



5 July 2019

Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP
Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and
Local Government
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Dear Secretary of State

The Government response to the Thames Estuary 2050 Growth Commission report: an initial response from the Thames Gateway Kent Partnership

As chairman of the Thames Gateway Kent Partnership (TGKP), I wanted to share our reaction to the report published earlier in the year, indicating how government intends to take forward the recommendations of Thames Estuary 2050 Growth Commission. Given the importance of these proposals to us we took the opportunity to discuss this in detail at a recent Board meeting.

TGKP was established in 2001 and brings together the public and private sector to promote the interests of North Kent, working to encourage, facilitate and enable sustainable, employment-led economic growth. TGKP's membership comprises the local authorities of Dartford, Gravesham, Medway, Swale, Maidstone and Kent, along with a set of wider public sector partners and a number of high-profile business leaders drawn from across the region.

As a partnership, we welcome government's renewed commitment to the Estuary and your personal view that you are looking to the Estuary to deliver "well-balanced, inclusive growth on a scale comparable to the Midlands Engine, Northern Powerhouse and Oxford-Cambridge Arc."

We are committed to a partnership with government that is focused on the long term and takes account of the specific needs, circumstances and opportunities in North Kent. We look forward to developing joint work in the Estuary in the spirit of openness and transparency, with an ability to shape the detail of the proposals together.

Good growth for North Kent, and for the Estuary in general, is growth characterised by improved, successful and prosperous places: environmentally, economically, culturally and socially. We should prioritise proposals which improve life chances, opportunities and overall quality of life.

During our Board discussions we highlighted areas where we are looking for an agreement with government on the future approach to initiatives in the Estuary, as well as those recommendations in your report which we would like to prioritise. I understand that you are visiting North Kent on Tuesday 16th July – and we look forward to taking this opportunity to discuss this further.

Areas where the partnership would value an agreement from government

Our Board discussion highlighted occasions over the 30-year history of the Estuary project when government commitments and promises have not been kept. Since the late 1990s North Kent has taken on (and is delivering) extremely challenging housing targets, but the broader, essential infrastructure needed to support such growth has lagged behind. We would therefore like government to commit to the principle of “catch-up” for such infrastructure in North Kent, as well as considering how we can deliver more sustainably for the future.

This may also be an appropriate moment for government to consider how North Kent can be better supported to manage the housing, homelessness, health and social care and crime challenges created by outward migration from London.

We welcome the proposed “Estuary Envoy” as someone able to represent the Estuary’s interests with government - a visible, credible champion: influencing, brokering, making connections and building coalitions. We are therefore very keen to ensure that the Envoy has a clear remit and that the lines of accountability between the Envoy and local authority leaders and partnerships are clear, transparent and structured. The Envoy should enhance existing arrangements and not confuse or dilute any of the formal legally delegated functions of the Estuary’s local authorities.

TGKP would not welcome government implementation of development corporations, in any form (or any other proposals which reduce local authorities’ formal legal powers). TGKP would be keen to explore further with government how locally-designed, implemented and managed approaches to development could be improved.

Overall, we think there is value in government restating commitment to the principle that only strategic issues of collective importance across the Estuary should be tackled collectively. Existing partnerships are an effective, efficient and sustainable way of doing business across local authority boundaries. The government’s approach should build on these foundations.

What we want to prioritise

Collectively, we want to improve the life chances of current and future residents in the Estuary. We want successful places, characterised by good employment, excellent transport links, a high-quality natural environment, modern health and social care provision and excellent housing. Attracting inward investment is a critical part of achieving this ambition. We would be very keen to work with government to improve our ability to promote the strengths and opportunities of our places. We would like to take a collective approach to place promotion, marketing and campaigning. Working together with central government could give us better access to international markets, investors and opportunities. We would be keen to explore how we can take this forward, in partnership with government, as a priority.

North Kent is home to a number of cutting-edge businesses. We have strengths in the creative and digital, life science, advanced engineering and manufacturing sectors – something reflected across the whole of the Thames Estuary. There could be a real benefit in taking an Estuary-wide approach to the expansion of specific economic sectors and sub-sectors, looking for every opportunity for growth, development and employment. We would be keen to take this work forward as a priority.

We very much welcome government commitment to taking the Crossrail to Ebbsfleet project through to the next phase of options development and are excited about the potential of this very valuable piece of work.

Partners across the Estuary are already working together on a number of strategically important issues with significant impacts across Kent, Essex and London. For example, there is much to still do to realise the economic, social and employment benefits that the Lower Thames Crossing could bring. Similarly, the Thames Estuary Production Corridor, although in its infancy, is already showing the benefits of taking an Estuary-wide approach to a specific part of the economy. We would like the proposed cross-Whitehall arrangements and the new Cabinet-level ministerial champion to play an active part in this work – and in other similar work – as soon as possible.

The Thames Estuary is a huge area with huge potential. Continuing growth is a fact of life and collectively we want this to be good growth. We want to harness the unique opportunity highlighted by the government response and to work with you to make that vision a reality.

We look forward to welcoming you to North Kent on 16th July and to taking this exciting agenda forward in partnership.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rob Bennett', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Rob Bennett, Chairman, Thames Gateway Kent Partnership