

---

# APPG Thames Estuary: Fair Economic Growth

Annual General Meeting & Discussion

Meeting Summary | Tuesday, 17 March 2026 | 17:30–19:30 | Committee Room 21, House of Commons

---

## Attendees

### Parliamentarians

Jim Dickson MP (Chair); James Asser MP; Daniel Francis MP; Steve Yemm MP;  
Jim Shannon MP; Polly Billington MP; Paula Barker MP;  
Baroness O’Neill of Bexley OBE (Vice-Chair).

### Local Government Leaders

Cllr Noel Ovenden (Leader, Ashford Borough Council);  
Cllr Vince Maple (Leader, Medway Council).

### Officers, Advisers & Representatives

Tom Walker (Greater Essex Combined Authority);  
David Godfrey (Kent County Council);  
Ashley Baldwin (Thurrock Council);  
Sian Foster and Poppy Windsor (Port of London Authority);  
Peter Griffiths (University of Greenwich);  
Jessica Power (Skanska);  
Dr Helen Gray and Charlie Allen (DPW);  
Tudor Price (Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce);  
Sarah Nurden (KMEP / KCC);  
Ian McNab (Essex Chamber of Commerce);  
Steve Elison (Lewisham Council);  
Vince Lucas (KMEP);  
Mollie McGolwing and Kevin Howlett (Lower Thames Crossing);  
Joel Herga (St Pancras Highspeed).

### Offices of MPs

Nicholas Beall (Office of Jim Dickson MP).

### Secretariat

Jonathan Shaw and Mark Hill (APPG Secretariat).

---

## Annual General Meeting

The AGM was chaired by Paula Barker MP.

- Jim Dickson MP was re-elected as Chair of the APPG.
- Baroness O’Neill of Bexley OBE was confirmed as Vice-Chair.
- Lauren Sullivan MP and James Asser MP were elected as Officers.
- The APPG’s due diligence return, income and expenditure report, and summary of activities were approved.

---

## Opening Remarks – Jim Dickson MP

Jim Dickson MP opened the main meeting and:

- Thanked APPG sponsors: Thames Freeport, Port of London Authority and St Pancras Highspeed, and welcomed the University of Greenwich as a new sponsor from April.
- Noted the closure of the Thames Estuary Growth Board and the resulting gap in strategic representation for the Estuary.
- Highlighted the Estuary’s significant economic potential, including major infrastructure and housing projects such as the Lower Thames Crossing.
- Emphasised the importance of cross-regional collaboration across London, Kent and Essex.
- Reaffirmed the APPG’s role as a constructive voice in shaping the Estuary’s future.
- Noted the intention to invite a Minister to a future meeting.
- Highlighted the need for a formal mechanism to represent and coordinate Thames Estuary interests.

---

## Discussion – The Future Growth of the Thames Estuary

### Tom Walker, Greater Essex Combined Authority

Tom Walker outlined key themes relating to devolution and regional growth:

- The importance of leadership, resources and collaboration in delivering effective regional partnerships.
- Progress on devolution in Essex, alongside slower progress in Kent.
- The role of devolved authorities in integrating skills, transport, housing and innovation.
- The emergence of spatial development strategies (“spatial investment plans”) across wider geographies.
- The establishment of the Greater Essex Business Board to inform future mayoral priorities.

- The potential role of Development Corporations in driving long-term growth.

## **Rt Hon Lord Heseltine**

Lord Heseltine reflected on national and regional economic development:

- The Thames Estuary represents one of the UK's greatest economic opportunities.
- Devolution remains challenging but essential to unlocking regional growth.
- Strong mayoral leadership is critical to driving investment and delivery.
- Development Corporations could provide a model for long-term, large-scale regeneration.
- Greater fiscal flexibility and investment mechanisms are needed to support growth.

---

## **Discussion – Governance, Investment and Delivery**

Members and stakeholders discussed key strategic issues:

- The potential for Development Corporations to provide long-term stability and delivery capacity.
- The need to ensure growth benefits local communities, including addressing inequalities and “hidden” deprivation.
- Challenges in securing sustained public and private investment, and the importance of long-term funding certainty.
- The role of devolved authorities in enabling local decision-making and resource allocation.
- The importance of aligning pan-regional priorities while recognising local identities and needs.
- The need for stronger data, alongside practical, place-based insight, to inform decision-making.
- The importance of collaboration between Mayors, local authority leaders and central government.

---

## **Next Steps**

The APPG agreed the following priorities:

- Continue HS1 Sub-Committee work on connectivity and economic growth.
  - Seek a future meeting with the relevant Minister.
  - Monitor and engage with emerging governance and devolution arrangements across the Thames Estuary.
-

## Upcoming Event

### Parliamentary Thames River Visit

14 May | 11:00–13:00 | Westminster Pier

Hosted by the Port of London Authority.

---

## Any Other Business

- Updates on UK Research and Innovation funding and Crossrail to Ebbsfleet were deferred to a future meeting.
- 

**Meeting closed at approximately 19:00, followed by informal networking.**