

**Thames Gateway Kent Partnership
13th Annual General Meeting (AGM) – 29 November 2012**

ITEM 2

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2013 - Paper TGKP(13)13

Introduction

1. I am pleased to report on the activities of the Thames Gateway Kent Partnership over the last 12 months.
2. I would like to thank all Board Members, and their advisers, for their positive and constructive contributions to the Partnership's work over the year. This has taken place not just in the TGKP Board meetings but also at the Thames Gateway Strategic Group meetings, in the TGK Officers' Group and, of course, this year in the TIGER Strategic Board. As in previous years, I am very grateful for the continued commitment and effort shown by everyone.

Background and Context

3. This time last year I said that I was optimistic about the future for North Kent, and I believe that optimism remains justified. There are clear signs that the economy is improving, and the sense I get from talking to businesses in the area is that they feel that the outlook for business is positive. Developers and housebuilders are more upbeat about the prospects for development getting under way. This is good news for North Kent - we are well placed to take advantage of the improvement in the economy. We have the sites available for new development, and we have some of the tools to assist businesses to grow, such as the TIGER loan fund.
4. At last year's AGM/Board we heard about the exciting proposals for Paramount Park on the Swanscombe Peninsula. This is a potential 'game changer' for North Kent, with the prospect of 27,000 jobs and huge supply chain opportunities for local businesses. I am pleased that over the last year the plans for the scheme have been moving forward. It is vital that, as a partnership, we do all we can to ensure that local communities, and local businesses, benefit to the fullest extent from these opportunities.
5. For the Partnership, much of our effort during the year has gone into seeking to ensure that North Kent's investment and economic priorities are reflected in county wide, LEP wide and national programmes, so that that our project priorities attract the funding they need. This has not been straightforward; it has not always been clear which would be the best approach for the Partnership to follow. Earlier in the year we debated a number of ways forward, including whether we should develop a 'City Deal' type arrangement direct with Government. However, following the

publication of the Government's response to Lord Heseltine's Review, it became clear that the main mechanism for funding economic development and regeneration in local areas in future would be via Local Enterprise Partnerships, and through a new fund called the Single Local Growth Fund (SLGF). Our focus more recently has been to ensure that North Kent's priorities have the best possible chance of being met through this new process.

Partnership Highlights

6. In terms of the Partnership's work there have been a number of highlights this year. For example:

- one of the most important milestones in the year was the **launch of the £20million TIGER loan scheme in April**. The TIGER scheme, funded through the Regional Growth Fund, gives businesses in key sectors in North Kent the chance to secure an interest free loan to enable them to grow, and to create new jobs. A tremendous amount of effort on the part of KCC, as the accountable body, the TGKP team and all the partners has been made to get the scheme up and running. I am very grateful to all concerned, and in particular to Mark Dance as chair of the North Kent Approvals Panel and to Jacqui Ward and her programme management team at KCC. I was very pleased to see the first presentational cheques awarded to successful applicants last month at the North Kent B2B.
- we have continued to **reach out to the North Kent business community** over the last 12 months in a number of ways, for example by:
 - hosting our second Business Breakfast event on 20 November to promote TIGER, and to seek views on the revised Growth Plan. We have had very positive feedback from businesses attending these events. I believe they are very helpful in building the partnership's profile with the business community in North Kent, and we are planning to hold another event in the Spring next year.
 - being a headline sponsor, and helping to the shape the programme, for the North Kent Business to Business event in October, organised by Kent Invicta Chamber. We also sponsored the Manufacturing Expo event in July at the Historic Dockyard. At both events we ran seminars and had an exhibition stand. I'm grateful to local authority partners who took part in the panel sessions at those events.

These are positive steps but it is only a start, and there is much more still to do.

- the Partnership has produced a revised draft **Growth Plan**, so as to make sure that we have an up to date statement of our economic and investment priorities, and that we are on the 'front foot' when it comes

to feeding into the Kent and Medway 'Unlocking Potential' and into the LEP's Strategic Economic Plan.

- Board members, local authority officers and the TGKP team, have played an important role in supporting the work of the **Thames Gateway Strategic Group** over the last year. In particular a major exercise was carried out to examine progress on over 200 **key development sites across the Thames Gateway**, to see which sites were progressing well, which were making slower than expected progress and which were stalled. The aim was to identify the obstacles to progress, and to seek Government help where appropriate to speed up delivery. The results of the exercise were reported to the TGSG in June and, as a result, there have since been two special 'focus group' meetings with the Thames Gateway Minister to consider what measures could be developed to stimulate development at a faster pace in the Gateway. I am grateful to Barbara Cooper, KCC, and her team, and to the TGKP team, for their work on supporting this exercise. As we have reported previously, TGSG has no dedicated support or resources of its own, and is dependent on its members and member organisations for support.
- During the year the Partnership responded to a number of consultations. I was very pleased that, in July, despite the obvious challenges, we were able to agree a **partnership response to the Government's consultation on the Lower Thames Crossing**. Other examples have been the coordinated submission on local Enterprise Zone proposals made to the LEP and, more recently, the Partnership's support for Assisted Areas status for the Medway/Swale Arc and for Gravesham/Thurrock.

TGKP Board Membership

7. There were no changes to the Board membership during the year.
8. There remains one private sector vacancy on the Board that has yet to be filled. Whilst I believe we have a high-calibre Board in place, with a very good mix and range of skills and experience drawn from private business, local authorities, from the higher and further education and from Government agencies, it is important the Board is up to full strength. It is particularly important, I believe, that the Board has as wide a range of representation as possible from the business community. I would ask that the Board make it a priority to fill this vacancy within the next 6 months.

TGKP Budget

9. TGKP's income for 2013/2014 is forecast to be £266,000 (made up of £252,000 from local authorities and £14,000 from the Environment Agency).
10. A budget was set for the year of £276,000. Expenditure is now forecast to be somewhat below this at around [£250,000], the actual figure will

depend on how much of the discretionary activities budget is utilised during the rest of the financial year.

11. I am very grateful to the five local authorities and to the Environment Agency for their financial support for the partnership and we will need to carefully consider funding, going forward, in what remain challenging times for the public sector.

12. The Board has received regular budget monitoring reports and I am grateful to Medway Council for providing the financial services.

Legal and Human Resources Support

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

TGKP Executive Team

14. There has been one change to the TGKP team during the year. Katharine Harvey left in February to join Shared Intelligence, and in March we were pleased to welcome back Richard Longman as our Senior Policy Officer. I would like to thank the whole team – David, Richard, Katharine and Linda - for their continued hard work and commitment.

Looking forward to 2014

15. As I said at the beginning of my report, I remain optimistic about the future for North Kent in 2014. The economic prospects are improving, the pace of delivery is picking up and new opportunities are emerging. The challenge is to ensure we make the most of these opportunities for residents and businesses in North Kent.

16. We will face a number of issues over the next year, including:

- the Government will shortly be announcing its decision on the preferred location for the Lower Thames Crossing. Whatever the outcome, it will have profound implications for the future economic development of North Kent. As a partnership, we need to consider those implications and respond effectively;
- also, in December, the Davies Commission will be publishing its interim report on airport capacity. The partnership will want to consider that report and decide on its response;
- the LEP's Strategic Economic Plan has to be finalised by March. We need to make sure it says the right things about North Kent, so that our investment priorities receive the funding they require;
- it will be important to build a close and effective relationship with the new Kent and Medway Economic Partnership as it becomes established, so that the North Kent voice is heard clearly at the Kent wide level;

- working through the TIGER Strategic Board we need to continue to support the delivery of the TIGER scheme. We must ensure that we utilise effectively all the funds available in support of our growth objectives and, if possible, seek further funds.
- finally, and most importantly, we need to renew our efforts to develop and strengthen our links with the business community, through hosting and sponsoring events, through building on the understanding and relationships developed as part of the TIGER process; and through specific, structured interventions to support key industry sectors.

17. It has been a great privilege to serve as TGKP's Chairman over the last year, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank you all for the help and support you have given to me over this time. I look forward to working with you in addressing the challenges and opportunities which 2014 brings.

Rob Bennett
Chairman, Thames Gateway Kent Partnership
November 2013