Southampton, 9 July 1803

My Lord,

I very sincerely thank you for your letter of [blank] which I had not revieced, as you will have supposed when I wrote my last scrap. I now only whish to know the ideas and desires of Government upon the subject of Volunteer Corps. I should in the first plan mention that I understand you have dome to some resolutions about pay and allowances to Officers of which you mention some design when I had the satisfaction of conversing with you but have not since received any intimation of the accomplishment. I shall be thankful for any communication upon that subject which your Lordship is prepared to make, when I expressed a hope that the Corps of Volunteers to which I allued, might experience indulgence equal to others in similar situation I want to remind that I had long before the 22nd of June made the offer of several one at Portsmouth, three at Gosport etc. I observe the acceptance of several Corps of Volunteers and of Officers appointed to them in the very last gazette. I should hope that they are not exempt from the ballott for the national Levy. I again assure your Lordship that neither I or my Volunteer Friends in this County desire more than equal measure. And indeed I heartily wish that exclusion from exemption may be general. It is not however out of the question with regard to new Corps and I therefore wish to know, to what extent I should give any encouragement to them, as the offers are likely to be numerous. My own ideas are strongly against so many small Corps as heretofore. Those of the most utility must be the Yeomanry Cavalry on all accounts but particularly because the Enemy would suffer most in case of their descent upon our Coasts by our superiority and their deficiency in that respect. I trust therefore that I do right in giving every impulse to such associations I really flatter myself that we shall make a figure of exemplary respectability in that way. Local Corps of Infantry even small may also be of use in particular situations, particularly Portsmouth and Gosport if engaged to do occasional Garrison Duty and to learn the use of the great Guns and to serve upon any emergency as Artillery. In other quarters I could wish to see large bodies in battalion or regiment with proper Officers, I have with that view been trying and I hope may be successful, to revive and extend and excellent Corps formely under Colonel Walcot at Christchurch. I only metion this as one instance. Your Lordship will kindly let me know, if I am right in these ideas and consequent conduct.

In the Isle of Wight every man almost would be a Volunteer but I think that every purpose of real use will be answered by adding perhaps if it may be, one troop of Yeomanry to the two already established. By perfecting the Regiment at Newport upon the footing I mentioned to 900 or 1000 men, by reestablishing the Corps of Artillery to act afloat or ashore at Cowes of about 80 Men and taking only two other Corps of Infantry – one on the South East Coast, and another on the South West. I shall be very glad if I can get Sir Thomas Worsley on one side and Sir John Barrington on the other to be even nominally at the head of those. I am just now on my return from Winchester where I held a General Metting of Lieutenancy, most respectably attended, and supported with zelaous unanimity. But we were unprovided with any acts for the national defence which I understand where usually sent to the Clerk of the General Meetings. Perhaps however it was thought unneccessary as the Act varies hardly at all from the former of 1798.

The Acts for the additional Military Force reached me at Winchester yesterday Morning and I took advantage of that opportunity of a meeting upon the other business of the National defence to introduce this also; and I am persuaded that every possible exertion will be made to give it success. But the Sessions and Assizes happen unluckily in the week after next, and we are thereby obliged unavoidably to postpone the subdivision meeting till Monday Fortnight I trust however that they amended returns will be there perfect and that Ballots may immediately ensue. I am sorry to say that we do not get men as could be wished for even the Militia in some parts fo the County. Money by fines comes in too fast. The Division about Portsmouth is composed of so fluctuating a body, that two out of ten are hardly to be found within a very few days, But I again and again assure your Lordship that no efforts shall be wanting to accomplish all the expectations of His Majesty’s Government in this very important business. We have been unfortunate in not having the General commanding the District with us either at Winchester or in the Isle of Wight, but I have taken care to have adjourned Meetings at short intervals, so that I hope, we shall soon have the benefit of their advice and cooperation. As I do not mean to teaze you more with my scrawls (And by the bye I entreat you to take only the trouble of reading them and to employ any body to give a mere line of Answer to anything material) I will now say one word or two upon the defenceless stats of this essential station.

We have worse that no troops here, viz a rabble of recuits without Officers or any sufficient guidance. Lord Charles Somerset has received orders to move his Brigade from Winchester chiefly to Sussex and we hear of no succession. I hope that the facilities as well as the difficulties of approach to a descent on this Island are well known but it is of incalculable consequence always to be aware of the impossibility to have a secure station for Ships at Spithead if the Enemy should possess this Island. They may be cooped up in it, but how large a force would be kept from other quarters to confine them.

I am very sensible of the natural suspicion attached to local representations, but I have great authorities of Military men, both of this Country and Foreigners, for assurance, that this is a Post of vast importance. The Marquis de Bouille himself tells me, that a plan has been completely formed for an attack upon it: And that he had every reason to believe, that the design was revived and likely to be attempted in the last War. I have no doubt of attention to this object, and every confidence is due to General Hewett, but he must have means or it will not be in his power to act successfully.

I think it right also just privately to hint to you that Frigates were stationed in the last war at the passes of St Helens and the Needles. There was nothing at either when I was there a few days ago. Some of the Enemie’s Vessels are perpetually hovering upon our Coasts – perhaps more for observation that with hope of prizes. I have once conceived that our frigates appointed to these stations might have been continually shifted from on to the other and this have more effectually kept of the Cruizers of the Enemy, but probably their fixed station except on special service would answer very well.

I am sure, that your Lordship will impute to a good motive the (probably) unnecessary matter and length of this letter, which shall cease to be a practice with me.

Ever my dear Lord, etc.

Bolton