



Thames Vision 2050: Safe, Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive

Response from South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP)

The Thames Vision 2050 sets out a clear framework for developing a safe, smart, sustainable and inclusive River Thames, reflecting the importance of key national policy areas, such as decarbonisation and levelling up.

SELEP welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this consultation and notes that the themes and priorities within the Thames Vision align well to SELEP's Economic Recovery and Renewal Strategy, particularly to our strategic priority around the UK's Global Gateway. The Maritime Sector is particularly prominent for the SELEP region and we are therefore keen to continue to work with partners such as the PLA to respond to the unique opportunities and challenges relating to this sector.

SELEP's response below addresses those themes and priorities that are most relevant to the work of SELEP and the role that we can play in supporting the Vision.

Themes

What actions do you think are needed for the success of the Trading Thames?

The Thames is a major asset to the UK economy and that of the SELEP region and joined up action will be crucial for encouraging future growth, investment and innovation.

SELEP is particularly supportive of actions to leverage Thames Freeport to support the development of trade and levelling up of communities in the region. Working with the Freeport, the Thames Estuary Growth Board, and other major employers and infrastructure projects along the estuary will maximise opportunities for sustainable growth and trade.

What would you see as your role, or the role of your organisation in those actions?

SELEP has played an important role in helping develop the successful bids and subsequent business cases for Thames Freeport and will continue to work closely with the Freeport as it establishes and works to drive new commercial opportunities that support the regional and national economy. We are keen to work with the Freeport to ensure that the benefits around new zero, innovation and levelling up are also realised and are felt in the local communities and across the wider economic area.

In particular SELEP is working to drive collaboration between our major infrastructure projects, including both Thames Freeport and Freeport East, to develop a strategic approach on shared issues such as local supply chains and workforce that will underpin the successful delivery of these significant projects. We will also continue to communicate key messages and opportunities with businesses and partners across the SELEP network.

What actions do you think are needed for the success of the Destination Thames?

Promoting the Thames destination offer will be crucial in supporting the ongoing economic



recovery, including working with the Creative Estuary to support this sector and kick start the wider economy both in London and in towns along the estuary.

Within SELEP, many of our estuary and seaside communities are in need of levelling up, with economies in the coastal towns also being significantly affected during the pandemic. Developing vibrant communities that benefit local residents, support recreation and attract visitors and investment into those areas will therefore be crucial, as well as ensuring they are attractive and sustainable locations for business. Supporting the creative sector and attracting an inclusive workforce into the area will also be important.

What would you see as your role, or the role of your organisation in those actions?

SELEP continues to play an important role in strategic economic planning and the provision of robust evidence to inform and drive activities across the region. We have developed and utilised an enhanced evidence base for coastal work to support prioritisation in delivering the coastal prospectus as well as identifying those areas most impacted by the pandemic and informing responses to the wider levelling up Levelling Up agenda.

SELEP also champions the needs of particular communities and sectors, including through our Coastal Communities Group and the South East Creative Economy Network. We work in partnership with the Creative Estuary and other groups and bodies such as Arts Council England to support the cultural and creative sector to breathe new life into our high streets.

Priorities for Action

*Do you agree that **safety** should be a cross cutting priority and what innovations or actions would you like to see in this area?*

Yes, but SELEP does not have any specific comments to add to this area.

*Do you agree that **net zero** should be a cross cutting priority and what innovations or actions would you like to see in this area?*

Yes. Net zero is a national and local priority and SELEP welcomes the clear focus within the Thames Vision and supports all of the identified actions.

Collaboration with the Thames Estuary Growth Board on their Hydrogen Route Map provides an opportunity to lead the way on this agenda. However, responding to climate change and achieving net zero is a huge challenge and, as demonstrated within the vision, requires working with a wide range of partners. SELEP has a number of existing partnerships and networks that can contribute to this area and support wider collaboration, including our U9 group of Universities, the Major Projects Group and Clean Growth Working Group. We are also keen to work with the PLA to understand the impacts and outcomes of the Clean Maritime funded projects.

*Do you agree that **resilience** should be a cross cutting priority and what innovations or actions would you like to see in this area?*

Yes. A key objective in SELEP's Economic Recovery and Renewal Strategy is to promote



greater resilience in our places. As part of this we welcome the commitment to protecting the estuary including our estuarine coastal communities. Our recent report, Creative High Streets, produced in partnership with Arts Council England aims to drive sustained action that will support regeneration and greater resilience in our high streets. Linked to SELEP's strategic priority 'Communities for the Future' we remain committed to working with partners to ensure that we understand the impact of changing patterns of behaviour and what this means for future communities, ensuring the design of our towns and high streets meet the needs of those communities and business.

*Do you agree that **technological change** should be a cross cutting priority and what innovations or actions would you like to see in this area?*

Yes. It is important that we enable local businesses, particularly SMEs, to embrace technological change through effective business support and engagement, whilst also increasing collaboration between academia and industry to promote innovative new technologies. Our U9 partnership of universities can play a crucial role in this, as well as the collective work of our Major Projects Group.

To support technological change in key areas such as the transition to net zero it is crucial that we upskill the local workforce, and this is a priority for SELEP's Skills Advisory Panel and the Major Project Group skills sub group. We therefore welcome the actions around the development of workforce skilled in applicable new technologies and would be keen to work in partnership wherever possible to maximise the opportunities in this area.

*Do you agree that **access and inclusion** should be a cross cutting priority and what innovations or actions would you like to see in this area?*

Yes. A key objective in SELEP's Economic Recovery and Renewal Strategy is to support equality to ensure everyone has opportunity to thrive. We recognise in particular the diversity challenge that exists within the maritime industry and also welcome the PLA's commitment to education programmes that encouraging engagement from diverse communities.

There are a number of SELEP ESF projects that have been put in place to support those furthest away from job market into employment. We would encourage the development of new activities to replace those programmes going forward and would be happy to share learning and expertise to inform this.