



Thames Gateway Kent Partnership Board

20th Annual General Meeting (AGM) – 4th December 2020

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2020 – AGM 201204(4)

Introduction

1. I am pleased to be able to present the Board with my reflections on TGKP's activities in 2020.

Background and Context

2. It scarcely needs saying that 2019/20 has been a year like no other in all our experience. The Covid-19 coronavirus pandemic has affected us all to a greater or lesser degree both professionally and personally. As I prepare this report we are still under national lockdown conditions and even as national measures are lifted Kent and Medway face strict controls in the weeks ahead and likely stretching into 2021. We can have guarded optimism that the unprecedentedly rapid development of effective vaccines offers the prospect of a return to something like normality as 2021 progresses, at least in terms of freedom of movement and assembly. But in many ways what constitutes 'normal' has probably been re-defined.

Partnership Highlights

3. **Thames Estuary:** TGKP has played a critical role over the past year in supporting the evolution of the Thames Estuary Growth Board and the role of the Envoy. This has included: supporting Kate Willard as part of a small Executive Team; helping to shape the Board's work programme, launched as 'The Green Blue: Action Plan' in July, and the accompanying engagement and communications strategy; supporting the recruitment of high calibre private sector members onto the Growth Board; researching and providing case studies for the Estuary Visionaries initiative; and ongoing engagement with the Cities and Local Growth Unit as Government sponsor. The Board is growing from strength to strength and putting flesh on the bones of the Action Plan with specific projects and programmes of Estuary-level significance. For example, the recent Hydrogen Summit signposted the immense opportunities there could be for businesses – and the environment – as part of a wider emphasis on renewable energy and green growth. We were pleased to play a part in shaping that work drawing on networks built with various partners including University of Kent. The Board itself has now met five or six times, both face-to-face and virtually and has put in place strengthened terms of reference and governance arrangements, with private sector members taking assigned lead roles in driving forward each strand of its work programme.
4. **Abbey Wood to Ebbsfleet:** TGKP has been at the heart of the C2E Partnership and played a key role in the core team (with LB Bexley and TfL) mobilising the £4.85 million AW2E Connectivity Study. This included specifying and procuring 10 consultancy assignments, getting the Delivery Team and main consultants in place, overseeing an interim report and refreshing the memorandum of understanding with Government. We have been engaged at every level from the Leaders' Group through to the Technical Group. With the Delivery Team fully in place, TGKP's active engagement continues as one of the client partners. The Study reached a key milestone in November with agreement on the short-listing of options to be taken forward for more detailed analysis and on the overall vision for the AW2E Corridor to inform the masterplanning work that forms a key element of the next stage. The project is on track to be completed in late summer 2021. The complex work programme will need to be kept under constant review, not least to reflect the changing realities of public transport planning and the implications of evolving Government guidance such as the new Treasury Green Book. As

preferred options become clearer and public consultation is undertaken the overall communications and lobbying activity to raise awareness of the opportunities that could be unlocked will need to be revived.

5. **Thames Estuary Production Corridor:** TGKP has continued to play an enabling role in making the Production Corridor a reality. The “Case for Investment” report was published in parallel with the launch of the Thames Estuary *Green Blue* Action Plan. *Creative Estuary*, backed by the £4.3 million Arts Council funding announced last year, is well underway with TGKP helping shape that work through the Steering Group and, in particular, through involvement in the Creative Assets work stream that includes projects in North Kent such as the Docking Station at Chatham Maritime. The initial programme for Estuary Festival 2021 was successfully launched on 25 November, along with the fresh branding and website for Creative Estuary.
6. **Lower Thames Crossing:** we have continued to engage proactively with Highways England to continue to press the case for changes to the scheme that would help maximise the economic benefits delivered to North Kent whilst minimising and mitigating the negative environmental and social impacts. As well as responding to two technical consultations, we have worked directly with Highways England in various forums to get the message across and offer proposals. The LTC has, as Highways England themselves describe it, hit a ‘bump in the road’ with the withdrawal of their DCO on 20 November. There remains work to be done to see what progress can be made on key partnership concerns as Highways England carry out additional work ahead of resubmitting their DCO in 2021.
7. **London Resort:** 2020 has seen highly visible activity by London Resort Company Holdings to prepare the way for their DCO submission, including statutory public consultation to which TGKP responded. We have also engaged directly with LRCH and in concert with partners on particular issues such as their transport and access strategy and the implications of the resort for the AW2E Study. Inevitably TGKP’s role, as a non-statutory body, is secondary to that of the host authorities, but we have a useful role in amplifying key messages. Our shared experience is that whilst there is a lot of good will towards the Resort proposals the information shared by LRCH falls short of the detail needed to understand the full implications and secure unqualified support. We seek to continue constructive engagement and to look at how we can add most value as the DCO process takes its course.
8. **Getting our views heard:** As well as the important consultations on Lower Thames Crossing and London Resort, this year has seen a number of other consultations with far-reaching implications for North Kent, including the Transport for the South East draft Strategy, HM Treasury consultation on Freeports and the Planning White Paper. The pandemic has altered the dynamics of events and conferences but early in the year TGKP had the opportunity to give a North Kent perspective at the Virtual Westminster Policy Forum event focused on the Thames Estuary.
9. **Economic Recovery:** It has been a priority for TGKP partners to support their local businesses and communities through the challenges brought by the pandemic. This has included administering grants to businesses under the various support schemes, and community support including food parcel distribution and other assistance to vulnerable households. The TGKP team offered to support partners in any way they could and played a very minor role as part of Swale’s Covid-19 response during the first Lockdown. The pandemic has prompted a re-think about others’ work that TGKP had been contributing towards including the Kent & Medway Enterprise and Productivity Strategy and SELEP’s Local Industrial Strategy. The first has effectively been superseded by the Economic Renewal and Resilience Plan, and the latter by the emerging Recovery and Renewal Strategy. We are continuing to make input into these plans and look at ways of supporting identified actions at a North Kent level.
10. **North Kent Enterprise Zone (NKEZ):** NKEZ has continued to see progress, particularly in the form of the Innovation Centre taking shape at Kent Medical Campus. Disappointingly, the Berkeley Modular Factory due to open this Spring has postponed operations until summer 2021. We are hopeful that

the Local Development Orders for Innovation Park Medway will finally be adopted before the end of this year enabling crucial enabling infrastructure to progress at pace in 2021. TGKP is actively contributing to an initiative by the LEP Network to lobby Government for extension of enterprise zone incentives, both to support EZs adversely affected by the pandemic (and the imminent expiry of existing incentives) and in offering a proposition about the role EZs could play in helping to drive economic recovery.

- 11. Private sector board members:** have continued to meet both collectively and individually on a virtual basis during the year and provide insight and value to the work of TGKP. Mark Heeley retired from Tarmac in June and I want to express my thanks to him for his input over recent years and to all our private sector board members for giving their time to support TGKP. Subject to the outcome of the current review, we will need to think constructively about strengthening our private sector engagement.

TGKP Team

12. I want to thank the TGKP Team, as ever, for their hard work on the Partnership's behalf and their support for me as Chair. I appreciate the way the team has seamlessly adapted to remote working and maintaining networks through virtual means. We have seen two changes during this year. It was good to welcome Rachael Spreadbury as a Summer Intern under the University of Kent's Employability Points programme, and I am pleased that we were able to follow through in offering that internship even on a fully online basis. Our Chief Executive Matthew Norwell left TGKP at the start of October to take up the role of Director of Place at the London Borough of Bexley. Matthew had been with TGKP for three and a half years and undoubtedly helped to ensure close alignment with the work of the Thames Estuary Growth Board and Envoy. I know that Kate Willard has greatly appreciated Matthew's contribution as part of the Thames Estuary Executive Team, and the profile the Thames Estuary is now gaining would not be the same without his input. Personally, I want to thank Matthew for all of his efforts over the period and for supporting my work as Chair. I also want to thank Richard Longman for his important and influential work across the partnership over the last year, and for supporting me since Matthew's departure, during what I know are difficult times.

Budget

13. The detail on TGKP's budget will be covered in a separate paper to the AGM. I once again thank our contributing partners – Dartford, Gravesham, Maidstone and Swale borough councils, Medway Council, Kent County Council and Ebbsfleet Development Corporation – for their financial support in 2020 and to Medway for financial systems support. As noted in the budget paper, staff changes and the impacts of the pandemic on meetings and activities point to a significant underspend by the end of 2020/21. Against a budget of £254,506 outturn expenditure is currently forecast at around £159,000. As agreed last year, the major portion of the Partnership's accumulated reserve has been redistributed to contributing partners. We are presently forecasting that at the end of this year the accumulated reserve would stand at around £247,000.

Legal and Human Resources Support

14. I would also like to thank Medway Council for continuing to provide legal services and Swale Borough Council (and Emma Wiggins in particular) for providing HR support to the Partnership.

Looking forward to 2021

15. This is, I think, the nineteenth Chairman's Report that I have delivered to the Partnership's AGM (following my offer to take on the Chairmanship on an interim basis for four months). Normally I would set out my thoughts about the year ahead and the challenges and opportunities for the Partnership. As I said at the beginning, normal has been redefined and it is healthy (now more than ever) for a Partnership to take stock to consider its rationale, purpose and direction and the best way of delivering partners' objectives and visions going forward.

16. Whatever decisions are taken, I remain convinced that there are some opportunities and initiatives that can, with real benefit, be tackled on a North Kent level (“the whole is something beside the parts” argument) and that the contribution from the private sector is critical, if we are able to harness that expertise and engage with them in a meaningful and value added way. I also remain personally committed to contributing to that agenda, wherever that is considered helpful.
17. My work elsewhere in the country also suggests that more than ever before, there needs to be focused effort on developing a strong pipeline of credible and investible propositions.
18. I have been very pleased to serve as TGKP Chairman in 2020, and I would like to thank all Board members for your help and support during the difficult circumstances of the past year.

Rob Bennett

Chairman, Thames Gateway Kent Partnership

4th December 2019