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Rt Hon Andy Burnham MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
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Via email to andy.burnham.mp@parliament.uk

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Dear Prime Minister

Delivering National Growth through the Thames Valley

On behalf of Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce and the Thames Valley Assembly, we congratulate you on your appointment as Prime Minister and wish you every success as you lead the United Kingdom through a period of significant economic opportunity and global uncertainty.

Representing thousands of businesses across Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, and Swindon, together with our universities, further education providers and civic organisations, we share your ambition to build a stronger, more productive and more inclusive economy.

The Thames Valley is one of Europe's most productive regional economies. The region is home of the technology and innovation that developed the first mobile phone call in the UK, a science base that developed COVID-19 vaccines during the pandemic, and Universities at the forefront of climate change research with industry. Yet our region's competitive future is by no means guaranteed.

This 10-point plan addresses how by working in partnership with your government, and by maximizing the benefits of Devolution through scale and purpose, we can continue to consistently turn innovation into investment, ideas into exports and talent into economic growth.

Fundamentally we have seen how this growth delivers economic opportunities and benefits across the UK, and every improvement in the Thames Valley's competitiveness creates benefits that extend far beyond our own business community through mutual supply chain opportunities for companies large and small across our Accredited Chamber network in the UK.

Our 10-Point Plan sets out practical recommendations shaped by employers and partners across our region. Together, they form a proposition for partnership: actions Government can take, matched by the assets, leadership and delivery capacity of the Thames Valley. To improve competitiveness, accelerate investment and strengthen the UK's long-term economic resilience, we ask your government to:

1. Act swiftly on the Milburn Review. Reduce the cost of hiring young people and those who are NEET, further reform the Growth & Skills Levy to enable industry to invest in workforce development and provide long-term certainty on funding for Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs).

2. Back Heathrow expansion. Back Heathrow expansion to drive economic growth across the whole of the UK and expedite the Western Rail Link to Heathrow, a fully developed scheme capable of early delivery and attracting substantial private finance to improve surface access. This will connect 20% of the UK population to the UK's only hub airport with a single interchange.

3. Endorse a fully-fledged Thames Valley Strategic Mayoral Authority. Endorse a fully-fledged Thames Valley Strategic Mayoral Authority for Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Swindon, unlocking more than £18.7 billion of additional economic output for the UK.

4. Ensure East West Rail unlocks wider economic opportunities. Ensure East West Rail unlocks new housing, employment growth and wider economic opportunities, strengthening links between national innovation clusters, the Thames Valley's functional economic geography and a new Mayoral Strategic Authority.

5. Ensure the UK-EU reset reduces barriers. Ensure the UK-EU reset significantly reduces barriers to supply chains, improves mobility for skilled workers and makes it easier for businesses to operate across borders.

6. Accelerate the New Hospitals Programme. Accelerate the delivery of a new Royal Berkshire Hospital, beginning with securing the available land option.

7. Prime the Thames Valley's investment potential. Designate Slough as an AI Growth Zone and the Thames Valley as a Life Sciences Innovation Zone, with the potential to partner with other UK regions to support the UK's digital transformation and healthcare ambitions.

8. Support our world-leading universities. Support our world-leading universities with policies that create an open and attractive environment for international students, researchers and global partnerships.

9. Unleash the economic potential of our business community. Commit to reducing the tax and administrative burden and cutting the cost of doing business. Provide the appropriate planning reforms to deliver growth.

10. Work with Accredited UK Chambers. Work with Accredited UK Chambers to grow SMEs' knowledge, capability and confidence to trade internationally.

Alongside these priorities, businesses need confidence and stability. Continued increases in the cost of employment, persistent inflationary pressures and international uncertainty have made investment decisions more difficult. A competitive tax environment, proportionate regulation and long-term policy certainty remain essential if businesses are to invest with confidence.

The Thames Valley has consistently demonstrated that collaboration between business, academia, and civic leadership delivers results. Through the Thames Valley Assembly, we are bringing those leaders together behind a shared ambition for the region and creating a ready-made partnership through which Government can align national priorities with regional expertise, investment and delivery capacity across productivity, innovation, skills, infrastructure and international trade.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss how the Government and the Thames Valley can work together as genuine delivery partners to unlock the next phase of UK economic growth. We would be delighted to host you, on a date convenient to yourself, at a meeting of the Thames Valley Assembly, bringing together business leaders, university vice-chancellors, local authority leaders and strategic partners to identify where joint action can deliver the greatest return for the region and the country.

The Thames Valley stands ready to invest, innovate, trade and deliver alongside your government. We look forward to building that partnership with you and your team.

Yours sincerely,

Paul Britton
Chief Executive
Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce

Professor Robert Van de Noort CBE DL
Vice-Chancellor, University of Reading
Chair, Thames Valley Assembly