



CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2018 - paper TGKP 181213(1)

Introduction

1. I am pleased to be able to update the board on TGKP's activities in 2018.
2. I would like to thank all board members, observers and their advisors, for their time, commitment and positive contributions to the partnership's work over the year. Similarly, I would like to thank the TGKP team for their continued support and hard work over this period.

Background and Context

3. 2018 concludes on an optimistic note. Whilst we might have been slightly disappointed that the Thames Estuary 2050 Growth Commission's final report was not as eye-catching or radical as it could have been, progress since has been positive and sets us up for a genuine partnership with government about the Estuary's future in 2019.
4. Similarly, work on the Thames Estuary Production Corridor has demonstrated that there is a real value in taking an Estuary-wide approach when it makes sense to do so.
5. We have made excellent progress in making the case to government, and to the wider world, for the extension of Crossrail to Ebbsfleet.
6. There have been challenges too in 2018. The development of the sites in the North Kent Enterprise Zone has not always happened as quickly as we might have wanted. Whilst it is encouraging to see plans for the Lower Thames Crossing take shape, we have not had the reassurances about the other – equally important – improvements needed to the strategic road network in north Kent and the rest of the county. And, frustratingly, deadlines have come and gone for the London Resort proposals at Swanscombe, with little visible progress.
7. I was particularly happy to welcome Maidstone Borough Council as full members of the partnership in 2018 and I hope that this relationship continues to be positive and productive in the future.
8. TGKP has continued to focus on a well-defined set of priorities which provide mutual benefit, I hope, to all partners. This has built on the new work programme which we adopted last year.

Partnership Highlights

- **Thames Estuary 2050 Growth Commission:** in 2018 we worked hard to maximise the opportunities for North Kent from the Commission's final report. Sir John Armitt attended a board meeting in February and, I think, was left in no doubt about our area's potential and the support and help needed from government to realise that. The Commission's final report was published in June, with the new Secretary of State at MHCLG committing to a formal government response within six months. Whilst we may not have supported all of the report's recommendations, all partners agreed that it represented a very valuable opportunity to highlight to government, and a wider audience, the potential of the Estuary. In November, Leaders from Kent, Essex and London agreed to establish a new, independently-chaired,

“Thames Estuary Growth and Prosperity Board” which will take forward this work, and champion transformational projects with government. The noises from government have also been positive – with informal feedback that the Estuary governance proposals are consistent with government expectations (and that there could be resources to take this forward) and indications that the formal response to the Growth Commission report will focus on those strategic projects where there is consensus.

- **Thames Estuary Production Corridor:** The Thames Estuary Production Corridor (TEPC) work to date has been overwhelmingly positive: strong partnerships across Essex, Kent, London and the creative sector have been developed; a sense of the opportunity and the scale of the prize on offer has been established across senior officers and politicians, and; a strong, rigorous evidence base has started to suggest those projects and places we should prioritise as the work develops. Consultants Hatch Regeneris, together with Emma Wilcox, produced a compelling evidence base which confirmed the potential of this initiative to North Kent – in terms of its impact on the local economy, on individual localities and on a set of sectors that have already seen strong growth. TGKP has helped to co-ordinate this across North Kent, ensuring that the unique potential of our area is acknowledged and reflected in the emerging proposals.
- **North Kent Enterprise Zone (NKEZ):** This year has seen the opening of the Cygnet Mental Health Hospital at Kent Medical Campus and the arrival of Kent Surrey & Sussex Air Ambulance at Innovation Park Medway. The Air Ambulance HQ hosted a very successful launch event for the Innovation Park, and public consultation on a draft new masterplan has paved the way for its adoption early in 2019. Construction has also started on the Berkeley Modular Homes factory at Northfleet Embankment East, and the remainder of that site and Northfleet Embankment West have both been put on the market. Other developments are in the pipeline subject to planning and confirmation of external funding. 2019 should see a step-change in the level of activity across the enterprise zone as schemes in preparation come to fruition.
- **Lower Thames Crossing:** TGKP has remained closely involved with Highways England’s Stakeholder Advisory Panel. The North Kent Working Group continued to meet in 2018, aiming to build consensus across the area about how best to shape and influence the developing proposals.
- **Other Government consultations:** TGKP has continued to represent the views of Partners to Government and other bodies on key policies and proposals affecting North Kent, including responses to consultations on the National Planning Policy Framework, the Mayor of London’s New London Plan and Highways England’s Route Investment Strategy.
- **Crossrail to Ebbsfleet:** TGKP has played a very active part in the Technical Group as well as through the Chief Officers’ steering group. In particular, TGKP led on preparing the draft strategic case that formed part of the Strategic Outline Business Case submitted to government this autumn, as well as contributing to the other elements of the SOBC and the lobbying activity carried on in parallel.
- **Canterbury Christchurch University Brexit report:** the TGKP officer team worked closely with the team in the Centre for European Studies at CCCU on their “Kent and Medway: Delivering a Brexit Border” report, providing the foreword and presenting at the report’s launch in Westminster and Canterbury. The report was very warmly received and proved an excellent opportunity to promote the partnership to a wide audience.

- **HIF / Garden settlements:** In keeping with the principle of assisting partners where there is scope to add value to initiatives from a cross-boundary perspective, TGKP has worked with Medway on development of its business case for HIF funding for the Hoo Peninsula, and provided input to Swale's bid for a new Garden Settlement.
- **Private sector board members:** have continued to meet regularly during the year and provide genuine insight and value to the work of TGKP. The TGKP officer team has been able to take full advantage of the networks, contacts and expertise of our private sector board members.

TGKP Budget

9. TGKP's spending for 2018/2019 is forecast to be £232,879, against a budget of £254,506. The underspend is partly the result of a staffing vacancy in the officer team, which I am keen that we fill in 2019, and restraint in commitment of our activities budget. I am grateful to the six local authorities and to Ebbsfleet Development Corporation for their financial support and to Medway for financial services support.

Legal and Human Resources Support

10. I would also like to thank Medway Council for continuing to provide legal services and Swale Borough Council for providing HR support to the Partnership.

Looking forward to 2019

11. The challenge for 2019 is to take full advantage of the significant opportunities ahead of us:

- **The new landscape:** the paragraphs below itemise some of the activity we expect to carry out in the next 12 months. But if the past twelve months have taught us anything it is that we need to be fleet of foot to take advantage of opportunities, to be flexible in spatial terms to work with different partners according to the topic, and to take a hard look at our governance to make sure that ownership of the agenda, accountability and delivery arrangements are transparent and fit for purpose.
- **Thames Estuary Production Corridor:** the final report from consultants Hatch Regeneris will be launched in early 2019, probably March. This represents an excellent opportunity to promote North Kent and to promote the development of the wider creative economy. At the same time, we will need to develop arrangements across North Kent and the wider Estuary that will maximise the practical benefit that this work could deliver.
- **Thames Estuary 2050 Growth Commission:** the establishment of the "Thames Estuary Growth and Prosperity Board" and the joint appointment of an independent chair gives us a new, improved and I hope effective means of engaging with government. We will need to ensure that the partnership's role within these new arrangements is clear and effective, and also that we are working well with those parts of Kent who have a stake in the Estuary developments.
- **Lower Thames Crossing:** We will pursue the improvements we would like to see in Highways England's proposals so as to maximise the economic benefits the Crossing could deliver for North Kent. In parallel we need to keep pressing the case for wider network improvements, and for delivery at pace.
- **North Kent Enterprise Zone:** In March 2019 the enterprise zone will have been in existence for two years. The window for government-funded incentives for occupiers will then only be open another three years, and a huge amount needs to be done by our partners to get more premises

on the ground capable of occupation by businesses. As delivery gains momentum we will need to review the nature of TGKP's role in relation to the NKEZ.

- **HIF:** We will continue to support partners wherever we can add value to help secure successful HIF bids to provide the infrastructure we need to support good growth.
- **Crossrail to Ebbsfleet:** Whatever Government's response to the SOBC, we remain committed to trying to secure better rail capacity and connectivity in North Kent and will work with C2E partners and a wider group of stakeholders to maintain momentum on building the case for investment, maximising the outcomes it could help deliver and investigating funding and financing mechanisms.
- **Board membership:** for some time now we have had two board vacancies, on the private sector side. Now, as our agenda becomes more positive, more encouraging and busier, it is more important than ever that we have the networks, contacts, expertise and insights that a strong and active board can bring. I am determined that we fill both these vacancies in 2019 and I ask for your help in doing so.

12. It has been a privilege to serve as TGKP Chairman in 2018. I would like to thank you for your help and support. I look forward to working with you in 2019.

Rob Bennett

Chairman, Thames Gateway Kent Partnership

13 December 2018