East of England
All Party Parliamentary Group
Co-Chairs: Jess Asato MP & Pam Cox MP
Vice-Chairs: Blake Stephenson MP & Marie Goldman MP

East of England APPG AGM and Housing &Transport Meeting

Held in House of Commons, 8th December 2025

Parliamentarians in Attendance

- Wera Hobhouse MP (AGM Chair)
- Jess Asato MP (APPG Co-Chair)
- Pam Cox MP (APPG Co-Chair)
- Marie Goldman (APPG Vice-Chair)
- Alice Macdonald MP
- David Taylor MP
- Peter Prinsley MP
- Bayo Alaba MP
- Baroness Scott
- Apologies were noted from Charlotte Cane MP.

1. AGM formal business

Wera Hobhouse MP, independent chair, reminded members of the Chair and Officers' responsibilities to ensure required governance and financial papers were prepared for APPG publication, including income and expenditure statements and required declarations, and signposted Registrar guidance. The APPG was confirmed quorate (eight present) and elections were held. Jess Asato MP and Pam Cox MP were confirmed as Co-Chairs, and Blake Stephenson MP and Marie Goldman were confirmed as Vice-Chairs. Members confirmed they had received and were content with the circulated annual report, and the APPG was formally reconstituted.

2. Update on devolution and mayoral changes

Jess Asato MP reflected on recent announcements affecting the timetable for mayoral arrangements across Essex, Norfolk and Suffolk. While there was enthusiasm for the opportunities mayoral leadership could bring, members noteded that proceeding at pace should not come at the expense of getting governance structures right. The group noted that while the revised timetable was disappointing, it was considered strategically preferable to ensure long-term effectiveness. Alice Macdonald MP highlighted that funding allocations would still be available (including set-up funding) and that local authorities should begin shaping priorities for how funding could be used. Jess Asato MP underlined that strategic work on investment priorities (including transport and skills) could begin ahead of formal mayoral commencement and that meaningful activity need not wait until later years.

3. Ely rail debate and ministerial engagement

Jess Asato MP thanked Charlotte Cane MP for leading the recent Ely debate and reported that the Minister for Rail had offered to meet. Jess Asato MP also confirmed she would meet the Minister the following week and invited stakeholders to provide briefings or updates (including in confidence) to inform the ministerial engagement, alongside the agreed collective briefing. Peter Prinsley suggested exploring a phased approach by separating Haughley Junction from Ely, noting that an incremental approach could unlock benefits sooner and avoid an "all-or-nothing" framing. Andrew Summers supported this and noted that ongoing rail reform and the emergence of Great British Railways provided an additional route to advance practical, targeted investment discussions.

4. Emerging issue: higher education provision in Essex

Concerns were raised about the University of Essex decision to close its Southend campus and move some provision, noting potential implications and that higher education issues can receive less attention compared to other education priorities. Alice Macdonald MP noted an upcoming Education Select Committee session and requested any updated briefing material be shared.

5. Theme session: Building Homes and Connecting Communities

David Armstrong (Bromford Flagship) set out housing pressures in the region, highlighting both volume shortages and the condition of the housing stock. He emphasised a "homes to places" approach, arguing that housing delivery must be aligned with access to services, jobs and amenities, and that infrastructure uncertainty directly affects development viability and housing numbers. He highlighted the importance of aligning "silent" infrastructure systems such as water, sewerage, power and environmental constraints with planning and delivery. Key recommendations included focusing on communities rather than headline numbers, recognising variation across the region (balancing regeneration and new development), and developing an integrated long-term vision.

Cllr Adam Zerny (England's Economic Heartland) described New Towns as an opportunity to design integrated places in a way that is difficult to replicate in existing settlements. He cautioned that new development cannot be expected to solve all existing infrastructure deficits, but argued that planned new settlements can embed solutions from the outset, including addressing longstanding bottlenecks and pollution issues. He highlighted the scale of concurrent projects and proposals in the wider region and stressed the need for stronger coordination across organisations and programmes. He also noted the importance of joined-up working to maintain public confidence and counter misinformation filling perceived leadership vacuums.

Andrew Summers (Transport East) set regional context for growth and outlined the case for matching housing delivery with both strategic and local transport investment. He reported significant projected housing and population growth and argued that this required an integrated pipeline that balances strategic connectivity with local network integration. He noted recent delivery and progress on a number of schemes and set out key future priorities, including Haughley Junction and securing wider benefits from East West Rail into Norwich, Suffolk and North Essex. He referenced disappointment at the A12 cancellation while advocating for a programme that retained core benefits, and highlighted the need for improvements to the A47. He argued these were prioritised interventions rather than an unconstrained wish list. He also welcomed the potential for mayoral combined authorities to enable longer-term planning and supported moving beyond five-year cycles towards a longer pipeline approach suited to the region.

Richard Bayley (AtkinsRéalis) introduced AtkinsRéalis as a new APPG sponsor and outlined the organisation's role in designing and integrating investable infrastructure schemes across sectors, including energy, water, transport and digital. He stated that the East of England had strong potential for growth and investment, including major projects already underway, but warned that stronger regional coordination would be necessary to remain competitive for future private investment. He highlighted modern methods of construction as a way to accelerate delivery, particularly for social and affordable housing, and emphasised the need to establish foundations in the near term to unlock long-term investment.

6. Panel discussion and Q&A

Members discussed day-one priorities for incoming mayoralties and what "good" looks like, with consensus around developing a clear vision, building sufficient capacity and capability, and creating early frameworks and investment pipelines. Panellists stressed early relationship-building with key national bodies (including National Highways and Great British Railways) and earlier private-sector involvement to address capacity constraints. The group discussed the potential value of a regional spatial strategy, while noting the coordination and resources required to make it effective, and the continued importance of district councils' local knowledge.

Discussion also covered skills: contributors emphasised the need for an East of England approach spanning public and private sectors, enabling long-term workforce planning aligned to a credible infrastructure and housing pipeline, and reflecting freight and logistics needs given the region's strategic role in ports and supply chains. Existing skills coordination activity was referenced, including the East of England Skills Delivery Group and the Opportunity East report.

7. Forward look

Dates and upcoming sessions were noted: a drop-in session the following day (9th December) to review Opportunity East one year on; a private briefing with the on Ofsted's education reforms in January; and an open meeting on 17th March focused on clean energy, climate change and carbon capture, usage and storage.

The meeting closed with thanks to speakers and attendees and seasonal good wishes.

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