

**By:** Mark Dance, Cabinet Member for Economic Development  
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**To:** Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee - 17 May 2016

**Subject:** Thames Estuary 2050 Growth Commission

**Classification:** Unrestricted

**Past pathway of paper:** None

**Future pathway of paper:** None

**Electoral Division:** All

### **Summary**

In March, the Government announced the establishment of a Thames Estuary 2050 Growth Commission, chaired by Lord Heseltine, to examine the long term potential of the Estuary and how this may be delivered. The Commission is expected to report by autumn 2017.

This report sets out the role of the Commission and introduces the initial views expressed by Kent County Council.

### **Recommendation**

The Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee is recommended to CONSIDER this report and to NOTE KCC's initial response to the Commission

## **1. Introduction: The Thames Estuary 2050 Growth Commission**

1.1 In the March 2016 Budget statement, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced the establishment of a Thames Gateway 2050 Growth Commission, to be chaired by Lord Heseltine. The Growth Commission is intended to:

*"... develop an ambitious vision and delivery plan for North Kent, South Essex and East London up to 2050. This will focus on supporting the development of high productivity clusters in specific locations. It will examine how the area can develop, attract and retain skilled workers. It will also look at how to make the most of opportunities from planned infrastructure, such as the Lower Thames Crossing."*

1.2 At the time of writing, the specific terms of reference and the membership of the Commission have not yet been published. However, in addition to Lord

Heseltine, it is anticipated that the Commission will include the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government and the Minister for the Thames Gateway. It is also understood that the Commission will include a number of prominent experts in planning and development, with the full list of members likely to be published shortly.

- 1.3 The geographic area on which the Commission will focus will extend along the North Kent coast, to include Canterbury and Thanet, as well as those districts which were previously included in the Thames Gateway (Dartford Gravesham, Swale and Medway). It is anticipated that the Commission will finally report back to Government in autumn 2017. It is likely however that interim findings will be published later this year.

## **2. Kent County Council and the Growth Commission**

- 2.1 Last month, KCC submitted an initial response to the Growth Commission, attached as Annex 1. This highlighted the major challenges and opportunities facing the Thames Estuary and welcomed the Commission as a reflection of continued Government support for the Thames Gateway as a priority for economic development and regeneration. While much has already been delivered, the area remains the most significant opportunity for growth in London and the South East.
- 2.2 The response also recommends a series of issues that the Commission should consider within its terms of reference, including:
  - The impact of rising traffic volumes in the A2/M2 Corridor and the need for further infrastructure improvements linked with the delivery of the Lower Thames Crossing. The response recommends that the Growth Commission takes into account the infrastructure constraints on the whole A2/M2 corridor, including the A2 from Brenley Corner to Dover, which is assumed to be outside the Commission's formal area of focus;
  - Solutions to the infrastructure funding gap identified in the Growth and Infrastructure Framework, noting that relatively high infrastructure costs and (in parts of the Estuary) low values impede delivery;
  - Maximising the benefits of High Speed One, particularly taking into account high commuting costs and the need for further investment (such as Thanet Parkway) to reduce journey times;
  - Addressing the costs of economic polarisation through investment in skills and community infrastructure;
  - Ensuring that new development is of high quality, reflecting the Commission's long-term objectives.
- 2.3 In addition, the response recommends that there is local representation from each of South Essex, the North Kent coast and East London on the Commission itself.

### **3. Moving forward**

- 3.1 While the issues highlighted in KCC's initial submission to the Growth Commission are not new, the Commission does present an opportunity to develop a consensus with Government on how the challenges to delivery may be overcome. Once the Commission's full membership and terms of reference have been announced, it is anticipated that it will begin work quickly. KCC, with partners in Thames Gateway Kent Partnership, as well as Thanet and Canterbury and the rest of the Estuary, will seek to work closely with the Commission to ensure that our priorities are considered.

### **4. Recommendation**

- 4.1 The Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee is recommended to CONSIDER this report; and NOTE KCC's initial response to the Commission.

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### **Annex**

Annex 1: The Thames Estuary: Opportunities and Challenges: KCC's initial submission to the Thames Estuary 2050 Growth Commission