

# *Green Cluster Studies*

## **Shorne to Shore Technical Report**



January 2011





# Executive Summary

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*The Shorne to Shore Cluster covers the countryside between the urban areas of Gravesend and the Medway Towns, both of which are experiencing intense growth. These new populations will put increasing pressure on the adjacent rural areas and the popular visitor destinations in the south of the cluster area. This cluster study explores ways to relieve pressure on vulnerable areas while protecting the landscape's unique biodiversity. It offers opportunities to increase access to the landscape, boost the local economy and raise the profile of the area.*

*The Shorne to Shore landscape begins at the rolling chalk downlands, drops down over open arable fields and stretches out to the wild, flat grazing marshes of the Thames Estuary. This is one of few places where views to the Thames Estuary marshes can be enjoyed from parts of Gravesend, the A226 and commuter trains. The broad belt of open arable farmland which sweeps from the ridge towards the marshes provides the setting for these expansive views. By contrast, the narrow rural lanes have an enclosed, almost sunken character; some continue as historic tracks leading out onto the marshes. The ancient woodlands that cloak the broad wooded ridge to the north of the downs form a backdrop to views and a setting for the villages of Shorne, Higham and Cuxton. The woodlands are the focus for a group of protected landscapes which include Shorne Woods Country Park, Ashenbank Wood, Jeskyns, the historic landscape parklands of Cobham Hall and Ranscombe Farm Nature Reserve. These highly accessible, beautiful landscapes are promoted as 'hubs' for countryside activities and environmental education.*

*At the heart of the Cluster, Shorne Woods Country Park is Kent County Council's flagship country park, with approximately 400,000 visitors a year. 2km to the north, the west section of the Thames and Medway Canal is being restored as a focus for informal recreation. This, together with the Thames Estuary Path and possible future cycleways along the River Medway will improve links in the National Cycle Network. At a much larger scale, one of the options under consideration for a Lower Thames Crossing will pass through the Cluster. There are also influential projects just outside the Cluster, including the Cyclopark to the south of Gravesend, the RSPB Cliffe Pools and a major mixed-use development in the centre of the Hoo Peninsula.*

*The Green Cluster Studies' vision for Shorne to Shore draws together and expresses a common vision for the Cluster. It is an ambitious vision, which focuses on new greenway connections, an innovative approach to engaging with farmers and landowners to deliver environmental improvements and a step change in the way countryside access is promoted to urban communities. The vision complements existing projects and activities. Key stakeholders responsible for leading and influencing the ongoing projects and activities in the Shorne to Shore Cluster include Gravesham Borough Council, Medway Council, Kent County Council, local parish councils, Natural England, Kent Downs AONB, Kent Wildlife Trust, the RSPB, Sustrans, Woodland Trust, Forestry Commission and Plantlife.*

*The Green Cluster vision makes the case for strategic, targeted investment in Green Grid places and connections and aims to strengthen links between urban communities and their surrounding countryside. It is accompanied by an Action Plan, which highlights interrelationships between proposed and ongoing projects throughout the cluster.*



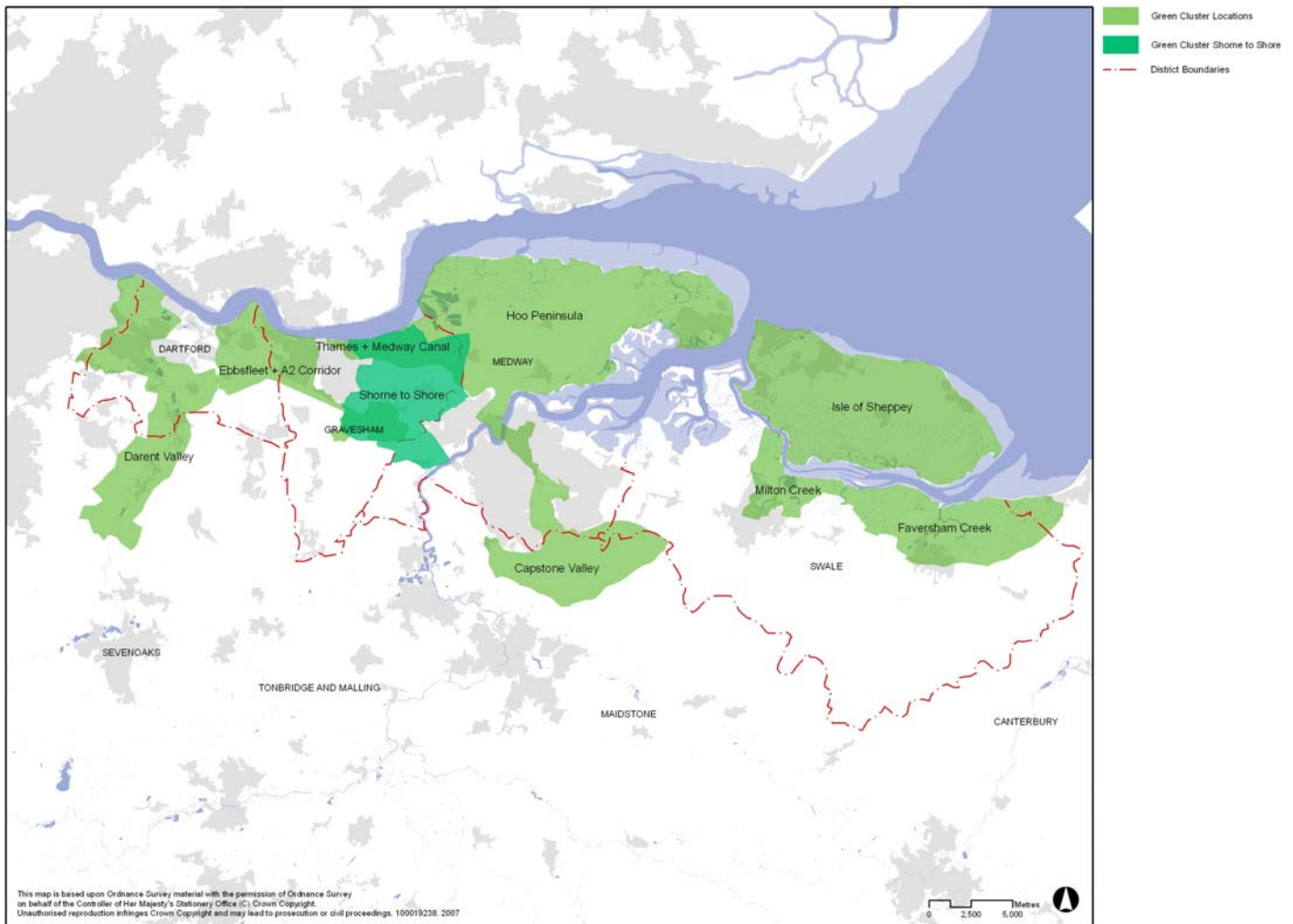
# 1 What are the Green Cluster Studies?

The nine North Kent Green Cluster Studies set out ambitious visions for environmental enhancements that will improve people's quality of life as well as boost biodiversity and protect wildlife habitats. These visions have been formed through a series of workshops with key stakeholders in each area, including representatives of local residents, community groups, charities and the public sector.

Gravesend, to the west of the cluster study, is expected to provide 9,300 new houses by 2026, while to the east, 5,000 new homes are proposed at Lodge Hill in the centre of the Hoo Peninsula when the MoD moves out of Chattenden Barracks in 2012. This cluster study responds to stakeholder concerns about increased traffic congestion and visitor management and looks at possible solutions that will protect vulnerable areas while enhancing the landscape's unique biodiversity. It offers opportunities to increase access to the countryside, boost the local economy and raise the profile of the area.

'Clusters' or groupings of planned and aspirational green space projects were identified during the Green Grid stakeholder workshops held in Kent Thameside, Medway and Swale in 2007 and the areas selected for the Green Cluster Studies take account of this earlier work. The Green Cluster Studies have:

- identified a coherent sense of place for each cluster area
- captured what is already happening
- identified stakeholder aspirations and updated existing studies



Green Clusters



- identified inter-dependencies, gaps and opportunities
- articulated a common vision for each cluster area
- developed an outline action plan which set out actions, governance and phasing for delivering the vision
- made the business case for investment

The Cluster Studies have adopted a partnership approach to co-ordinate discussions amongst key stakeholders in each cluster. Many are engaged in developing ideas and drawing up plans for individual sites and the Cluster Studies' workshops have provided a valuable opportunity to focus attention on the relationships between projects and the wider landscape setting.

The Shorne to Shore Cluster Study has been informed by research and consultation with stakeholders working on environmental projects in the area. The results of this preliminary review were used to inform and prompt discussion at two stakeholder workshops and a meeting with representatives of local parish councils and community groups. The focus of the first workshop was to collate information, define objectives and understand stakeholder aspirations. The community meeting provided an opportunity for people to discuss local environmental issues and articulate their own locally based vision. It was timed to contribute to the ideas and information gathering stage of the study, so that the views of local community groups could be taken into account. The second workshop was a creative session in which the stakeholders worked together to develop a common vision for the cluster.

The overarching Green Clusters vision for the Shorne to Shore Cluster captures stakeholder aspirations and visions and inspires an ambitious and creative approach. It is not a proposal or a bid, but is intended to be a helpful tool to prompt creative discussion and joined-up thinking in future discussions between stakeholders as the various projects in the cluster are taken forward. Ultimately the Green Cluster Studies will increase confidence, make the case for investment and provide a lever to bid for further funding.





## 2 Shorne to Shore Green Cluster

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### Sense of place



exposed sky/shore - vantage - dropping away - trackways - clustered farmsteads - make-do



wooded ridge - closed to open - undulating edges - downland curves - coppice - hints of time



This is a relatively simple landscape, shaped by a transition between the rolling chalk downs to the south and the flat grazing marshes on the shores of the Thames Estuary to the north. A broad, wooded ridge to the north of the downs bisects the area and continues beyond the cluster boundary to form the spine of the Hoo Peninsula.

The ancient woodlands that cloak the ridgetop form a backdrop to views and a setting for the villages of Shorne, Higham and Cuxton, which are tucked against the undulating margins of the ridge. Higham has a more open setting; much of the village is surrounded by a vast expanse of arable farmland that sweeps away towards the Thames marshes. This broad belt of open arable farmland forms the transition between the wooded ridge and the Thames marshes and historic maps (dating from the 1860s) confirm that this has long been an open landscape, with an exceptionally large scale field pattern.

The expansive views from the A226, which crosses the landscape linking Higham with Gravesend, are a striking, distinctive characteristic of the cluster landscape. They prompt an immediate understanding of the simple structure and pattern of the key elements. These views continue throughout the rolling arable farmland to the north, towards Cliffe, but here they are often framed by straight shelterbelts and occasional grids of orchard trees. By contrast, the narrow lanes which run north-south between the wooded ridge and the marshes have an enclosed, almost sunken character. Some continue as historic tracks leading straight out onto the grazing marshes. Individual farmsteads along the lanes on the fringes of the marshes are often prominent in local views.

The village of Lower Higham and the ancient hamlet of Church Street step down towards the marshes, where the landscape becomes increasingly sparse and isolated. It is a flat, open marshland of exposed pastures dissected by drainage ditches and grazed by flocks of sheep. There are hints of activity in the form of the Metropolitan Police Firearms Training Facility and a cluster of industrial sites centred on the Hoo Railway Junction where there is a Network Rail Depot and the former British Uralite asbestos works, now used for a variety of commercial operations. The skyline is dominated by a double line of pylons carrying overhead cables between Gravesend and Cliffe.



The historic Thames and Medway Canal crosses the southern margins of the marshes, alongside the North Kent railway line. The canal dates from the early 19th century when it was constructed to provide safe passage for ships between the Thames and Medway rivers during a period when the Thames was at risk from attacks by the French. Today it is a narrow, partially infilled waterway which is the subject of a long-term restoration plan. The canal towpath/ cycleway provides a superb flat and easy route between Gravesend, the marshes and Lower Higham.

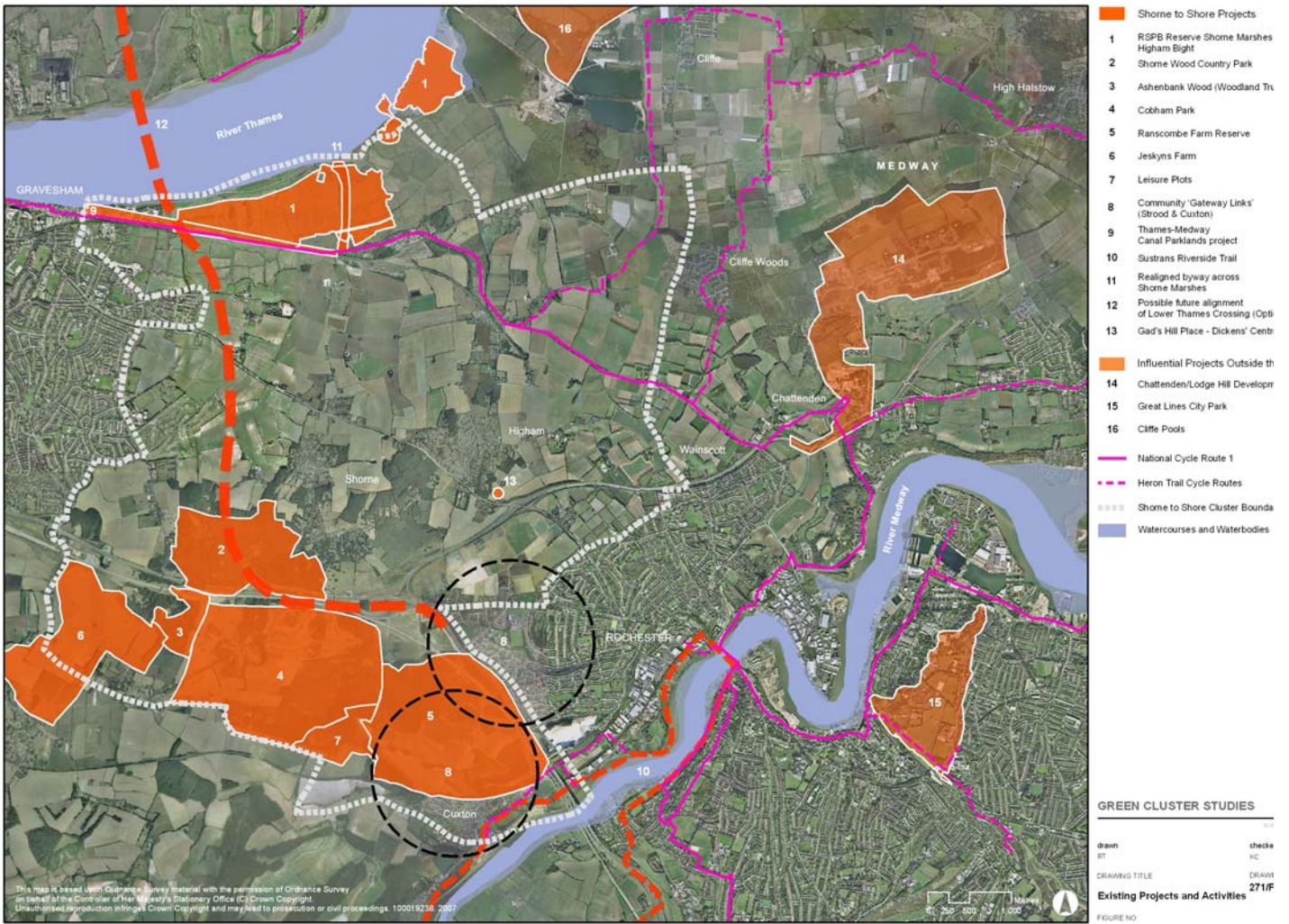
This stretch of countryside marks the first point to the east of London where the Metropolitan Green Belt meets the Thames Estuary. It has the potential to be an exceptionally accessible landscape and one of the few parts of North Kent where the Thames Estuary marshes can be enjoyed from the north eastern fringes of Gravesend and the commute between Gravesend and Rochester along the A226. Thousands of rail commuters also enjoy the views across the marshes from the mainline railway every day.

Most of the woodlands on the ridge and on the rolling chalk downlands to the south of the M2 corridor are ancient, with veteran trees, medieval earthbanks and historic tracks. The woodlands are the focus for a series of protected landscapes which include Shorne Woods Country Park, Ashenbank Wood, Jeskyns Community Woodland, the historic landscape parklands of Cobham Hall and Ranscombe Farm Nature Reserve. These highly accessible, beautiful landscapes are popular destinations, with car parks full to capacity at weekends. Shorne Woods Country Park and Jeskyns are promoted as 'hubs' for countryside activities and the visitor centre at the country park provides a range of facilities and programmes of environmental education.

To the south of Ranscombe Farm, the village of Cuxton is squeezed between the wooded downs and the floodplain of the River Medway. This is one of a string of settlements along the Medway Gap, a riverside access corridor which contains the A228 and the Medway Valley railway.







Existing proposals, projects & activities

## Forces for change

Existing and proposed projects and activities are shown on the aerial view. These include projects that are in the planning stages, as well as those that are ongoing.

Protected landscapes where there is ongoing investment and active management are:

- **RSPB Shorne Marshes & Higham Bight Reserve** - part of one of the largest remaining blocks of lowland wet grassland in England. The area is under active conservation management that aims to re-establish a thriving coastal grazing marsh eco-system.
- **Shorne Woods Country Park** - Kent County Council's flagship country park, with approximately 400,000 visitors a year. The country park is set within ancient woodland, with areas of coppice, meadow and local wetlands. The visitor centre (opened in 2006) is a model of sustainable design and renewable technologies. The park has a range of access for all facilities, with an all-terrain motorised scooter, easy access trails and a sensory garden. The Shorne Community Archaeology Project plays an active part in the life of the country park, with a programme of archaeological digs and activities.
- **Jeskyns** - a Forestry Commission owned community woodland which includes areas for children's play and picnicking, as well as footpaths and cycleways through woodlands, meadows and orchards.





- **Ashenbank Wood** - owned and managed by the Woodland Trust, this ancient woodland/wood pasture has numerous veteran trees and pollards and is the site of a nationally important Bronze Age barrow.
- **Cobham Park** - the grounds of an important 16th century mansion which is now a school. The 150 acre parkland was landscaped by Repton and includes the Gothic Dairy, Pump House, Darnley Mausoleum and a range of classical garden buildings. It is on the register of Historic Parks and Gardens and has been restored by the Cobham-Ashenbank Management Scheme (CAMS). The successful restoration programme now means that ownership of Cobham Woods and the Darnley Mausoleum can be transferred from Gravesham Borough Council to the National Trust. Public footpaths criss-cross the park landscape, and access across the park is set to become more integrated with the creation of new permissive routes and facilities that link into the existing public rights of way network.
- **Ranscombe Farm** - managed by the wildflower charity Plantlife, this 560 acre reserve provides opportunities for quiet walks amidst a landscape of arable habitats, extensive ancient woodland and relict fragments of chalk grassland.

Management of the Jeskyns - Ashenbank - Shorne Woods Country Park - Cobham Park - Ranscombe Farm complex is co-ordinated through the Cobham and Shorne Countryside Partnership, which works to promote the area as a whole. For instance, the partnership arranges joint activities/events, monitors common issues and shares best practice.

The western section of the **Thames and Medway Canal** is being restored for informal recreation as part of the Thames Gateway Parklands initiative. This 'Great Expectations' project includes the restoration of the first 1200m of canal east of Mark Lane, the installation of pumping equipment to provide a sustainable water source which will allow the canal to be re-filled and 'topped up' and improvements to adjacent rights of way, including National Cycle Route One to increase opportunities for recreation. Improvements to the Gravesend Riverside Leisure Area are also underway as part of the Great Expectations project.

**Gads Hill Place** - there are plans for a new school building and the possible conversion of Dickens' former home into a visitor centre which will be a significant tourism destination.

**Strood and Cuxton community engagement** - This initiative, led by the Valley of Visions Landscape Partnership Scheme, includes a series of community engagement projects focusing on the environmental, access and education improvements in villages and towns. The aim is to encourage neighbouring communities to work together and two of the settlements, Strood and Cuxton are within the Cluster.

**Medway Gap Cycle Route** - Sustrans is commissioned by the Valley of Visions Landscape Partnership Scheme on a project planning study to investigate providing cycle access on both banks of the River Medway between Rochester and Maidstone. Such a route would enable National Cycle Route 17 to be moved from its current path up the busy A228 at Bluebell Hill to a preferable, largely traffic-free, route.

**Lower Thames Crossing** - a Department of Transport funded study has considered how to address capacity constraints at the existing Dartford-Thurrock River Crossing. A number of options have been explored and the study concluded that there were three potentially viable routes for the Lower Thames Crossing. One of these, Option C, is aligned across the Shorne to Shore Cluster Study area and the Forces for Change map shows the indicative alignment (for Option C) that is mapped in the Department of Transport's report. This would be a major new piece of infrastructure in the national highway network which could have very significant impacts on character and accessibility of local landscapes and on the range of environmental assets within the Shorne to Shore Cluster.

A number of influential projects and activities are underway on the fringes of the Cluster, immediately beyond the Cluster boundary. The most relevant are:

- **Cyclopark** - proposals for a major multi-sports attraction for the area between the traces of the A2 and High Speed 1 to the south of Gravesend. Phase 1 is due to be completed by March 2010 and phase 2 (subject to funding) by March 2011.
- **RSPB Cliffe Pools** - restoration of the saline lagoons (former clay diggings) associated with a cement



works to develop a nature reserve with a focus on sustainable wetland habitats, development of a visitor experience plan and appropriate visitor infrastructure

- **Lodge Hill development** - a mixed-use development of approximately 5,000 homes on the site of Chattenden Barracks in the centre of the Hoo Peninsula. The development is expected to progress when the MoD moves out of Chattenden Barracks in 2012 and the increased population is likely lead to greater visitor and commuter traffic on the Shorne to Shore area, and particularly to Lower Higham railway station.
- **Great Lines Heritage Park** - work is underway to transform the Great Lines Heritage Park as part of the restoration of the historic fortifications of the Chatham Lines and its field of fire. The park will offer education, training, sports and recreation opportunities for the people of Medway. Great Lines Heritage Park is part of the proposed World Heritage Site which includes Chatham's Historic Dockyard, Fort Amherst, Gun Wharf, Upnor Castle, Brompton Village, Pembroke and the Great Lines.
- **Valley of Visions Landscape Partnership Scheme** - a three-year Landscape Partnership Scheme supported primarily by the Heritage Lottery Fund and delivered through the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The project aims to encourage local people and visitors to conserve, enhance and celebrate the natural beauty and heritage of the Medway Gap, to ensure its survival for future generations.





## Stakeholders

**Key stakeholders who have contributed** to the Shorne to Shore Cluster Study are:

**Gravesham Borough Council** - delivery of Thames Gateway Parklands projects - Great Expectations (Riverside Leisure Area and Thames and Medway Canal) and the Cyclopark. Gravesham Borough Council is also developing an Open Space Strategy and is a partner in the delivery of the Kent Thameside Green Grid

**Medway Council** - the planning authority responsible for the Lodge Hill development. Medway Council is a unitary authority with responsibility for rights of way, cycleways and delivery of the Medway Green Grid. Medway Council owns the Ranscombe Farm reserve (which is managed by Plantlife)

**Kent County Council** - the accountable body for public rights of way and highways in the Gravesham Borough Council area - the Rights of Way Improvement Plan has been a key influence on the Cluster Study. Kent County Council owns and manages Shorne Woods Country Park.

**Local Parish Councils of Higham, Shorne, Cuxton, Frindsbury Extra and Cliffe and Cliffe Woods** - serve as the main link between local communities and the two planning authorities within the Cluster

**Natural England** - promotes public access to the natural environment and in the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity throughout the Shorne to Shore Cluster. A key area of interest is the targeting and management of agri-environmental schemes.

**RSPB** - RSPB Shorne Marshes & Higham Bight is a nature reserve covering 159 hectares of coastal grazing marsh, ditches, reed-bed, scrub and semi-improved grassland. The RSPB is also developing the RSPB Cliffe Pools, a nature reserve just to the north of the Cluster which is an influential destination.

**Kent Wildlife Trust** - Kent's leading nature conservation charity. It provides expert advice on biodiversity issues, organises wildlife surveys and runs a series of centres for environmental education. The Trust also works with planners, developers and decision makers to assess potential impacts of built development on biodiversity interests. Kent Wildlife Trust's Living Landscapes project has been used to inform the development of the vision for the Shorne to Shore Cluster

**Sustrans** - has prepared a feasibility study for the Thames Estuary Path which has the potential to promote enhanced cycleway and footpath access along the Saxon Shore Way. National Cycle Route 1 runs alongside the Thames and Medway Canal so Sustrans has a role in delivering the Parklands Great Expectations project. Sustrans is also commissioned by the Valley of Visions LPS to undertake a project planning study that explores the feasibility and costs of providing traffic free cycle access along both sides of the River Medway.

**Woodland Trust** - owns and manages Ashenbank Wood and is contributing to the co-ordinated delivery of objectives for the Cobham and Shorne Countryside Partnership. Plantlife - manages the Ranscombe Farm Reserve and is contributing to the co-ordinated delivery of objectives for the Cobham and Shorne Countryside Partnership

**Valley of Visions Landscape Partnership Scheme** - a three year Heritage Lottery funded project in the Medway Gap, led by the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Unit (AONB).

**Forestry Commission** - the Forest Enterprise owns and manages Jeskyn's community woodland and is contributing to the co-ordinated delivery of objectives for the Cobham and Shorne Countryside Partnership

**Shorne Community Archaeology Project** - based at Shorne Woods Country Park, this project leads a programme of digs and activities and is a focus for a large number of committed volunteers. The project ends in 2011 but there are already plans for a Shorne Heritage Group that will continue to explore the archaeology of the area and run a dig each summer.



## 3 Policy Context

The context maps have been prepared using GIS data. They illustrate current knowledge of the Shorne to Shore Cluster and highlight key potential influences that should be taken into account in planning future activities.

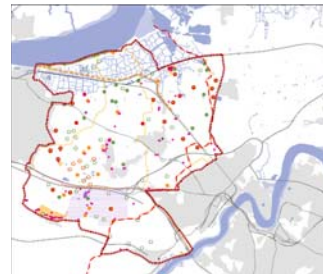
The full set of context maps is available separately; the mini-maps below provide an indication of the range of maps available.



*Statutory Designations*



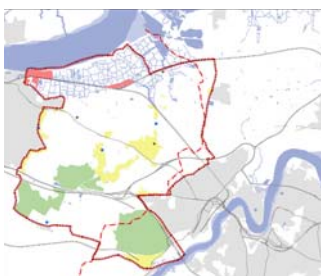
*Accessible Greenspaces*



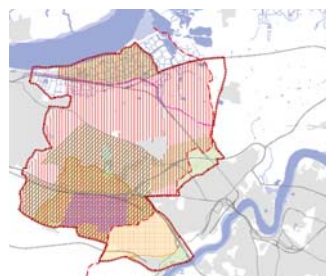
*Cultural Heritage*



*Ecological Network*



*Land Use*



*Planning & Policies*



*Topography*



*Destinations & Connections*

Key issues to note from the context maps are:

- **Thames Gateway Spatial framework**
  - the Shorne to Shore Cluster is part of the Thames Gateway and therefore of the Thames Gateway Parklands Programme, which aims to provide a network of accessible, high quality and sustainable landscapes and waterways, which capitalise on existing natural, built, historic and cultural assets. It supports their conservation, enhancement and ongoing use.
- **Topography**
  - the map shows the simple underlying structure of the land, with low-lying marshlands along the shore of the Thames Estuary and the Shorne Ridge, which continues north east to form the spine of the Hoo Peninsula
- **Statutory designations**
  - the grazing marshes, mudflats, creeks and inter-tidal salt marshes of Shorne Marshes and Higham Bight are of exceptional ecological value and part of the South Thames Estuary Marshes Special Protection Area (SPA) and Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI); part of the North Kent Marshes Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) and a Ramsar site (wetlands of international importance).
  - The majority of the ancient woodlands on the elevated land towards the south of the cluster are also SSSIs and the Ranscombe Farm Nature Reserve on the slopes of the North Kent Downs, includes relict fragments of chalk grassland, which are being actively managed for habitat creation and conservation.





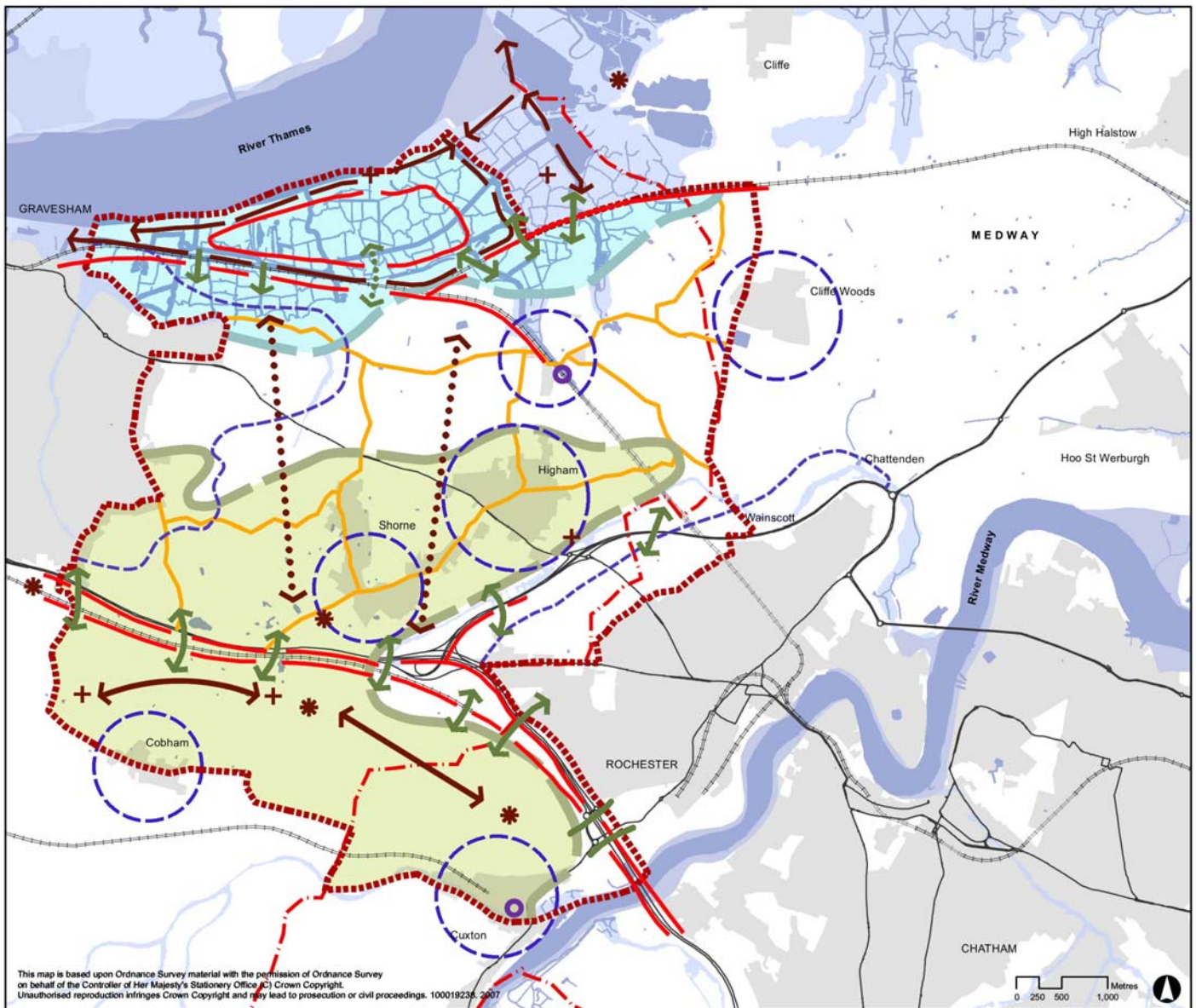
- **Ecological network model<sup>1</sup>**
  - there is potential to develop wetland and wet pasture habitats on the southern fringes of the marshes and throughout the Hoo Junction area.
  - The model also shows the potential for woodland habitat links along the Shorne Ridgeway and suggests that the soil type would support the creation of acid grassland/heathland habitats along the northern fringes of the Brammelhill and Randall woods (both ancient woodlands).
  - To the south of the A2/M2, the model shows that there is potential for the creation of chalk grassland habitats on the margins of the ancient woodlands on the slopes of the North Kent Downs.
- **Accessible greenspaces** - The key accessible greenspaces are the country park at Shorne Woods, Ashenbank Wood, Jeskyn's Community Woodland and the Ranscombe Farm Nature Reserve.
- **Cultural heritage**
  - The villages of Cobham and Shorne have Conservation Areas and the map also shows the Repton designed parklands at Cobham Hall, which are on the register of Historic Parks and Gardens.
  - Data from the Historic Environment Record suggests that there is a concentration of Bronze Age/early Roman sites along the fringes of the marshes and on the northern edges of the ancient woodlands near Shorne, as well as evidence of Mesolithic flintworks on heathlands within Shorne Woods Country Park.
  - There is the site of a Benedictine Priory at Church Street and a large cluster of lynchets and medieval earthworks (including two ancient hollow-ways) within the ancient woodlands of Shorne Ridgeway. Some of the farmhouse complexes along Lower Road and the rural lanes are of medieval origin.
  - The Thames and Medway Canal dates from 1800 and is a significant element within the wider network of military defence sites along the Thames. Military defence sites dating from the first and second World War are found throughout the cluster and include the remnants of RAF camps in Ashenbank Wood (which include two air-raid shelters and slit trenches).
- **Destinations and connections**
  - The Thames Estuary Path is a newly proposed promoted cycle route, which will be adopted as part of Sustrans' National Cycleway Network. This project is planned but not yet implemented.
  - National Cycle Route 1 runs along the towpath of the Thames and Medway Canal while the Heron Trail (a Regional Cycle Route) provides loops leading off NCR 1 onto the Hoo Peninsula. Other promoted routes, The Weald Way and the North Downs Way are on the slopes of the North Kent Downs in the southern part of the cluster. This map also shows public greenspaces, destinations (including railway stations, rural pubs and schools) and places of interest.
  - There are several significant destinations just outside the Cluster, including the Cyclopark (to the south of Gravesend), RSPB Cliffe Pools and Shornemead Fort to the north and Great Lines City Park in Chatham to the east.
  - The Shorne to Shore Cluster functions as a gateway to these sites and will receive additional visitors because of them. But destinations within the cluster are also well used and there is an increasing need for co-ordinated visitor management to tackle the associated access and environmental issues.

<sup>1</sup> Kent Wildlife Trust, 2007, Living Landscapes. A GIS based model which takes account of the location of existing core habitats, soil type and a range of criteria to indicate areas where habitat creation is likely to be of most benefit in terms of connecting core (fragmented) habitats and maximising opportunities for species migration and adaptation to climate change. This was also used as a basis for Kent's Biodiversity Opportunity Areas for the South East Biodiversity Strategy.



## 4 Analysis

The Analysis drawing begins to focus on the way the area is perceived, by pedestrians, cyclists, residents, visitors and those who work in the Shorne to Shore Cluster. It analyses the public realm, highlighting connections, gaps, barriers and the inter-relationships between existing projects and activities throughout the cluster



*Shorne to Shore: Analysis*

The Shorne to Shore Analysis Plan shows the broad structural landscape types - the open shoreline marshes and the broad wooded ridge - and highlights the importance of the edges of these landscape units as a backdrop to local views. It also shows the enclosed lanes, which are a feature of the landscape, and the location of villages where there may be specific opportunities for investment.

The map shows the key promoted cycleway and footpath routes and the severance caused by the major roads and railway lines which cut across the cluster. Villages and farmsteads are connected by a network of narrow rural lanes, but traffic pressures mean that they are unsafe for pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders. Overall there is a need for more connections between the promoted routes, a more legible landscape (with safe strategic routes between the Shorne ridge and the marshes) and improved access for cyclists, horse riders and pedestrians, so that there is less reliance on the car.





Visitor and recreation management is an important issue in a stretch of countryside which is on the doorstep of the expanding populations of Gravesend and Medway. There is a need for a more co-ordinated approach to managing visitor access, with an emphasis on sustainable transport (rather than access by car), provision of high quality information and enhanced gateway points.

## Shorne to Shore Cluster - SWOT ANALYSIS

### STRENGTHS

- Has the potential to be a highly accessible landscape, close to urban areas of Gravesend and Medway and prominent in views from roads and railways
- Internationally important grazing marsh and inter-tidal habitats along shores of the Thames Estuary
- Dense cluster of semi-natural ancient woodlands and commons on Shorne Ridge and slopes of the North Kent Downs
- Contrasting experience between the remote, exposed 'wild' landscape of the marshes and the 'safe' family orientated countryside of the Shorne Woods - Ashenbank - Jeskyns - Ranscombe Farm complex
- Shorne Woods Country Park is Kent's flagship country park, with an award winning visitor centre which is a focus for countryside activities and environmental education
- Good rail access, with stations in rural areas which can provide 'hubs' and gateways for promoting recreational access
- Wealth of heritage interest, from Mesolithic flintworks to medieval trackways, a Repton landscape, Dickens' home and WW2 military sites.

### WEAKNESSES

- Severance by major transport infrastructure - A2/M2 and railway to the north and by police firing range on Shorne Marshes
- Narrow, busy rural lanes are too dangerous for cyclists, horse riders and pedestrians
- Illegal access and anti-social behaviour in the countryside
- The structural elements that define the open arable farmland are relatively degraded
- Poor quality gateways to settlements at points of access from the A226 and A228
- Over reliance on car travel for access to environmental destinations
- Poor bus service, particularly at weekends
- Pressures of visitor access to popular destinations, such as Jeskyns - car park is often over capacity at weekends
- Lack of connectivity (across arable farmland) between core habitats of the ancient woodland and the marshes
- Limited information about and promotion of the assets the area has to offer and lack of graded visitor accommodation
- Concerns amongst rural communities that additional visitors will mean more cars



## OPPORTUNITIES

- GGKM - potential for Thames Gateway Parklands funding
- Enhancement of existing freshwater and grazing marsh habitats as potential compensation for loss of designated habitat
- Re-connect the rather fragmented rights of way network to the north of Shorne Ridge
- Promote strategic routes connecting Shorne Ridge and adjacent urban areas to the Thames Estuary Marshes to the north and the Kent Downs AONB to the south (for pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders)
- Increase provision for horse riders, since there are exceptionally large numbers of horses in the cluster
- Reduce the sense of severance caused by the M2/rail corridor by improving access across this corridor (particularly underpasses and footbridges)
- Provide safe off-road cycleways which encourage direct access to Shorne Woods Country Park from adjacent urban areas
- There is scope to transform the Gravesham Borough Council owned Cascades Leisure Centre with multi-user greenway links to Shorne Woods Country Park
- Build a programme of positive, proactive dialogue with local farmers, agents and landowners so that opportunities for landscape, access and habitat improvements can be developed and delivered in conjunction with financed agri-environmental schemes (HLS)
- There are specific opportunities to encourage HLS on the Thames Marshes when the existing Environmentally Sensitive Area scheme comes to an end (in 2012)
- Off-road 'behind the hedge' permissive recreational routes might offer alternative safe, attractive routes for pedestrians and horse riders who cannot safely use the busy rural lanes
- Shorne Woods Country Park has the potential to be considered a Site of Special Archaeological Interest for the variety and condition of its archaeological sites

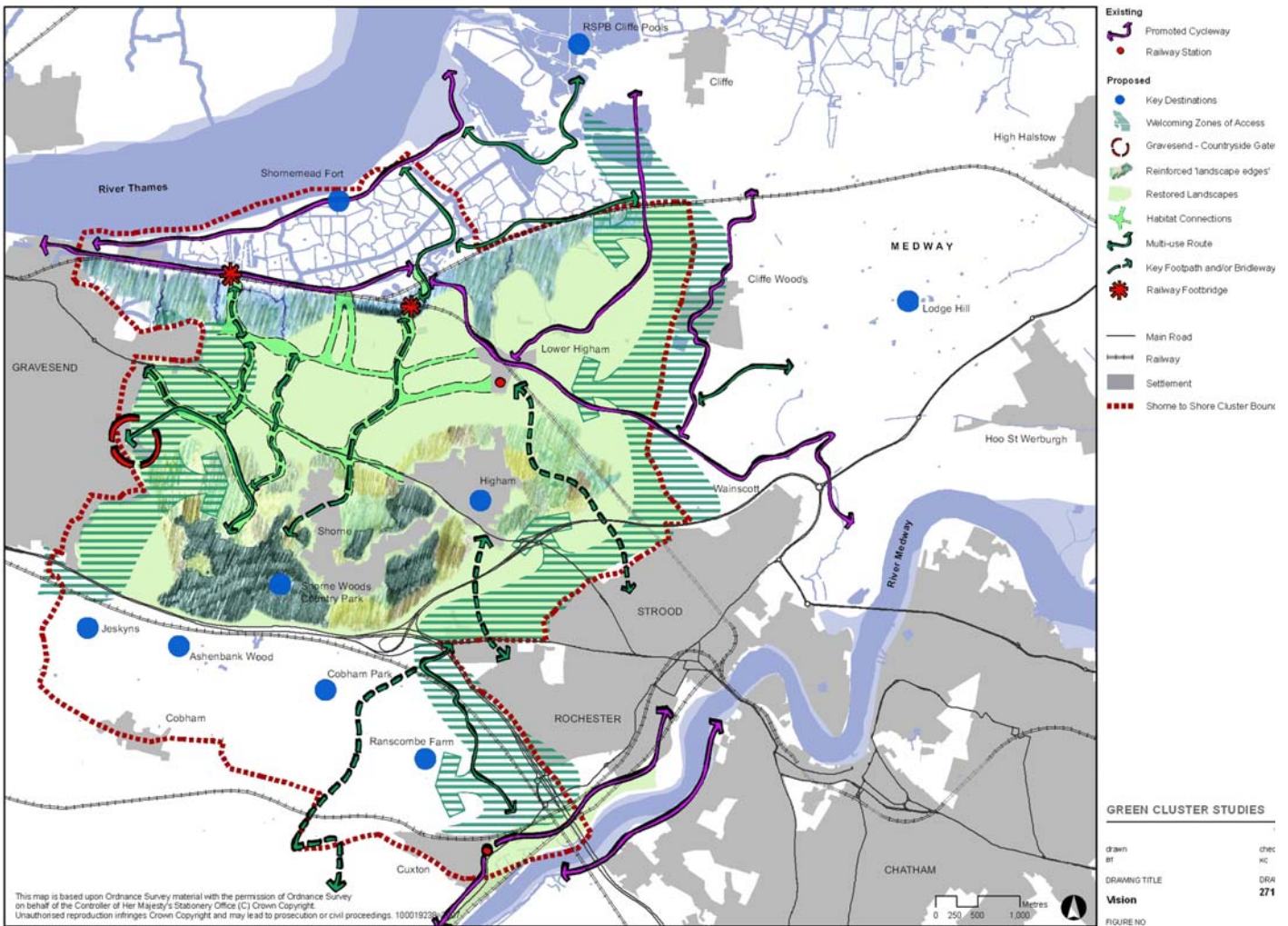
## THREATS

- The Lower Thames Crossing - Option C (one of three under consideration) is aligned across the study area
- Sea level rise could lead to loss of inter-tidal habitat - resulting in the re-alignment of tidal defences to create new compensatory habitats
- The process could result in the need for new secondary tidal defences for the communities on the edge of the floodplain [TE2100]
- Increased frequency of trains between Rochester and Gravesend means that the existing crossings are not safe.
- Possibility that proposals to encourage access (for cyclists and horse riders) onto Shorne Marshes could have the potential to adversely affect the Thames Estuary and Marshes Special Protection Area (SPA) and Ramsar site to the north of the study area (risk of bird disturbance). Formal proposals will need to be assessed under the Habitats Regulations (The Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations 1994 (as amended))



# 5 Shorne to Shore Cluster - Vision framework

Working with local farmers, we will restore traditional landscape patterns, reinforcing the character of woodland and marshland edges and strengthening habitat links across the belt of arable land between these two contrasting landscape types. The Shorne to Shore Cluster has the potential to be an exceptionally accessible landscape, easily reached by train from London and on the doorstep of Gravesend, the Medway towns and the forthcoming development at Lodge Hill. The accessibility of the countryside will be transformed through off-road cycleways, bridleways and high quality footpaths, linked to improvements to bus services, promotion and interpretation. Local train stations and bus stops are targeted as important gateways to the countryside and new high quality greenspaces and facilities at Gravesend's Cascades Leisure Centre will be the starting point for recreational trails to Shorne Woods Country Park.



Shorne to Shore: Vision Framework





Key opportunities and components of the vision are:

- **Reinforcing the edges** - The long views across the belt of open arable farmland are a distinctive characteristic of this landscape. There is an exhilarating sense of space and it is easy to understand the underlying topography as the land drops away gently from ridge to marsh. Historic maps dating from the 1860s demonstrate that this has long been a large scale, open landscape and that the margins of the marshes and the ridge have always been a focus for settlement. However, the basic structural elements have become relatively degraded; over the years, hedgerows and green lanes have been removed, woodland edges diminished and scattered development and pylons are often prominent.

The Shorne to Shore Cluster vision aims to retain the inherent open character of the landscape while reinforcing the key landscape edges - of the wooded ridge and the estuarine marshes - which form the backdrop to views. There are also opportunities to reinstate hedgerows and for carefully sited tree and orchard planting which is designed to integrate built structures and strengthen the character and presence of landscape transitions and edges. These objectives can be achieved via a range of projects:

- **Higher Level Stewardship**, which finances improvements in access, landscape and biodiversity on farmland
  - **An A226 road corridor enhancement scheme**, which identifies, protects and frames key views (northwards to the marshes and southwards to the woodlands) from the section of the road between Higham and Gravesend. This project includes landscape and potentially Shared Space improvements to the 'village gateways' at key junctions along the A226. Details would be determined through further studies, but might include new bus shelters (with information points), tree and hedgerow planting and improved (Shared Space) road crossing zones.
  - **Improvements to public rights of way** (both in terms of landscape and functional accessibility) which link the woodlands to the marshes
  - **Tree planting** (GGKM's Urban Forestry Project) which is carefully targeted and designed to reinforce landscape 'edges' and traditional landscape patterns, particularly on the margins of settlements, industrial areas and farmsteads.
- **Strategic Green Grid connections** - The Cluster area has a potentially important role within the overall North Kent Green Grid simply because of its location. This stretch of countryside between the urban areas of Gravesend and Rochester functions as a link between town and countryside, fulfilling a basic need for access to nature and an opportunity to enhance quality of life for many thousands of people. So the Shorne to Shore vision has a strong focus on promoting and enhancing countryside access and on improvements to some key connections within the network of rights of way. The main long distance routes (Thames Estuary Path, North Downs Way, Weald Way National Cycle Route 1) are already well known and circular routes are promoted around the key landscape destinations (the country park, nature reserves, Woodland Trust site and Jeskyns) and locally around some villages, but some key connections are under-used or missing and there is generally a lack of provision for horse riders and cyclists.

This is a relatively large scale landscape so it is particularly suitable for cycling and there are excellent opportunities to promote cycleways linked to railway stations at Higham and Cuxton.

There are an exceptionally large number of horse riders within the cluster so there is strong demand for an increase in the number of bridleways, along with parking for horse boxes.

The **Strategic Connections Map** shows the key improvements to links proposed as part of the Shorne to Shore Cluster vision.



The focus is on providing:

- **off-road multi-user routes** between Gravesend and Shorne Woods Country Park, between National Cycle Route 1 (along the Thames Medway Canal) and the Thames Estuary Path and along both banks of the River Medway, linking Maidstone with Rochester. These routes will be specified to a high quality and will be suitable for family cycling
- **improved provision for horse riders** on new bridleway loops (some of which could be Toll Ride routes)
- **high quality, promoted recreational trails** which connect Gravesend and Strood with the farmland, woods and marshes on their doorstep and which connect to long distance routes - the North Downs Way, Weald Way and Thames Estuary Path.
- **new pedestrian footbridges over the railway line** to ensure safe access and maintain key connections within the rights of way network.

The routes shown on the Strategic Connections Map are indicative and detailed feasibility checks will be required before they can be taken forward. The map has been informed by discussions with stakeholders at the Cluster Study Workshops, the public consultation for the Kent Rights of Way Improvement Plan<sup>2</sup> and a detailed scoping study which considers options for environmental and access improvements on the Gravesham Marshlands<sup>3</sup>. Most of the proposed strategic routes follow existing rights of way, but there are a few new connections.

- **Integrated transport** - Local bus services to the rural villages are generally infrequent and there is a particularly poor service at weekends, when connections between the countryside and adjacent urban areas would be most beneficial.

Improved bus services will be promoted and packaged as part of a more integrated rural transport system, with information points, signposted rights of way and possibly organised trips to the countryside (with transport provided). The two rural railway stations within the Cluster, at Lower Higham and Cuxton, will be promoted as significant hubs in this system. Higham Station is the starting point for cycleway links to the marshes, RSPB Cliffe Pools and the Thames Estuary Path, while Cuxton is the link for cycleways on the North Kent Downs and along the Medway Valley. There may be opportunities to promote the use of Higham and Cuxton stations as starting points for cycle or walking tours at weekends when the station car parks are relatively quiet or to provide minibus transport specifically for visitors to the countryside.

- **Urban-countryside gateways** - The key points of access from urban areas to countryside are critically important for this study. Stakeholders have identified sites in Gravesend and Rochester/Strood which merit investment, although the railway stations, village centres, road junctions and even the bus stops are also important gateways to the countryside.

The Cascades Leisure Centre on the eastern edge of Gravesend, is owned by Gravesham Borough Council and offers a superb opportunity to provide access to the countryside. The site has parking, a bus stop, children's play area, skatepark and range of sports facilities, but the open spaces surrounding the swimming pool/leisure complex are relatively degraded and under-used. There is scope to re-structure some of the uses to maximise public access and wider countryside links. For instance, this site could be the starting point for the proposed multi-use off-road connection to Shorne Woods Country Park. The appropriate scale of intervention will be determined by a feasibility study which includes an appraisal of the site and an assessment of user requirements.

In Rochester/Strood, the key strategic Green Grid connection is along the River Medway, where the Valley of Visions LPS is undertaking a project planning study to explore options for delivering off-road, multi-user routes along both sides of the river. Rochester, Strood and/or Cuxton railway stations are the gateways to this new accessible route, and the landscape corridor along the edge of the valley floor (including the A228 and land alongside the River Medway) offers opportunities for biodiversity, landscape and access enhancements. There are particular opportunities to improve the landscape setting of villages at gateway

<sup>2</sup> Kent County Council - Countryside Access Improvement Plan, 2007 - 2017

<sup>3</sup> Gravesham Borough Council, *The Gravesham Marshlands (including Hoo Junction and its environs) - Towards a Conservation and Management Framework. A Scoping Study, February 2010.*



junctions along the A228. A co-ordinated approach is required as there are a number of potential development sites which could contribute to the delivery of this part of the vision.

Improvements to the underpasses linking Strood to the Ranscombe Farm Reserve will reduce the severance of the busy M2 corridor and connect residents of Strood and Rochester with links to the woodlands, meadows and downs to the south

Future Green Grid links between the new Lodge Hill development and Higham station are likely to become increasingly important. For instance, new cycleways may be needed to ensure safe access alongside busy rural roads such as Town Road.

- **Engaging with farmers** - This part of North Kent is characterised by institutional landowners, several of whom own exceptionally large tracts of land. There are wide variations in the size of farms, but the majority of farmers are tenants and most of the farmland is high grade. The cluster study has been informed by a study by the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group<sup>4</sup> which identified issues and trends in agriculture in the study area and suggests where there may be opportunities or barriers to strengthening engagement with farmers.

Much of the Shorne to Shore area is either:

- within one of Natural England's target areas for Higher Level Stewardship - the northern marsh section where wet grassland for waders is a priority; or
- is covered by Natural England's 'themes' - the arable middle section where farmland bird options, access (including educational), and historic environment themes are applicable.

The Shorne to Shore Cluster Cluster Study offers a vision for focused environmental and access enhancements which restore traditional landscape patterns, strengthen habitat links across arable farmland and provide opportunities for off-road recreational trails. In addition to enhancements to existing footpaths and bridleways, there may sometimes be opportunities to allow permissive access within field margins alongside rural lanes. Heavy vehicular traffic along the narrow lanes within the Shorne to Shore Cluster means that they are unsafe for use by pedestrians and cyclists so this type of access 'behind the hedge' would be ideal.

At a broader scale, Higher Level Stewardship may provide opportunities to deliver inter-connected habitat networks which also reinforce the inherent character of the landscape. For instance, habitat networks could focus on woodland, tree and hedgerow planting on the margins of the wooded ridge; hedgerow planting and field margins within the arable belt; and new wetland scrapes, wet woodland and scrub habitats on the margins of the marshes to benefit wildlife.

Farmland which forms the immediate landscape setting for Gravesend and Strood will be a particular focus for this type of project, which offers opportunities to strengthen local sense of place and improve the way buildings are integrated with the surrounding countryside. Habitat enhancements may follow traditional field patterns and rights of way or they may concentrate on meeting biodiversity objectives. Kent Wildlife Trust promotes and manages two small Roadside Nature Reserves alongside roads within the Cluster and the habitat networks could extend and enhance these localised habitats. We want to work closely with farmers and landowners to maximise opportunities for positive working landscapes, recognising the need to respond to the individual visions of farmers and landowners, who know the opportunities and constraints of their land.

- **Securing the landscape** - This is an urban fringe area where there are significant issues of illegal access and anti-social behaviour in the countryside. Local people's perceptions can be tainted by such activities so it is important to counter the problem with a strategy to build confidence long term. The Valley of Visions Landscape Partnership Scheme in the Medway Gap has pioneered a strategic partnership approach to tackling problems of fly-tipping and illegal access with motor cycles and vehicles which would be continued as part of the Shorne to Shore Vision.

<sup>4</sup> Farming and Rural Advisory Group, 2010, Medway Agriculture Research Project





The success of the Valley of Visions' Securing the Landscape project (which resulted in a 40 per cent reduction in fly-tipping in 18 months) stems from a proactive approach with co-ordinated action from Kent Police, Kent Fire Service, Clean Kent Campaign, local authority partners, including the rights of way team, and landowners. The programme of works includes traditional fencing and gates, but the key to long-term success has been the development of a partnership of agencies and a multifaceted approach to education, engagement, targeted enforcement and evidence gathering, as well as providing alternative places and routes for enhanced countryside access. The National Intelligence Model, which police forces use to share intelligence on criminal activities, was used to bring together the partners in a structured working group and to target action so that there is a direct response to evidence on the ground. This approach makes the best and most efficient use of the resources available to deal with the issue. It enables a fast reaction to situations which builds confidence and acts as an effective deterrent to offenders. Local communities can also play a key role in the programme, as residents are invited to report incidents online and build an accurate picture of patterns of activity with their area.

- **Raising the profile** - proximity to London, Gravesend and Medway, and to the exceptional landscapes of the Thames Marshes and the North Kent Downs, suggests that this area should have excellent potential for tourism and day trippers. But in practice it is restricted by pressure on car parks and overspill to surrounding areas, relatively poor countryside access, a lack of graded accommodation and limited information. A carefully targeted programme of promotion, information and visitor management will encourage a wider range of points of access to the countryside and will highlight the variety of experiences that the area offers - the exposed marshes will be attractive to walkers or cyclists looking for a challenge and contact with 'wild' nature, while the wooded northern slopes of the Kent Downs provide a relatively 'safe' countryside experience suitable for the whole family. This type of promotional activity is needed throughout the cluster, but there will be a specific focus along the 'welcoming zones of access' along the east and west margins of the cluster, where pressures from increased public access are likely to be most intense. Promotional material will be co-ordinated with schemes for environmental education and will build an appreciation of local biodiversity, landscape and cultural heritage.

The area has a wealth of built and cultural heritage, including evidence of Mesolithic flintworks, medieval manor houses, the Benedictine Priory at Church Street, ancient field systems, earthbanks and hollow ways (in and around Shorne Woods), Repton's Parkland and Wyatt's Darnley Mausoleum at Cobham and an RAF camp with two air raid shelters and slit trenches at Ashenbank Wood. Dickens lived at Gad's Hill, Higham and many of his books reflect the history and character of places within and around the cluster, including Chalk, Rochester, Gravesend and Shorne.

Local rural communities will reap the economic benefits of increased visitor interest and access, but it is essential that they are fully engaged in shaping enhancements to landscapes which form the setting and approach to villages and in drawing on their heritage to strengthen local identity. Representative of rural communities consulted in developing the cluster study welcomed this approach, as long as visitors arrive without their cars!



## 6 The Bigger Picture

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The **Thames Gateway Parklands Programme** is a strategic planning and development initiative, overseen by the Department for Communities & Local Government. It builds on the *Greening the Gateway Strategy* first set out in 2004<sup>5</sup> and aims to transform the identity of the Thames Gateway, increasing economic social and environmental value so that the area becomes a flagship for sustainable living.

In north Kent, the regeneration process is well underway, but there is much to be done to make the most of the current opportunities, raise expectations and articulate an ambitious vision to secure high quality environments for sustainable living. **The Greening the Gateway Kent & Medway initiative (GGKM)** is one of three partnerships engaged in promoting and delivering this vision in the Thames Gateway (the others are in East London and South Essex).

**High level regeneration outcomes for the Thames Gateway:** The **Thames Gateway Parklands Programme**, providing the context for a network of accessible, high quality and sustainable landscapes and waterways, which capitalise on existing natural, built, historic and cultural assets, to support their conservation, enhancement and ongoing use, and boost the Gateway's rich biodiversity assets, strengthen character and identity, transforming perceptions and making it a great place to live, work and invest.

*Thames Gateway Delivery Plan, December 2007*

The Thames Gateway Parklands Programme offers new opportunities for investment which will be delivered via **five transformational themes**:

- *Thames Waterfront* - a new estuary path, which will eventually run along both banks of the River Thames, waterfront projects featuring public access and an improved river environment
- *Thames Gateway World Class Heritage* - finance for the bid for Chatham Historic Dockyard and improvements on other heritage sites
- *Thames Gateway Landscapes* - large-scale public green spaces of regional importance
- *Thames Gateway Corridors* - environmental improvements to some strategic transport corridors, including key rail routes and A-roads to provide carbon offsetting schemes, easier travel and an enhanced first impression
- *Thames Gateway Squares* - two or three large urban squares with a focus on cultural, economic and environmental activities.

<sup>5</sup> DEFRA and ODPM, *Creating sustainable communities: Greening the Gateway, 2004*



## 7 Delivery

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The Green Cluster Studies provide a framework for delivering Thames Gateway Parklands 'on the ground'. The vision expressed in this Technical Report, captures many of the individual visions and ideas being promoted by stakeholders, combining them all into an overarching vision for the Shorne to Shore Cluster which all stakeholders recognise and can buy into. So far, we have a vision framework to help inform funding decisions, but it is only the starting point and will be followed by a rolling programme of consultation, planning, funding bids and, for some projects, design development and implementation.

### Action Planning

This *Technical Report* is accompanied by a separate *Action Plan* which sets the broad agenda for the transformation of the Shorne to Shore Cluster, emphasising the scope for delivery of green infrastructure. The *Action Plan* sets out the issues to be addressed and the type of funding required to achieve the Green Clusters vision. Greening the Gateway Kent & Medway will establish a Cluster Steering Group for each of the Green Clusters. The *Action Plan* will be a working document, which will identify (for each project):

- who will be the lead partner (champion) and how stakeholder involvement should be broadened
- how it will be taken forward, in terms of funding, consultation, resourcing and procurement
- a clear timetable for planning and implementation which takes account of all other relevant projects
- plans and revenue funding for ongoing monitoring and management.





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