

## **View from the Humber: Our Economic World Today Freeports, Food and Future Opportunities, What's Next For Our Region?**

On Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> June, Andrew Jackson Solicitors LLP joined forces with RSM UK to host a panel discussion on the key issues for our region as a part of Business Week 2021. The session was chaired by Dominic Ward, Senior Partner at Andrew Jackson, who facilitated the discussion with our panel of guests:

- **Simon Bird**, Regional Director Humber, Associated British Ports
- **Rowena Clifton**, Indirect Tax Partner, RSM UK
- **Colin Moody**, Managing Director, Neill & Brown Global Logistics
- **Adam Couch**, Chief Executive, Cranswick Plc
- **Andrew Oliver**, Partner, Commercial Fisheries, Andrew Jackson Solicitors LLP
- **Jo Ackers**, Company Secretary, Independent Shellfishermen's Cooperative (Bridlington) Ltd

After a brief round of introductions, the first topic for discussion was the Humber's new Freeport status. Simon Bird outlined the great many benefits that this new status will bring, including driving investment, creating jobs and acting as a catalyst for future investment. As Simon noted, "It's fair to say, even from early conversations, having this status is stimulating a lot of conversations and it will certainly have a great impact on the region." Conversation then moved to Brexit, what 'business as usual' looks like at the moment and the wider outlook for the region. In terms of the latter, the message from Simon was resoundingly positive, "with freeport status, we can see the really big ticket items that are going to drive and change the economy for the good: manufacturing in Goole, carbon capture, hydrogen.. it's all about to happen."

Rowena Clifton then added some specialist insight into her work with businesses on their preparations before Brexit and the current position. She noted that a key issue for these businesses was a lack of clarity on imports and VAT registration, and a subsequent delay on processing those registrations, which had an impact on the flow of goods and services. As Rowena noted, "things are much better than they were in December and January, but in terms of delays, we're not out of the woods yet."

Conversation then moved onto logistics, with Colin Moody adding his perspective to the

discussions around the twin challenges of Brexit and Covid-19. In particular, many of Neill and Brown's customers have faced challenges in terms of the movement of cargo and the associated administrative pressures but, as Colin discussed, the company has made significant investments in its people and service offer to mitigate these pressures. As Colin said, "Next year, we're looking to update our fleet, as we always do, but costs are currently 12-15% higher than they were before Brexit. I'm sure there will be more challenges coming our way but our focus is on delivering an excellent service for our customers, and always at the right cost."

Adam Crouch then added his perspective on the current challenges, as Chief Executive of Cranswick plc, who process and supply meat products throughout the UK. Adam noted, "since the discussions around Brexit began, we have invested in improving and enhancing our values structure and own self-sufficiency, with greater integration and the development of our own farms." As an employer of over 5500 employees in the Humber region, Adam highlighted the importance of community engagement, with the company having recently supplied local primary schools with digital equipment to help close the gap in terms of technology and digital skills.

The seafood sector has always played a key role in the Humber region, not least due to Bridlington's status as the largest lobster port in Europe. Throughout the Brexit discussions seafood was consistently in the headlines, but what is the picture now? Jo Ackers, outlined the challenges of preparing for Brexit, with the announcement of the UK's withdrawal coming so late in the day. As Jo outlined, though, preparations were in place and the industry continues to thrive, and there are upsides, "the publicity for our sector throughout the Brexit process was great. Our fishermen benefited as our export price remained high and there is a lot more domestic awareness of the wonderful products that are on our doorstep- so I do foresee an increase in domestic demand."

Andrew Oliver, Chair of The Humber Marine Alliance (THMA) and Partner at Andrew Jackson reported that the knowledge and insight of the THMA are in high demand, with recent requests for help from the USA. Andrew commented, "the Humber, or the energy estuary, has now become a global exemplar. We've hosted delegations from Taiwan, China and the USA to name but few. This is something that we should all be very proud of."

The session was attended by 70 delegates on the day, several of whom submitted their

own questions, which were responded to by our panel. If the team at Andrew Jackson Solicitors can be of assistance to you and your business, or if you would like to receive invitations to upcoming events, please email [enquiries@andrewjackson.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@andrewjackson.co.uk).