

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2016 - Paper TGKP(16)18

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 again express my thanks to all Board Members, Observers and their advisers, for their time, commitment and positive 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 Thames Gateway Strategic Group and in many other ad hoc meetings and events.

Background and Context

3. 2016 has undoubtedly been a tumultuous year in terms of national and international events, not least the EU referendum vote in June. Perhaps surprisingly therefore, as we near the end of the year, my impression is that the policy and organisational landscape in which the Partnership operates has been more settled this year than in the recent past. There have of course been changes. A new Government Ministerial team was appointed in the Summer and that included a change in Ministerial responsibility for the Thames Gateway with Gavin Barwell MP taking over from Mark Francois MP.
4. One important new initiative to impact on the Partnership's work has been the setting up of the Thames Estuary 2050 Growth Commission headed by Lord Heseltine. As outlined in the 'Partnership Highlights' below, we have been heavily engaged with the Commission and its officials from the outset. I welcome establishment of the Commission – it is a recognition by Government of the continued importance of the Thames Gateway. But I also see it as an opportunity to raise our sights above the more immediate challenges we face and to think through some of the longer-term, strategic issues that are vital to the future success of the area.
5. We already have a strong and established partnership and we continue to work closely and constructively with the South East LEP, both at the overall LEP level and at the federal Kent and Medway Economic Partnership level. I am pleased to report that the extent of TGKP's collaborative partnership working has, if anything, broadened still further over the year. We have been working more closely than before with our immediate neighbours – for example, with the

London Borough of Bexley on building the case for the extension of Crossrail, with Maidstone Borough Council on the North Kent Enterprise Zone and with Thanet and Canterbury Councils on the Thames Estuary Growth Commission.

Partnership Highlights

6. In terms of the Partnership's work there have been a number of highlights this year. For example:
 - at the time of last year's AGM we had just learned that our bid for a new Enterprise Zone had been successful. This year a significant proportion of the TGKP team's time has been devoted to getting ready for the EZ, now named the **North Kent Enterprise Zone**, coming into force on 1 April next year. This has involved setting up the new NKEZ Strategic Board, which has already met twice, preparing and agreeing the Memorandum of Understanding and drafting the EZ's Implementation Plan. In addition, the three locations which make up the NKEZ – Ebbsfleet Garden City, Rochester Airport and Kent Medical Campus have each been busy drawing up the plans for their specific sites. I am very grateful to all colleagues for the hard work done so far to prepare for the Enterprise Zone and, in particular, to Richard Longman for his work as coordinator of the project group.
 - in March the Partnership submitted a comprehensive and detailed response to Highways England's consultation on the route of the **Lower Thames Crossing**. In last year's Chairman's Report I said that, despite the differences of view held within the Partnership on the preferred location, it was important that we submitted a 'robust, considered and well argued response', and I believe that is exactly what we did. We now await a decision on the preferred route by Government, hopefully before the end of the year;
 - as I said we have been working closely with **Thames Estuary Growth Commission** both directly, for example in our response to the 'Call for Ideas', and indirectly, with our partners in Essex and London, through the Thames Gateway Strategic Group. It is important that we do so. The Commission is not independent of Government; it includes Government Ministers in its membership and its recommendations will carry weight as a result;
 - we have again been active this year in supporting the work of the **Thames Gateway Strategic Group**. In the early part of the year, in response to a challenge from the then Thames Gateway Minister to identify the priority transport infrastructure projects, TGKP, working with Kent County Council (KCC), led on the development of a Thames Gateway Transport Prospectus which set out the 'Top Ten' transport investments needed to unlock the potential growth in the Gateway. That prospectus was well received and endorsed by TGSG. With the setting up of the Growth Commission TGSG's primary role is now moving towards providing a responsive stakeholder forum to support and advise the Commission in its work;
 - one of the 'Top Ten' investment priorities endorsed by TGSG is **the extension of Crossrail** from Abbey Wood to Ebbsfleet and Gravesend. TGKP, along with

KCC, Dartford and Gravesham Borough Councils and the Ebbsfleet Development Corporation, has been working to develop the outline business case, together with partners in London. We have committed £20,000 of the Partnership's budget to this work. I am pleased that TGKP has also been able to play a useful role in facilitating senior level discussions on the strategic issues that need to be considered alongside the technical preparation of the business case, and in that context I am grateful to Dartford Council for hosting the meeting with Bexley Council in October;

- **Business events** – no TGKP business breakfasts have been held this year, but in June we again sponsored, exhibited and ran a seminar at the **North Kent B2B** event, held for the first time at Buckmore Park. In addition, as part of our effort to support the key industry sectors in North Kent, TGKP has been working with KCC and the Kent and Medway Skills Commission to support the development of Guilds. We have hosted two meetings of the **Construction Guild** at the Innovation Centre, and been actively involved in the development of the **Advanced manufacturing and engineering Guild**
- finally, as in previous years, we have been fortunate to have heard a number of interesting and stimulating presentations at our Board meetings, including one from Paul Spooner at the May Board meeting on the exciting plans and progress being made to **create Ebbsfleet Garden City**, and a presentation at our September meeting given by Robert Goodman and Neil Carron on the plans for **expansion and evolution of Bluewater** to ensure it stays ahead of the ever changing requirements of the retail sector.

TGKP Board Membership

7. There have been several changes in Board membership and representation since the last AGM:
 - Alan Everard has replaced David Simms as Tarmac's representative on the Board.
 - Paul Spooner took over from Robin Cooper as Chief Executive of Ebbsfleet Development Corporation, and hence as the Corporation's representative on the Board;
 - Professor Alan Reed, University of Greenwich, has taken Martin Davies' place as the HE representative; and
 - Julie Foley has replaced Andrew Pearce as the Environment Agency's representative;
8. I would like to welcome all our new Board representatives and again thank all those who have moved on for their support and contribution.

TGKP Budget

9. TGKP's income for 2016/2017 is forecast to be £235,368. A budget has been set for the year of £267,725. Actual expenditure for the year will depend largely on how much of the discretionary activities budget is utilised, but the current

forecast is for an outturn of £272,271. 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 and to Ebbsfleet Development Corporation 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 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 three members of the team – David, Richard, and Linda - for their continued hard work and commitment.

Looking forward to 2017

14. In an increasingly unpredictable world it would be unwise for me to attempt to set in stone what the Partnership should focus its attention on next year. However, some of the key priorities for 2016/2017 are already pretty clear:

- we must continue to engage with the **Thames Estuary Growth Commission** and be ready to respond creatively and constructively to their interim report in March and their final report next Autumn;
- it has become increasingly clear that the single biggest impediment to sustainable economic growth is the **inadequacy of the infrastructure needed to support that growth, notably transport infrastructure**. We must make renewed efforts to press the case with Government, with well-evidenced argument, for the necessary investment;
- we should, at last, have a Government decision on the preferred route for the **Lower Thames Crossing**. Whatever the decision is I hope that, as a Partnership, we can come together to agree an approach that recognises the need to get the Crossing delivered as quickly as possible, in a way that minimises and mitigates the environmental impacts to the greatest possible extent and which recognises the need to tackle the wider transport infrastructure needs on the routes to the Crossing from the Channel Ports;
- working to ensure a successful implementation of the **North Kent Enterprise Zone** will continue be a top priority for 2017. Whilst implementation of the Enterprise Zone is the single most important

action that we can take as a partnership to support our key industry sectors, I also want us to do more to focus on the needs of our key sectors in North Kent more generally, to understand better their concerns and seek to reflect these in our plans and actions. That includes continuing to work with KCC and others on the development of the sector based Guilds; and

- working with KCC and partners we must ensure that the new access to finance regime being launched early next year, offering interest free loans using recycled Tiger funds, supports the needs of North Kent businesses;

15. It has been a great privilege to serve as TGKP's Chairman in 2016, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank you all for the help and support you have given to me over the last year. I look forward to working with you over the next year, one which I am sure will again bring new and interesting challenges for us all.

Rob Bennett
Chairman, Thames Gateway Kent Partnership

30 November 2016