

THAMES GATEWAY KENT PARTNERSHIP RESPONSE TO THE THAMES ESTUARY GROWTH COMMISSION CALL FOR IDEAS

Executive Summary

- The Thames Gateway Kent Partnership welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Commission's Call for Ideas. We see our response as the start of an important conversation with Commission members over the coming year.
- **Work Stream 1:** There is huge potential for sustainable economic growth in North Kent and, specifically, to develop **high productivity clusters** in:
 - medical, healthcare, life and bio-sciences;
 - advanced manufacturing and engineering;
 - cultural and creative industries and entertainment.
- The **Commission should address the principal constraints** to maximising this potential which are **connectivity, especially transport, and skills shortages**.
- **Work Stream 2: Increasing connectivity.** The transport infrastructure in North Kent is already under severe stress. These pressures are adding huge costs to existing businesses and deterring new companies from investing and locating in the area. There is no avoiding the need for significant additional Government investment in new transport infrastructure. We recommend the Commission develop proposals for;
 - a more **joined-up approach by Government to transport planning**;
 - **devolving responsibility for transport decisions** to local areas;
 - achieving a **step change in modal shift from private car to public transport** – road, rail and river.
- Companies are looking for future-proofed **digital connectivity**; ultra-fast broadband will be essential to retain and attract businesses to the area.
- **Work Stream 3: Creating new homes and communities.** To stimulate increased rates of delivery of high quality homes the Commission should develop proposals for:
 - **spreading Garden City principles** more widely through the Thames Estuary;
 - **piloting incentives to encourage build-out of planning permissions** eg charging a proportion of Council Tax on land remaining undeveloped after a specified period;
 - the Thames Estuary to be a **pilot area for environmental innovation** including low carbon energy production and a new hydro-electric Thames Barrier;
 - the Thames estuary to be a **pilot area for innovation in health care provision**;
 - a new **programme for enhancement of green spaces** building on the Parklands experience.
- **Work stream 4: Securing investment.** A more comprehensive toolkit of funding mechanisms is needed, including:
 - **the creation of an infrastructure 'bank' to forward-fund enabling infrastructure (including essential commercial accommodation)**;
 - **re-establishing 'gap funding' schemes** on the lines of those operated successfully in the past to unlock brownfield sites that are unviable;
 - **simplified mechanisms to provide certainty and make it easier for local authorities to borrow for investment** against future income.
- More radically the Commission should examine the case for **a new regime of land valuation and capturing land value uplift**, which could be **piloted in the Thames Estuary**.

- **Work Stream 5: Harnessing innovation in the built environment.** We argue the Commission's focus should not be confined to innovation in design; it should consider *how best to achieve high design standards throughout the Thames Estuary*. It should *review best practice from past initiatives / incentives in promoting design excellence*, including in the Thames Gateway
- **Work Stream 6: Putting it together: centres of excellence.** Our Vision for North Kent and the Thames Gateway remains valid. The *Commission's focus should be on the the priorities and mechanisms for achieving that Vision* which need to be refreshed over time to respond to the changing world we live in.
- **Lessons from previous initiatives in the Thames Estuary.** The Thames Gateway is a long-term project. The last 20 to 30 years has seen real progress and significant delivery. *Key to that success has been consistent support from central Government*. That continued support will be important through to 2050 and, whilst it is clearly not possible to commit future Administrations, the *Commission should consider how plans for the area's future, which are of necessity long term, can be future-proofed and made resilient so they can adapt to changing political and economic cycles*.
- Part of the answer, we would argue, *is to look for opportunities for devolution of responsibilities and funding to local areas* wherever possible.
- This response outlines our *preliminary views and suggestions*. We recognise that many would require further work and analysis to become well evidenced, practical propositions. *North Kent could pilot some of these suggestions*. We *look forward to the opportunity to discuss and develop the ideas in more detail with the Commission* over the coming months.

Thames Gateway Kent Partnership

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