From: **Paul King, Cabinet Member for Economic Development & Coastal Regeneration**

Simon Jones, Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport

To: **Growth, Economic Development & Communities Cabinet Committee**

Subject: **Implementation of the Kent & Medway Economic Framework Ambition 3**

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway of report: N/A

Future Pathway of report: N/A

Electoral Division: All KCC electoral divisions

Summary: This report provides an overview of the progress in implementing the Kent and Medway Economic Framework Ambition 3. It sets out the high-level key actions that have taken place to date and the future activity planned to support sustainable growth of Kent & Medway's economy, through to 2030. This one of a regular series deep dives into the framework's five ambitions.

Recommendation: The Cabinet Committee is asked to note the report.

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1. Background

1.1 In April 2024, the Kent & Medway Economic Partnership[1] (KMEP) approved the publication of the *Kent and Medway Economic Framework (KMEF)*[2]. This a medium-term strategy that looks to guide actions that support the growth and prosperity of the region (functional economic area) through to 2030.

1.2 The Framework focuses on three overarching objectives (Productivity, Sustainability and Inclusivity) which sit above five ambitions for delivery, these being:

- Enable innovative, productive and creative businesses
- Widen opportunities and unlock talent
- Secure resilient infrastructure for planned, sustainable growth
- Place economic opportunity at the centre of community wellbeing and prosperity

[1] KMEP is the local growth board for this area, and its membership includes Kent County Council, Medway Council, all district councils' leaders, businesses, universities and colleges. Its website is www.kmep.org.uk

[2] KMEF can be read at: [Kent & Medway Economic Framework]

- Create diverse, distinctive and vibrant places.

2. Implementation

2.1 Since publication, the KCC Economy Team (which acts as the KMEP Secretariat) has been working to implement the KMEF ambitions in partnership with the KMEP Board Members, the Business Advisory Board (BAB), and partners.

2.2 For each of the five ambitions, a private sector board member and a local authority officer have been appointed to act as a Thematic Lead for the ambition, helping to oversee the implementation of the KMEF and direct the team's activities. These thematic leads are as follows:

Ambition	**Private sector lead**	**Local Authority lead**
Enable innovative, productive and creative businesses	Tudor Price – CEO, Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce	Steve Samson – KCC Head of Economy
Widen opportunities and unlock talent	Simon Cook - Mid-Kent College Principal	Dan Ratcliff, Medway Council's Head of Skills, Employment and Adult Education
Secure resilient infrastructure for planned, sustainable growth	Vince Lucas - Director, VA Rail	Tom Marchant, KCC Head of Strategic Development & Place
Place economic opportunity at the centre of community renewal and prosperity	Nick Fenton, Locate in Kent & Kent Developers' Group	Andrew Osborne, Ashford BC's Head of Economic Development
Create diverse, distinctive and vibrant places	Miranda Chapman - MD, Pillory Barn	Adam Bryan, Medway Council's Director of Place

2.3 The information below outlines the focus of the work to date against the ambition 3 of the KMEF.

3. Ambition 3: Secure resilient infrastructure for planned, sustainable growth

3.1 The third ambition of the Kent & Medway Economic Framework focuses on securing the infrastructure that Kent and Medway needs to support long-term sustainable growth. This will include action at national as well as local level, recognising the county's stock of nationally-important infrastructure assets.

3.2 There are four action areas that fit within this ambition. These are:

- Maximising the benefit of international connectivity
- Understanding our infrastructure needs and developing new solutions
- Ensuring that Kent and Medway's digital infrastructure meets the dynamic evolution of business need and technology development
- Supporting Kent and Medway's energy potential

3.3 Work since January 2025 by the KMEP Board Members and the KMEP Secretariat has focussed primarily on:
- Bringing Back Eurostar Services to Ashford and Ebbsfleet International railway stations
- Lobbying for the Lower Thames Crossing project to proceed.
- Working with the Port of Dover on their Short Straits Cluster, and gaining Government attention to their Green Shipping Project.
- Creating an investible infrastructure pipeline to feed into central government.

Bringing Back Eurostar Services to Ashford and Ebbsfleet International railway stations

3.4 Kent and Medway have benefited from international rail services for 24 years from 1996 through to 2020; these were paused by Eurostar during the pandemic, but are woven into the local economy with businesses having located to the area and built European customers and connections following decades of use. A key priority for KMEP is to see these services return.

3.5 KMEP partners have sought the resumption of Eurostar services to Ashford International and Ebbsfleet International, as a partner within the Bring Back Eurostar Group. KMEP held meetings with both Eurostar's General Secretary and Chief Strategic Partnerships Officer, and with senior Department for Transport civil servants in late 2024 to emphasise how the profitability arguments (used as the original reason for the temporary suspension of services) no longer hold true.

3.6 KMEP and its Bring Back Eurostar Group has ongoing liaison with local MPs, securing their support in raising this matter. This resulted in Ministerial statements to the House of Commons; in January 2025, Sir Keir Starmer responded to Sojan Joesph, MP for Ashford's question saying: *'I know this is an issue of considerable frustration to his constituents. The decision in question is ultimately for Eurostar, but we are keen to see international services reinstated to Ashford as soon as possible'*

3.7 On 23rd May 2025, KMEP hosted a Eurostar briefing to which all MPs were invited. The MPs were asked to encourage the Government to:
- Commit to intervening to secure a return of services as soon as possible by lowering the barriers for operators such as facilitating access to the high speed line and supporting partners and infrastructure
- Establish a working group immediately to develop the public interest case with local partners and determine the powers government can use to ensure a return of services.

- Invest in the two Kent international stations so that they are maintained to a functional standard and have the new EU Entry Exit System ready for a return of international rail services.

3.8 Also in May, a meeting was held by KCC and KMEP with the National Wealth Fund to specifically discuss investment that could help to bring international rail back to the county, focusing on EES. In October 2025, the new Entry/Exit System (EES) - a new automated border management system – will be implemented by the European Union to enhance security and streamline travel for non-EU nationals entering and exiting the wider EU. A key benefit of resuming services to the Kent stations is that the majority of the infrastructure is already in place, lying dormant until services resume. However, the new EES system will require some modifications to the stations, and hence conversations were held to explore funding possibilities.

3.9 Members of KMEP's Bring Back Eurostar Group have also reached out to the potential new operators on the line, as there is a possibility that Eurostar will not be a monopoly provider of international rail services in the future. Conversations stressed the profitability for the operators in calling at Kent's stations. A number of operators submitted applications requesting that the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) directs Eurostar (the Depot Facility Owner) to enter into Depot Access Agreements for the Temple Mills International depot. The ORR is now assessing these applications based on detailed representations and an independent capacity study.

3.10 KMEP's Bring Back Eurostar Group has also had ongoing discussions with counterparts in mainland Europe (such as Hauts-de-France) regarding intermediate stations, as, like Kent, they have seen Eurostar suspend services to regional stations (such as Calais-Fréthun). Working closely with French partners may be beneficial as the French national government is a major stakeholder in Eurostar, primarily through its national rail operator, SNCF (which holds a 55% ownership stake in Eurostar International Limited).

3.11 A public interest case, written by Mark Welch (KCC Transport Planner) with contributions from other partners, was sent by KMEP to the Ministerial Team and the local MPs.

3.12 A media campaign is also being coordinated by the Bring Back Eurostar Group. This includes a third campaign video, which features business interviews and explore the long-term economic impact of the suspension of international rail services.

3.13 Finally, work is progressing to organise a significant media event in Ashford and Ebbsfleet stations at the end of September under the direction of the KCC Leader to publicise the call for Eurostar to return to Kent.

Lobbying for the Lower Thames Crossing project to proceed

3.14 On the roads network, KMEP recognises the importance of the international trade corridor between the continent and the Midlands and the North. Keeping the M2, M20, and A282/M25 running smoothly, and minimising the use of

Operation Brock doesn't only assist international trade, but also enables residents and businesses to move freely around the county and unlocks local economic growth. Consequently, KMEP has been lobbying for the Lower Thames Crossing project to proceed. This lobbying has been in the form of letters and emails sent to the Government and National Highways, formal submissions during the planning process as an 'interested party', and liaising with the Port of Dover.

3.15 These topic have also been raised and explored through the Kent Business Advisory Board (BAB). For example, the businesses were asked to register their support on National Highways' interactive map of support.

3.16 KMEP was delighted that the Government officially granted development consent for the Lower Thames Crossing project in March 25. This decision was made by the Secretary of State for Transport following a comprehensive examination conducted by the Planning Inspectorate. Work is underway to ensure that local businesses and young people can benefit from the supply chain and job opportunities that accompany such a significant infrastructure project.

Working with the Port of Dover on their Short Straits Cluster & gaining Government attention to their Green Shipping Project

3.17 Sarah Nurden (KMEP Manager & KCC Economy Lead) was a panellist at the Coastal Powerhouse Short Straits Event on 25th June 2025. This event celebrated the launch of the Short Straits Cluster, which is a maritime initiative designed to foster collaboration, innovation, and economic growth across one of the UK's most strategically vital gateways.

3.18 The cluster brings together key stakeholders from both sides of the English Channel—including the Port of Dover, Port of Calais, DFDS, and regional authorities—to address shared challenges and opportunities in the Short Straits region (an area in which KCC is also actively working with neighbouring regions across the Channel through its own 'Straits Committee' activity). Its focus areas include:

- Green shipping and decarbonisation
- Skills development and recruitment
- Digital transformation
- Port masterplanning
- Growth and investment

3.19 The Port of Dover is critical, not only to Kent & Medway, but to the whole of UK. £144bn of trade in goods and 33% of UK-EU trade goes through the Port. In addition, 1.3m tourist vehicles use the Port every year.

3.20 The Green Shipping Project, led by the Port, seeks to bring electric ferries to serve UK-EU shipping routes for the first time. Dover is the optimal place to make such an investment as the shortest strait between the UK and mainland Europe. For reference, there are other nations that use electric ferries such as the Denmark's E-Ferry Ellen, that operates between the Danish islands of Ærø and Als, and Bastø Electric in Norway, so it is tested technology.

3.21 £100m of investment is required for the Green Shipping Project to succeed. The project will deliver a host of benefits, including a 8% reduction in the UK's carbon emission from the maritime sector and providing a range of new employment opportunities in this emerging sector.

3.22 The issue is that Kent's electricity network is not fit for purpose. The Grid does not supply enough energy to the town of Dover for the Port to then connect to, whether electric ferries or multiple existing cruise liners. Here are some facts and figures:

- Currently, 8 megawatts of electricity feed the port and that supports all the lights, security, berths, trains, etc.
- However, if the Port were to cold-iron (i.e. allow emergency equipment, refrigeration, cooling, heating, lighting and other equipment to receive continuous electric power while a ship loads or unloads its cargo) or shore-power a cruise ship, each ship would take somewhere between 7 and 15 megawatts. The Port can physically provide berthage for three cruise ships at any one time. There is insufficient energy supply in the area, however, to shore-power these ships reducing the ability of the port to hold multiple vessels simultaneously.
- If the Port wanted to recharge a ferry that was fully electric, that will require between 30 and 35 megawatts per vessel.
- Ignoring the energy requirements for electric vehicles (cars and trucks), the Port will need somewhere north of 100 megawatts, maybe up to 160 megawatts in the future. That is a **2,000%** increase in energy supply required.

3.23 The Green Shipping Project asks the Government to invest in the energy network, so sufficient power is delivered to Dover. This aligns with the Industrial's Strategy theme about energy supply and supporting the foundational industries[3].

3.24 The KMEP Manager has introduced the Port of Dover's Engineering Director to key personnel in the Government department Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and the National Wealth Fund, so that discussions can occur with the inetntion that appropriate support may be forthcoming from central Government.

Creating an infrastructure pipeline, aligned to MHCLG needs

3.25 The Green Shipping Project is one of a number of projects that would provide significant benefits to the region and wider UK if Government funding were granted.

3.26 Back in February 25, KMEP liaised with its partners and created an investment/infrastructure pipeline in short order at the request of MHCLG. This pipeline includes over 80 projects that will unlock significant employment

[3] Foundational industries are recognised by government as providing critical inputs and infrastructure to support the eight sectors highlighted in the 'Invest 2035' Industrial Strategy. The foundational industries are: Chemicals, Critical minerals, Composites, Construction, Energy networks, Materials, Ports and,Steel.

opportunities, as and when they are taken forward. Locate in Kent has subsequently been asked to take this initial pipeline and refine it, in light of the subsequent Industrial Strategy Publication, so it creates a compelling story for investment in to Kent and Medway. The intention is that this pipeline accompanies the forthcoming Local Growth Plan, which is being drafted by KCC as the KMEP Secretariat, and will be submitted to the Government by the end of the calendar year.

4. Next steps and Conclusions

4.1 KMEP will continue to concentrate on the projects listed above, but will also do a deep dive into the energy-related matters to understand how grid connections are required to secure and deliver development in the local area. A presentation will be given to the KMEP board in November.

4.2 This report has provided an overview of the progress in implementing Ambition 3 within the Kent and Medway Economic Framework. Much work is underway, and more future activity is planned to support sustainable growth of Kent & Medway's economy, through to 2030.

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