



A Summary of the Planning Framework



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What is Thames Gateway?

Thames Gateway is East London, Essex and Kent along the River Thames. Previously called the East Thames Corridor, it extends from Stratford and Greenwich in London to Tilbury in Essex and Sittingbourne and Sheerness in Kent (see map [43Kb]).

Why is Thames Gateway special?

For London and the South East of England to be able to keep up with the demands of modern society, and to remain competitive as somewhere to live, work and invest, the region must have room for new development as well as the ability to preserve what already makes it attractive. Thames Gateway provides outstanding opportunities for new homes, jobs and community and leisure facilities. It has many large under used or derelict sites which can be used for development without building in the open countryside. Its network of railways and roads is expanding fast. Easy access to the rest of Europe, and to the jobs that will bring, will be even quicker once the Channel Tunnel Rail Link is in place. All this is set among fine examples of natural and historic heritage.

However, there are problems to be tackled. Traditional industries employ far fewer people, or have left the area, leaving unemployment in their wake. Parts of Thames Gateway's environment show the legacy of past carelessness with damaged land, breakers yards and overhead power lines.

What has been done so far?

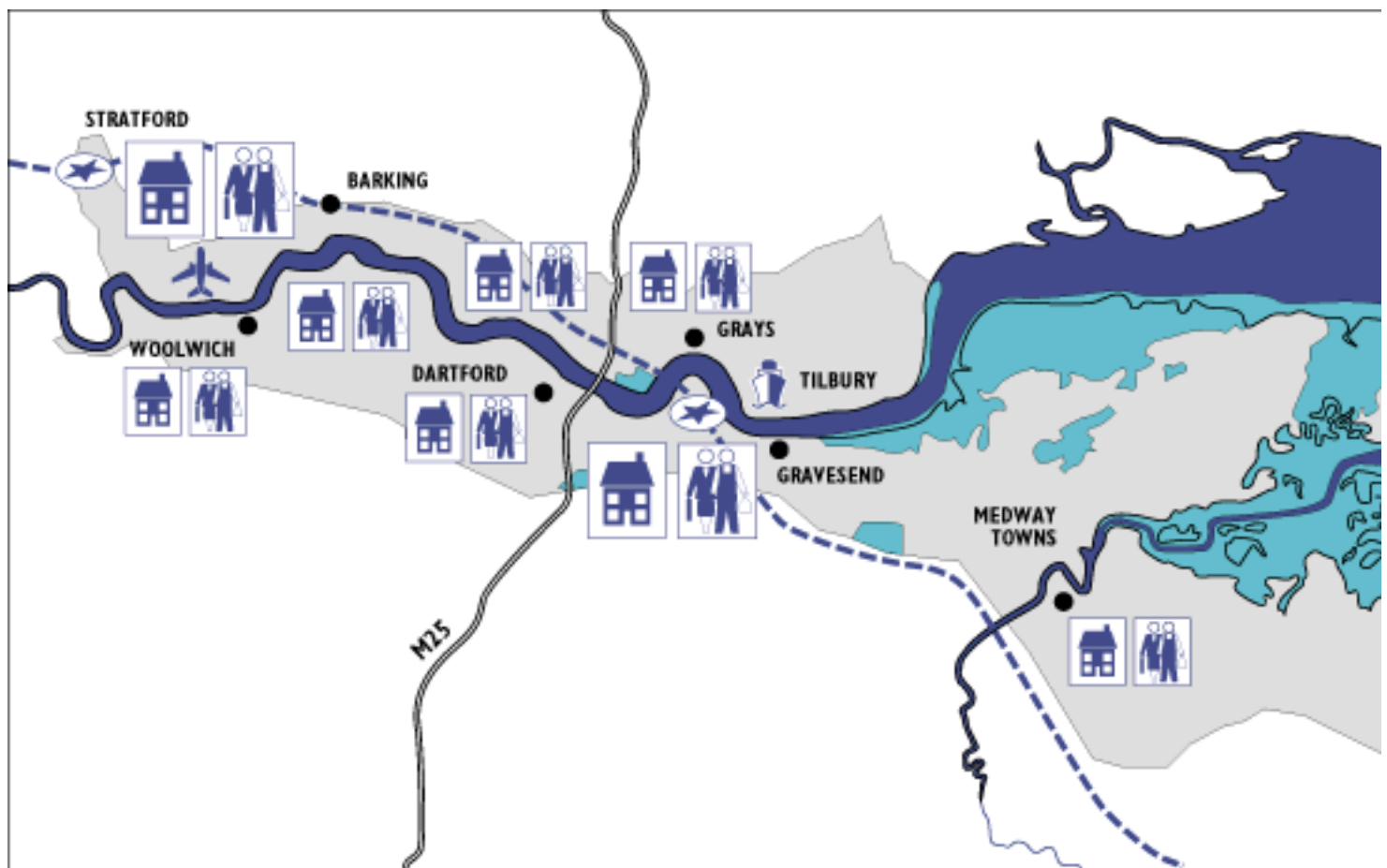
In 1991 the Government commissioned a report by consultants Llewelyn Davies on the development capacity of the East Thames Corridor. Published in 1993, this confirmed the area's potential, but made it clear that for this to be realised, there needed to be a coherent overall framework for the area and arrangements to ensure that efforts to promote its economic and environmental improvement are properly co-ordinated. Without that it was likely that past patterns of piecemeal development would be repeated. In particular, it was likely that the full scale of the opportunity would not be realised.

The Thames Gateway Task Force was set up to prepare a "Planning Framework" and co-ordinate Government policy in the area. The remit of the Task Force was to create and maintain an overall vision, to inform and coordinate the activities of all concerned, and provide a clear idea of what the area can become. It was asked to foster partnership between all of these different organisations and interests, who can work together in achieving this vision.

The Thames Gateway Planning Framework

In June 1995 the Government published the Thames Gateway Planning Framework. This is a supplement to the Planning Guidance for the South East, (RPG9) issued in March 1994, which identifies what was then called the East Thames Corridor as a major potential focus for growth and development, as part of an overall shift of emphasis from the west of the South East Region to the east. The Planning Framework (RPG9a) as sub-Regional Planning Guidance provides, along with Regional Planning Guidance and Planning Policy Guidance notes, the context for the revision of statutory development plans by local authorities. It will also be reflected in decisions on planning matters taken by the Secretary of State for the Environment.

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Planning Framework

Objectives for Thames Gateway

to improve economic performance, enhancing London's position as a major World and European city;

to maximise the opportunities for new economic activity and jobs, created by the improving transport connections to continental Europe;

to work with the market; building on existing economic and community strengths, reinforcing the economic base, and at the same time attracting new economic investment; strengthening existing communities as well as attracting new residents;

to encourage a sustainable pattern of development, optimising the use of existing and proposed infrastructure and making the fullest possible use of the many vacant, derelict and under-used sites which previously supported other activities;

to safeguard and enhance natural and man made environmental assets and, where necessary, raise the quality of the local environment; to encourage the highest quality in the design, layout and appearance of new developments.

Taking account of these objectives the Planning Framework aims: to foster full realisation of the area's opportunities; to provide the context that will enable individual developments to be taken forward with confidence; to be flexible enough to allow the area to respond to a range of levels of public investment and market interest over the long term; to protect environmental assets and identify improvements to the environment which can be undertaken through a more coordinated approach; and to be based on the principles of sustainable development.

The Planning Framework establishes a set of principles to guide the consideration of future proposals for the development and environmental enhancement of the area, sets out a broad strategy for economic and housing development, transport and the environment, and outlines a land use vision, together with more detailed guidance on how that might be reflected at the local level.

The Planning Framework Principles

Making the most of the Thames Gateway opportunity: developments will be encouraged where they make best use of the area's strengths and resources for growth and regeneration, including its huge sites, lying between the centre of Europe's largest City and the heart of Europe's expanding market.

Creating a vibrant and sustainable pattern of communities: the aim is for new developments to provide a mix of employment, housing and the activities needed for thriving communities, minimising the need for travel, and taking full account of the existing pattern of development.

Relating transport opportunity and land use opportunity: Thames Gateway can provide a practical example of the application of the principles of sustainable development, with less need to travel and less reliance on the motor car; making the most of transport facilities, including public transport, already in place or planned.

Bringing life to the river and river-front: much of Thames Gateway has a water-frontage, whether on the Thames, Lea, Medway or Swale. The river is a valuable resource for transport, amenity and environmental benefits, and developments which ignore or detract from it will be discouraged.

A new Environmental Standard: for Thames Gateway's potential to be fulfilled requires a new approach of greater care for its environment, including its man-made and natural heritage. New development will be of the highest quality.

The Broad Strategy

Centres of development

Development is encouraged where suitable throughout Thames Gateway, but two main centres are envisaged:

- i The Royal Docks and Stratford: where substantial growth can promote a stronger association between Thames Gateway and the commercial heart of the capital, gaining sufficient development impetus to help regeneration in a wider part of East London, north and south of the River Thames.
- ii Kent Thames-side: Dartford and Gravesend north of the A2 can be a growth area of regional significance. Its locational advantages for business suggest that its development can complement growth in London. Development will focus on damaged land and can help to reduce Kent's current reliance on London for jobs.

The local application of the strategy is described in the Planning Framework in some detail. As well as the two strategic centres, the main areas for change include Greenwich Peninsula and Barking Reach where new communities are promoted, and Havering Riverside - a major site which could accommodate a single, land extensive project as well as homes and other job opportunities. Much can also be expected from existing communities, including the Medway Towns, Chafford Hundred and Thamesmead. The strategy makes the most of the potential of Thames Gateway's rivers, with the Medway estuary and Essex Thames-side in particular supported as centres of port operations.

The Framework promotes regeneration in the context of an improving environment, where areas for conservation are clearly identified, the countryside is valued, and the best agricultural land protected. It also protects the character of individual towns, and the internationally important marshes of the Thames and Medway estuaries and the Swale.

Economic Development

The Planning Framework recognises that for Thames Gateway to fulfill its potential will require development planning which is responsive to market forces while meeting the needs of the local community. It must build on existing strengths, for example through training and the introduction of new technology. Manufacturing is well represented in the area, and the Framework promotes retention of areas for industrial uses. Offices activities are also important but, except at premium locations, unlikely to grow significantly in the short to medium term.

Distribution and logistics can build on Thames Gateway's strategic location and infrastructure, including the major ports of London, Tilbury, Sheerness and Thamesport. The Planning Framework promotes the transport of freight by water. Thames Gateway's extensive sites with good access to large markets might attract sports stadia, exhibition and conference centres or leisure facilities. The area's history and heritage provide potential for tourism, not only building on attractions at Greenwich, Rochester and Chatham, but developing sites at Woolwich Arsenal, Three Mills and Tilbury Fort.

The Planning Framework outlines why some of the area's existing strengths, such as energy generation and a variety of "poor neighbour" industries, must be treated with care. Their products and services are important, as is the employment they provide, but any expansion will need to be consistent with the Framework's principles, including the need to promote vibrant mixed communities, the commitment to sustainable development, and the new environmental standard.

Homes

The Planning Framework estimates that in due course Thames Gateway might provide over 110 000 new dwellings, with 70 000 anticipated by the year 2006. Of these in particular, a significant proportion will be in London and Essex, with the potential of Thames Gateway in Kent extending into the longer term.

Existing communities will continue to provide homes for the majority of residents, helped where necessary by planning policies to encourage an improvement in the quality and amenities of the housing stock and local environment. Local authorities are asked to give priority to the redevelopment of vacant and under-used urban sites before the release of greenfield land, and to foster sustainable relationships between homes, workplaces and community facilities. Nevertheless, the main scope for new housing will lie in the major sites, including the Royal Docks, Barking Reach, Thamesmead, Chafford Hundred and Chatham Maritime, together with, in due course, Greenwich Peninsula, Kent Thames-side and Havering Riverside.

The Planning Framework emphasises the need to cater for the full range of housing needs, from affordable housing to the executive market. It emphasises the benefits of mixed development and the need to provide a good quality residential environment. The Framework points out that mixed housing and employment developments with, where appropriate, higher densities, can help achieve more sustainable development. Affordable housing is identified as a key requirement, and local authorities are asked to plan for a reasonable mix and balance of house types and sizes to cater for a range of needs, especially on the larger opportunity sites.

Environment

Thames Gateway is at the core of the Greater Thames, an internationally significant chain of estuarine habitats for overwintering birds, with many scarce plants and invertebrates. Extensive areas are given protection as Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Special Protection Areas under the EC Birds Directive, and as wetlands designated under the RAMSAR Convention. The Framework promotes effective management of the coastal zone as necessary for the sustained quality of these habitats. The Planning Framework emphasises too the importance of the unique open landscape of this area. It also draws attention to the importance of other ecological resources, as well as tree cover and open ground, particularly in the built up areas of Thames Gateway.

Emphasis is also placed on archaeological resources and the built heritage, reflecting the long history of man's activities in the area. Policies to recognise the potential of the estuarine environment to yield remains are promoted. Particular emphasis is placed on protecting the settings of important historic features, such as in Greenwich and Rochester. In general, landscape enhancement, environmental improvement and attention to the design of new building and the urban environment are identified as central to the Thames Gateway initiative.

Open spaces, and other leisure and amenity facilities, are promoted as an integral part of the living environment, helping to turn new developments into new communities. Within existing communities, policies to safeguard well-used open spaces and improve the use of others are encouraged.

Transport

The Planning Framework emphasises that the success of Thames Gateway will require a level of accessibility comparable with that available elsewhere. The scale of regeneration possible in the area provides an opportunity to plan transport and land use together, in the interests of sustainability. The initial emphasis is on using the capacity of the transport network which is already in place or in the pipeline. The Planning Framework lists the very substantial improvements under construction or consideration, amounting to a 4billion investment over 10 years, excluding the Channel Tunnel Rail Link (CTRL) and other projects to be taken forward by private finance. The CTRL, with a station at Ebbsfleet in Kent Thames-side and perhaps at Stratford, will provide fast access to and from the Continent and high speed commuting into London.

While the already improving transport network can support the development of many of the major sites in Thames Gateway, there may be a case for further investment over time, particularly where this can help to secure a more sustainable relationship between development and transport. Some projects may attract private finance, while others will require contributions from the development they facilitate. There is a need for an increasing emphasis on public transport, walking and cycling. Nevertheless there remains a need for improvements to Thames Gateway's road network, which will influence the pace at which development opportunities can be brought forward.

Among planned or potential improvements, the need for new and improved links across the River Thames is given particular emphasis. These have the potential to help the area function more efficiently, and reduce the time and distance of journeys. The Framework suggests that realistic options which maximise the use of public transport should be given first consideration. A number of schemes which could contribute to these objectives are identified, including the Jubilee Line Extension, the Docklands Light Railway extension to Lewisham, a third Blackwall Crossing, a multi-modal river crossing in the Gallions Reach area, a lower Thames crossing, and the CTRL. A rail tunnel linking the North Kent line at Woolwich and the North London line at the Royal Docks could produce significant improvements in accessibility. Linked to Ebbsfleet and the major sites of Kent Thameside, this would provide a public transport link between the Thames Gateway's two major centres of development.

The First Steps

The regeneration and development of Thames Gateway is seen as a long-term, market-led project, stretching for 20 or 30 years into the future. Nevertheless, it has got off to a promising start. Government policies are giving full weight to the area's needs. Swale and the London riverside have gained Assisted Area status, attracting grants to assist job-related investment. Thames Gateway is a priority for English Partnerships, the new agency for regeneration which can help in restoring derelict land. 8m at Barking Reach is its first major investment. The very first bidding round for the Government's Single Regeneration Budget Challenge Fund produced 54m of Government money for Thames Gateway, leveraging in a total of 227m towards regeneration projects. Many other regeneration initiatives focus on individual communities within Thames Gateway.

Meanwhile transport improvements are not waiting for the Channel Tunnel Rail Link. The DLR and Jubilee Line

extensions will bring new river crossings, helping to connect homes and jobs. Modernisation of the North Kent Lines and improvements to the London, Tilbury and Southend Line will encourage travel by rail. New river crossings were the subject of a consultation paper from the Government Office for London within days of the issue of the Planning Framework. Meanwhile improvements to the trunk road network are well underway.

Partnerships between local and central government agencies, the private sector and local community groups are coming into being. They are promoting the vision of Thames Gateway outlined in the Planning Framework. Such activities are developing at all levels, from the strategic concerns of North Kent Success and the Thames Gateway London Regeneration Partnership, through area bodies such as the Greenwich Waterfront and Kent Thameside development partnerships, to those working towards the development of each of Thames Gateway's major sites. Implementation of the Thames Gateway vision may be a long term process, but it is one which has well and truly begun.

How do I Find out More?

This provides a description of the Thames Gateway Planning Framework, for use as general information. It does not itself constitute planning guidance or a statement of policies. These are contained in the Thames Gateway Planning Framework (RPG9A), which is available from **The Stationery Office**.



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