

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2019

Introduction

1. I am pleased to be able to update the board on TGKP's activities in 2019.
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. I would also like to thank the TGKP team for their continued support and hard work over this period.

Background and Context

3. 2019 comes to a close with an exciting set of work underway – work which could lay the foundations for the large-scale transformational investment in the Estuary for which we have long campaigned.
4. The government's response to the Thames Estuary 2050 Growth Commission was published in March and, whilst we weren't happy with everything it said, we have worked hard in the months following its publication to hold government to task for those positive commitments that we believe will benefit the Estuary, and North Kent in particular.
5. The appointment of Kate Willard as Estuary "Envoy" and establishment of the first Thames Estuary Growth Board later this month are both extremely welcome developments – and are a direct result of the persistence, lobbying and tenacity that TGKP members have collectively and individually demonstrated to government.
6. There have also been encouraging developments in respect of funding. Under the banner of the Growth Commission, government announced a number of funding commitments to the Estuary: £4.85m for further work on options for Crossrail to Ebbsfleet, £4.65m for the Thames Estuary Production Corridor and £1m for the "Envoy" and Growth Board. Looking ahead, the challenge will be to develop opportunities that build on this "down payment" and demonstrate the potential of our part of the Estuary to deliver government priorities in a sustainable, balanced and positive way which benefits all of our communities.
7. There have also been changes at board level, with new administrations taking control of Gravesham Borough Council and Swale Borough Council. I hope that we have been able to demonstrate the value of working in partnership across the public and private sectors, and I look forward to building on this in 2020. I would like to put on record my thanks to the outgoing partners.
8. 2019 has also brought its challenges. The development of the sites in the North Kent Enterprise Zone has not happened as quickly as we would have wanted. There remain a number of unanswered questions about the Lower Thames Crossing, both about the scheme itself and about the other – equally important – improvements needed to the

strategic road network in North Kent and the rest of the county. And, frustratingly, progress has still been disappointing in respect of the London Resort proposals at Swanscombe,.

9. However, despite this TGKP has continued to focus on a well-defined set of priorities which provide mutual benefit, I hope, to all partners.

Partnership Highlights

- **Thames Estuary 2050 Growth Commission:** more than 9 months after the original report, the government finally published its response to the Growth Commission. There was some evidence that government had taken account of feedback from North Kent. The emphasis on housing-led growth was reduced and the importance of employment, infrastructure and sustainable growth was significantly increased. Critically, funding was announced to support a number of the commitments. TGKP has continued to play a convening role, bringing together partners across the Estuary to develop a common collective approach to this, and to engagement with Whitehall officials. This has meant that government have been held to a number of key commitments that might otherwise have drifted, given the national political situation. As a result, the Thames Estuary “Envoy” role was scoped, recruited and appointed in little over three months (despite initial fears that it might take as long as 18 months), the new Growth Board was rapidly established and a shared Estuary-wide view about what it makes sense to tackle collectively has continued to develop.
- **Thames Estuary Production Corridor:** The very positive work of the Thames Estuary Production Corridor (TEPC) continued in 2019, supported by strong public/private partnerships across Essex, Kent, London. The Department of Culture, Media and Sport announced that Kent and Essex would receive over £4.3m of funding to develop work in Kent and Essex, specifically highlighting the strength and diversity of partnership as a key reason for the bid’s success. This programme of work, now branded “Creative Estuary”, has a set of exciting projects in scope between 2019 and 2022 which aim to maximise the creative industries’ wider economic, social and physical impact on regeneration and “place-making”. TGKP has worked with the new programme director for “Creative Estuary” to ensure that it directly benefits North Kent. On the wider Production Corridor work with London, the first public-facing set of commitments were launched in July, with the publication of the “Call to Action” document based on the consultancy report produced by local partners and Hatch Regeneris.
- **North Kent Enterprise Zone (NKEZ):** The construction compound on Rochester Airport is a visible demonstration of progress towards delivery of Innovation Park Medway, complemented by much activity behind the scenes, particularly by Medway Council, to create a new Masterplan and prepare a streamlined planning regime for the Park. Maidstone BC have shown commendable leadership in bringing forward and securing the funding for a proposed new Innovation Centre on Kent Medical Campus. And at Ebbsfleet the new Berkeley Modular housing factory is complete and ready to go. TGKP has kept the flame alive through engagement with government and the South East LEP to ensure our enterprise zone sites secure appropriate recognition in the emerging Local Industrial Strategy, and working with LIK to promote NKEZ to potential investors.

- **Resilient Infrastructure:** TGKP played an active role in shaping a partnership bid involving universities, public sector and business partners across Kent and Essex, to InnovateUK for Strength In Places funding to develop a virtual 'Institute for Resilient Infrastructure'. We await with interest to see whether this is taken forward to the next stage of business case development next spring.
- **Lower Thames Crossing:** TGKP has remained closely involved with Highways England's Stakeholder Advisory Panel and direct meetings with Highways England to explore legacy and broader strategic economic implications. The North Kent Working Group continued to meet in 2019, aiming to build consensus across the area about how best to shape and influence the developing proposals.
- **Crossrail to Ebbsfleet (C2E):** This is another critically important initiative where TGKP has provided capacity, strategic and technical input not only to shape the original propositions put to government and the Thames Estuary Commission, but also to help steer the C2E partnership on the next stage of work, backed by the £4.85m commitment from Government, for a more detailed study on the options for enhancing connectivity in the Bexley-North Kent corridor.
- **Private sector board members:** have continued to meet regularly during the year and provide genuine insight and value to the work of TGKP. I was extremely happy to welcome Daniel Ghinn as a new member of the board earlier in the year. We do still have a vacancy on the board for a private sector representative which I am keen to fill. The TGKP officer team has continued to work closely with private sector colleagues, fully engaging with the networks, contacts and expertise of our private sector board members.

TGKP Budget

10. TGKP's spending for 2019/20 is forecast to be around £210,800, against a budget of £282,022. The team have kept expenditure to an absolute minimum, given the financial challenges facing our local authority partners. As a result, the officer team have not filled the staffing vacancy in the team, which has had an impact on the team's capacity. The year-end position for our accumulated reserve is likely to be over £400,000 – and the AGM may be an appropriate moment to reflect on how we might most effectively use this. I am grateful to the six local authorities and to Ebbsfleet Development Corporation for their financial support and to Medway for financial systems support.

Legal and Human Resources Support

11. 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 2020

12. The challenge for 2020 is to take full advantage of the significant opportunities ahead of us:

- **The national perspective:** there is significant volatility and instability at central government level. It seems probable that whatever the make-up of the new national

government, there will be a renewed push on devolution and new models of local governance (Whitehall officials have already started to talk about “levelling up” and “rebalancing powers”). It looks likely that the Shared Prosperity Fund will replace European funding. In all of this, there is a need to ensure North Kent plays an active part in discussions, maximising influence and challenging some of the incorrect central government misconceptions and preconceptions about the region, and providing a riposte to traditional thinking about “London and the South-East”. Current experience has demonstrated that government departments are keen to have a single conversation with sub-regions. Members may want to consider how TGKP could have a role to play in helping to facilitate, broker and enable this.

- **Building on the Thames Estuary 2050 Commission:** TGKP have played a critical role over the past 18 months in keeping the Growth Commission on the government’s agenda and, once they produced their response to the Commission, holding them to account to deliver the promises and commitment they made. We have hitherto been successful in doing this. The appointment of the Thames Estuary Envoy, establishment of the new Thames Estuary Growth Board and allocation of the £1m funding to support this all represent a set of different challenges that North Kent need to meet over the next 18 months. Already the TGKP chief executive is playing a critical role in the orientation/induction of the new Envoy, helping her to shape a draft set of priorities and developing an engagement and communications strategy. Members should consider the benefits of whether this arrangement can be strengthened and become more formal as things develop.
- **Lower Thames Crossing:** the next 18 months are critical for this project. There is a significant job of work to be done to help Highways England bolster the scheme’s overall business case to make it as robust and compelling as possible. There is also a substantial task to ensure that businesses across North Kent are able to take advantage of the economic benefits from the construction phase, accessing the tier two, three and four contracts that Highways England will be letting. Longer-term, there is a collective challenge to maximise the wider economic benefits that the scheme presents – working with colleagues in Essex to seek out these opportunities. Finally, there is a slightly more defensive task – to help central government to have a realistic view of what impact the scheme could have on the viability of housing delivery in North Kent (and, critically, what other social and infrastructure interventions are needed for this to be sustainable). TGKP has already played a significant role in each of these areas of activity and has the capability to continue to do so.
- **Crossrail to Ebbsfleet:** as with the Lower Thames Crossing, the next 18 months are extremely important for the development of C2E. Although government announced the

funding for the next phase of feasibility work as part of their response to the Thames Estuary 2050 Growth Commission earlier in 2019, TGKP have played a critical role ever since, working with Bexley, to develop a business case which satisfies the expectations and requirements of different government departments to enable drawdown of the funding. Once this is complete, there will be significant work needed to scope the programme of activity, appoint the team of contractors to carry out the feasibility work, programme manage them and ensure that they are able to access accurate information and contacts across the partnership. This work will need effective governance and its progress will also need to be reported – and the final product of the study will need to be effectively communicated to government and other partners. Throughout this time, the overall communications and lobbying activity to raise awareness of the opportunities that could be unlocked will need to be continued. Again, TGKP has already played a significant role in each of these areas and has the capability to continue to do so.

- **Thames Estuary Production Corridor:** over the past two years, TGKP has played a leading role in making the Production Corridor a reality. The next 18 months have the potential to take this much further – demonstrating the wider, transformational economic impacts of the work, helping to raise the profile, reputation and attractiveness of North Kent and the Estuary more generally, and generating sustained interest in the area from public and private investors. TGKP has the experience and potential to help drive this forward: ensuring that the Production Corridor and Arts Council funded “Creative Estuary” work complements, supports and highlights Medway’s bid for UK City of Culture 2025; continuing to make the connections with different local authority functions as the work develops (planning, communications, tourism, economic development); helping to generate inward investment opportunities for specific sites and places in North Kent; ensuring that the economic benefits of the Estuary 2020 festival are maximised; and, ensuring that wider Estuary-wide work is co-ordinated with the Thames Estuary Production Corridor.
- **A final thought:** over the past two years the TGKP work programme has largely been shaped by the need to respond to external factors and to identify and take advantage of emerging opportunities. It is now over five years since the publication of the “Thames Gateway Kent Plan for Growth 2014-20” (<http://www.tgkp.org/content/documents/TGKP%20Growth%20Plan%20brochure%20-%20-%20web.pdf>). With the establishment of the Thames Estuary Growth Board, appointment of the Envoy and renewed government thinking about regional planning, now might be an appropriate moment to consider whether there might be a value in developing an updated strategic statement of ambition and priorities for North Kent and in particular TGKP’s potential role in that respect.

13. It has been a privilege to serve as TGKP Chairman in 2019. I would like to thank all members and observers for your help and support over the last 12 months and I look forward to a productive 2020.

Rob Bennett

Chairman, Thames Gateway Kent Partnership

10th December 2019