East of England
All Party Parliamentary Group

Luke Pollard MP
Minister of State for Defence Readiness and Industry
Ministry of Defence
Whitehall
London
SW1A 2HB

Dear Minister Pollard,

On behalf of the East of England APPG, I'd like to congratulate you on your reappointment as Minister for Defence Readiness and Industry.

We are writing following the East of England APPG meeting on 6 July 2026, Maximising the Defence Dividend in the East of England. We were sorry that you were unable to join us, but wanted to share the principal conclusions from the discussion and seek your support for a stronger regional defence proposition.

The session was convened in collaboration with the East Regional Defence & Security Cluster (EastRDSC) to consider how the East of England can secure the greatest possible benefit from the Government's increased investment in defence. It brought together senior voices from across the region's defence, business, academic and public sectors to examine how a more place-based approach could strengthen supply chains, support innovation, create skilled jobs and deliver lasting benefits for communities across the East.

The East of England is well placed to contribute to this agenda. It combines major operational assets, including RAF Lakenheath, RAF Mildenhall, RAF Wyton, RAF Marham, MOD Wattisham, MOD Woodbridge, Colchester Garrison and the Foulness and Shoeburyness test and range complex, with a strong industrial base spanning Airbus, MBDA, MSI Defence, Marshall Aerospace, MEL Group, BAE Systems, Mass Consultants, QinetiQ and Lockheed Martin. These strengths are reinforced by specialist SMEs, emerging clusters such as Huntingdonshire, leading universities, Freeport East, strategic ports and nationally significant capabilities in geospatial intelligence, aerospace, space, cyber, autonomous systems, advanced manufacturing and logistics.

Your recent visit to Ukrspecsystems' new facility in Mildenhall illustrates the opportunity in our region. That investment demonstrates how defence activity can attract advanced manufacturing, strengthen local and national supply chains, create high-quality employment and support wider economic and educational opportunities. The challenge is to ensure that

examples such as this form part of a broader regional strategy, rather than remaining isolated successes.

The discussion made clear that the East of England is already a substantial defence and security region, but that its capabilities are too often considered separately. The region's assets are dispersed across several places and institutions, yet together they form a connected ecosystem with the potential to make a much greater contribution to defence readiness, national resilience, innovation and regional growth.

Following the discussion, we would be grateful for your consideration of five priority points.

First, we ask the Government to recognise the East of England as a nationally significant defence and dual-use innovation and manufacturing region, and to work with regional partners to develop a clear cluster proposition. The region should be understood as a network of complementary capabilities spanning operational military sites, defence businesses, SMEs, universities, innovation assets and critical infrastructure. A stronger proposition would improve the East's national and international visibility, help Government and industry understand the capability already available, and create clearer routes into UK Defence Innovation and future procurement opportunities.

Second, we ask that the East of England is considered for a future Defence Growth Deal and that the Ministry of Defence provides greater clarity on the criteria and process for future rounds. The region has many of the characteristics these Deals are intended to support, including major operational assets, advanced industrial capability, specialist research, dual-use innovation and a substantial SME base. A future Deal could align procurement, innovation, skills, infrastructure and private investment around a focused regional proposition, while ensuring that increased defence spending delivers skilled employment, stronger local supply chains and new opportunities in rural, coastal and post-industrial communities. As part of this, we ask the Government to support the EastRDSC to develop a funded proposition, with the professional capacity needed to map regional capability, support SMEs, coordinate investment opportunities and act as an effective gateway between the region and Government.

Third, we ask the Government to provide more practical support for SMEs seeking to enter and grow within defence supply chains. Many capable businesses are deterred by complex procurement processes, unclear points of contact, cyber-security requirements, vetting, compliance costs and the expense of specialist legal and commercial advice. These barriers are particularly significant for firms in adjacent sectors that possess relevant technologies or skills but lack defence-market experience. Funded navigation support, clearer procurement guidance, early-stage grants and more direct routes into UK Defence Innovation would broaden participation, while appropriate incentives for prime contractors could help smaller firms meet security, contractual and compliance requirements and increase the proportion of defence expenditure flowing through domestic supply chains.

Fourth, we ask the Government to support a regional defence skills and supply-chain audit. The East of England has major strengths in engineering, aerospace, life sciences, AI, cyber, space and advanced manufacturing, but its defence-specific skills and industrial capability are not yet sufficiently visible or coordinated. A robust evidence base would help identify current strengths, future workforce requirements, supply-chain gaps and

opportunities for transferable skills between defence and adjacent sectors. The East RDSC, chambers of commerce, employers, universities, colleges and strategic authorities would be well placed to support this work, including consideration of apprenticeships, postgraduate technical provision, veterans and service leavers, and the movement of skills between defence, technology, energy and advanced manufacturing.

Fifth, we ask the Government to improve the finance, infrastructure and procurement environment for high-growth defence businesses. Some companies can scale rapidly after securing a contract but struggle to access finance, suitable premises, equipment and working capital at the pace required. Closer collaboration between the Ministry of Defence, banks and industry could help lenders validate contracts more quickly and support businesses with greater confidence, while flexible premises, short-term leases, shared facilities and innovation testbeds could reduce the risk of rapid expansion.

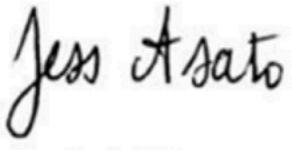
Across these priorities, the central message was clear. The East of England already has a substantial defence ecosystem, but has not yet realised its full strategic or economic potential. With stronger coordination, clearer Government recognition and a more place-based approach to investment, the region can make a larger contribution to national defence while delivering meaningful benefits for its businesses and communities.

The APPG is optimistic about the role the East of England can play. With a stronger regional proposition, a strengthened cluster, better support for SMEs and a credible route towards a Defence Growth Deal, the region can help strengthen defence readiness, national resilience and economic growth.

We would welcome the opportunity to work with you, your officials and the EastRDSC to take this forward. In the first instance, we would be grateful for your response to the five priorities set out above.

Thank you for your consideration. We would be delighted to invite you to speak at a future APPG meeting to return to these issues and continue the discussion.

Yours sincerely,



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