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**Neil O'Brien MP**

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Dear Julia,

**Freeports: Next Steps**

Following the announcement at Autumn Budget 2021, I am pleased to confirm that three prospective Freeports based in Humber, Teesside and Thames, will be able to begin initial operations from November following the designation of their tax sites. The next step is to complete designation of Freeport customs sites, which is expected from mid-November provided operators demonstrate that they meet HMRC's conditions for authorisation.

I appreciate how important Freeports are to you and I am grateful for your endless support to deliver this programme. As you know, Freeports are a cornerstone of the Government's plan to drive post-COVID recovery and level up the country. This exciting milestone represents an important next step on the journey and signals confidence to investors and businesses, including those in your constituency, to seize on opportunities presented by Freeports.

Our work is not yet finished, and like you I share the objective of rapid progression for all prospective Freeports. We remain committed to make sure that all our Freeports partners become operational as soon as they are able. I will provide another update once more of our prospective Freeports have reached this milestone.

The UK Government remains committed to establishing its Freeport programme in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland as soon as possible.

**NEIL O'BRIEN MP**