

# THAMES ESTUARY

GROWTH DAY 2019



# FOREWORD



**ROBERT SINCLAIR**  
CEO of London City Airport

**T**he Thames Estuary has always received a great deal of focus and attention. For years, politicians, businesses and councils have all seen, and talked about, its enormous potential. But as we enter this new decade, one that will be crucial for the prospects of the United Kingdom, I believe we have a unique opportunity to deliver on that potential and to make the Estuary one of the nation's leading locations for working and living.

As you will see from this report, the local support is there and real thought and consideration has been put into identifying the investments that will unlock the greatest returns for current and future generations.

Take the example of Crossrail to Ebbsfleet. Extending the new Elizabeth Line, so that it connects with High Speed 1 and serves London City Airport, would be hugely beneficial to people's lives, and help create 55,000 new homes and 50,000 new jobs.

With collective investment, and government support, improving our transport infrastructure will help create a rapid, agile geography where businesses can thrive, local culture can develop and where people want to live.

From London City Airport's perspective, we are currently taking forward a transformative £500m redevelopment which, by the middle of this decade, will have created a dynamic, state-of-the-art airport with the potential to connect more people to even more destinations in the UK, Europe and beyond.

I believe this will not only help connect people and businesses to and from the Estuary, creating investment opportunities in the region, but also help residents secure one of the 2,500 new, high-quality jobs we will create at the airport.

The airports of the Estuary, and London City in particular, will play a key role in the economic, social and cultural fabric of the Thames Estuary. More than just join the dots, we can help facilitate positive change. The airport is committed to being a champion for the area and standing shoulder to shoulder with all of our partners as we make the 2020s the era of the Estuary.

# INTRODUCTION



**DARREN RODWELL**  
Leader, London Borough of  
Barking and Dagenham



**ROB GLEDHILL**  
Leader,  
Thurrock Council

**O**n 3 October 2019, senior decision-makers from local authorities, developers and businesses came to east London to attend the third annual Thames Estuary Growth Day. Now that the Thames Estuary 2050 Growth Commission has finished its report, and the government has published its response, we believe stakeholders in the region should come together and share their views on how real and sustainable growth can be achieved in the region. There is fantastic potential. By including local communities, focussing on high-quality design and investing in transport infrastructure including London City Airport and Crossrail to Ebbsfleet, we can create places that people will want to live and work in. The event provided the perfect platform to facilitate this debate on how to achieve this.

At the event, delegates were offered the choice to participate in one of three focus group sessions covering the key themes affecting growth: housing, hosted by Patricia Brown, director at Central, employment, hosted by John Newbiggin OBE, co-founder of Creative England, and transport, hosted by Robbie Owen, partner at Pinsent Masons. At these sessions, delegates were actively encouraged to participate in the debate and share their views and thoughts.

This report is the outcome of these discussions. It captures the key priorities formulated by region stakeholders, and summarised the key points in a list of recommendations.

We hope this report will be part of the evidence base for decision-makers, and would welcome the opportunity to engage as much as possible with government leadership. If we want the regeneration of the Thames Estuary to become a success, collaboration across all levels of government as well as the private sector is essential.

On a final note, we would like to thank London City Airport for making this report possible, and John, Patricia and Robbie for their contributions.

# DELIVERING HOMES

**T**he wealth of innovations in housing design and community planning will struggle to make the impact their advocates believe they deserve, unless more is done to win hearts and minds of established communities in the Thames Estuary.

These communities are fearful of what development and expansion might mean for them, and to overcome their concerns policymakers and government must focus on two key issues.

First, it is important for them to stop emphasising the Thames Estuary 2050 Growth Commission's vision to deliver one million homes within the next few decades. Figures like that might be useful to grab an easy headline, but they instil fear in communities that are concerned about being swamped by new developments.

Instead, the discussions on new homes needs to be about local people, the type of homes they need now and will be needing in the future due to demographic changes, as well as discussions about the sort of communities they want to live in.

Furthermore, many believe that large developments will erode the value of their homes, which many people hold as their principal investment for their futures. The Nimby factor cannot just be brushed aside: it has to be addressed constructively, which is another reason why the one million target needs to be re-stated more sensitively.

Second, and interwoven with the fears of being swamped by new developments, is an urgent need to give a much higher priority to infrastructure issues. There has to be an "infrastructure first" policy which will require government investment. This goes beyond just roads, although the over-burdened A13 network in Essex is a major concern for everyone working along the north side of the Thames Estuary development.

Any successful vision must embrace the need for schools, medical facilities, a range of shops, community spaces and open spaces. A holistic approach that benefits both new and existing communities will go a long way when alleviating concerns of local people.

## SETTING AND AGREEING A VISION

There is a need to step back and create a clearer vision of what is needed. This will need coherent leadership if the obvious roadblocks are to be removed. There is a great story to be told around inclusive growth – if it is a real aspiration – and how that can benefit existing communities, as well as those new communities needed to properly regenerate the region. This can only be done by engaging and getting the buy-in of those living in the areas where development is needed.

Proper infrastructure planning and upfront investment will be key to achieving that buy-in and overcoming the fear of development; an "infrastructure first" policy, which will require government investment.

It is a catch-22 challenge as housebuilders are unlikely to provide all this investment. The commercial imperatives facing housebuilders mean that the necessary investment will rarely be available for infrastructure before a single house has been built or sold.

Much of the infrastructure is clearly needed before building starts, especially to allay fears about roads clogged with heavy lorries for years while construction is going on. This lack of upfront investment is not because housebuilders are walking away from the challenge – they understand any successful development of sustainable communities will depend on their contribution – but because they have their own commercial viability to consider.

# DELIVERING HOMES

Brownfield sites, in particular, have to be part of this fresh pre-development government funding because housebuilders will naturally opt to develop greenfield sites over the expense to clean up brownfield sites. If this issue is not addressed, there is a danger that the potential of reusing redundant urban sites will never be realised.

There could be a battle to get this funding and to maintain sufficient government focus on housing as a major policy issue. There are fears that it could be slipping down the government agenda. The optimism generated by the government's response to the Thames Estuary 2050 Growth Commission report in March 2019 seems to have quickly evaporated.

This promised a new £1m strategic board, chaired by an independent Thames Estuary Envoy, to support delivery of the vision and champion the Thames Estuary with key stakeholders, including local and central government. Alongside that it said the government would strengthen ministerial advocacy by creating a new Cabinet-level ministerial champion for the Thames Estuary.

Late 2019 the Government announced that Kate Willard, director of partnership development at Stobart Group had been appointed as Thames Estuary Envoy.

## HOUSING DESIGN

Alongside the broad issues of how many homes to build, where to build them and how to make sure they are viable as communities, run complex choices of what sort of homes to build. This brings design and affordability into focus; both potentially contentious issues and sources of friction between developers and local authorities.

Design is a multi-faceted challenge. It is not just about style and appearance, but also about where and how people want to live. Demographic changes are impacting housing design, as are concerns about climate change, and these all have to be factored in as the vision for the Thames Estuary is developed.

The desire to address these issues has to be tempered with an acknowledgement that even if the full development plan is realised, 80% of the housing along the Thames Estuary come 2050 has already been built.

Demographic issues are having a major impact on the thinking about what type of housing is needed. There is the obvious challenge of increasing life expectancy, but how this impacts housing provision is not clear: do people want houses that can be adopted as they grow older or, do they want other types of appropriate accommodation provided in the same area?

The HAPPI principles (Housing our Ageing Population Panel for Innovation) have a role to play. These focus on meeting older peoples' housing needs by offering an attractive alternative to the family home, which can be adapted over time to meet changing needs.

The "boomerang generation" is another emerging challenge with added complications around additional car ownership, as a household with a large number of adults, rather than children, will want more vehicles to ensure their independence. This puts new pressures on the challenge of creating sustainable communities with reduced need for private car ownership.

# DELIVERING HOMES

## PAN-ESTUARY PLANNING

The region is diverse, stretching from the City of London to the seaside, so the vision has to acknowledge this when it comes to creating design guidelines.

A single set of guidelines is unlikely to work and will not resolve the issues that already arise between developers and local authorities. Better structures and guidelines for design reviews are needed because the current process can be demoralising. On the other side of the table, local authorities want earlier engagement, as too often developers come to them late in the day with plans that are already inflexible.

This tension between the private and public sectors also surfaces when it comes to social housing, with many feeling that there is insufficient provision included in the current plans.

This is a sensitive area with housebuilders quick to defend themselves against criticisms of under-provision or inappropriate design such as “poor doors” and separate community facilities.

In general, from the developer’s perspective, the bigger the scheme, the easier it is to have a broad, inclusive community vision that incorporates adequate and appropriate social housing units.

Tackling these issues could be made easier through a streamlined and accessible planning process. It is currently too complex and offers too little opportunity for genuine community involvement. Many find that despite the extended strategic planning process – typically taking up to five years – flash points still come when individual schemes are proposed. These then take more time to resolve and often exacerbate tensions in the process.

Meeting these challenges will not be made easy because of the administrative complexities of the region which covers 18 different administrations.

While models of improved collaboration are emerging, such as in south Essex, more needs to be done. Regeneration schemes in Greater Manchester and Merseyside are perceived to have succeeded because there was greater collaboration and stronger leadership, enabling the vision and values of major regional redevelopment to be communicated effectively and kept at the heart of an effective delivery plan.

In addition, fears of a skills shortage in construction haunt the sector. It is currently felt most acutely in the middle and upper management levels. While the lower construction site skills are still available there are worries that this might not be maintained after Brexit.

It is a significant problem, but there is a potential solution. It entails building in a forward-looking vision and a broader and deeper partnership with the established communities, and bringing the education sector into the strategic planning process to ensure it can help provide the courses and training needed.

It is this multi-faceted approach that Thames Estuary leaders will have to adopt to overcome the complex issues they are facing in regard to housing development in the region.

# TRANSPORT & INFRASTRUCTURE

**T**he Thames Estuary has some big questions to answer on transport, connectivity and how it can best create the infrastructure needed to deliver on its ambitious growth plans. Good transport links are essential when creating new communities, so there is a major role to play for initiatives like the development of London City Airport and Crossrail to Ebbsfleet.

In particular, attention needs to be paid to the role of central government and the creation of effective devolution around infrastructure planning and policy.

## THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

A key issue with regards to the role of central government in delivering major transport projects, is whether or not central bodies are able to make decisions that fully take into account regional factors and complexities. Currently, major infrastructure contracts are awarded through a competitive tender, with final decisions being made centrally.

The question is if more can be done to feed decisions effectively into a better-managed national policy for infrastructure.

A key consideration is the perceived and often real lack of any holistic planning from central government with regard to improving connectivity between individual projects.

Past experience has shown that communication between government departments is sometimes lacking. This has hampered connected thinking and delivery at a regional level and is something the Thames Estuary development leaders need to be aware of.

It is also true that communication between the multiple local government bodies in the Thames Estuary needs to improve further to facilitate genuine progress.

Achieving support for different infrastructure projects has become much harder over the past 30 years. Going forward local authorities need to work together more effectively to overcome future challenges.

## UP-FRONT FUNDING

A key barrier to delivering large-scale infrastructure projects is the extent to which central government does not provide upfront funding, instead relying on the private sector to provide funds.

The result is a faltering national and regional infrastructure system because upgrade and new development plans generally fail the value-for-money test.

The scheduling of infrastructure developments has also proved problematic. As a consequence of projects not taking place concurrently, there are knock-on issues in creating effective connectivity between projects.

A lack of upfront funding often creates delays, exacerbating the issue around missing deadlines. There is a strong argument to create a development fund to get projects out of the starting blocks more reliably.

An example of these issues coming into play can be found in the proposals for the new Thames Clipper boat service. The new service would connect Gravesend to Canary Wharf, and then beyond to the Embankment.

# TRANSPORT & INFRASTRUCTURE

However, getting the service up and running will be expensive, requiring some £25m for three new craft and a public subsidy to support it during its first five years.

Furthermore, there needs to be new rail services to link with the Clipper route at the requisite points along the river if it is to be effective and convenient for local communities.

But without funding from central government – at least in the short-term – getting such a scheme off the ground becomes incredibly difficult.

Despite these criticisms, there has been a notable shift from 2007/8 onward when HM Treasury started to view infrastructure spending not as a cost but as the development of an asset.

Perhaps, central government's reticence to provide upfront funding is as a result of being unnerved by some of the failures of local government in the past. If this is the case, it underscores the need for Thames Estuary leaders to create a very clear vision, backed by detailed research and community engagement that has significant consensus from across the region.

There may be issues to resolve, but there is also real appetite to muster around the stated Thames Estuary growth plans and lobby for effective engagement between central government, local government and key regional bodies to deliver positive change.

## KEY TRANSPORT CORRIDORS

For the region to grow in a sustainable manner, it is imperative to move beyond a road-based infrastructure system and adopt a more holistic approach to transport solutions.

In particular, there is a need to reduce the existing over-reliance on the A13 arterial route and make more use of other transportation methods such as electrified rail and the River Thames.

There is a great opportunity to do something unique around the river but that will require overcoming the additional complexity of delivering such projects, which are not as well-practiced as road-based schemes. The whole estuary needs a bold vision for transport and more non car-based solutions are required to effectively connect the entire gateway region and realise its potential.

Thames Estuary leaders must be ambitious in their thinking and push for much wider and better integrated cycle, rail and water-borne transport networks. That includes integrating them with housing and employment hubs to reduce both the number and length of journeys at every opportunity.

Such integration must include better utilisation of the River Thames with local boroughs already unlocking land along its banks for development. Creating better river links will dramatically improve what these developments offer the region as a whole.

It should also incorporate the position of London City Airport as the region's primary gateway to Europe, which offers businesses and residents access to dozens of destinations on the continent. Decision-makers in the region should endeavour to include the opportunities the airport offers in their transport strategies.



# CASE STUDY

## TILBURY 2

Tilbury2 will become the United Kingdom's largest unaccompanied ferry port and the country's biggest construction processing hub. The new port will be built on brownfield land next to the Port of Tilbury, in Thurrock, on the site of the former Tilbury Power Station on the north bank of the River Thames.

Forth Ports Group's £1 bn investment programme seeks to double the volume of cargo handled at the Essex site from 16 million to 32 million tonnes.

The new terminal claims it will be able to accommodate changes arising out of the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union, and will embrace the latest technologies and streamline the border process. The intention is to be operational by spring 2020.

Forth Ports Group said expansion was essential to cope with rising demand for construction materials and aggregates from Britain's construction sector as well, as for imported and exported cars.

The development will include a roll-on/roll-off terminal, a Construction Materials and Aggregates Terminal (CMAT), and associated infrastructure including rail and road facilities that link to the existing network, including modifications to the existing marine infrastructure.

### According to the Department of Transport, work to facilitate the development includes the:

- Creation of hard-surfaced pavements
- Improvement of, and extensions to, the existing river jetty including the creation of a new berth
- Associated dredging of berth pockets around the proposed and extended jetty and dredging of the approaches to these berth pockets
- New conveyors and material handling machinery
- Erection of security, welfare and ancillary buildings
- Erection of a single 10,200sq m warehouse
- A number of storage and production structures associated with the CMAT
- Construction of a new link road from Ferry Road to Fort Road
- Formation of a rail spur and sidings

Tilbury2 is an infrastructure success story that will soon be operational. It is an example of how the Thames Estuary can build on existing strengths, expand its capabilities and position itself to take advantage of future opportunities.

As regional leaders seek to develop the Thames Estuary, they will need to find ways of delivering many such projects successfully in the years to come.

# EMPLOYMENT & SKILLS

**T**he Thames Estuary 2050 Growth Commission set out an ambitious target of creating 1.3 million jobs in the next three decades. If the Thames Estuary is to hit and exceed that goal it has some significant challenges to overcome.

Logistics and construction industries already have a strong presence in the area, but evolving technology will impact how these sectors operate, the staff numbers they employ and the roles they fulfil.

Potential areas of employment growth include the environmental technology sector and there are already sizeable offshore windfarms operating in the Thames Estuary. This is certainly a sector for which skills can be developed and then deployed locally.

Modern methods of construction is another significant area of interest and a number of developers are locating factories in the Thames Estuary where they can fabricate the panels needed to build modular homes.

The creative and cultural sector is also a strong market on which local leaders should look to build to realise the Thames Estuary Production Corridor's ambitious vision and it has a strong foothold in the region.

## CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The Thames Estuary 2050 Growth Commission highlighted the region's underperformance, citing the fact that between 2009 and 2016 employment in the Thames Estuary grew by 19%, but lagged behind the London average of 21% and the 27% recorded by east London.

It is clear the region must reduce the percentage of adults who have no formal qualifications and reshape the 'low wage' economy that has characterised it in recent times.

The good news is that the Thames Estuary has some significant cornerstones around which it can build for this brighter future.

Creative and cultural industries are growing quickly and account for around 15% of employment in London. These industries provide jobs that rely on creative and cognitive skills that will not be readily replaced by the increasing influence of automation and artificial intelligence in the workplace.

High House Production Park in Purfleet has already established itself as a creative hub, supporting growing businesses and offering numerous training and volunteering programmes.

All the sets and scenery for opera and ballet at the Royal Opera House are created here, and a partnership between South Essex College, the University of the Arts London and the Royal Opera House has established new BA (Hons) degree courses.

The Thames Estuary will see many world-leading organisations open new facilities in the future on the East Bank, including the V&A (in partnership with the Smithsonian Institution), Sadler's Wells, the BBC, University College of London and UAL's London College of Fashion.

Local leaders must make the most of the opportunities created by these new ventures and develop their links with schools, further/higher education providers and employers.

# EMPLOYMENT & SKILLS

They must also help existing employers in the construction and logistics markets to train their staff to adapt to new ways of working as manual tasks are increasingly automated. Some labour-intensive roles may be created in the environmental sector as companies seek to recycle, re-use and repair products for future use. But largely, employees will need to reskill and upskill as the future unfolds.

Instead of bemoaning the fact that jobs will be lost through automation, Thames Estuary leaders must find ways to prepare the workforce for the new ones it will create. Research from global consultancy McKinsey suggests that the drive towards digital will change the skills required to fulfil around 25% of today's jobs.

Leaders must provide workers with access to the learning that will allow them to forge new skills and take their first steps into this new age.

Success will require strong leadership and a strategy that commands real consensus across the region. Such consensus will prevent plans being overturned by every changing administration at a local and central government level. Only by working consistently towards long-term strategic goals will demonstrable success be achieved.

## LOCAL AND CENTRAL GOVERNMENT FRICTIONS

In the past there has been a tendency for local and central government to be almost too collaborative. There is a growing feeling that in the last 12 to 18 months stakeholders have realised this approach can stifle progress.

Today there is a better understanding of where collaboration works – i.e. large infrastructure projects such as the Lower Thames Crossing – and where it is better for local authorities to take the lead and drive action on the ground.

One positive example cited was the way local boroughs had taken it upon themselves to push forward the appointment of the Thames Estuary Envoy to interact with central government.

The challenge is to educate people of all ages about how things are changing and to engage with them effectively, so as to accurately assess what support they need to develop the skills required to then realise the forthcoming opportunities in the evolving labour market.

## EDUCATION THAT DELIVERS THE NECESSARY SKILLS

A huge part of driving community engagement and developing the necessary skills will rely on the ability of Thames Estuary leaders to work with further education (FE) and higher education (HE) organisations.

FE organisations in particular are well-placed to deliver the immediate needs of local employers. However, too often the fight to secure funding from multiple sources eats into their resources and detracts from their ability to develop constructive links with local businesses, understand their needs and create innovative solutions that then deliver.

It is not only links between FE providers and businesses that need to be improved. That chain needs to be extended to include schoolchildren and their families and to explain how the labour market is evolving and what skills will be needed by employers in the future.

Too often, FE providers have launched courses at the behest of local businesses only to find that take-up from school leavers is poor. Thames Estuary leaders must publicise their future vision for the area and by

# EMPLOYMENT & SKILLS

enthusing and informing people about developing opportunities, encourage them into courses that teach the flexible skillsets required.

Creating an effective learning pipeline means improving career advice in schools and developing citizen pathways that take people from their present situation – regardless of age, experience or qualifications – and support them into becoming attractive to potential employers.

It also means understanding that people, especially those from deprived areas, may need additional support in terms of personal, social and financial issues to help them into learning programmes and ultimately the workplace.

Getting this right will be essential if the planned development of the Thames Estuary is to really bring benefits for local people and their communities.

## DEVELOPING THE SKILLS OF AN AGEING WORKFORCE

Creating local benefit and making the most of the Thames Estuary's labour pool, means expanding the focus of skills learning to include older workers.

A commitment to lifelong learning must lie at the heart of the vision to create the flexible skills that employers need.

Older workers are often passed over in the skills and learning debate. But encouraging and supporting them to develop new skills will enable them to progress their careers in a more digital environment and empower them to seek out new opportunities.

There is an ageing group of poorly supported workers that wish to change careers or grow the amount of volunteer work they do in later life. Facilitating this transition effectively will enable a cross-fertilisation of skills between sectors and allow older workers to share experience with younger colleagues when they move into new jobs.

In Essex, for example, there is a critical need for FE tutors and questions were raised as to why more older workers were not being retrained and attracted into these positions, for which they could be ideally suited.

There was also a strong feeling on the ground that skills development within FE and HE organisations should have a closer and more direct link to local business output.

Why, for example, could more student research projects not be directly linked to commercial problems that local companies are struggling to solve? Programmes run by various organisations such as The Edge Foundation and London South Bank University to bring students and SMEs closer together.

But these sorts of initiatives are too informal at present. Skills and mentoring should be incorporated in a more structured way into the overall vision for the Thames Estuary.

People are at the heart of the Thames Estuary and developing their skills effectively is going to be central to future success. That development must take a ground-up approach to ensure individual workers benefit and to enable and encourage employers to recruit from the local labour pool. Only then will the people of the Thames Estuary get the most out of the ambitious plans earmarked for this region.

# CASE STUDY

## THAMES ESTUARY PRODUCTION CORRIDOR

The Mayor of London, the South East LEP, the South East Creative Economy Network and partners in East London, South Essex and the North Kent Coast have a shared vision for the Thames Estuary Production Corridor, a bold programme developing a world-class cluster of creative and cultural production along the Estuary.

Following a year-long programme of activity which has included granular research into baseline conditions across the Estuary and consultation with over 200 local and external partners and stakeholders, the TEPC partners have launched a Vision to Action report.

The report provides a summary of the strategy to unlock and maximise the potential of the Thames Estuary Production Corridor. With the potential to create over 50,000 jobs (the UK's densest concentration of production activity) and to generate £3.7bn GVA for the local areas, the Thames Estuary Production Corridor will enhance UK productivity and local prosperity and has received endorsement and funding support from government.

The Thames Estuary Production Corridor was highlighted as a key objective of the Thames Estuary Growth Commission in its June 2018 report to government. In January 2019 it was awarded £4.3m from DCMS's Cultural Development Fund to unlock long term, transformational, culture-led growth across North Kent and South Essex and establish the region as a creative hub connected to London, the UK, Europe and global markets. In March 2019, MHCLG announced a £350,000 grant to support masterplanning and feasibility for key Estuary sites.

# SYNTHESIS

**C**larity of vision, clear leadership and deeper collaboration will be absolutely imperative if the roadblocks to regenerating the Thames Estuary are to be swept away. That was the consistent, unifying message that emerged from the in-depth discussions on housing, employment and transport, all of which also brought in key concerns around education and infrastructure.

At the heart of that vision must be a clear message about the potential benefits of inclusive growth, which can only be realised through consistent engagement with established communities.

Winning their buy-in will mean overcoming fears about being overwhelmed by development; fears that have been stoked by the glib use of huge round numbers such as one million new homes.

It is not just the numbers that worry people, there is also a nervousness about gentrification and creating isolated new communities within existing communities.

These fears will remain a substantial roadblock unless local leaders can develop a context for developments that focuses on people, the type of homes they will need in the future and the wider benefits that will flow through to the region's established communities.

## BETTER COLLABORATION TO DRIVE EFFECTIVE DEVELOPMENT

It is necessary to build collaboration from the ground up and to avoid having it imposed by central government. Public and private sectors need to work in partnership, understand the different roles they play, but be united in understanding that as London moves eastwards, taking control of the development that entails will require much deeper collaboration.

Local authorities have to understand that the private sector needs to make a profit – the private sector must understand that local authorities are there to get the best deal for the people they represent.

That partnership will have to be robust and flexible enough to withstand the strains of several economic cycles, not to mention political upheavals. There is a growing optimism on both sides that the determination to make this partnership work is now widely shared. A higher degree of stability at central government level would also be helpful in making it a more useful and reliable partner.

Historically, there has been a lack of trust of local authorities from government departments, which has hindered progress. This may be changing as the huge switch of central government resources and political attention to preparing for Brexit has meant that local authorities have had to get on with many major projects themselves. They have built new partnerships across old boundaries as they have done so.

A new local authority initiative on the north side of the Estuary is already a living example of what can be done, with a six-strong executive led by an independent chair. This has seen politics put to one side and replaced by a new focus on delivering what people need.

Areas for further improvement include the local authority planning process for handling large scale developments and its current effectiveness was called into question. A process that gives local people just a few minutes in front of a planning committee is not an effective way of involving them and putting them at ease.

# SYNTHESIS

The national infrastructure planning process, seen in action in the Estuary at Tilbury, could be a more suitable vehicle for making decisions about large schemes. It normally involves a rolling six-month consultation with more engagement and interaction between local communities and all the other stakeholders.

Identifying and then implementing appropriate means of partnership and collaboration will be central to the successful delivery of future development proposals.

## TRANSPORT: THE RIVER THAMES AS AN ASSET

Boundaries are a challenge and potentially a barrier too. There are 18 authorities within the Thames Estuary and numerous regional and sub-regional agencies, especially for transport, layered over the top.

Many of these need to be integrated or re-focussed so that they can work with others in the region and address the key issues more effectively. Could the transport bodies be given a wider brief to cover infrastructure too?

All governmental and private sector bodies also need to stop using the River Thames as a boundary. This inhibits the river being fully integrated into the development plans and also ignores the shared problems and opportunities on both sides of the Estuary.

Kent and Essex have so much in common in terms of the housing, employment, educational and transport needs of their established communities – using the river as a boundary prevents these needs being properly addressed.

Never again should it appear as a grey line on a map dividing the region; it should be seen as its vibrant heart. This will mean building developments that embrace the river, rather than turn their back on it as many previous developments have done. It is a fantastic asset, but just not used to anywhere near its full potential.

There was little support for creating a Thames Estuary Development Corporation. The region was seen as too large, too complex with too many different interests for that model to be effective. There could, however, be a role for more localised Development Corporations such as that working in Ebbsfleet.

Collaboration will be essential in order to develop a holistic plan for transport that represents a sustainable, long-term, economic spatial vision for the region. Integration will be the key to making that a success, but opportunities are being missed with the failure to see Crossrail as part of an integrated regional transport plan identified as a prime example.

Also on the government agenda has to be an urgent shake-up of the Housing Infrastructure Fund. This was roundly condemned as not being fit for purpose with an overly complex bidding process and the need to compete for funds on a year-by-year basis simply not working for the sort of schemes that should be benefitting from it.

The lack of confidence that infrastructure issues will be properly addressed as developments get underway is one of the major barriers to making a success of the Thames Estuary project, and so getting this right is essential.

# SYNTHESIS

## PROMOTING A COMMUNITY-CENTRIC VISION FOR SKILLS

The most crucial challenge will be creating a vision that people can believe in. They must see themselves at the centre of that vision and feel they are respected. With the impact of demographic changes, especially the ageing population, already pressing hard, the strategic vision must deliver for the local population. This affects education, skills and employment as much as the built environment.

Too often there is a mismatch between the skills supplied and the skills required. With new challenges looming as the fourth industrial revolution gathers pace and artificial intelligence becomes prevalent in the workplace, the need to search for solutions that offer a high degree of futureproofing has become apparent.

This has brought fields such as the creative industries, environmental technology and the hospitality and tourism sectors to the fore. Many of these are already important to the London economy. The needs of the construction sector for a steady flow of well-trained workers over the next thirty years must also feature in ongoing and future skills provision.

This will mean overcoming the current tension between higher education and further education and ensuring agility and relevance to the needs of local businesses become key features of educational and training provision across the region. Too often the two sectors find themselves chasing the same funding, resulting in a waste of resources.

There is also a need to share the vision with potential future students and their parents. They need to believe in the future skills that will be required, and which will be at the heart of the growth envisaged for the region.

Too often, they do not understand the new industries, which is why projects such as High House Production Park are so important. It is proactively and effectively demonstrating how the creative industries can become the core of long-term growth in a community.

The education sector must also be sensitive to the need to offer continual learning programmes as extended working lives mean people will have multiple jobs during longer careers. The obsession of focussing learning on young people is no longer relevant and major changes such as the potential four-day week, the University of the Third Age, and the growth of volunteering are not being sufficiently factored into long-term thinking.

With imagination these trends can be harnessed to solve multiple problems. For instance, the further education sector has a shortage of tutors, so creating opportunities for older people to contribute their knowledge back to the next generation is one such solution.

Responding to these trends will require innovative and collaborative thinking: it also requires a vivid vision of inter-generational living in communities that are designed around people with all the support structures, facilities and useable community spaces they need.

Only this sort of thinking will deliver the vision that so many in the Thames Estuary want to make a reality.



# APPENDIX

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### R1

Estuary Leadership should be more mindful of how local communities perceive the impact of large-scale development projects, and adjust communication to be more inclusive and address local concerns.

### R2

Government should adopt an “infrastructure first” policy where funds are provided upfront to deliver infrastructure improvements before housebuilding begins.

### R3

There should be more effort to base the design of new homes and communities on actual need driven by demographic changes.

### R4

Estuary Leadership and employers should engage more with education providers to ensure schools and colleges are offering courses and training that match opportunities offered by growth sectors and address skill requirements of the employment market.

### R5

When thinking about transport improvements, Estuary Leadership should consider a more holistic approach that includes cycle, rail and water-borne solutions, as well as giving greater thought to housing and employment hubs that are connected to each other and the wider region.

### R6

Estuary Leadership should better support employers to train their staff to adapt to new skill requirements that come with increased automation and sector changes.

### R7

The Thames Estuary Envoy should be given the resources to engage with local communities in the region and to promote the vision of the Estuary.

Report published by



Sponsored by



Content provided by

