# Ministers face financial and biosecurity challenges as Sevington Border Control Point becomes surplus



Ministers are navigating a complex landscape as they attempt to offload the Sevington Border Control Point (BCP) in Kent, a substantial facility originally constructed to handle the influx of lorries anticipated during a potential no-deal Brexit. Following a new trade agreement between the UK and the EU, the need for such an extensive facility is now in question, with expectations that border checks will be significantly reduced by 2026.

The Sevington facility, designed to process up to 1,300 trucks, was built in 2021 at a cost of £23 million to manage checks on plant and animal imports, particularly dairy and meat products. However, it has not been able to generate sufficient revenue, bringing in only £12.58 million in the year leading up to April 2025, according to figures released by the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. This shortfall poses financial challenges for the government, which is already reportedly in talks with Eurotunnel and the Port of Dover about the future of the site — discussions that insiders suggest are still in their infancy.

The decision to reduce border checks aligns with statements from port executives, who express relief over the new agreements aimed at easing supply chains between Britain and the continent. Doug Bannister, chief executive of Dover Port, noted that this development should help alleviate logistical challenges faced by businesses operating across the English Channel. However, he acknowledged the complexity involved in the practical implementation of the new rules and emphasised the need for ongoing dialogue with government officials regarding the future of Sevington.

The implications of this trade reset extend to the broader spectrum of British ports, where significant investments in BCPs have led to calls for compensation. The British Ports Association reported that the industry collectively invested £120 million in 41 BCPs mandated by the previous Conservative government in an effort to facilitate post-Brexit trade. Now, many of these facilities, having remained largely unused during the transition period due to delays and technical failures, face redundancy. Portsmouth International Port, for example, has incurred losses amounting to £7.8 million on its own BCP, which is now considered a financial burden rather than a valuable asset.

Concerns surrounding biosecurity have also surfaced in relation to the Sevington facility. The Dover Port Health Authority has voiced apprehension about the infrastructure's capacity to handle all food imports, warning that inadequate facilities might allow pathogens into the UK, jeopardising public health. Lucy Manzano, the DPHA's head, articulated fears that the decision to centralise inspections at Sevington could lead to food safety issues, potentially allowing contaminated goods to enter the domestic market.

Though the government maintains that it is committed to negotiating an agreement with the EU aimed at minimising unnecessary border checks, this situation prompts reflection on the broader consequences of Brexit. The British Ports Association has reiterated its position, arguing that port operators, having acted on government directives, deserve reasonable compensation for their investments in border facilities that are rapidly becoming obsolete.

Efforts to mitigate the financial ramifications for ports are underway, with the Cabinet Office indicating a willingness to collaborate with port authorities to streamline any transitions necessitated by the new trade arrangements. Yet, as the clock ticks down to the anticipated regulatory changes, the reality remains that these once-essential facilities may soon stand as testimonies to the swift and often tumultuous changes of recent years.

### Reference Map:

1. Paragraphs 1, 3, 4, 7
2. Paragraphs 2, 5, 6
3. Paragraphs 5, 7
4. Paragraphs 4, 6
5. Paragraphs 5, 6
6. Paragraphs 5, 6
7. Paragraphs 4, 6

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.ft.com/content/66763def-d141-465d-ba96-31399071bf3b> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/66763def-d141-465d-ba96-31399071bf3b> - The UK government is attempting to sell the Sevington Border Control Point (BCP) in Kent, a facility constructed in 2021 to manage post-Brexit border checks, particularly on plant and animal goods. Following a new EU-UK trade agreement, the necessity for such checks will diminish beginning in 2026, rendering the 1,300-truck facility largely redundant. The government has initiated talks with Eurotunnel and the Port of Dover to potentially repurpose or sell the site. The Sevington BCP cost £23 million to operate in the year up to April 2025 but only generated £12.58 million in revenue. Across the UK, port operators, who collectively spent £120 million on 41 government-mandated BCPs, are demanding compensation due to the anticipated redundancy of these facilities. Portsmouth City Council, having spent £6 million on their BCP, is considering demolition and seeking reimbursement. Many BCPs remained idle due to implementation delays and technical issues, sparking criticism from port executives. The British Ports Association has formally requested compensation from the government, which has pledged to work with affected ports to manage transitions and uphold its commitment to reducing trade friction and food costs post-Brexit.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/9ffbc826-5612-46dd-9db7-1a3805de4f3d> - UK ports have requested compensation from the Labour government if trade barriers with the EU are reduced, following extensive investments in post-Brexit border control facilities. The British Ports Association (BPA) has highlighted the high cost of constructing checkpoints that have seen minimal usage, risking financial losses for port owners. The BPA's letter to government departments underlines the need for compensation in light of Labour's promise to strike a deal that would lessen the need for these checks. Ports had previously invested heavily, guided by government direction, only to face underuse of the facilities. The BPA criticizes the recurring cost incurred due to changing political directives and calls for discussion on reasonable compensation. The issue adds complexity to the UK’s post-Brexit border regime, with ports struggling to recover investments from the underutilized facilities.
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2024/mar/27/dover-health-authority-says-inland-border-facility-will-be-open-door-for-disease> - In March 2024, the Dover Port Health Authority (DPHA) criticized the UK government's decision to designate the Sevington Border Control Post (BCP) in Ashford, Kent, as the main facility for inspecting food and plant imports arriving via the Port of Dover. The DPHA's head, Lucy Manzano, argued that Sevington was not designed to handle all food imports and lacked the necessary infrastructure, potentially compromising biosecurity and increasing the risk of disease outbreaks. This decision led to concerns about the adequacy of the facility and the potential for contamination of imported goods.
5. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-hampshire-62052578> - Portsmouth International Port, owned by the city council, constructed a £25 million Border Control Post (BCP) to handle inspections on animal products and plant and forest products from the European Union. However, after the UK government postponed physical checks on imports until the end of 2023, the facility remains unused, leaving the council £7.8 million out of pocket. The council is seeking compensation from the government to recover the costs incurred in building the facility, which was expected to operate with a workforce of 67 port employees.
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/jul/05/portsmouth-border-control-post-eu-imports-brexit> - Portsmouth International Port, the UK's second-busiest cross-Channel port, invested £25 million in a Border Control Post (BCP) to handle inspections on EU imports post-Brexit. Despite the significant investment, the facility remains unused due to delays in implementing post-Brexit border checks. The city council, which owns the port, is facing financial challenges and seeking compensation from the government to recover the costs incurred in building the facility, which was expected to operate with a workforce of 67 port employees.
7. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/01/20/dover-council-warning-contaminated-food-new-ashford-border/> - In January 2024, Dover District Council raised concerns about the UK's decision to designate the Sevington Inland Border Facility, located 22 miles from the Port of Dover, as a primary checkpoint for inspecting goods entering the UK. The council argued that moving checks inland could compromise biosecurity and food safety, potentially allowing contaminated food to enter the country. The decision has sparked debate over the effectiveness and safety of the UK's post-Brexit border control measures.