

**Thames Gateway Kent Partnership
14th Annual General Meeting (AGM) – 18 November 2014**

ITEM 2

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2014 - Paper TGKP(14)19

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 in the TGK Officers' Group, in the TIGER Strategic Board and in many other ad hoc meetings. As in previous years, I am very grateful for the continued commitment and effort shown by everyone.

Background and Context

3. The improved confidence and positive outlook for business I reported last year has continued. I have seen this in my contacts with business and it is reflected in the economic data. For example, over the last two years, from September 2012 to September 2014, the numbers of Job Seekers Allowance claimants in North Kent has fallen significantly from 14,592 to 8862, a reduction of more than 39%. Business growth, in terms of numbers of businesses, has also been stronger in North Kent than in the rest of the South East.
4. This optimism about the future in North Kent is not surprising given the exciting plans for our area. In March this year we had the announcement of a new Garden City at Ebbsfleet backed by an Urban Development Corporation and £200million of funding for infrastructure. And during the year the plans for London Paramount have gathered pace with the latest consultation from the schemes promoters launched this month.
5. Other key events since the last AGM were the Davies' Commission's decision in September not to shortlist the proposals for an Estuary Airport, and the Government's decision at the end of last year to drop Option B from the list of possible options for the Lower Thames Crossing – partly I am sure in response to the views expressed by local partners, including this Partnership. The Government subsequently announced in July that a decision on the preferred location would not now be made until late next year.

Partnership Highlights

6. In terms of the Partnership's work there have been a number of highlights this year. For example:
 - we worked hard to ensure the Partnership's investment priorities for North Kent were reflected in the **South East LEP's Strategic Economic Plan and Growth Deal**, including holding a special additional Board meeting in March. In the event £44million of Local Growth fund resources were allocated to transport schemes in North Kent;
 - alongside and working in support of the local authorities directly involved, we have liaised closely with DCLG on the emerging proposals for the Ebbsfleet Development Corporation, including responding to the Government's recent consultation to ensure the wider interests of North Kent are fully taken into account;
 - the Partnership's **revised Plan for Growth** was launched at the TGKP Summer business breakfast event in June;
 - the twice yearly series of TGKP **business breakfast** meetings is now well established. These are becoming increasingly popular – the event in June had over 80 businesses attending – and are an important way for us to keep in touch with the business community. A key theme emerging has been the desire for better arrangements for business support, an issue to which we shall return at the next business breakfast meeting on 10 December.
 - In October we sponsored and exhibited at the **North Kent B2B** event in Gravesend. The seminar TGKP ran highlighting the plans for Ebbsfleet Garden City and London Paramount was full to capacity, demonstrating the interest there is in these new developments amongst the business community. This was only one of a number of business events during the year in which TGKP took part either as a speaker or as an exhibitor;
 - the **TIGER loan scheme** has been very active throughout the year and 49 businesses have been helped through the fund. 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;
 - we have put the Partnership's **views robustly to Government** and to others on topics ranging from Assisted Areas status for the Medway-Swale Arc, now confirmed, through to airports capacity in the South East;
 - the Partnership has led and funded an important project to support development of the **Offshore Wind manufacturing** industry. This is just the kind of action – specific support to encourage growth in a key industry sector - that I am keen for the Partnership to undertake, and I hope we can carry out similar, targeted initiatives to support other key

sectors in the future, particularly in the context of the development of London Paramount;

- the **Thames Gateway Strategic Group** has been less active this year, but the TGKP team helped facilitate a positive TGSG meeting with the new Thames Gateway Minister, Penny Mordaunt MP, last month. She indicated that she was keen to do what she could to support Thames Gateway priorities within Government.

TGKP Board Membership

7. During the year we were very pleased to welcome James Speck, Director of the Kent Science Park as our new private sector Board member. James' knowledge and understanding of the Life Science and other high tech industries at the Science Park brings valuable new expertise to the Board.
8. The other change during the year was that, following ownership changes at Bluewater, Robert Goodman now attends the Board as the representative of Land Securities Group PLC rather than Lend Lease. I am delighted that Robert is able to remain on the Board and pleased to welcome Land Securities as Board members.

TGKP Budget

9. TGKP's income for 2014/2015 is forecast to be £230,000. A budget has been set for the year of £287,260. Actual expenditure for the year will depend on how much of the discretionary activities budget is utilised. Actuals to date and known commitments for the full year amount to £244,846. The excess of expenditure over in-year income can be accommodated through utilising some of the Partnership's accumulated reserve.
10. I am very grateful to the five local authorities for their financial support for the Partnership.
11. 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

12. 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

13. There have been no changes to the TGKP team during the year. I would like to thank the whole team – David, Richard, and Linda - for their continued hard work and commitment.

Looking forward to 2015

14. These are exciting times for North Kent. The pace of delivery is picking up and there are huge opportunities on the horizon. As I have said in previous years, the challenge is to ensure we make the most of these opportunities for residents and businesses in North Kent.

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

- the outcome of General and Local Elections in May will inevitably lead to new initiatives, programmes and other changes to which the Partnership must be ready to respond;
- the Ebbsfleet Development Corporation will be established and we need, as a partnership, to forge an effective and positive relationship with this important new body in North Kent;
- similarly, we need to continue to develop our relationship with KMEP and SELEP as these partnerships evolve, so as to ensure that North Kent has a clear voice and that the priority status of this growth area, part of the Thames Gateway, is recognised when it comes to decisions on funding - both domestic funding and wider EU funding;
- working with partners, and following the success of the TIGER scheme, we need to put in place arrangements for recycling the TIGER loans as they are repaid, and seek additional new funding, so that we can continue to offer access to finance beyond March 2015 to businesses in North Kent wishing to grow and create jobs, and
- finally, we need to renew our efforts to develop and strengthen our links with the business community, through hosting and sponsoring events and through specific, structured interventions aimed at, for example, improving business support arrangements, supporting key industry sectors and strengthening supply chains.

16. It has again been a great privilege to serve as TGKP's Chairman in 2014, 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 over the next year, one which I am sure will bring new and interesting challenges for us all.

Rob Bennett
Chairman, Thames Gateway Kent Partnership
November 2014