

Roundtable on Planning, Partnerships, and Economic Growth with Kate Willard OBE, Chair of the Thames Estuary Growth Board

Tuesday 5th December 2023

Introduction

The APPG held a roundtable meeting with the Chair of the Thames Estuary Growth Board and Thames Estuary Envoy, Kate Willard OBE. The Thames Estuary is the most significant UK government-backed growth opportunity with the potential to build 1 million homes and create 1.3 million jobs. The meeting aimed to discuss the merits of public and private sector partnerships in stimulating economic growth, as well as Kate's work in going above and beyond to deliver fair and green investment to the Thames Estuary.



Key takeaways

- The discussion shed light on challenges in bridging investment viability gaps and attracting foreign investment to large scale development projects. Kate Willard OBE stressed the importance of selling a credible, fair, and green vision to investors, ensuring that the region remains attractive despite the challenges presented to investor confidence by the cancellation of major projects such as HS2.
- The meeting emphasised the importance of increasing efforts to raise skill levels within the planning sector and collaborating with government agencies to support planning processes. Participants recognised that industry wide underfunding of public sector planners is one of a multitude of problems faced by the industry at grassroots level.
- A focal issue presented by Kate Willard OBE was the importance of data-driven decision-making. Kate credited the success of the Thames Estuary to the Growth Board's ability to develop a detailed understanding of the core reason behind slow economic growth and left behind neighbourhoods within the region - a lack of job creation that effectively targets the skill set of the area.
- Further to using data analysis to ascertain the needs of the Thames Estuary, Kate credited the success of the region to her willingness to meet with residents directly to gain an understanding of the challenges and issues that face them on a day to day basis. With this knowledge, Kate was able to create a bespoke growth plan that effectively targets the needs of the Estuary.

Issues raised

- Participants noted that when aiming to establish successful development projects, the strength of the political backing within the area, and nationally, is the most essential factor in the success of the project, concerns were voiced that the success of the Thames Estuary could not be replicated in areas with weaker political backing.
- Discussions touched on the Estuary's ability to harness foreign investment, participants expressed fears that sourcing foreign investment is a highly competitive activity, and that the Government's cancellation of the HS2 project is a signal to foreign investors that the Government is not willing to support the growth of the UK in line with investor efforts.
- Participants expressed unity with the Thames Estuary Growth Board in endeavouring to forge places with the people who live there. The APPG expressed its intent to find links between placemaking and problems people face in their day to day lives, particularly in efforts to provide public services such as hospitals and schools.

We would like to thank the members of our Advisory Board for their contributions and continuing support.

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**Ben Everitt MP is the Chair of the
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To get involved, please contact
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