

## Thames Gateway Kent Regeneration: Business and Community Perspectives 2015

***“Delayed and different but more exciting and better aligned to the Kent economy”***

### Executive Summary

*“Has regeneration made the Thames Gateway more active and successful over the past 10 years? In my view the answer is undoubtedly ‘Yes’ albeit delayed and different to what was originally planned. What is planned now is more exciting and better aligned with the wider Kent economy.*

*Our local authorities have been proactive and collegiate in this process. Smaller businesses (especially those in the technology, creative and service sectors) are growing. Inward investment continues to flow. Centres of academic excellence have expanded and flourished. The look and feel, and the economic and social vibrancy of large parts of North Kent have improved immensely.*

*Exciting major project announcements will further enhance the economic and social fabric of the region and act as a magnet for further inward investment. I am excited about the future”.*

***Kamal Aggarwal, Partner and Founder/Head of Thomson Snell & Passmore’s Thames Gateway office, who lives with his family in the area.***

Thames Gateway is Europe’s largest regeneration project. It promised significant investment and development and the creation of numerous jobs, homes and businesses in each of its regions: East London, South Essex and North Kent.

### Research in 2005 and 2009

In 2005, Thomson Snell & Passmore solicitors opened a new office in Thames Gateway Kent. The firm undertook research with 50 Thames Gateway Kent businesses to determine their views about the regeneration project and to explore the challenges facing local businesses. The research was published and then repeated in 2009.

The firm worked closely with public agencies, local financial and professional organisations and large and small businesses in the area to support the regeneration project and to address the issues faced by local businesses.

Despite the recession, the Thames Gateway office has flourished and is proud to now be a £2 million business with almost 25 staff.

### Highlights of 2015 Research

To celebrate the office’s tenth anniversary Thomson Snell & Passmore has undertaken a further research project to critically assess the regeneration project and to consider the future for Thames Gateway. The firm wanted to draw together information from a variety of sources to provide a central reference resource.

This report examines 10 key areas of importance for Thames Gateway. It analyses statistics and information from a variety of sources showing what progress has been made and what successes delivered. The firm obtained the expert views of its own legal and industry specialists as well as those from the wider business community to provide an insightful commentary to the past, present and future changes. It also looks into an educated crystal ball to see what might happen in the future and to set an agenda for change.

The highlights are as follows:

**Regeneration** – Significantly more new homes, new jobs, commercial development and open spaces are planned now than were originally promised. Rather than trying to create another Canary Wharf-like office environment, the planned projects build on Kent's traditional businesses in leisure and tourism as well as growing new technology-based industries.

**Infrastructure** – The UK's biggest port at London Gateway and Ebbsfleet International High Speed 1 train services have been delivered. There are further plans to accommodate recently-announced new major projects at London Paramount Entertainment Resort in Swanscombe and Ebbsfleet Garden City, including an extension of the Fastrack bus service. If one or both of these projects gain traction, there will be enormous pressure to proceed with the next river crossing and Crossrail extension to Swanscombe.

**Construction** – Over 12,000 new homes have been completed. Current plans indicate a further 40,000 homes and over a million square metres of commercial property space. Private investment was encouraged by the announcement by the European Union in 2014 of the Medway-Arc Assisted Area and by the UK Government in the same year of the Ebbsfleet Garden City.

**Property** - Over 52,000 new homes (and 58,000 new jobs) are to be delivered over a 20 year period. The demand for more commercial property is driving a number of developments. Major developers currently involved in schemes include: Edinburgh House, Essential Land, Land Securities, Peel Holdings, Countryside and Crest Nicholson.

**Business** – Thames Gateway Kent's 17,000 businesses are now dominated by two sectors: construction and professional, scientific and technical. But when combined, the accommodation/food and arts/entertainment sectors take third place and will be boosted by the arrival of London Paramount Entertainment Resort.

**Finance** – 50 Thames Gateway businesses benefitted from Government backed TIGER loans between 2013 and 2014. A host of other public sector zero-interest schemes have since launched. Some banks also provided dedicated teams and resources for the area.

**Regulation** – There has been over 350 major Acts passed by the Government in the last decade and a myriad of other regulations affecting all businesses, as well as those in specific sectors which are important to the region such as construction, agriculture and retail/leisure.

**International** – Invest Thames Gateway secured 3,500 jobs through Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) between 2008 and 2011. 17% of jobs created or protected in the area have been from overseas companies.

**People, skills and employment** – The population of the area is projected to grow by 22% by 2035 - higher than the national average of 20%. The unemployment rate for Kent Thames Gateway is lower than the UK national average. Dominant professions include those employed in professional occupations and slight increases in skilled traders and caring, leisure and other service occupations.

**Culture** – Whilst preserving the agricultural and maritime legacy of the past, new developments will ensure that tourism and hospitality support Kent as "The Garden of England", perhaps repositioning it internationally to become "The playground Garden of England".

## The journey ahead

We asked 10 of our own experts – people who work with local businesses every day and live in the area - to give their views on the future challenges. We also asked local business people and important influencers in the local community to share their perspectives.

Suffice to say that the over-riding view of the regeneration project is positive. Yet everyone we spoke to feels that there is still much to do.

The report concludes with our 10 point plan for what needs to be done. Our recommendations cover:

1. Upgrade the infrastructure
2. Promote the area
3. Focus construction and development effort
4. Support businesses
5. Enhance our town centres
6. Develop the local workforce
7. Engage with people
8. Reduce regulation and red tape
9. Support business communities
10. Promote the rich cultural heritage and vibrant communities

Thomson Snell & Passmore would like to thank everyone for their support over the past 10 years. We have enjoyed working with you and recognise your huge contribution to our success. We look forward to a bright future where we can continue the debate about the future of Thames Gateway Kent.

## 10 Perspectives from 10 of our people

But what do our people who live and work in the Thames Gateway think?

At Thomson Snell & Passmore we are fortunate to have working with us a myriad of experts who are leaders in their field and young professional and support staff who are passionate about the region.

Here are their views on regeneration progress so far and the future challenges in the 10 key areas:

### 1. Regeneration - Kamal Aggarwal, Partner & Head of Thames Gateway Office

“Has regeneration made the Thames Gateway more active and successful over the past 10 years? In my view the answer is undoubtedly ‘Yes’ albeit delayed and different to what was originally planned. What is planned now is more exciting and better aligned with the wider Kent economy.

Our local authorities have been proactive and collegiate in this process. Smaller businesses (especially those in the technology, creative and service sectors) are growing. Inward investment continues to flow. Centres of academic excellence have expanded and flourished. The look and feel and the economic and social vibrancy of large parts of North Kent have improved immensely.

Exciting major project announcements will further enhance the economic and social fabric of the region and act as a magnet for further inward investment”.

#### *My thoughts for the future of regeneration*

“I see two big challenges over the next 10 years:

1. Pursue the remaining infrastructure issues – particularly another river crossing at Gravesend/Tilbury as an extension of the M2 (and not alongside the existing Dartford bridge);
2. Engage with and prepare our young people so that they are ready to benefit from the considerable opportunities that will come.

As someone who lives and works in the region, I'm excited by the future and proud of our achievements so far”.

### 2. Infrastructure & Transport - Chris Kirby-Turner, Associate, Construction & Engineering

“The long standing ‘infrastructure first’ philosophy adopted in the Thames Gateway regeneration has meant that many of the major infrastructure improvements have been in place for a large part of the last 10 years. Perhaps the most high profile example is the new High Speed 1 rail link through Ebbsfleet International, which opened to domestic passengers in December 2009.

Passenger numbers have grown steadily, with 33% more journeys made from Ebbsfleet in 2014 than 2013, and 50% of journeys from Gravesend now made on the HS1 service. More local schemes, such as the Fastrack bus service connecting the Dartford and Gravesend area, have been integrated within major residential developments such as The Bridge and Ingress Park, with additional capacity as future developments come on stream.

Major work was undertaken to widen the A2, although even with current traffic levels the Bluewater and Ebbsfleet junctions still require upgrading (and this could be severely exacerbated by the London Paramount Entertainment Resort proposal”.

### *Thoughts for the future of infrastructure*

“The most high profile transport issue to address and the most widely perceived infrastructure problem in the area will be the Second Thames Crossing.

Ensuring that infrastructure improvements continue to be implemented adequately and timeously is critical to ensuring the successful delivery of further regeneration, particularly if major projects such as London Paramount Entertainment Resort proceed within currently envisaged timescales”.

### **3. Construction - Chris Whittington, Consultant, Construction & Engineering**

“10 years ago, one of the major construction projects planned for the region was a large commercial hub centred around Ebbsfleet International – a ‘Canary Wharf lite’ as it were. The recession meant that that was effectively put on ice. Eastern Quarry, long plagued by the intransigence of the Highways Authority, was finally ready to start just before the onset of the recession, which brought a halt to that one too (now re-started).

However, many other significant construction projects were being built along the Kent Thames Gateway and continued through those dark days (although perhaps at a slower pace than initially anticipated): The Bridge mixed use development by the Dartford Crossing, Ingress Park, Chatham Maritime and Rochester Riverside to name but a few, along with significant infrastructure projects including the removal of the toll barriers at the Crossing”.

### *Thoughts for future of construction*

“Construction in the area is now looking healthy with numerous significant developments in the offing: among these are of course London Paramount Entertainment Resort on the Swanscombe Peninsula, Ebbsfleet Garden City and Medway-Swale Arc.

I am optimistic that the next 10 years will provide rich pickings and a great deal of employment in the construction sector. I also hope that the slowdown has given developers and local authorities time to reflect on the quality, environmental sustainability and aesthetics of new developments”.

### **4. Property - Alex Lewsley, Senior Associate, Commercial Property**

“Like all regions during the course of the last 10 years, the Thames Gateway property market was hit by the recession and this undeniably impacted on the pace of investment and development. Speculative schemes stopped, those private developments that did go ahead were smaller in scale, and deals generally were slower to put together and get over the line.

However, a 70-odd year regeneration project will inevitably contain such difficult periods. We are now seeing signs of the recovery, with housebuilding leading the way with the public sector doing what it can to keep good developments viable.

However, as ever, many businesses looking to acquire commercial property are reporting that an undersupply of the right type of stock at the right price in areas where it is wanted remains”.

### *Thoughts for the future of property*

“The building of what is being branded as Ebbsfleet Garden City is, to me, a given. It may not be completed before 2020, but I have no doubt that housebuilding is back in the Thames Gateway albeit with the supply/demand dynamic being more controlled by landowners and developers to protect sale prices. The role and impact of the Ebbsfleet Development Corporation in this will be interesting.

Commercial property investment and development will continue to grow as demand and the local population grows. I see two big 'possibles' coming during the next 10 years:

(1) London Paramount Entertainment Resort. This would be a significant catalyst in accelerating the wider Thames Gateway regeneration. The economic ripple effect would be reflected in changing the face of property investment and development in the Thames Gateway from predominantly housing and business to a more rounded housing, business and leisure. There is a huge amount of goodwill and excitement towards the proposals, tempered with proper concerns revolving around impact on local infrastructure

(2) I hope there is a green light by the end of the next decade for another Thames Crossing”.

## **5. Business - Faye Cook, Solicitor, Corporate & Commercial**

“The shape of business in the Thames Gateway has changed over the last decade in large part due to the commitment to economic growth and regeneration. Interestingly, figures available from the Office of National Statistics show that broadly, the area mirrors the national and sub-regional picture in having the greatest number of enterprises in the construction, professional, scientific and technical service sectors.

Other areas of relative strength, in terms of concentration of enterprises compared to the national and sub-regional averages, are manufacturing, accommodation and food services, transport and storage and health.

In addition, other important sectors in the region are retail, business administration and support and arts and entertainment. There are a number of high quality business parks and innovation centres where cutting-edge, innovative companies have found flexible space with the support needed to start up, grow and develop. This supports the figures that show relatively high numbers of enterprises in the scientific and technical service sectors”.

*(As this quote currently reflects what is in the available statistics could it be adapted to reflect what we have learned from working with local businesses? Perhaps linking to the original research? Or with survey results from the TSP+ group?)*

*Subsequent info from TSP:*

*5.1 What makes the business community in TG vibrant?*

*5.1.1 This is likely to be more opinion based comment rather than statistics, as requested by Kim. Many groups and government backed initiatives campaign for investment in TG and this helps the business community to thrive as it gives businesses a sense that they are part of a successful regeneration project with a promising future.*

*5.2 What is the make up of it – start ups vs. established businesses.*

*5.3 There are very few statistics on start up rates in TG, most relate to the South East which is too large an area to be representative.*

### ***Thoughts for the future of business***

“As someone who grew up and lives in the area, I believe that North Kent is a great place to live and do business. With fantastic connectivity to London and Europe and increasing awareness of the area’s importance and potential, with London Paramount Entertainment Resort and Ebbsfleet Garden City, the opportunities for businesses in the area over the next 10 years have never been better. It is a question of ensuring that that potential is unlocked in order to achieve long term sustainable economic growth”.

## **6. Finance - Joanne Gallagher, Partner, Corporate & Commercial**

“10 years ago the financial sector looked remarkably different to how it is today. Bank finance was in plentiful supply and lending criteria were considerably more relaxed. In the wake of the financial

crisis, banks scaled back lending under a new regime of tighter regulation and higher risk aversion. Following the years of volatility and uncertainty, the financial markets appear to be stabilising.

What's now clear is that a structural shift has taken place in the last 10 years in the way that businesses access finance. No longer able to rely exclusively on traditional banks, companies are now enjoying the positive benefits of greater diversification, both in terms of flexibility and cost. New challenger banks have emerged in the market, boosting competition and offering a different perspective in terms of the traditional banking model.

In addition, crowdfunding's rise (*any information about this specific to Thames Gateway?*) to prominence in recent years has been an interesting development and become a further way for companies to raise finance from a wide body of investors on the back of the advance of the internet and social media".

### *Thoughts for the future of finance*

"I believe that the resulting funding mix in the local market will continue to evolve, providing businesses with greater choice. This change will continue to be driven by a host of external factors, from governments and the consequences of regulatory change, to the availability of money".

## **7. Regulation - Krishen Patel, Associate, Corporate & Commercial**

"One of the most talked about issues facing the business landscape in the Thames Gateway and elsewhere was and is regulation. Most people agree that, as a matter of principle, businesses of all sizes need regulation to operate within the framework of the law.

What are the common complaints?

- (1) There is general frustration about the level of regulation and the overall impact / burden on small businesses
- (2) Frequent changes to employment law and health and safety regulations mean that businesses find it hard to keep up and so run the risk of falling foul (albeit inadvertently) of the law
- (3) The level of management time required to interpret, understand and comply with regulations is huge.

This may sound very negative but it is not all doom and gloom. Industry bodies such as the Confederation of British Industry actively lobby the government, and the general message is that legislators need to think small first. After all, small businesses account for over 90% of the UK economy".

### *Thoughts on the future of regulation*

"My view is that the government needs to:

- (1) engage proactively with SMEs to identify what guidance they need in order to comply with the law and
- (2) to the extent possible, centralise that information in a way that is comprehensible.

There is also uncertainty about the impact of further devolution in Scotland and potentially Wales. (*And possible withdrawal from the EU?*)

Above all, policy makers need to remember that business owners want to operate under a common set of rules and preserve a single market, both domestically within the UK and across the European Union".

## **8. International - James Cradick, Senior Associate, Dispute Resolution**

“Foreign investment is a key source of economic growth and the Thames Gateway region has an enviable track record of attracting and retaining businesses and investors from abroad over the last 10 years, despite the global economic downturn.

The area remains one of the UK’s priority areas for growth and has the continued and committed support of the government as well as a large number of private investors. Close proximity to London, easy access to the rest of the UK market and unrivalled links direct to the heart of Europe continue to be attractive to overseas businesses seeking to establish a cost effective UK base outside of central London”.

### *Thoughts for the future of international*

“The significant and continuing investment in infrastructure (exemplified by the billion pound investment made by Dubai based DP Ports in turning London Gateway Port into the UKs biggest port) and investment made by significant and established global companies (such as ASDA, Ford, Kimberley Clark, Lidl, Lafarge, BaE Systems and HSBC) means the Thames Gateway is well placed to capitalise on an improving economic climate, which will further facilitate continued regeneration and development of the immediate area.

The huge range of investment opportunities remain attractive to overseas investors and facilitating and converting that interest must remain a priority over the next 10 years.

At the same time local businesses need to be supported in developing new markets overseas in what will continue to be a challenging environment for those trading globally”.

## **9. People, Skills & Employment - Susanna Gilmartin, Partner, Employment**

“Recruitment was a key concern for many businesses in our original research 10 years ago, particularly in relation to the availability of skilled staff at appropriate levels. This concern was compounded by a fear that new employment opportunities created by the regeneration would further increase competition for skilled labour.

The impact of the recession and the change in focus however has resulted in a change to the make-up of the workforce in the region. We have increased the number of managers and directors, professional occupations, caring, leisure and other service related occupations and seen a reduction in those working in technical and associated professional occupations with skilled jobs remaining at a consistent level”.

### *Thoughts on the future for people, skills and employment*

“We are undoubtedly entering a new and exciting period of growth and business expansion in the Kent Thames Gateway. The HR professionals and businesses we are speaking with tell us that recruitment is now a key agenda item for them.

The challenge for businesses in the area continues to be finding the right skill sets and attracting the right people. We need to recognise that how employees work, and what they want from work, is changing. The meaning and direction of “a career” needs to be more closely aligned with individuals’ personal motivations, aspirations and development.

Allowing employees to influence how they work and when they work not only empowers them but is proven to increase productivity. I anticipate that temporary employment in the Kent Thames Gateway, as elsewhere in the UK, is likely to be a permanent fixture with work predicted to be more collective, less routine, more specialised and on demand.

There is likely, given the business demographics in the area, to be an increase in apprenticeship opportunities from businesses wishing to invest in developing specific skill sets. There is also likely

to be greater job opportunities in the construction, leisure, technology, research and scientific sectors”.

## **10. Culture - Emma Stevens, Office Co-ordinator**

“The main changes that I have seen over the past 10 years have been around the greater aspiration, pride and sense of community of young people. I think the three are all related.

Young people are not interested in what were the traditional jobs in north Kent any more. Their aspirations are very different now and the range of opportunities available to them has grown hugely. There is certainly more to aspire to. Community facilities have improved enormously as well. Whether it be our local Church or Judo centre in Dartford, Cyclopark in Gravesend or the leisure facilities at Bluewater, there is certainly a lot more for children to do and get involved with.

There is also a lot more pride in our culture and heritage. People are much more aware for example of our links to Pocahontas at Gravesend; Rochester’s Dickens festival, Castle and Cathedral and Chatham’s Historic Dockyard. There is a much better mix of the old with the new.

Our community has been multicultural for a long time but the building of the new Sikh temple in Gravesend and the celebration of Sikh and other religious festivals with the involvement of schools and the wider community has meant that we are now much more of a multicultural community”.

### *Thoughts for the future of culture*

“Whilst it is important for the area to continue to attract more investment, more jobs and more homes I think that it will be very important to ensure that we retain that sense of community and pride and make sure that we create an environment that will help to retain and attract young people and families”.

## Business perspectives

To gain more perspectives, we asked key influencers in the local community for their comments about what we thought about the 10 key themes. We would like to thank them for sharing their views on what think has happened in the Thames Gateway over the past 10 years and what they consider the key challenges ahead.

**Stephen Richmond, National Head UK Agency, Dartford**  
**Altus Edwin Hill – Commercial Property Agents** <http://www.altus-edwinhill.com/home/>

“Another river crossing at Gravesend/Tilbury as an extension of the M2 (and not alongside existing Dartford bridge) is paramount to the successful infrastructure in the region.

With regards to property, there is currently a lack of commercial stock with very few brown field sites available for redevelopment. There is currently a lack of building and development of small and medium size warehouse and industrial units. There is no sizeable commercial demand for large offices that would ever support a "Canary Wharf-esque" development at Ebbsfleet”.

**Daniel McLeish - Eastern Region Engineering Manager, Longfield**  
**Bovis Homes – House Builder** <http://www.bovishomes.co.uk/>

“I don't see a co-ordinated drive to get North Kent development moving again. Development seems to be piecemeal and sporadic, and whilst the Ebbsfleet Development Corporation has now been set up, there doesn't appear to be a body looking at the region as a whole. I do see there is a risk that communities such as Swanscombe and Northfleet are lost in the major development of the area.

A new Thames Crossing would significantly open up new areas for development, and free up capacity for the Ebbsfleet/London Paramount region which I fear is likely to suffer from excessive congestion given its proximity to the M25 tunnel/bridge. Infrastructure delivery is still lagging, and there seems to be little progress on the Second Thames Crossing. There needs to be works undertaken prior to it being required rather than afterwards when developments are occupied

Working for a house builder, my main issue is finding suitable trades to actually undertake work. This is limiting growth in production on site. Recruiting the right staff is currently challenging, and those companies that are willing to be flexible will reap the benefits.

As someone who teaches evening classes in civil engineering at a local college, I think that we are still not doing enough to train young people to take up roles in the industry. Many people left construction after the downturn, and sufficient numbers are not yet training to fill the void. Increases to tuition fees are also limiting opportunities, as I have found employers are only funding for one or two years whereas previously they would fund right through to degree level.

I see the lack of a substantial commercial hub as a major obstacle in the North Kent area. Other than Kings Hill, there are no locations that attract major companies which in turn flow down and provide opportunities for the SMEs”.

**Howard Gilroy – Finance & Administration Manager, Gravesend**  
**Britannia Refined Metals** <http://www.glencore.com/>

“The construction of attractive new residential developments outside the traditional town envelopes may be popular with developers but they will simply accelerate the decline of the existing towns. The centre of Gravesend at 8:30pm on a weekday evening is a ghost town of deserted streets and boarded up shops. Town centre regeneration is more sustainable than out of town housing development which simply generates more traffic as every journey then requires a car.

As a significant local employer in the engineering industry, we are constantly disappointed by the quality and skills of local job applicants. As a result we intend to more than double our annual apprentice intake this year to at least eight young people”.

**Brian Horton, Director**  
**Horton Strategic - specialist advice on housing and regeneration**  
<http://hortonstrategic.com/>

“We have to face the impact of changing demographics and an ageing population. Also, we must consider the enduring impact of our proximity to London and the opportunities and challenges that this brings.

There is also potential from growth in the use of offsite construction methods and scope for Thames Gateway to become an important manufacturing base for offsite construction in the region.

There’s a growing role for institutional investment in the area at scale. Thankfully, the prevailing political imperative is to simplify and reduce the business burden of red tape and regulation”.

**Deb Sen, Director, Chatham**  
**Ministry For Growth Ltd - Human resource consultants**  
<http://www.ministryforgrowth.co.uk/>

“Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) will need to be much better at working together, to jointly achieve results that they would not be able to individually. This will need new ways of thinking, new ways of structuring businesses and many other changes.

The big projects should represent significant business opportunities for local SMEs. However, SMEs will need to invest in continuous improvements to provide competitive products and services. They will need to make the right connections. They will in many cases need to work together - "United we stand".

Local SMEs need to plan ahead for these significant growth opportunities. They will need to understand the critical success factors for winning business from the prime contractors. In addition to being a high quality supplier in their supply chain, what else are prime contractors looking for? Answer: how SMEs are contributing to the local economy themselves, e.g. taking on apprentices and local staff and their local Corporate Social Responsibility activities.

As well as investment in construction skills, successful SMEs will also need to invest in business skills. They will need to be financially robust, innovative and engage the full capabilities and potential of their staff – both now and in the future. Attracting growth funding will be dependent on demonstrating an ability to manage existing finances.

While the projects are themselves potential opportunities for SMEs, some sectors have significant entry requirements that SMEs will have to meet, for example the Health & Safety requirements in the rail industry. There needs to be continued emphasis on reducing the "burden" of red tape.

There is scope to get greater "integration" of tourism and cultural offerings in Kent, and link up with London Paramount. Visit Kent is a good place to start, but then the supply chain needs to work together so that attractions, accommodation, transport, eating and other leisure activities are integrated.

It’s good to see a sense of belonging from young people. There needs to be much greater Pride in North Kent (I may have just created a new acronym!?! "PiNK") Pride means you are keen to "put back" into the area out of the "profits" you are lucky enough to make.

I strongly believe that projects such as London Paramount are an opportunity to showcase local SME talent in a global arena. SMEs who supplied the Sydney Olympics were supported and encouraged by the Australian government to compete for and win contracts around the world - We could create a similar hub in North Kent”.

**Toby Crayden, Associate Partner, Ashford**  
**MLM Consulting Engineers** <http://www.mlm.uk.com/index.php>

“The Town Centre Initiatives, which originally included Dartford, were not successful. Whilst they showed promise the delivery and support does not appear to have followed through.

Many great opportunities lie ahead. As an engineering consultancy based in Kent we see a bright future. Time, effort and money are being spent on many great projects that will, in their own way, create opportunities for further growth, investment, employment and regeneration.

Attracting the right skillset into the region and the proximity to London makes recruitment an uphill struggle at times. However, the projects are here to attract the right calibre of people and if we stick to the 'local delivery' mantra and encourage and reward clients for appointing local teams for local projects then the future for construction-related companies and individuals looks good. Local companies can grow on the back of the success of the region.

Overall, I agree that great strides have been achieved in the region and it is a much better place now than it was. It has great potential with the planned projects we know of and undoubtedly the many projects that we don't yet know about”.

**Jon Gurney, Corporate Banking Manager, Dartford**  
**Handelsbanken** <https://www.handelsbanken.co.uk>

“The two biggest challenges for me are getting the infrastructure in place to maximise the opportunities coming our way - road, rail, river crossing, schools and emergency/care services and to breathe new life into the town centres of Dartford and Gravesend.

The pace of change has to be quicker. The Thames crossing decision must happen sooner than the end of next decade or else the area will be paralysed. The Ebbsfleet Development Corporation (EDC) has a key role to play in seeing London Paramount and Ebbsfleet Garden City come to life and successfully take their place in North West Kent.

Investment is the big challenge. I'm not sure that the planners, designers and developers of London Paramount and Ebbsfleet Garden City really get this yet. The Dartford Crossing is such a bottle neck, nothing other than a third crossing can alleviate the problem so this needs action soon. The A2 with Bluewater, Paramount and 15,000 new homes in close proximity cannot cope without major improvements - This is more than just a couple of roundabouts. Significant increased capacity is required.

Geographically we are fantastically placed. My comments about infrastructure remain the caveat. If the area grinds to a halt it will cease to be as attractive. We also need to ensure the infrastructure promises deliver the required end product. I understand that London Gateway Port will not be used by shippers as the access difficulties make other options preferable”.

**Brendan Magee, Chartered Accountant, Maidstone**  
**James Magee** <http://www.jamesmagee.co.uk>

“The function of town centres will evolve organically. That is not the purpose of this regeneration exercise. I would stress that the most important thing for young people is to make available a supply of housing which they can afford (as opposed "affordable housing" which I take to be a euphemism for state-supported housing).

We must lobby to improve the quality of the planning system. That means getting planners to realise that the speed with which they process applications is a severe incubus on development. I cite Maidstone as a particularly acute problem area”.

**Terry O'Connell, Director, Bethersden**  
**CLS Associates (UK) Ltd** <http://www.clsassociatesuk.co.uk>

“There is a significant section of young people who have no soft skills and no ambition or direction, which needs to be addressed. The key is communication, especially for the younger generations. Everybody should be aware of other people's points of view. Multi-ethnicity is great, over multiculturalism should be viewed with caution.

Constant development is necessary but the focus is what is good for the community and not short term for the developers. I agree that vibrant development is necessary to keep the area vital and optimistic. However, there is a concern about over-population and development creep.

The movers and shakers should be realistic and sympathetic to the needs of communities. If things get too hot these considerations go by the wayside. House prices in the Gravesend and similar North Kent regions will be the litmus test as to how the region succeeds.

We should encourage more public transport - is it Denmark that has this as a major policy? Roads fill to capacity however much they are upgraded. Too many people, too many cars”.

## **Other viewpoints**

The following comments were made by Thames Gateway Kent business people at recent Thomson Snell & Passmore events. They preferred not to have their comments attributed.

### **Regeneration**

“I am not convinced that the authorities work with the business environment closely enough on these issues. The educational facilities still have their own agenda without the experience to deliver focused advice to the young that will be in the work place soon”.

“Bring forward the roads and rail improvement and investments to encourage growth”.

### **Infrastructure**

“The development of an appropriate infrastructure plan is woefully behind and lacking in credibility. Or the appropriate information has not been communicated to the people who live in and operate businesses in the area”.

“We need to harness more use of river transport both for freight and passengers. We need to ensure that employment development/land allocations are near equal between all four North Kent Districts otherwise there is a risk that areas that do not have decent start up and then follow on space will fall behind those that do, making an unbalanced local economy”.

### **Construction and property**

“More commercial properties of a better standard are required than there are available at present but with so many small businesses around who knows what to build. It would be good to see some larger businesses with 50 - 100 employees again as not everyone has the ability or the where with all to be self-employed and therefore contribute rates and taxes to the area to aid development and better environment”.

“Gravesham is at risk of losing existing commercial space to permitted development rights, mainly from Town Centre B1 to residential units. This is beginning to affect the local economy as new commercial space is not being bought forward to replace that being lost. In some instances existing town centre businesses are likely to be required to find space outside of the Borough and new businesses are struggling to find space to start up. This is likely to continue until new commercial space is built to replace supply”.

### **Business**

“I still feel that the education system does not provide sufficient leaning to those about to embark in work as an employee or even to understand and run their own finances. We have encouraged and developed an industry of small and independent businesses that do not invest enough in the development of personal and social skills”.

“Are there enough skilled local people to undertake some of these projects as a number are likely to come on stream at the same time? There will be a fair amount of competition from different developers so we need to ensure that local people have the correct skills to benefit from these employment opportunities. Local businesses may be required to raise local salaries to compete with employers such as London Paramount which will have a wider pull than North Kent”.

## **Finance**

“It can only get better as those in business understand how finance will work in the future - based on better economic decisions from all sides that will hopefully assist in ensuring that the internal finances and development are appropriately planned”.

“The work place has changed but do we have now too many small businesses that cannot fund developments and employ those not able to work properly for themselves?”

## **Regulation**

“Regulation is necessary for specific areas only and needs to be clear, concise, reasonable and not another level of mouths to feed for no real benefit to anyone”.

“It is hard when as professionals we do know and understand some of the employment and safety rules that sometimes become costly and time consuming for businesses to implement and maintain. Sometimes it's a sledge hammer to crack a nut but we are now in the grip of these rules and a litigious environment”.

## **International**

“We do have a vast amount of foreign investment that is aiding growth and a better Kent. We however do not have enough businesses exporting so that Kent can bring its own cash back into the area and keep it spent in the area. Some still do not know how to sell to the next village let alone, France, Europe, the Americas, Asia and beyond”.

“Inward investment tends to be in areas of distribution and logistics – we should encourage manufacturing and export markets”.

## **People**

“The young do have their problems in achieving what perhaps is perceived was easier in past generations. However, in the past they did not expect to have everything now and on a plate. If they wanted something then they did something about it and worked to better themselves and went without some of the luxuries that the younger generation feel that they have an automatic right to and someone else will pay for”.

“Pride needs to be checked - there is too much litter and poor upkeep of parks. These indicate the relative health of the community”.

## **Culture**

“Multi culture has been good but sometimes a single direction and blinkered congregation of sectors not only changes the demographics of an area beyond recognisable history but also alienates some due to the inability to adjust the lack of some standards, courtesy, respect and vast language challenges”.

“There is a lot going on that will change the face of area for decades and in places some history will be lost. Will the area become part of the sprawling mass the metropolis know to the outside world or the London borough of Dartford or even the London Borough of North Kent?”

## About Thomson Snell & Passmore

Thomson Snell & Passmore is a highly respected legal practice and one of the largest law firms in the South East of England, employing over 200 staff. The firm is highly rated in all practice areas in The Legal 500 directory and a number of individuals are quoted as leaders in their field in Chambers Guide to the Legal Profession. We have achieved this by continuously aligning ourselves with our client's ever changing needs as well as ensuring that we provide quality and practical legal advice to both businesses and individual clients.

Our client's range from high net worth private individuals and owner managed businesses to AIM listed companies, U.K. subsidiaries of multi-nationals, major U.K. Plc's, local authorities, charities and public/private sector partnerships.

Our Thames Gateway office, based in Crossways Business Park, has been designed to provide a complete legal solution to businesses in the Thames Gateway and London. We are 15 minutes from central London. Whether you need advice in relation to the preparation of terms and conditions, commercial contracts, mergers and acquisitions, corporate finance, securities documentation, employment law and tribunals or dispute resolution including international disputes and arbitrations, engineering and construction, health and safety and environmental or are involved with property development, planning or construction project, we have a team of specialists available on your doorstep with all the resources of a major regional firm available to you.

Our Commercial Group consists of approximately 50 lawyers most of whom have qualified, trained and worked in magic circle and other large City practices before moving out to Kent. They are experienced in providing a degree of expertise and practical commercial advice at service levels and fees that our more astute commercial clients expect.

Our Private Client Group provide the full range of family services including residential property, matrimonial affairs, wills, tax planning, probate and court of protection.

© The content of this report is correct at the date of publication (September 2015) and is intended to provide an overview to the subject mater.

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