 

**All-Party Parliamentary Group for the Central South UK**

**Meeting held at Portcullis House**

**Wednesday 26th February 2025.**

**In attendance: Amanda Martin MP (Chair); Darren Paffey MP; Caroline Dinenage MP; Leigh-Sara Timberlake Group CEO Business South; Shaun Stevens UK MD EPS Water; Tim Hancock Chair Business South; Simon Ashwell VP Corporate Affairs Carnival UK; Gavin Hall Head of Central South office Savills; James Alderson Terminal Operations Manager Southampton Airport; Oliver Sowton Partner Blake Morgan; Ross McNally Chair Hampshire Chamber of Commerce; Mark Perry CEO VIVID; Claire Whitaker CEO Southampton Forward; Nick Sutcliffe Cavendish; Steve Jolly Director Marengo; Matt Turpin Public Affairs VIVID; Dan Wiseman Senior Director Gillings; Kate Pearce Head of Strategy Business South.**

**Apologies: Tom Hayes MP; Suella Braverman MP; Damian Hinds MP; Chris Loader MP; Desmond Swayne MP; Alan Mak MP; Lord Cookham.**

**Central South: A Call for Housing Change**

Ahead of the official launch of the housing document **Central South: A Call for Housing Change,** at a parliamentary reception,Mark Perry, CEO VIVID, presented the final document to the APPG for the Central South.

He explained the document had been created with the aim of shedding a light on the housing situation in our region. Businesses and universities shared their concerns and spoke about the impact they are already feeling.

Mark questioned what the next steps should be, given the expertise around the meeting table and that there was general agreement that there is a major issue.

Amanda said red tape was being removed to allow more houses to be built but she questioned whether devolution might impact the pace of change.

Caroline questioned to what extent the different types of accommodation are an issue?

Mark said we needed to encourage a culture which is permissive rather than dismissive. Too often obstacles were put in the way of homes being built. He said we all need to advocate the economic benefits derived from building homes.

Simon said Carnival UK employs 2,000 people and is the largest employer in Southampton. They have recently mapped where their employees live and there is a concentration in Southampton and the wider Solent region. He said a joined-up agenda is needed to support long-term economic prosperity and employers can help by advocating.

Ross said the Chamber is aware that talent is being lost from the region and when those people try to return they can’t find suitable homes. He said **Central South: A Call for Housing Change** was the business model required and was happy to support it as the Chamber.

Tim said a strategic plan was needed for the region. Darren said it was important to identify the barriers and blockers to skills and a vision was needed.

Amanda said the APPG for the Central South should look at the economic drivers and whether we can engage support from Homes England. She said housing needs to come back on the agenda so we can identify how to move the issue forward.

**Action: Housing will be included on future agendas.**

**Culture update**

Claire gave an update on cultural activity in Southampton. She highlighted the creation of a Creative Directory that will allow developers to find local artists to work on schemes/public art and said the Daily Echo was supporting messaging with a regular culture column. She explained the city has one of the best collections of 20th century art outside of London.

Southampton as a tourist destination was being further developed and the New York Times recently identified Southampton as the No 1 place in the world to visit. A new visitor guide and visitor itineraries were being developed and there will be a focus on the conference and business events market.

Gavin said it was great to see that the hard work that went into Southampton’s City of Culture bid had been taken forward by Claire and her team.

Darren said his focus was on the next generation and how kids in Thornhill can be inspired to study something creative in the future.

Claire said there was a lot of work still to be done and it was all about ensuring a new generation feel they are part of the city’s future. Events such as the Annual Young People’s Festival will help and the skills agenda remained a priority.

**Promoting the Central South region**

Leigh-Sara shared the background regarding how Central South – Gateway to the UK was born and how a private sector led consortium has been championing the region on a national and international stage.

Leigh-Sara invited Gavin Hall, Head of Central South Office, Savills and Oliver Sowton, Partner, Blake Morgan to share why they are involved.

Gavin described it as the perfect partnership between public and private sector and Oliver said they were working together to make sure the economy of the region continues to move forward.

Ross said the powerhouse of the Central South needs greater recognition but we need to be able to articulate the offer with clarity to ensure we attract investment.

Amanda suggested the way forward was to put together a comms overview highlighting the economic investment opportunities and where it fits with the industrial strategy. She said devolution will be the catalyst for more things happening and we need to articulate the offer from our region.

**Action: Business South will continue to promote the Central South Region and prepare an overview of the economic investment opportunities**

**A Place Partnership Package has been launched to support the annual programme of activity** [**10266\_Place\_Partnership\_Pack.pdf**](https://centralsouth.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/10266_Place_Partnership_Pack.pdf)**.**

**Ends**