



Rt. Hon. Simon Clarke MP  
Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and  
Communities

21 October 2022

Dear Secretary of State

At the full New Forest National Park Authority meeting on 20 October, board members<sup>1</sup> unanimously agreed the following position in relation to the Solent Freeport and the separate (but related) Investment Zone expression of interest process. Members also agreed that as Chair I should provide further explanation of our agreed position and the relevant context.

### **1. Solent Freeport ‘outer boundary’**

Following the publication of the Freeport maps earlier this year, the New Forest (Solent Freeport), Dartmoor (Plymouth & South Devon Freeport) and North York Moors (Teesside Freeport) national park authorities sought clarification on the implications of land within National Parks being in the defined Freeport ‘outer boundaries’. In terms of the New Forest, approximately 95% of the National Park lies within the Solent Freeport ‘outer boundary’.

The overlap between the National Park and the Solent Freeport outer boundary was also recently raised in a Parliamentary question from the New Forest East MP (Dr Julian Lewis). The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up responded on 11 October 2022 (Levelling Up, Housing and Communities – Solent Freeport – 53254). The response provided some reassurances and confirmed the overlap does not mean that the outer boundary area has been earmarked for development and nor does it confer any special planning status.

At our meeting on 20 October members were clear that the inclusion of National Park land within the Solent Freeport ‘outer boundary’ must not result in the essential protections for the National Park and the integrity of internationally designated nature conservation sites being overridden. Members agreed that any extended permitted development rights should only apply to specific Freeport tax and customs sites and not the whole of the ‘outer boundary’.

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<sup>1</sup> The members of the New Forest National Park Authority comprise Secretary of State appointees, parish council representatives and councillors from our constituent local authorities – Hampshire County Council, New Forest District Council, Test Valley Borough Council and Wiltshire Council.

#### **New Forest National Park Authority**

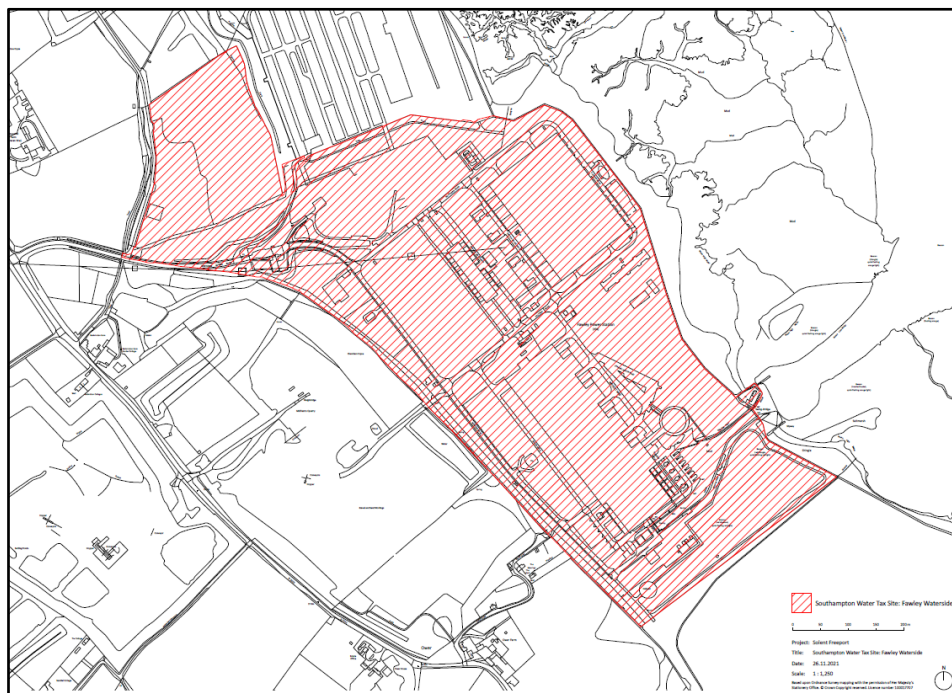
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CHAIRMAN GAVIN PARKER CHIEF EXECUTIVE ALISON BARNES

## 2. Investment Zones – ‘expression of interest’

On 14 October the Solent Freeport submitted an expression of interest to convert the Freeport to an Investment Zone – see [here](#). The expression of interest includes circa 6 hectares of land within the New Forest National Park as part of the ‘Southampton Water - Fawley Waterside Freeport tax site’. The plan below (taken from [Maps of Solent Freeport tax sites - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)) illustrates the Fawley Waterside Freeport tax site (red shading) and the area of land in the north west of the site is within the New Forest National Park. The whole of the Fawley Waterside Freeport tax site was included in the Solent Freeport’s Investment Zone expression of interest proposals submitted on 14 October.



Guidance on Investment Zones confirms that the submission of an expression of interest should only happen after local, in principle approval is confirmed. The expression of interest form (Question 3.7) requires confirmation that discussions with the relevant local planning authority(s) have taken place; and that the leader of the planning authority agrees in principle with the bid.

The National Park Authority is the sole statutory planning authority for the New Forest National Park area and therefore any Investment Zone expression of interest covering land within the National Park requires support from the Authority. In your recent correspondence with the Campaign for National Parks<sup>2</sup>, it was confirmed that, “*Local planning authorities, which includes National Park Authorities, have to support any proposal for a specific site that comes forward into the [Investment Zone] Expression of Interest. Proposals for a site without that local consent will not be taken forward in the process and therefore cannot become an Investment Zone.*”

For the Solent Freeport expression of interest, the required support and local consent from the New Forest National Park Authority (in our capacity as planning authority for land within the submission) has not been achieved.

<sup>2</sup> Correspondence with the Campaign for National Parks, 7 October 2022 – see [DLHUCresponsetoCNPonInvestmentZonesOct2022.pdf](#)

At our 20 October meeting, members unanimously resolved that the Authority does not support the principle of Investment Zone designation for sites in the New Forest National Park due to the incompatibility of a liberalised planning approach with the high level of protection afforded to the National Park. This protection is currently set out in paragraph 176 of the NPPF (2021), the English National Parks UK Government Vision & Circular (2010) and in primary legislation (National Parks & Access to the Countryside Act 1949 and the Environment Act 1995). Investment Zone status would conflict with the delivery of the two statutory National Park purposes and the recognition that the 'planning balance' is weighted differently in National Parks.

We understand the Fawley Waterside site is part of a single Freeport tax site (Southampton Water); and that an adjustment to any land interest within this would constitute an adjustment to the tax site as a whole. However, we would encourage the Government to explore the feasibility of excluding land within the New Forest National Park from the consideration of the Solent Freeport's recent Investment Zone expression of interest bid. As currently proposed, the Solent Freeport Investment Zone expression of interest cannot demonstrate in principle support from all relevant local planning authorities.

### **3. Liaison and partnership working between New Forest National Park Authority, the Solent Freeport and other partners**

The National Park Authority is not a Solent Freeport Board member, but attends meetings in a non-voting capacity. We have engaged in discussions on the Solent Freeport in a constructive manner, with the aim of ensuring the Freeport delivers environmental benefits alongside economic outcomes. We would like to emphasise that the decision of the Authority to not support the principle of Investment Zone designation for sites within the New Forest National Park will not affect our ongoing positive partnership work. Through our work on the [Green Halo](#) and [Greenprint for South Hampshire](#) we will continue to liaise with the Solent Freeport and other partners in the Waterside area of the New Forest.

I hope this letter helps explain the context to the National Park Authority's decision not to support the Solent Freeport's recent Investment Zone expression of interest, insofar as it relates to land within the National Park i.e. where we are the statutory planning authority. I would welcome the opportunity to explore constructive ways forward.

Yours sincerely



Prof Gavin Parker FRTPI  
Chair  
New Forest National Park Authority

cc:

Lord Richard Benyon, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Defra  
Dr Julian Lewis MP (New Forest East)  
Cllr Edward Heron, New Forest District Council  
Cllr Rob Humby, Hampshire County Council  
Mr Brian Johnson, Solent Freeport  
Anne-Marie Mountifield, Solent LEP  
Mr Aldred Drummond, Fawley Waterside