



APPG Thames Estuary – Meeting Summary (10 December 2025)

APPG Thames Estuary Fair Growth – Meeting Summary (10 December 2025)

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Unlocking the River Thames – Transport, Skills and Economic Opportunities

Meeting Summary | Wednesday, 10 December 2025 | Houses of Parliament

Attendees

Parliamentarians

- Jim Dickson MP – Dartford (Chair)
- Bayo Alaba MP – Southend East & Rochford
- Jen Craft MP – Thurrock
- Lauren Edwards MP – Rochester & Strood
- Daniel Francis MP – Bexleyheath & Crayford
- Kevin McKenna MP – Sittingbourne & Sheppey
- Tris Osborne MP – Chatham & Aylesford
- Lauren Sullivan MP – Gravesend
- Baroness Teresa O'Neill of Bexley OBE (Vice Chair)

Stakeholders and Local Government

- Stuart Rimmer MBE – Chief Executive, Thames Freeport
- David Godfrey – Executive Director, Thames Estuary Growth Board & Kent County Council
- Linden Kemkaran – Leader, Kent County Council
- Paul King – Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Coastal Regeneration, Kent County Council
- Ashley Baldwin – Thurrock Council
- Lee Watson – Deputy Leader, Thurrock Council
- Councillor David Leaf – Leader, London Borough of Bexley
- Sian Foster – Director of Corporate Affairs, Port of London Authority
- Poppy Windsor – Port of London Authority

Parliamentary Staff

- Nicholas Beall – Parliamentary Researcher to Jim Dickson MP
- Molly Hartill – Parliamentary Researcher to Jim Dickson MP

APPG Secretariat

- Jonathan Shaw
- Mark Hill

Governance Update – Vice Chair Election

Chair: Paula Barker MP (acting on behalf of the Speaker's Panel)

- The meeting opened with an Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) to elect a new Vice Chair.
- Parliamentary orders were read, compliance with APPG rules was confirmed, and the meeting was noted as quorate.
- **Baroness Teresa O'Neill of Bexley OBE** was duly elected as Vice Chair, replacing **Julia Lopez MP**.

High Speed 1 – Update from the HS1 Sub-Committee

Update provided on behalf of: Sojan Joseph MP

Chair: Jim Dickson MP

- Members received a brief update on progress since the most recent HS1 Sub-Committee meeting held on **12 November 2025**.
- The **Office of Rail and Road (ORR)** has confirmed that the international depot at **Temple Mills** will operate as a shared facility for international services.
- **Virgin Trains** has been announced as a new international operator and has indicated its intention to stop at **Ashford and Ebbsfleet**, should the stations reopen.
- A **Department for Transport working group** has been established to address the remaining barriers to reinstating international services.
- Members welcomed continued momentum while highlighting the importance of improved onward connectivity, including links to the **Elizabeth Line**.

Unlocking the Economic Potential of the River Thames

Speakers: Sian Foster and Poppy Windsor

Organisation: Port of London Authority (PLA)

- The Port of London Authority set out the River Thames as one of the UK's most strategically important yet underutilised economic assets, with a central role in freight, construction, passenger transport and clean growth.
- As a **Trust Port**, the PLA reinvests all surpluses for the benefit of river users, communities and the wider economy.
- The PLA manages **150km of tidal river**, supports around **48,000 full-time equivalent jobs**, and handled **51.9 million tonnes of goods in 2024**.
- Ambitions were outlined to grow river freight from **55 million tonnes to 78 million tonnes by 2050**, supporting a significant modal shift from road to river.

- Innovation and decarbonisation are central to this growth, including the adoption of **hydrogen and other low-carbon fuels**, alongside a commitment to achieve **net zero by 2040**.
- The **Tidal Thames Master Plan** was highlighted as the strategic framework for balancing economic growth with safety, environmental protection and community engagement.
- MPs discussed opportunities to expand the use of the river for construction materials and freight, including **electric and hydrogen-powered barges**, and the need to unlock greater use of wharves across the Estuary.

Thames Freeport – Driving Investment, Jobs and Skills

Speaker: Stuart Rimmer MBE

Role: Chief Executive, Thames Freeport

- Thames Freeport was presented as a major **public–private partnership** spanning **Thurrock, Barking & Dagenham and Havering**, anchored around the **Port of Tilbury, London Gateway and Ford's Dagenham plant**.
- Its core purpose is to connect local communities to sustainable growth by attracting inward investment, boosting productivity and creating **high-quality local jobs**.
- To date, the Freeport has supported the creation of **around 1,400 jobs**, secured **£2.2 billion of private investment**, and delivered significant skills outcomes including **over 130 apprenticeships**.
- Education and workforce programmes have supported **more than 1,000 pupils and 500 adults**, unlocking **£2 million in levy funding** and strengthening local talent pipelines.
- Strategic priorities include **advanced manufacturing, sustainable construction, port logistics**, and the development of **AI-enabled industrial ecosystems** through to 2035.
- Infrastructure investment already underway includes **electric HGV charging, 5G rollout, a connectivity lab, and housing retrofit pilots**.
- Members discussed the importance of **long-term policy certainty, strong transport connectivity**, and reducing barriers to trade in sustaining investor confidence.

Future Priorities for the Thames Estuary • An update from the **Thames Estuary Growth Board** was deferred, with announcements expected shortly.

- Members proposed future APPG sessions focus on **housing delivery, transport connectivity, rural and coastal economies, tourism, ferry services**, and the **creative industries**.

Looking Ahead Chair **Jim Dickson MP** thanked speakers and attendees for their contributions and invited Parliamentarians to bring forward proposals for future agendas.

Next APPG Meeting



Date to be confirmed (New Year 2026)

- Continued focus on housing, transport, skills and economic growth across the Thames Estuary.