



19 November

THAMES ESTUARY COMMISSION RESPONSE

Dear Secretaries of State,

This Government has been a champion of the Thames Estuary: recognising the economic need, and rightly setting it within its drive to secure prosperity across the UK.

The work of the Thames Estuary Growth Commission is the centrepiece of this effort. Its carefully considered vision - coupled with the streamlining of the Estuary's governance now underway – puts in place the framework for the future: able to achieve growth, housing and industry across the Estuary. But only if it is backed by Government.

We are at a singular moment. The recommendations of the Commission and completion of C2E's outline business case bring to a head years of planning. We are now eager to get on with the job of building new homes, supporting industry and ensuring the Thames Estuary delivers on its economic potential, not least as the UK's gateway to Europe.

Given the energy and expectation across the Estuary, we were of course disappointed that the Budget statement did not emphasise more the good work underway, especially as this is a record of which Government can be proud. But we now look forward to your response to the Commission. It is essential that central and local government show that we are serious about taking positive, sensible steps to safeguard our long-term growth – even in a difficult political moment.

The centrality of Crossrail to Ebbsfleet

Most especially, we want to emphasise the need to progress Crossrail to Ebbsfleet to a full business case in an efficient and timely manner - making use of the expertise and resource established from across Kent and London.

C2E is the lynchpin of plans to reinvigorate the Thames Gateway. It is the only intervention able to shift the dial on the housing and jobs that can be achieved in the next decade. This is the case not just in its immediate corridor, but also across Kent where the connection between HS1 and Crossrail will transform access to jobs, and help enable developments as far as Folkestone.

That is why the Commission made the extension of Crossrail to Ebbsfleet a priority for the 2020s, and the only rail ask in its vision. Without it, there is no cost-effective option to deliver the increase in rail capacity Kent needs as its population grows. Moreover, we will be unable to secure new housing at the magnitude C2E makes achievable.

There is much to do in determining the best-value approach to delivering the extension. Working with the DfT Centre of Excellence will help establish the right option – one that

strikes the balance between the best value for taxpayers now, and the capacity needed to support economic growth for the future. The full business case process, in particular, will give us the opportunity to bear down on the scheme's cost. It will also enable us to explore local sources of funding while we work to maximise the development C2E brings forward.

As we look to move to this next phase, it is important that we also provide the right short-term signals to investors and private sector partners aiming to progress their work in step with C2E. The absence of a clear, positive signal will undermine the interest and ambition that is gearing up to transform the South East's biggest brownfield opportunity.

Officials will be reaching out in the coming days to discuss the emerging programme plan and governance models needed to take the technical work forward in partnership with DfT and MHCLG.

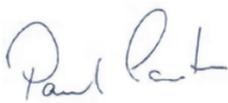
A joined-up approach

We understand that a cross-Whitehall process is now in place to support the Estuary vision. Successfully targeting the breadth of challenges highlighted by the Commission calls for pragmatic cross-Whitehall working. We stand ready to help with that process. And are reciprocating with clear, streamlined leadership across the Estuary.

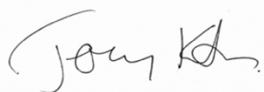
It is no overstatement that the Estuary's economic trajectory during the 2020s will be determined by the plans we put into action now. That is why we have invested so much energy and resource into this process. The way forward needs to be commensurate with this effort, and with the resource given to other regions - many with far smaller economic footprints.

We all share a vision for a Thames Estuary that fires on all cylinders, and that plays its part in the wider vision of a positive, prosperous UK as it leaves the EU and emerges from austerity. We look forward to continuing working with government to achieve that.

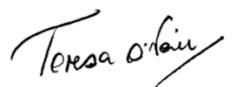
We are copying this letter to Sir John Armitt, Liam Fox and colleagues across Whitehall.



Mr Paul Carter CBE
Leader
Kent County Council



Cllr Jeremy Kite MBE
Leader
Dartford Borough Council



Cllr Teresa O'Neill OBE
Leader
London Borough of Bexley



Cllr David Turner
Leader
Gravesham Borough
Council



Michael Cassidy CBE
Chairman
Ebbsfleet Development
Corporation



Rob Bennett
Chairman
Thames Gateway Kent
Partnership