

Green cluster studies

Shorne to Shore



Isle of Sheppey



**Greening
the Gateway**
KENT AND MEDWAY

Milton Creek

SWALE

Hoo Peninsula

Thames + Medway Canal

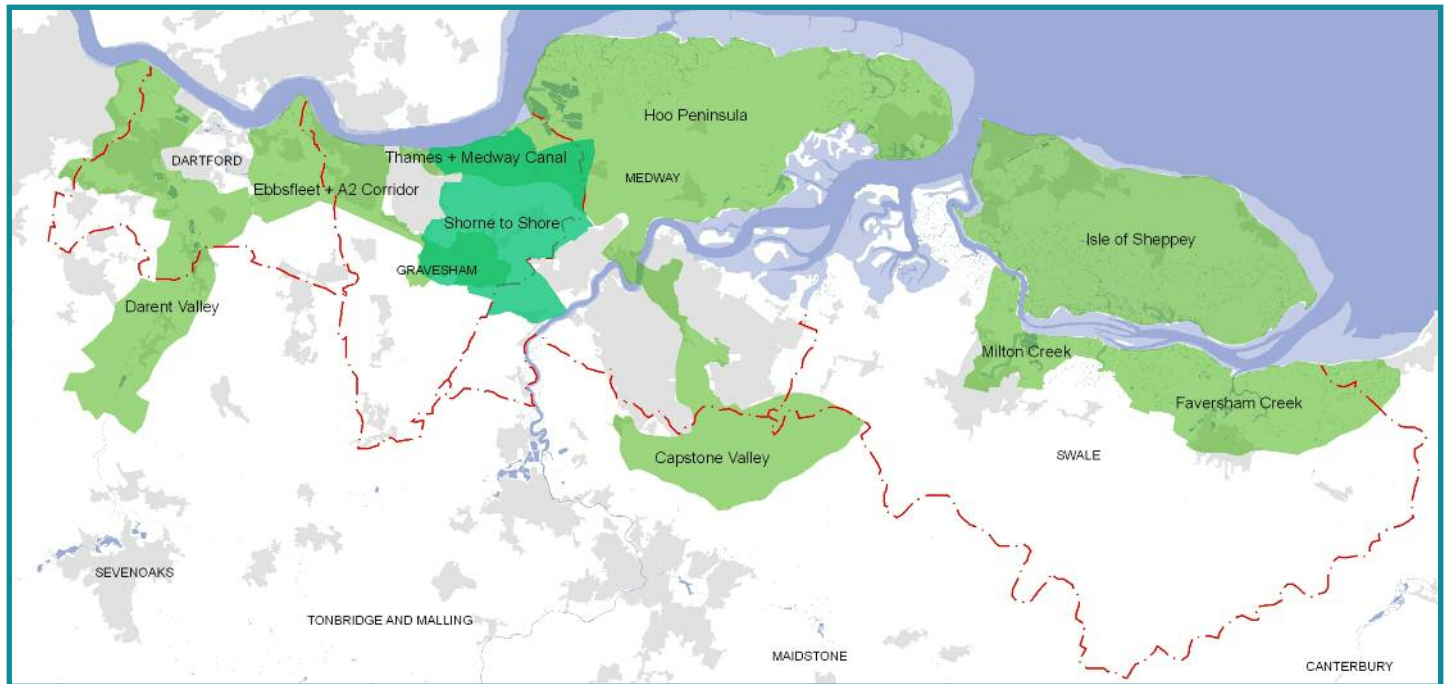
MEDWAY

Capstone - Brethurst



Contents

03	What are the Green Cluster Studies?	11	Links to the Thames Gateway Parklands
04	Sense of place		
05	Forces for positive change	12	More information
06	The BIG vision for Shorne to Shore Cluster		Acknowledgements
07	Vision framework		Photo credits



What are the Green Cluster Studies?

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

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 growing urban populations will put increasing pressure on adjacent rural areas which include highly protected, sensitive sites such as Shorne Marshes, as well as popular visitor destinations in the south of the cluster, such as Shorne Woods Country Park, which attracts some 400,000 visitors a year. However, while there is capacity within this area for extra visitors, such as at Ranscombe Farm Nature Reserve in Cuxton, there is limited scope for increased traffic and parking, and a need to identify new sites for recreation.

This cluster study responds to these concerns and looks at possible solutions that will protect vulnerable areas and enhance biodiversity in line with local and national targets, while also offering opportunities to increase access to the countryside, boost the local economy and raise the profile of the area.

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
- identified inter-dependencies, gaps and opportunities

- articulated a common vision for each cluster area
- developed outline action plans which set out tasks, governance and phasing for delivering the visions
- made the business case for investment

The **Shorne to Shore Cluster Study** is not a proposal or a bid, but is intended to be a helpful 'tool' to prompt creative thinking in any future discussions between stakeholders as the various projects in the cluster are taken forward. Ultimately, the Green Cluster Studies aim to increase confidence, make the case for investment and provide a lever to bid for further funding. The Shorne to Shore landscape begins at the rolling chalk downlands of the Kent Downs, falls away 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 that sweeps from the ridge towards the marshes provides the setting for these 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 Community Woodland, 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.

Sense of place

Sets out where we are and the challenge ahead



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



Wooded ridge – closed to open – undulating edges – downland curves – coppice – hints of time

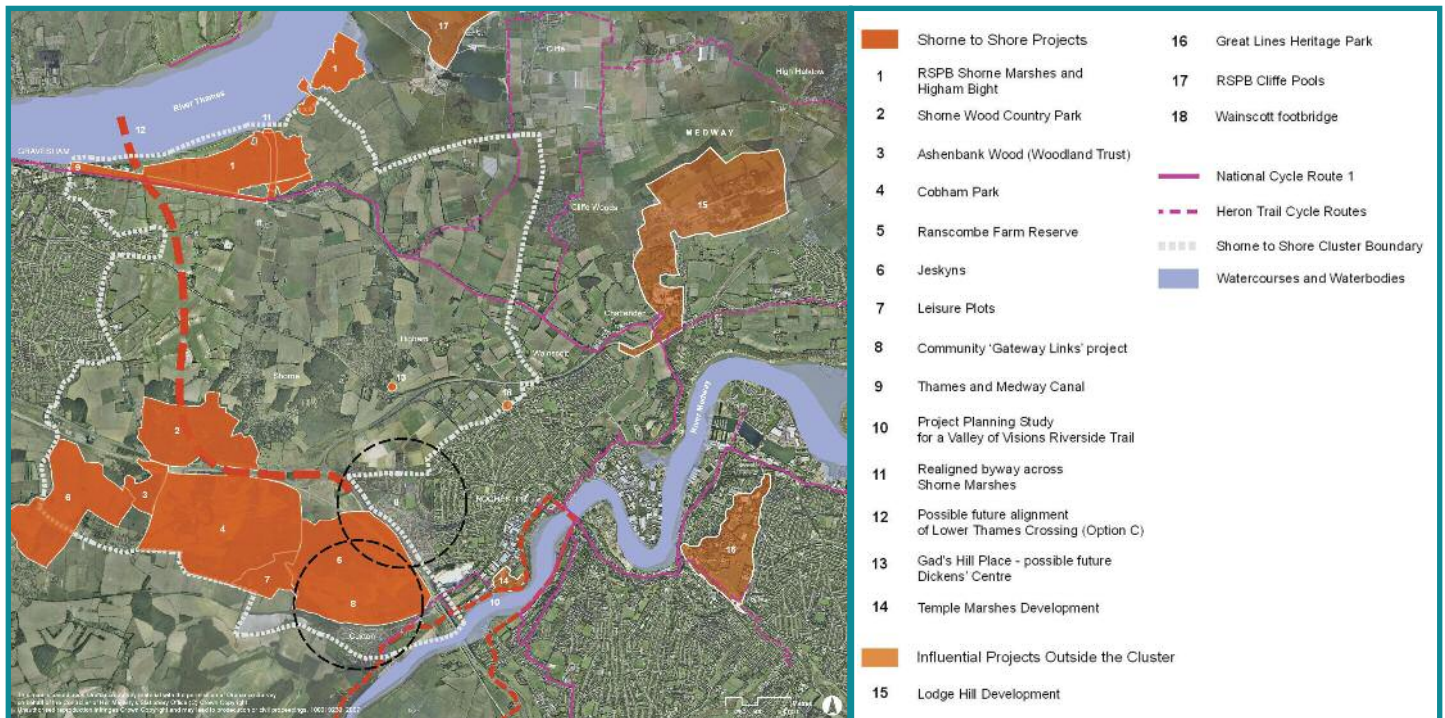


Forces for change

Growth, projects and challenges in the Shorne to Shore Cluster

Gravesend is expected to provide several thousand additional houses by 2026 and, to the east of the cluster, 5,000 new homes are proposed at Lodge Hill when the MoD moves out of Chattenden Barracks on the Hoo Peninsula in 2012. These developments will put pressure on the countryside in terms of extra traffic and footfall. Projects under way to address these challenges include the restoration of part of the Thames and Medway Canal near Gravesend for informal recreation,

development of the Thames Estuary Path, and possible cycleways along the River Medway. One of the options for a Lower Thames Crossing under consideration by the Government (*Dartford River Crossing Study into Capacity Requirements 2009*) passes through the area. Projects on the fringe or just outside the cluster include multi-activity centre Cyclopark to the south of Gravesend and RSPB Cliffe Pools nature reserve to the north, while in Wainscott some residents are seeking a footbridge over the A289.



The BIG vision for Shorne to Shore

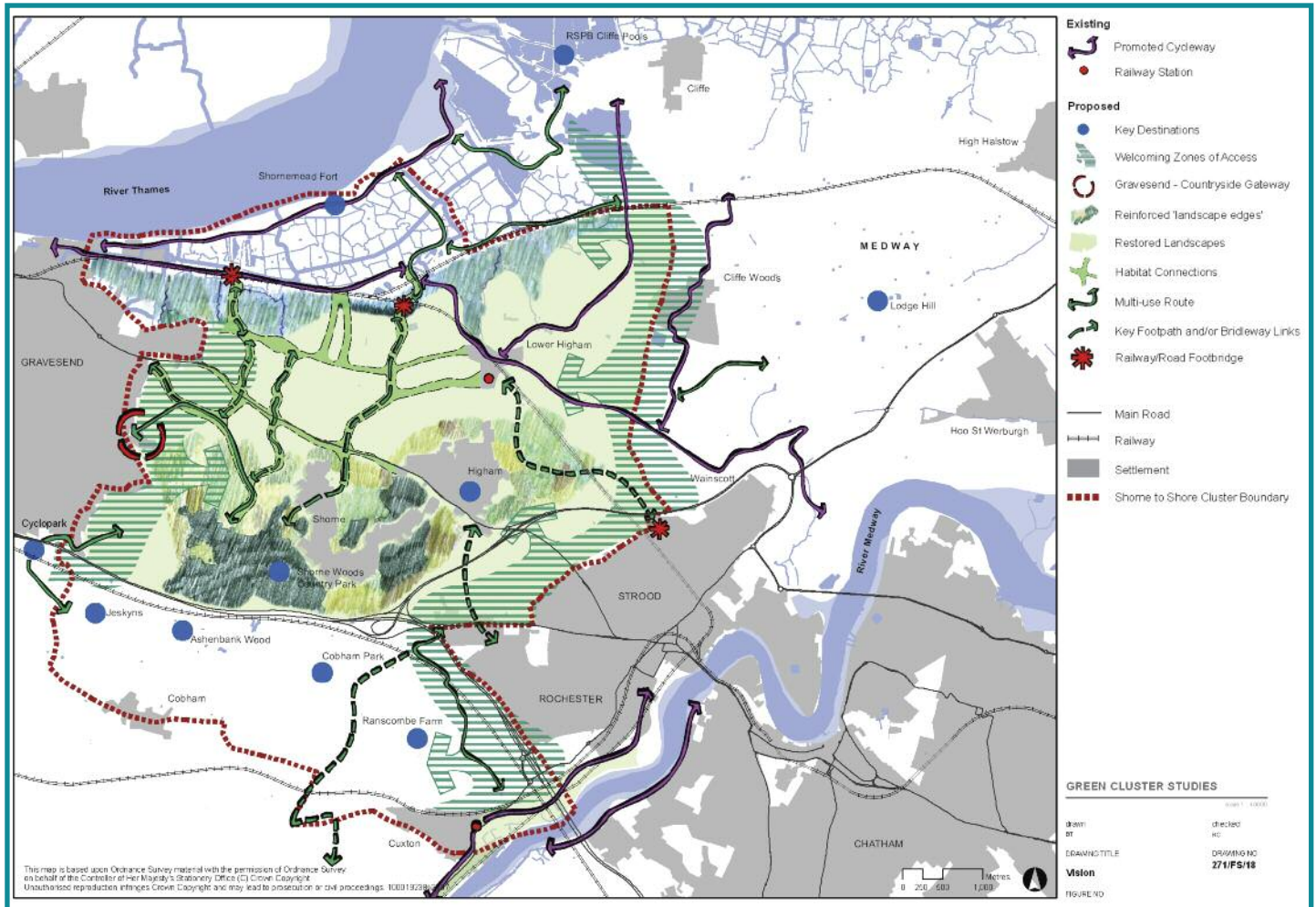
Working with local farmers and landowners through agri-environmental schemes, we will seek to restore traditional landscape patterns, reinforcing the character of woodland and marshland edges and strengthening habitat links across the belt of arable land, and explore opportunities for sustainable local food production. 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 Lodge Hill development. Accessibility will be transformed through off-road trails, bridleways and footpaths, linked to improved bus services, promotion and interpretation. Local train stations and bus stops will be important gateways to the countryside while 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.



Vision framework

Sets the agenda for a step change in environmental quality across the Shorne to Shore Cluster



The Green Cluster vision for Shorne to Shore has been informed by stakeholders and reflects the inherent character of local landscapes, as well as opportunities for connectivity, recreation and place-making.

Key components are:

Reinforcing the edges

The long views across the belt of arable farmland prompt an immediate understanding of simple landscape elements as the land falls gently from ridge to marsh. The Shorne to Shore vision retains the inherent open character of the landscape while reinforcing the key landscape edges – of wooded ridge and estuarine marshes – which form the backdrop to views. Archaeological evidence suggests that the margins of the marshes and the ridge have long been a focus for settlement and a programme of carefully targeted tree and hedgerow planting will be designed to restore traditional landscape patterns, particularly on the margins of settlements, industrial areas and farmsteads. The expansive views from the A226, which crosses the landscape linking Higham with Gravesend, are a striking, distinctive characteristic of the cluster landscape. These views will be protected and a road corridor enhancement scheme will explore the potential for landscape and shared space improvements at village junctions along the road.

Strategic green grid connections

This stretch of countryside between Gravesend and Medway 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 thousands of people. The Shorne to Shore vision promotes and enhances some key connections, while also addressing strong local demand for new cycleways and bridleways:

- ▶ Quiet off-road multi-user routes between Gravesend and Shorne Woods Country Park, between National Cycle Route 1 and the Thames Estuary Path, and along both banks of the River Medway, linking Maidstone with Rochester.
- ▶ Improved provision for horse riders on a series of new bridleway loops.
- ▶ High quality, promoted recreational trails which connect Gravesend and Strood with the farmland, woods and marshes on their doorstep.
- ▶ New pedestrian footbridges over the railway line to ensure safe access and maintain key connections within the rights of way network.

Welcome Access Zones

Pressures from growing populations will be most intense along the east and west margins of the cluster study, and it is here that efforts will be concentrated to encourage people into the countryside for recreation. These ‘welcoming zones of access’ of high-quality footpaths, cycleways and trails will provide safer and highly visible routes into the countryside from towns and villages. Town-dwellers will be able to access the countryside from their doorstep or via public transport, removing the need to travel by car and taking pressure off country roads and lanes. Promotional material will be co-ordinated with schemes for environmental education and will build an appreciation of local biodiversity, landscape and cultural heritage. Train stations, bus stops and village centres are also important countryside gateways and will act as ‘hubs’ where visitors can get local information such as maps, timetables, and interpretation and access toilet facilities.

Engaging with landowners

The Higher Level Stewardship scheme provides opportunities to deliver environmental and access enhancements that restore traditional landscape patterns and strengthen habitat connectivity across the arable land. These could include carefully sited tree and hedgerow planting on the margins of the wooded ridge; new field margins within the arable belt; and new wetland and scrub habitats on the margins of the marshes to benefit wildlife. There may be opportunities to allow permissive access 'behind the hedge' within field margins alongside busy rural lanes. Farmland which forms the immediate landscape setting for Gravesend and Strood will be a focus for these projects. Habitat enhancements may follow field patterns and rights of way or they may concentrate on meeting objectives within biodiversity opportunity areas (BOAs). 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 local people's perceptions are tainted by anti-social use of the countryside 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 that resulted in a 40 per cent reduction in fly-tipping in 18 months. A similar proactive approach is required throughout the Shorne to Shore Cluster, with co-ordinated action from the emergency services, local authorities and landowners to gather evidence and target enforcement. This enables a fast reaction which builds confidence and acts as an effective deterrent to offenders. Local communities will also play a vital role in the programme, as residents will be invited to report incidents online.

Raising the profile

Proximity to London, Gravesend and Medway, and to the exceptional landscapes of the Thames Marshes and the Kent Downs, suggests that this area should have excellent potential for tourism. But in practice it is restricted by relatively poor countryside access, lack of graded accommodation and limited information. A carefully targeted programme of promotion, information and visitor management, taking in Shorne Country Park and attractions to the south of the cluster which form important gateways to the countryside, will foster an appreciation of local biodiversity, landscape and the area's rich cultural heritage, while highlighting the variety of experiences on offer. The exposed marshes will be attractive to those seeking contact with 'wild' nature, while the wooded northern slopes of the Kent Downs provide relatively 'safe' countryside. Local communities will reap the economic benefits but it is essential they are fully engaged in the process.



Links to the Thames Gateway Parklands

The Parklands initiative aims to regenerate urban and rural open spaces to create an accessible and connected landscape that will improve quality of life for hundreds of thousands of people who live, work or visit the Thames Gateway. This spatial framework, overseen by the Department of Communities & Local Government, suggests ways in which public, private and third sector organisations can work together to develop green infrastructure in the Gateway.

In North Kent, some £10 million of Parklands' funding is being invested in creating new urban parks or on enhancing and extending existing ones in Dartford, Gravesham, Medway and Swale. The cluster studies provided the evidence necessary for **Greening the Gateway Kent and Medway** (GGKM) to bid for this funding. 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 vision expressed in this booklet, and in the accompanying more detailed Technical Report, captures many of the individual visions and ideas being promoted by stakeholders, combining them all into an overarching vision for the cluster which all stakeholders recognise and support. 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.

Next steps

For each of the Green Clusters, Greening the Gateway Kent & Medway will develop the action plan in more detail – this means identifying (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

More information from

Write to: Martin Hall, Greening the Gateway Kent & Medway, Innovation Centre Medway,
Maidstone Road, Chatham ME5 9SD

Email: martin.hall@gtgkm.org.uk

Tel: 01634 337593

Website: www.gtgkm.org.uk

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all those who have participated in the workshops and contributed to the Green Cluster Studies. The stakeholders involved in developing the Green Cluster vision for the Shorne to Shore Cluster were:

- ▶ Cliffe & Cliffe Woods Parish Council
- ▶ Cuxton Parish Council
- ▶ Dickens Country Protection Society
- ▶ Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group
- ▶ Forestry Commission
- ▶ Friends of the North Kent Marshes
- ▶ Frindsbury Extra Parish Council
- ▶ Frindsbury & Wainscott Community Association
- ▶ Gravesham Borough Council
- ▶ Higham Parish Council
- ▶ Kent County Council
- ▶ Kent Downs AONB Unit
- ▶ Kent Wildlife Trust
- ▶ Medway Council
- ▶ Natural England
- ▶ Plantlife
- ▶ Ramblers' Association
- ▶ Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
- ▶ Shorne Community Archaeology Group
- ▶ Shorne Local History Group
- ▶ Shorne Parish Council
- ▶ Sustrans
- ▶ Valley of Visions Landscape Partnership Scheme
- ▶ Woodland Trust

The Green Cluster Studies have been undertaken for Greening the Gateway Kent & Medway by **Sheils Flynn** – www.sheilsflynn.com

Photo credits

Aerial photographs - © UK Perspectives.com

OS base maps - © Crown copyright. All rights reserved 1000 19238 2008

1.Forestry Commission, 2.Woodland Trust, 3.Ben Sweeney, Plantlife, 4.Woodland Trust