



**East of England**

**All Party Parliamentary Group**

**Co-Chairs:** Jess Asato MP and Andrew Pakes MP

**Vice-Chairs:** Blake Stephenson MP & Marie Goldman MP

***Delivering future skills to Get East of England Working to its maximum growth potential  
AND***

***Ensuring the Spending Review supports investment in the East of England  
including in Ely and Haughley Junctions***

**2 to 3.30 pm, Monday 24<sup>th</sup> March**

**Committee Room 5, House of Commons**

**NON-VERBATIM MINUTES**

**Welcome and introductions**

- *Jess Asato MP, Co-chair, welcomed all Parliamentarians and stakeholders from the East of England . She informed all attendees that since the last meeting in January – which focussed on clean energy, Net Zero and Climate change - follow up letters have been sent to both DESNZ and DEFRA Secretaries. There has also been a submission to Spending Review and a letter to Transport Secretary/Chief Secretary to the Treasury regarding Ely & Haughley Junctions which was signed by 30 MPs and many others. These last two subjects will be discussed after the discussion regards skills policy.*
- *With regret, Andrew Pakes MP is standing down as Co-chair of this APPG so our next meeting will also be an EGM to agree his successor. She asked that her thanks to him for his contribution is recorded and wished him every success in his future endeavours.*
- *Andrew Pakes MP, Co-chair, declared his interest in skills as Chair of the Apprenticeships APPG and remarked that too many people are held up in achieving their life ambitions due to lack of opportunity and that the Government's approach to skills is to rectify this matter. He said it was a pleasure to introduce Baroness Jacqui Smith, [Minister for Skills and also Minister for Women and Equalities](#). She is, of course, also the former Home Secretary (2007 to 2009), the first woman to hold that high office, and was the MP for Redditch for the whole of the period of the last Labour Government (1997 to 2010).*

**Keynote speech by Minister for Skills, Baroness Jacqui Smith**

- *She began by saying that being Skills Minister is one if not the best job she's ever had because getting skills policy right is so very important to our plan for change. The Minister also said it was good to hear the interest and ambition in the East of England regarding apprenticeships, training and skills. She went onto say that there is already some very good practice in the region: of 11 FE colleges 9 are good and two outstanding.*
- *The Minister said there is an enormous challenge if skills are to help deliver growth. One third of all productivity increases are associated with skills. However there have been the doubling of some skills shortages - largest shortages are in construction, manufacturing and tech*

- Skills are what we very much need if the economy is to grow. It is also vital for opportunity. That is why the Government have started working on a post 16 skills strategy. There is a national dimension but also local and sectoral ones. The aim is to get better at clear and coherent pathways that ensures the support is there to thrive and learn
- The government is not waiting – at the forefront of its plan is Skills England which will be fully operation very soon, possibly as soon as summer. It will take over from the rather unplanned system at present; it will identify skills now and in future, appropriate qualifications etc with appropriate regional/local influence. She welcomes Phil Smith as Chair and David Bell as Vice Chair. She is sure they will make a difference.
- On apprenticeships, it is important to reform and listen to employers. The Minister claimed that they are already delivering more flexibility through the introduction of new foundation apprenticeships, new shorter apprenticeships which makes sense to industry. Also where there were barriers these are being removed, for example the English and maths qualification requirement. This should benefit adult care, early years and construction sectors where there are currently shortages.
- There will inevitably be some hard choices regarding prioritising and the number of level 7 apprenticeships will be reduced. Very significant announcement over the weekend: [60,000 more apprenticeships in the construction sector.](#)
- The Minister recognised that there is a 'leaky pipeline' problem – some people who train don't go onto work. Placements are therefore critical as they often lead to greater employability and sometimes directly to employment
- The Government has a national plan but it also recognises that action is needed to empower regions, for example through LSIPs. The East of England is represented by 4 LSIPs who are doing a great deal of work – to simplify and avoid duplication. The system will be at its best when local employers and local providers deliver in partnership with national plan.

## **Q&A**

- The following questions were asked and answered:
- Given NHS recruitment issues should not the level 7 apprenticeship delivering medical students be retained? **Answer: During the last Government there was a reduction in apprenticeships for youngest but increase in level 7 ones so we have to reprioritise.**
- In Cambridge and across the region there is big need for digital skills. **Answer: When we consulted regarding gaps in skills provision the answer was health, construction and digital. Often the digital skills gap is with those who are already in work.**
- Are there enough FE technological colleges, especially in Suffolk? A letter has been written to the Minister. **Answer: Can't specifically respond to letter but the Government is focussing on the 16-19 age group and we are trying to focus on biggest gaps, which are in level 4 and 5.**
- Colleges often have a problem with getting access to sufficient student placements. There is also an issue paying for transport. **Answer: I recognise problems regarding sufficient placements. Often it is the most exciting/memorable thing in an apprenticeship. I hear what being said regarding transport.**

- We also need to race to the top and still attract the best and brightest. However, the cost of the graduate visa has increased. We do need to preserve the graduate route. **Answer: right to bring HE into the discussion, which plays a key role in innovation and growth. I understand the tension between those who are for/against migrants. I will continue to make the case for growth sectors and higher-level skills.**
- There is a “dental desert” in the East of England, the “Sahara” of which is Norfolk. Please work with us and support a dental college. **Answer: Minister agreed with importance of system facilitating new dental provision, but noted limits on OfS capacity to consider all projects.**
- Regarding AEB we welcome devolution and full control of AEB but we are worried about funding levels. **Answer: Yes there is a small cut in AEB. We are devolving AEB where there are devolved strategic authorities. Hope devolution will provide means by which to address many of the issues raised this afternoon**
- Innovate Cambridge has a keen focus on talent and skills. Would like to draw your attention to our Opportunities Hub proposal and pilot work, which aims to create ‘pipelines and pathways’ into appropriate education and training, in response to sector need. Perhaps we could collaborate on this – which could act as a pilot for mechanisms of national-regional collaboration on skills infrastructure? **Answer: happy to promote collaboration and would like to hear more about the proposal – also keen to hear about the barriers to talent and skills in regions. Opening up pathways into HE is something I am very interested in.**

#### **Agreement regarding next steps**

- Jess thanked the Minister for her time and then explain that the East of England Skills Delivery Group, which was helpful in preparing for this session and will be meeting next Monday, will draft a follow up letter. She then invited any final comments regarding the key points to be included in this letter. Points raised included:
- Pam Cox MP is sitting on the Skills England Bill Committee and is happy to hear about any issues that attendees today would like to see raised.
- The proposed dental school attached to UEA has been a key project for Norfolk County Council. If we don’t get a decision soon then we will not make a start on training this coming September. We have written to Minister but tricky issue due to standing review. We need to keep working on this
- Level 7 apprenticeships would be helpful in the defence sector which is to be expanded.
- There is a need for tourism apprenticeships
- The bursary for care leavers should be used for securing a tenancy.

#### **Next steps regarding the East of England and the Spending Review especially Ely and Haughley Junction – Introductory remarks by Charlotte Horobin, Chambers East.**

- On behalf of Chamber East, which is made up of Chambers of Commerce in Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Norfolk and Suffolk and so represents thousands of businesses of all sizes and sectors, Charlotte wanted to thank everyone here for their zeal and hard work in campaigning for the Ely and Haughley rail junction upgrades in the run-up to the Spending Review.

- *She said it's been a pleasure to be part of such a well-evidenced, broad-based and professional campaign.*
- *The recent letter from the East of England APPG neatly summarised the overwhelming national case for the projects with a nearly £5 return for every £1 invested in upgrading the junctions, releasing both freight and rail capacity to boost decarbonised economic growth from north to south and east to west and so contributing perfectly to a number of Government missions.*
- *The Chambers have obtained the impression that by speaking with one voice on Ely/Haughley, these messages have been received and understood by the DfT. The Chambers appreciate, therefore, that the focus has shifted to the Treasury and understands that MPs are campaigning vigorously whenever possible to get Ely/Haughley front of mind.*
- *Therefore the key question before us now is: how can the region help over in this final push over the next few weeks. The chambers and the businesses the Chambers represent stand ready to do what you need of us.*

#### **Q&A plus contributions**

- *Jess Asato MP, Co-chair, said she was very grateful to all the partners who have helped make the case and noted that as MPs it is very difficult to get into dialogue with Treasury as they redirect us to DfT. She then invited Andrew Summers from Transport East to update attendees on the latest word from DfT/HMT on the projects.*
- *Andrew said that Transport East has been working very closely with England's Economic Heartland and both have submitted formal advice regarding Ely and Haughley Junctions. DfT have relayed some of Treasury's concerns and we are now rebutting these most notably to point out that the business case is not out of date; and that there are very limited sums involved - £30m for Haughley and £70million for Ely.*
- *The following other points were raised by attendees:*
  - *Suggest meet with Blackrock ASAP because as financial backers of Felixstowe they have direct line to Jess Glover in HMT*
  - *Might Sizewell pay for Ely?*
  - *The Haughley Junction is very inexpensive. Can we not at least get that as a win; or at least reference it first in communications.*
  - *The benefits are felt in the Midlands and East Midlands. How do we get them more involved?*
  - *Link the campaign more to Cambridge and East West Rail especially the fact that for benefits to spread eastwards across the region Ely and Haughely are essential*
  - *There are lots of letters about Ely Junction but graphic format – or video – might have more impact. (NB Network Rail Anglia have some graphics that can be shared.)*
  - *Get MPs and businesses to the site?*

- *Jess concluded by saying that the “ask” is to deliver the £30m funding to deliver Haughley now and the £70million for Network Rail to develop Ely so can be delivered in next SR period. A couple of other Spending Review priorities were raised*
- *A12 widening scheme – Borehamwood junction – is important to plans for 55,000 new homes*
- *We have one reservoir underway but that is to meet current need – another one is needed*

## AOB

- *Jess announced that the next meeting, likely to be on Monday May 12<sup>th</sup>, will discuss how together we can maximise the tourism and cultural offer of the East of England. As referenced earlier it will also be an EGM. The Parliamentary Officers – who met a fortnight ago – have also agreed a series of APPG visits starting with one to the Port of Felixstowe probably in May. Again, further information will be circulated by the Secretariat in the usual way.*
- *Finally, the Chair thanked Baroness Smith again, Charlotte Horobin for also speaking, all for attending, the partners of the Group and the Secretariat.*

## REGISTERED TO ATTEND

PARLIAMENTARIANS		
Rt Hon Baroness	Smith	Minister for Skills
Jess	Asato	MP for Lowestoft
Andrew	Pakes	MP for Peterborough
Marie	Goldman	MP for Chelmsford
Blake	Stephenson	MP for Mid Bedfordshire
Pam	Cox	MP for Colchester
Ian	Sollom	MP for St Neots and Cambridgeshire
George	Freeman MP	MP for Mid Norfolk
David	Burton-Sampson	MP for Southend West and Leigh
Jack	Abbott	MP for Ipswich
Sam	Carling	MP for NW Cambridgeshire
Pippa	Heylings	MP for South Cambridgeshire
Bayo	Alaba	MP for Southend East and Rochford
Kevin	Bonavia	MP for Stevenage
Jerome	Mayhew	MP for Broadlands
Matt	Turmaine	MP for Watford
Gagan	Mohindra	MP for SW Hertfordshire
Terry	Jermy	MP for SW Norfolk
Peter	Prinsley	MP for Bury St Edmunds and Stowmarket
Richard	Holden	MP for Basildon and Billericay
Nick	Timothy	MP for West Suffolk
Ben	Obese-Jecty	MP for Huntingdon
Chris	Vince	MP for Harlow
Patrick	Spencer	MP for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich
Rt Hon Lord Andrew	Lansley	Former MP for South Cambridgeshire

<b>EE APPG PARTNERS</b>		
Matt	Stewart	EELGA
Beth	Davies	Flagship Group
Naomi	Green	England's Economic Heartland
Adam	King	England's Economic Heartland
John	McGill	UK Innovation Corridor
Andrew	Summers	Transport East
Olivia	Seccombe	British Sugar
Paul	Carter	Anglian Water
Chioma	Obi	Anglian Water
Tom	Davis	Sizewell C
Andrew	Smyth	Sizewell C
Saskia	Hervey	UEA
David	Maguire	UEA
Owen	Stratford	Lower Thames Crossing
Simon	Papworth	Freeport East
Patrick	Hall	London Stansted Airport
Biplab	Rakshi	IoD East
Richard	Holdaway	CBI East
Simona	Marr	FSB East
Charlotte	Horobin	Cambridgeshire Chambers of Commerce
Andy	Sparks	Essex Chambers of Commerce
Iain	McNab	Essex Chambers of Commerce
Paul	Simon	Suffolk Chambers of Commerce
Dean	Pierpoint	Norfolk Chambers of commerce
Claire	Pike	ARU
Kevin	Keable	East of England Energy Group
<b>COUNCILS</b>		
Francesca	Day	Essex County Council
Cllr Kay	Mason-Billig	Norfolk County Council
Chris	Starkie	Norfolk County Council
Cllr Matthew	Hicks	Suffolk County Council
Richard	Rout	Suffolk County Council
Nicola	Beach	Suffolk County Council
Andrew	Cook	Suffolk County Council
Thomas	Dray	Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority
Constance	Anker	Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority
<b>EDUCATION</b>	<b>STAKEHOLDERS</b>	
Nick	Frank	Cambridgeshire LSIP
Rebecca	Porter	Cambridge Science Centre
George	Walker	Careers and Enterprise
Rose	Ryan	Careers and Enterprise
Tom	Lloyd	Eastern Education Group
Gareth	John	First Intuition
Tim	Robinson	Tech East
Mark	Robertson	Cambridge Regional College
Corrin	Hoyes	Cambridge Regional College
Anne	Bailey	Form the Future

<b>OTHERS</b>		
Peter	Coombes	Standard Gas
Kate	Snowden	Network Rail
Philip	Smart	Rail Freight Group
Ellis	Shelton	Logistics UK
Victoria	Fleming-Williams	AB Ports
Jonathan	Denby	Greater Anglia
Tony	Houghton	
Dominic	O'Donnell	Infrastructure Matters
Solomon	Westmancott	Infrastructure Matters
Lucy	Somers	PLMR
Kevin	Craig	PLMR
Louis	O'Halloran	Inflect
Stephen	Barwick	Secretariat

*Prepared by Steve Barwick, Director, East of England APPG Secretariat*

The East of England APPG is kindly supported by:



The academic partners of the East of England APPG are:



The East of England APPG's business partners are:

