he and Joanne had at an adult careers fair held earlier this year at Middlesbrough Town Hall.

“We had a lot of interest on the day, people wanted to know who we were and what we stood for,” he says.

“I asked everyone I spoke to what they knew about the maritime industry – what it involves – and if they knew where Teesport is.

“A few knew there was a port down the road but most thought it was quite small fry in the UK picture, maybe the 25th biggest port in the country. They were all amazed to hear it was the sixth largest in the UK.

“That’s astonishing to me and something we really need to tackle.”

Joanne adds: “It’s been very interesting to me coming into this sector from ‘outside’ as it were.

“I knew nothing about the port before the role came up – I’ve never known an industry that’s as hidden from view as maritime.”

Maritime clusters have been long-established in other parts of the country, including Mersey, Solent and Thames, among others.

A key element of the cluster is the direct link into the Department of Transport, via Maritime UK, to push for investment or raise issues holding back development in the region.

Supporting Richard and Joanne is a non-executive board, made up of representatives from across the region’s maritime businesses, who will provide guidance and direction to Tees Maritime.

Plans are underway for an official launch event for Tees Maritime, alongside a number of public facing events to begin the work to promote the industry to a wider audience.

Joanne says: “I thought it would be hard to get people on board, but everyone is really keen to work with us.

“The collaboration that’s needed already exists in Teesside – people are keen to help and get involved. So long as that good will is there, we will be able to grow and develop as an organisation.

“It’s very early days but signs are positive.

“We are facilitators, project managers. It’s about getting people in the room, having the conversations.

“At the moment people have the conversations, all agree what needs to be done and then leave the room and nothing happens until the next time they all get in the room to have another conversation.

“We will be the people to get things moving in between those meetings, to join the dots and move the conversation forward.

“There’s a real sense of ‘why not Teesside’ – we can be at the heart of the net zero journey, we can lead the way in welcoming new technologies and growing our existing industries.

“And we will make sure we bring our region’s young people with us.”

“We will be the people to get things moving, to join the dots and move the conversation forward”







During his time as Shadow Maritime Minister **Mike Kane** wrote for Bridge setting out the priorities of a potential Labour Government. Now, after almost a year as Maritime Minister, he again writes to highlight the importance of the port sector to the UK economy and why it is key in the push for net zero.

# Ports are at the heart of the growth mission

British ports are key to unlocking economic growth across the country.



As an island nation these gateways have, historically, been at the centre of the UK's prosperity and this strength continues today.

Our ports' success flows from their adaptability to accommodate the markets that drive them, leading not only to a resilient sector, but also a resilient United Kingdom, which, despite disruption in recent years, has seen container traffic increase by 20%.

Epitomising this commercial agility is Teesport – which has weathered the storms of coal decline, ore and other traffic, yet has invested

in new traffics, becoming one of the leaders in port-centric logistics.

It's this sector's tenacity which continues to inspire me, and whether it's delivering greener transport or ensuring the safety and prosperity of the people who keep the sector moving, we see ports as major facilitators of growth.

Working in partnership with the sector, we want to enable their prosperity and growth and that means reducing bureaucracy and red tape.

Our co-drafted planning framework for ports has been designed to consider the complexities of modern planning and environmental regulation.

So too, the new Planning and Infrastructure Bill will lead to reforms of nationally significant infrastructure, including more frequent reviews of National Policy Statements, and greater flexibility in the processes that we know ports want.

And although we have yet to consult on revisions to the National Policy Statement for Ports, you can expect to see an even stronger backing for the sector, favouring ports to make their own commercial judgements on future traffic trends.

Central to everything that this sector achieves is of course its people – seafarers, port employees and the nearby coastal communities in which they operate.

We are prioritising the employment of UK seafarers, including a better representation of women, and we are already leading the way in implementing the Seafarers' Wages Act to strengthen employment rights and improve working conditions.

And, thinking ahead, we are supporting existing and future generations of seafarers, ensuring that UK training remains highly skilled, is internationally competitive and equipped to handle new vessels, green fuels and future technologies.

I'm excited by the sector's technological transformation and how we can work together with ports to contribute to the Government's Clean Energy Mission.

Our recently published Maritime Decarbonisation Strategy sets out our plans for decarbonising the domestic maritime sector, with the new Net Zero Ports call for evidence looking at how we can reduce emissions at berth.

But all of this is just a fraction of the work this sector is doing to drive forward economic growth.

It is a privilege for me, and my department, to work with the ports industry to help it grow while contributing to a lasting transformation of our trade and economy. I look forward to working alongside our partners as we look to a promising future for maritime.



Litter is a blight on communities across the UK, spoiling urban, rural and coastal locations alike. On a mission to tackle the issue along Teesside’s coastline and beyond are the South Gare Litter Pickers, a group of volunteers who give their time each week to collect litter and fly tips from some of the region’s beauty spots. Charity lead **Matt Stilwell** explains more about their purpose and drive to make the world a better place.

# A real pick me up

How the South Gare Litter Pickers became a force for good in the community

Winston Churchill once said: “What is the use of living, if it be not to strive for noble causes and to make this muddled world a better place for those who will live in it after we are gone?”

The idea that true fulfilment comes from serving others and contributing to the well-being of the world around us is at the very heart of the work done by the volunteers who make up the South Gare Litter Pickers (SGLP).

The group, first founded in 2020 as the country emerged from lockdown by Matt Stilwell and Brian Atkinson, gather each week to pick litter and clear fly tips at some of Teesside’s best-loved spots, including South Gare.

With more than 20 core members and support from the local business community and landowners, including PD Ports and Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council, SGLP have become a well-known sight in the community.

Tenacious and patient in their work to tackle the on-going blight of litter, flytipping and ‘ghost gear’, often discarded or lost fishing gear thrown from the sea, SGLP have cleared tens of thousands of bags of waste over the years, working as a team to clear the gare, the public road through Warrenby and a wide range of

community areas, woodlands and beaches in the Redcar area.

The group became a charitable community benefit society three years ago and regularly team up with schools, businesses and other community groups to target problem areas, or introduce people to the idea of volunteering and doing their bit.

Matt Stilwell, who combines his role as leader of the group with running his graphic design and printing business, took up litter picking after seeing the impact of litter on the gare after lockdown.

“There was just litter everywhere, I was just horrified at the sight of it,” he said.

“I just thought, who is going to clean it up? And then thought, why can’t it be me?”

Teaming up with Brian Atkinson, who was already a well-known figure litter picking the local beaches, the pair set to their work, spending hours each day tackling litter and fly tips.

With much of South Gare privately owned, the group engaged with the landowners and the



“A group like this brings people together and gives them purpose”

council to remove fly tipping which, over the years, has included asbestos, building waste and hundreds of tyres.

Matt says: “I never thought of litter as a problem until we came out of lockdown – everywhere was covered in litter.

“The fence line was full of litter that people had thrown out of their cars.

“It gave me a purpose. When my time on this planet is done, I want to be the person that people remember for cleaning up South Gare and Redcar.

“But god, when I started I didn’t know what I was letting myself in for – I only thought about litter, I didn’t even consider the fly tips.

“A lot of people didn’t understand at first, people often thought I was the one doing the fly tipping, because nobody goes out and picks up other people’s rubbish, do they?

“Well, they do now, because there is an army of us.”

The core group of more than 20 volunteers who make up the SGLP include retirees, people of all ages who want to keep our local areas clean.

As well as litter picking, the group regularly meet for meals, pub quizzes and often gather for a quick pint after their Saturday morning efforts.

“We’ve had members join who have moved to the area and didn’t know anyone,” explains Matt.

“A group like this brings people together and gives them purpose.

“I realised there was a need for a more social aspect when I started providing cups of tea at the end of a session and, instead of just packing up and leaving as soon as they were done litter picking, people would stay for a cup of tea and have a chat – it made us into a real community group.



“It’s the best thing I’ve done in my life, the knowledge that I’ve made a difference”

“It gave us the opportunity to talk about what we wanted to achieve as a group and what we needed to tackle problem areas and where we should go next.”

With funding secured from a range of sources including the National Lottery Community Fund and local businesses, SGLP is well-equipped and well-drilled organisation.

“You will not find a litter picking group out there that’s as well-equipped as ours,” says Matt, proudly.

“We keep a huge stock of litter pickers and hoops that we give to people who want to litter pick in the community at discounted cost.

“We became a charity about six months after we first started because we realised how much equipment and support we would need to tackle to litter blight in the area.



“We’re on our third trailer in three years – the first one we had could hold ten bags, the latest can carry 100 bags of litter.”

As well as the weekly group picks, SGLP members also do individual picks in their local areas and clean up their communities.

Volunteers are also on hand to support community efforts – a recent litter pick outside Grangetown’s Caedmon School in conjunction with the council and Beyond Housing resulted in 180 bags of litter being collected.

Matt says: “Wherever we work we interact with dog walkers, anglers, bird watchers and boat owners – we’ve seen them change their attitude and many of them have had litter pickers off us and do their bit to support our efforts.

“There was a fisherman we spoke to who said he’d had a hut at the gare for 30 years – he said our group is the best thing to happen to the area. That comment still makes me emotional now.

“It’s not just my pride – it’s the group members who volunteer their time and effort, it’s their pride as well.

“I couldn’t possibly have achieved alone what we’ve gone on to achieve as a group. We work together and tackle problems. I’ve made so many friends and now we’ve got a good group of people who are friends for life.

“It’s the best hobby in the world, litter picking.

“It’s the best thing I’ve done in my life, the knowledge that I’ve made a difference.”







The beating heart of Teesside's economy, the River Tees welcomes thousands of ships from around the globe each year, bringing goods and materials to berths and wharfs along its lower reaches. Responsible for the safe passage of those vessels into Teesport is the Harbour Master **Paul Brooks**, supported by the Vessel Traffic Services team. Here, Paul explains more about his role and his passion the river community.

# For the love of the river

The Tees has been a trading river since Roman times, with people working together to harness its strengths and overcome its challenges. That spirit of collaboration remains today – it's what makes Teesside such a special place.

The river has seen so much change over the years – from the physical changes made in the 19th Century to reclaim the land now known as Seal Sands and create a deeper channel to allow bigger ships to enter its waters, to the waves of industry it has supported to thrive and then watch decline or disappear.

At its heart, though, the Tees has remained a constant, welcoming vessels of all shapes and sizes, each filled with cargo that ends up on supermarket shelves, supports our farmers or fuels our vehicles.

Teesport is responsible for adding an estimated £1.6bn to the regional economy each year, supporting a supply chain workforce in the region of 22,000.

Its importance to the local area cannot be underestimated.

Overseeing it all is the Harbour Master, a position I have been immensely proud to hold for nine years, having joined the Tees Harbour Office some 30 years ago.

Ultimately, I have one role – to make sure that the harbour under my command is safe for vessels to come and trade.

Supported by the Vessel Traffic Services (VTS) team, made up of seven Assistant Harbour

Masters and overseen by VTS manager Luke Oldham and VTS assistant Amy Preville, I hold overall responsibility for the safe passage of the 4,000 vessels, and those who sail on them, that visit the Tees each year.

I work most closely with deputy Harbour Master, Chris Stocks, and secretary Sue Green, who assist me in my daily duties.

The Harbour Office is operated by PD Ports under its obligations as Statutory Harbour Authority for the ports of Tees and Hartlepool.

Sitting in the shadow of the famous Middlesbrough Transporter Bridge, in the former Marine Fire Station, the Harbour Office is a round-the-clock operation not dissimilar to air traffic control.

The team monitors and manages ship movements on a 12-mile stretch of the river, plus a three-mile area of the North Sea, including the Port of Hartlepool, using radar, radio contact and CCTV to ensure safe and effective operations for all port users.

I'm also responsible for safe navigation and maintenance of channel depth, working in partnership with PD Ports' Conservancy team who survey and dredge the river almost daily, while also maintaining the navigational aids.



“This is my tenure of looking after this river and allowing it to flourish”

The scale of port operations on the Tees, and the industry on its banks, is often a surprise to people – even those who have lived in the area their whole lives.

I often refer to it as a sleeping giant, with the river largely hidden from general view in its lower reaches.

I love bringing people into the Harbour Office or out on the river – I love watching their eyes grow wide as I describe to them how the river works, what comes here and what its future can hold. I’ll never get bored of that.

I love seeing the realisation from people of the scale of what goes on.

For many, the most visible sign of activity at the port are the tankers and cargo ships anchored off the coast of Redcar and Seaton Carew while they wait their turn at their designated berth.

It’s more important than ever that people in the local area are helped to better understand the importance of the port and the great jobs the maritime sector and industries along the banks of the river can offer to people in the region.

We must also work together with colleagues in education and training to make sure the next generation have the skills they need to be part of the workforce of tomorrow.

For my own part I served in the Merchant Navy, joining at 16 straight from school.

Given that I hail from a small village near Barnard Castle, and with no strong family links to the sea, it was perhaps an unlikely career choice, but I was just fascinated with the idea of setting sail and seeing the world from a young age.

When I joined my first vessel, I’d never left the UK – by the end of that voyage I’d reached the tip of South America.

I’ve never lost that love of the industry and, in 2023, I was proud to be voted President of the UK Harbour Masters Association, a role I will hold until later this summer.

It has given me the opportunity to promote the work and importance of UK ports to key



figures within Government – we are an island nation after all, ports are vital to our everyday supply chain.

The Government has recognised that importance and the association is also working closely with the UK Major Ports Group, Tees Maritime and the British Ports Association to continue to shine a light on the development and investment needed if ports are to continue to thrive and support future growth.

I work for PD Ports but, more importantly, I work for this river. As a business and as individuals we take great pride in our status as custodians of the river – this is my tenure of looking after this river and allowing it to flourish. I’m passionate about it.

My main driver is to keep the port going, to keep it safe and make sure it has a future.

This river, this community gets into your soul. We are a close community that pulls together and keeps talking to each other. A lot of the people I work with across the river are friends as well as colleagues.

I’m a quiet person by nature but I get quite passionate about these things. This place is in my soul and it always will be.





As chief executive of process industry business network Nepic, **Joanne Fryett** leads an organisation dedicated to supporting the needs and interests of one of the North East's key sectors. Proud to be from Middlesbrough, she tells Bridge about her career journey and what makes Teesside such a special place.

# My Tees Valley



Middlesbrough is my hometown – it has been an important part of developing my career and now it's so important to me to give back and support others in their career journeys and to talk about what an amazing area we live in.

Throughout my career, my roles have been about connecting with people and connecting businesses, talking up the area – understanding what they are good at, what do they do and how can we raise awareness of them more widely in the area and beyond.

My role at Nepic has brought me full circle, that idea of connecting businesses and helping them to grow together through collaboration and partnership is our very ethos.

Although my career path may not be as straightforward as some, every job I've ever had has taught me a new skill, introduced me to new people or opened a door to new opportunities.

As a young woman, I balanced working, studying at night school and raising a young family.

My career began at Teesside TEC. (Training and Enterprise Council) thanks to a conversation I had while waitressing at an event there, which led to me moving across to manage their conference and events floor.

I spent several years at the Training and Enterprise Council, followed by Business Link and then ten years at the North East Chamber of Commerce, all of which brought me into contact with businesses of all shapes and sizes.

I've also had roles with Middlesbrough Football Club and Stockton Borough Council, but it was in 2019, while travelling in Japan with my daughter, that I decided I needed a new challenge.

I got one – I had my first interview for Nepic, for business development director, in March 2020.

I got the job and started in May 2020, at the peak of the pandemic, learning about a new industry – one that was working flat out to keep the lights on for the whole country in extraordinary circumstances – and meeting new colleagues, all through Teams.

I'd worked at Nepic for a year before I met anyone face to face.

It was a challenging but fantastic time, where I got to know and understand the industry of industries.

I came to realise that the process sector is far beyond any other industry in terms of how it impacts our daily lives.

Late last year I was immensely proud to be named chief executive of Nepic, the first woman to hold the role, in the organisation's 20th year. It's not a responsibility that feels heavy, but I don't take it lightly.

Nepic is a membership organisation, with its headquarters at the Wilton Centre, Redcar, representing the process industry across the North East, working to help the industry thrive by forging relationships and promoting collaboration in investment, innovation and skills.

The process industry is one of the largest in the region, with more than 1,400 companies directly involved or in the supply chain, generating £26bn in sales each year. It employs some 190,000 people and is responsible for £12bn of exports annually..

Being part of that is scary and exciting at the same time. There are challenges facing everyone in the sector including the race to net zero.

The sector is playing its part to protect the planet, while recognising the challenges the industry faces – we can only progress in our aims with the right regulations, the right skills and the right investment.

A key issue is ensuring the region's young people are made aware of the sector and the jobs and opportunities it offers.

The perception is that it's a sector that is old and tired – young people now want to do something that they feel has social conscience. But there are firms around Teesside working on great projects around sustainable aviation fuel and plastics recycling – everybody wants to be a part of projects that are green.

It's up to all of us working in industry to reach out to young people and ensure Teesside and the wider region really benefits from the opportunities available.

“Every job I've ever had has opened a door to new opportunities”

## Local history

The things that represent home to me are places like the Dorman Museum, which I love, Ormesby Hall and the Transporter Bridge, plus the river and our rail heritage – the new Hopetown site in Darlington is amazing.

The River Tees plays a huge part in who we are, a focal point for our economy and sense of place. There are so many adventurers and inventors who once called Middlesbrough home – Christopher Dresser from Linthorpe Pottery and Gertrude Bell, who was an archaeologist and explorer. We should be proud of our heritage and our history and how Teesside helped to shape the world.

## People

What really brings Teesside together and makes it home are the people. It has been thanks to the people I've met along the way who have made a massive difference to me personally.

In my career, nobody has ever said no to me if I've asked for support. Sometimes people have had to say 'not just yet' but have always come back and offered support at the right time. It's about people and connections.

## UTB

Football has been a huge part of my life, from playing as an 11-year-old to my lifelong support of the Boro. I even have a dog named Franck Queudue, in honour of the French defender who played for us from 2002.

I briefly worked for the football club and was asked to become a trustee of the MFC Foundation, which I was proud to do.

It's a role I love, it gives me the opportunity to do more for the community than I could in a typical job – there's a massive sense of giving back to the community and region that's afforded me a fantastic career. I want to inspire other people and the Foundation is a great way of doing that.





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