

Green Cluster Studies

Thames & Medway Canal

Technical Report



March 2008

Executive Summary

The Green Cluster studies set out an ambitious vision for the Green Grid public realm and provide an Action Plan to support its delivery across north Kent. Seven Green Cluster Studies have been undertaken to date, and a further Cluster Study is planned for the Isle of Sheppey.. Each one focuses on areas of intensive regeneration and change where there are superb opportunities to create strategically sited new greenspaces which will raise expectations, add value to existing investment and create high quality green infrastructure for future development.

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.

Originally constructed in the early C19th, the Thames & Medway Canal was a speculative venture to provide safe passage for ships between the Thames and the Medway Rivers during a period when this strategic maritime gateway to London was perceived to be at risk of attack from the French. Today the Canal is a dramatic landscape feature, linking the urban fringe of Gravesend with its rural hinterland and its heritage. Gravesend's historic Riverside Leisure Area, the Canal Basin and canal will be the focus for a distinctive sequence of urban public spaces, a range of new and enhanced wetland habitats, a superb recreational facility, and sustainable links to the Shorne Marshes, Higham Station and the flagship RSPB Cliffe Pools nature reserve.

The Green Cluster Studies' vision for the Thames & Medway Canal draws together and expresses a common vision for the Cluster as a whole. It is an ambitious vision, which will lead to the restoration of Gravesend's Riverside Leisure Area, a sequence of distinctive urban spaces, a restored canal, a 8km greenway extending right from Gravesend town centre to Higham Station and a new public open space with car park picnic area and wetland habitats at a natural hub in the network of public rights of way which links the Canal to the Thames shoreline and Cliffe Pools. Key stakeholders responsible for leading and influencing the ongoing projects and activities in the Thames & Medway Canal Cluster include Gravesham Borough Council, Kent Thameside Delivery Board, the Environment Agency, the RSPB, Natural England, Sustrans, the Inland Waterways Association, the Thames & Medway Canal Association and local landowners.

The Thames & Medway Canal Green Cluster Study makes the case for strategic, targeted investment in the Green Grid places and connections which link Gravesend and the new Cliffe Pools reserve to their wider landscape hinterland. The restoration of the Thames & Medway Canal is the key to unlocking the potential of this part of the North Kent Marshes. It could provide an unrivalled network of connections which enhances the accessibility and appreciation of this key gateway to the Cliffe Pools reserve. By lifting land values, the Canal will also be the catalyst for a sequence of major urban regeneration projects, but early investment in the infrastructure of the canal, in the form of structures, remediation, environmental enhancement and connectivity, will be required to realise the full scale of these opportunities.

The Green Cluster Vision for the Thames & Medway Canal Cluster is accompanied by an Action Plan for its delivery. The Action Plan demonstrates how the delivery of various components of the vision can be facilitated - by Greening the Gateway Kent & Medway and by a range of other partners. It also sets out broad capital costs for the investment required to achieve the vision and an overall timetable for its implementation which demonstrates the inter-relationships between proposed and ongoing projects throughout the cluster.

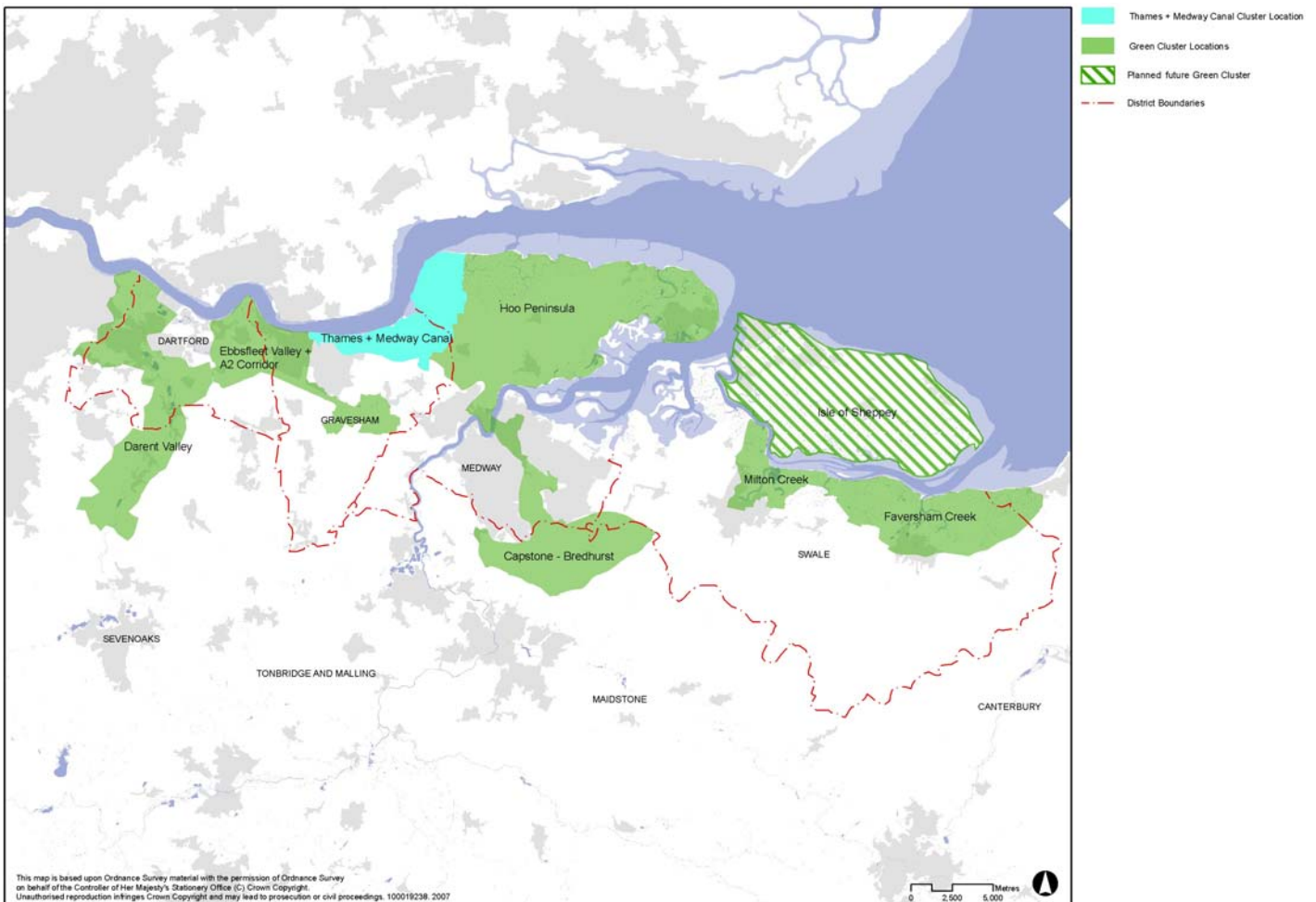


1 What are the Green Cluster Studies?

The Green Cluster studies set out an ambitious vision for the Green Grid public realm and provide an Action Plan to support its delivery across north Kent. Seven Green Cluster Studies have been undertaken to date, and a further Cluster Study is planned for the Isle of Sheppey. Each one focuses on areas of intensive regeneration and change where there are superb opportunities to create strategically sited new greenspaces which will raise expectations, add value to existing investment and create high quality green infrastructure for future development.

'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
- 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

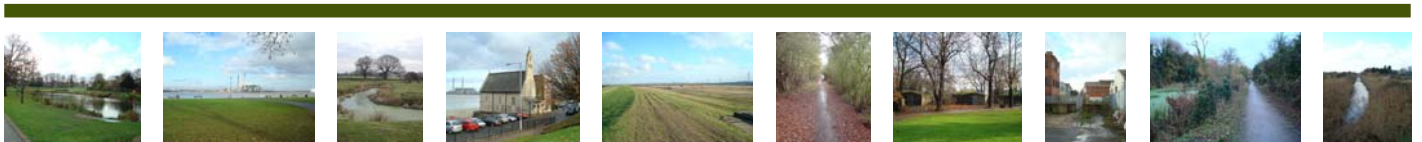


Green Clusters



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. Two workshops were held for each cluster: the focus of the first workshop was to collate information, define objectives and understand stakeholder aspirations; the second workshop was a creative session in which the stakeholders worked together to develop a common vision for the cluster.

The area to the east of Gravesend town centre, extending out onto the North Kent Marshes has the potential to contribute to the achievement of a number of regeneration objectives - social, economic and environmental. The overarching Green Clusters vision for the Thames & Medway Canal 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 Thames & Medway Canal Green Cluster

Sense of place



familiar - estuary expanse - Essex skyline - engineered - artificial - transformation



working fringe - power - seclusion - microcosm - slice - isolation - route - overlook



The Thames-Medway Canal was constructed in the early C19th to provide safe passage for ships between the Thames and the Medway Rivers, avoiding the potentially hazardous journey around the Hoo Peninsula, during a period when this strategic maritime gateway to London was perceived to be at risk of attack from the French. The military advantages of such a route were also important when the scheme was originally conceived, as it provided a means of transporting supplies from the protected waters of the Thames, adjoining the New Tavern Fort, to those close to Chatham Dockyard and Upnor Castle, on the Medway. Ships entered the Canal via a series of lock gates connecting to a canal basin close to Gravesend's historic New Tavern Fort. The straight alignment of the canal, which slices eastwards across the Shorne Marshes, was designed to ensure that the Fort could protect the ships as they traversed the marshes en route to Higham and the secure harbours along the River Medway. Whilst the link to the Medway was lost in the 1840s, with the construction of the Gravesend to Rochester Railway, the remainder of the canal to Higham continued in use until abandoned in 1936/7.

Today the Canal connects Gravesend with its rural hinterland and its heritage. The Thames & Medway Canal Basin is the focus for a new mixed use waterfront development, a natural extension of Gravesend's town centre heritage quarter which adjoins the historic New Tavern Fort and Riverside Leisure Area. This nationally important site is synonymous with the life and work of General Gordon, when resident in Gravesend, and the most important recreational area supporting the Town Centre. Constructed on the edge of the historic town and the adjoining marshland in the late C18th, the New Tavern Fort was a key element in defending the maritime Gateway to London. Today this site is locally valued and within an area identified as being multiply deprived. It has the potential to support both the regeneration of the Town Centre and act as a gateway to new development to the east and the open countryside beyond.

The Canal is the primary environmental asset and catalyst for economic regeneration in this part of Gravesend. The area immediately to the east of the Canal Basin is a semi-derelict industrial zone which has enormous potential for regeneration, with new development fronting onto the continuous secluded 'secondary' waterfront of the Canal. Development of a marina and mixed use community around the Canal Basin is already under construction and this



industrial zone will be phase two of the ongoing regeneration in north east Gravesend. The restoration of the Thames and Medway Canal is the logical third phase, building on the existing investment and rediscovering the Canal as a unique asset - the focus for a distinctive sequence of urban public spaces, a superb recreational facility and a sustainable link to the surrounding countryside.

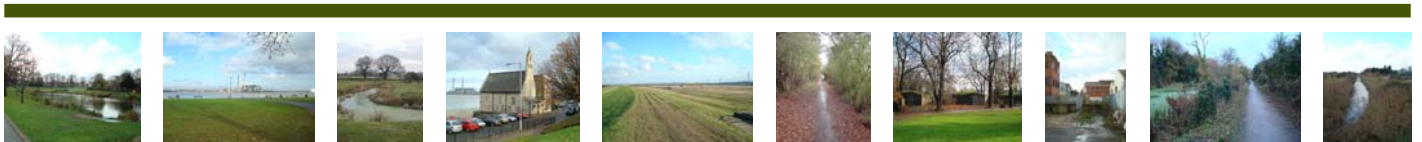
The length of canal immediately to the east of the Canal Basin is currently filled in and developers are being encouraged to come forward with proposals for waterfront development which will reopen this section and re-connect the canal to the basin via a new lock gate. The balance of uses and how this area will be regenerated is still under discussion through the planning process although it is likely that additional public funding will be required to create an alternative access across the railway. Beyond the semi-derelict industrial area, the canal is in a good state of repair. It runs due east through an area of traditional riverside industry, including the Port of London Authority operations at Denton Wharf, along with the Metropolitan Police Public Order and Firearms Training Facility at Mark Lane. Sustrans' National Cycle Route 1 runs along the northern canal towpath, but is underused by members of the public, who are likely to be intimidated by the surrounding industrial areas and unaware of the canal's existence.

Beyond this point, the cluster has a remote rural marshland character, dominated by the River Thames and big open skies. It is a dramatic flat open landscape, dissected by a complex pattern of drainage ditches, many of which are medieval in origin. This landscape was much loved by Charles Dickens, who lived at Gads Hill in Higham, and used the marshes here and at Cooling as the setting of his novel, Great Expectations. The railway line between Gravesend and Higham runs directly alongside the Canal, along the route of the southern towpath. It is a barrier to rights of way to the south of the Canal, but there are a number of crossing points which allow circular walks back to Gravesend and southwards to the sheltered woodlands and meadows of the Shorne Wood Country Park. There is also a connection northwards across the Shorne Marshes to the Saxon Shore Way along the Thames estuary shoreline. But here the military range presents a partial obstacle to public access - people can cross the range on the public right of way provided the officers on duty are aware of their presence and give the order to 'hold fire'.

In common with many transport corridors based on the canal and railway system, industrial development has been attracted to sites around Hoo Junction on the boundary between Shorne and Higham parishes. These sites include the Network Rail depot at Hoo Junction itself; the former Nuralite Asbestos Works, now used for a variety of industrial uses; Beckley Hill Works, a series of smaller industrial units set within a former quarry; and the Viking Industrial Estate, a former concrete products works linked to sand and ballast extraction to the south of the railway, also now sub-divided into a variety of industrial and open storage uses. At a central point between Gravesend and Higham, the Canal skirts around the Nuralite site, this former asbestos factory is now a general industrial estate partially enclosed by woodland which has regenerated on the industrial tips. The Canal is overgrown and contaminated in this zone, but the area is of relatively high biodiversity value with a range of transitional wetland habitats, from dense carr woodland to open water. To the east of the Nuralite site the canal bends southwards and continues in a very overgrown state to the village of Higham, where traces of the former canal run alongside the station platform.

To the north of the Nuralite site, Higham Marshes is a fascinating and distinctive area, steeped in heritage. The ancient route along Higham Common links the site of the Benedictine Priory at the medieval village of Church Street to the coastal path and there are attractive views across to Cliffe Pools from Barrow Hill. Higham Station will serve the new RSPB Reserve at Cliffe pools and the Thames and Medway Canal will provide a key link in a network of potential cycleways which connect the reserve to the station, Gravesend and a network of routes and destinations within the wider area.

In looking at the marshes today, it is sometimes difficult to appreciate that the underlying landscape pattern has strong medieval origins - an irregular mosaic of salt and fresh marshland pasture divided by deeply incised drainage channels which was won from nature by human hands. The marshes now seem 'empty' as the economic rationale and agricultural practices which originally supported their creation have largely disappeared. However, it is a dramatic landscape that requires careful management of assets and investment if it is to contribute in a meaningful way to the future regeneration of this part of the Thames Gateway.



A short history of the Thames and Medway Canal

The town of Gravesend has a strategic site at the first point up river where a ridge of higher ground extends to the shore. Tidal conditions in the river added to the importance of the location, in that sailing vessels would have found it difficult to make the passage between London and the sea in one tide and Gravesend would have been a natural 'break point' in their voyage. The granting of exclusive rights by Royal Charter to operate the Long Ferry between London and Gravesend during the C13th ensured Gravesend's significance as the maritime gateway to London.

Such a strategic site merited military protection and fortifications were built both in Gravesend and Tilbury in the C16th to defend the river approaches to London and the Royal Naval Dockyards at Woolwich and Deptford. These were subsequently upgraded and additional defences constructed at Shornemead, Cliffe and Coalhouse Forts as part of an integrated network of gunnery positions to the north and south of the river.

Whilst the River Thames has historically been a major trading artery, it is also a barrier to north-south movement so the location of ferries was significant. One such ferry, which is still in existence, ran between Gravesend and Tilbury and served both civil and military traffic. Another once ran between Higham Creek and the north shore of the river, accessed via Higham Common. This had linkages with the Benedictine priory which once stood on a spur of higher ground close to St Mary's Church and the settlement at Abbey Farm, Church Street. Having first been established in 1148, as an outpost of the abbey of St. Sulpice, at Rennes in Brittany, the priory moved to the Abbey Farm site in the 1280s. It was finally dissolved in 1522 following allegations of gross impropriety.

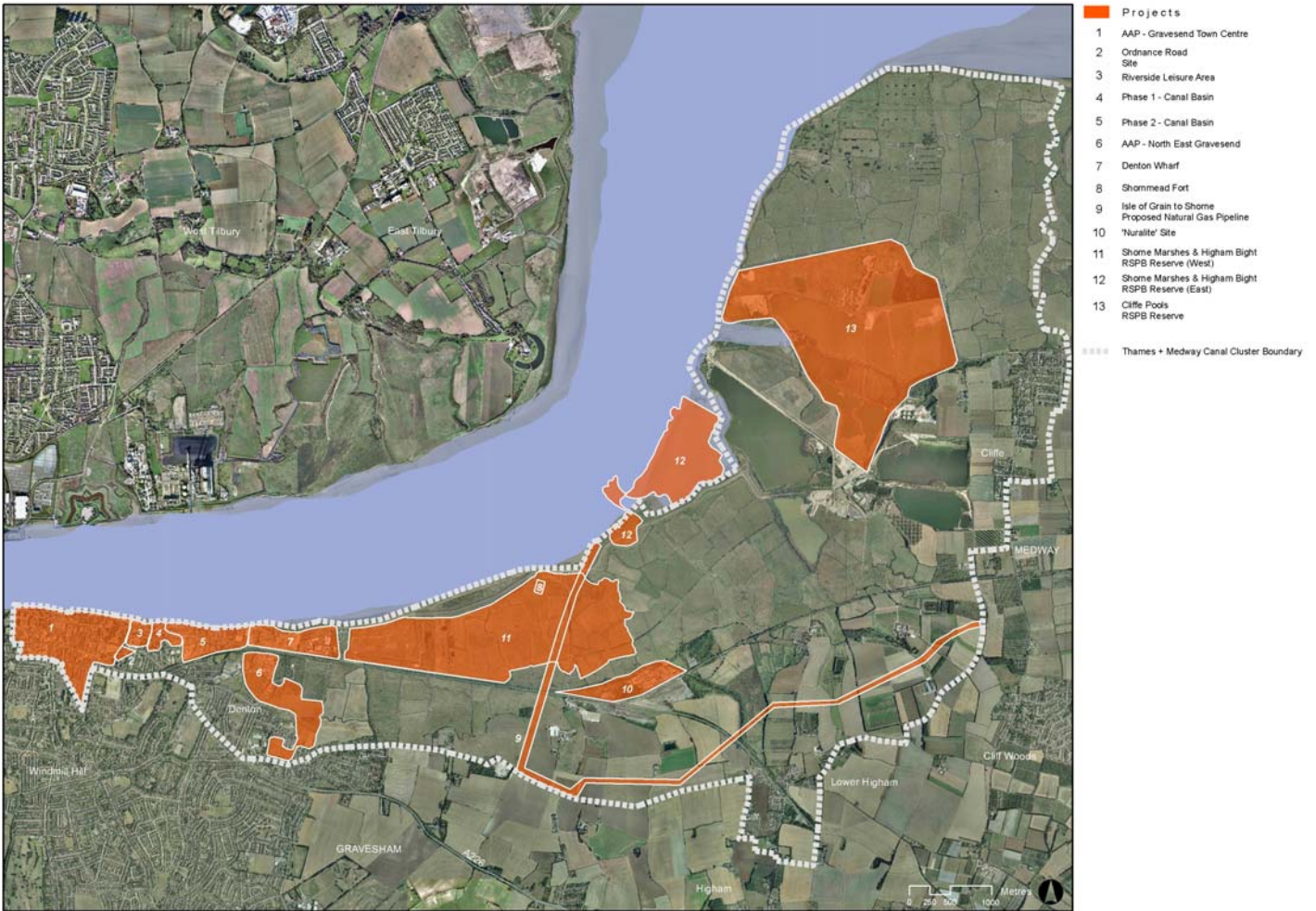
Toward the end of the C18th, the importance of establishing safe and convenient waterborne transport between the River Thames and River Medway was becoming increasingly recognised - particularly as a means of avoiding the long journey around the Hoo Peninsula and protecting shipping from attack during time of war. So, in 1799, it was logical to propose the construction of a canal linking the two rivers. Given the military advantage of providing a secure route between the Royal Naval Dockyards at Woolwich and Deptford with that at Chatham, it is no surprise that this was designed to run from close to the New Tavern Fort in Gravesend to equally well defended waters close to Rochester.

However, following the commencement of construction in 1800, the Thames and Medway Canal suffered many setbacks as a private speculative venture. It was only after several changes in alignment and the construction of the Strood Tunnel (3,931 yards) that the canal was finally completed in 1824. Even then, it was not commercially successful and proposals were brought forward in 1845 to convert the southern towpath and one half of the tunnel into a railway running between the Gravesend Canal Basin and Strood.

Following an Act of Parliament in 1846, the canal and railway were sold to the Southern Railway Company and integrated into the wider network. Whilst the works involved the infilling of the canal through the tunnel, the remainder of the canal between Gravesend Canal Basin and Higham Wharf continued to operate for the next 88 years before being formally abandoned as a working waterway in 1934. In the interim, a branch line was constructed between Hoo Junction and Port Victoria on the Isle of Grain in 1880. Whilst passenger services on this line were discontinued in the early 1960s, it is still heavily used by freight trains accessing the marine facilities at Thamesport.



Forces for change - existing proposals, projects & activities



Existing proposals, projects & activities

Gravesend town centre is the focus of a £110Million bid for a major mixed use development and there is ongoing investment in a high quality transport interchange associated with the station district. In addition to this town centre investment, the Thames & Medway Canal Basin is at the centre of a new waterfront area, which is currently under construction. Further improvements will be made as development progresses. Phase two will be developed over the course of the next five years and may be accessed by a new bridge over the railway, which would transform the accessibility of this whole waterfront area. Preliminary design work has been undertaken to assess the capital cost of installing new outer lock gates and the reinstatement of first urban section of canal. An Area Action Plan is in place for a further zone of potential large scale development to the south of the Canal - known as North-east Gravesend AAP, which will incorporate new employment areas and open space.

A Conservation Plan and Masterplan¹ for New Tavern Fort and the Riverside Leisure Area has been completed in consultation with key stakeholders and the public and translated into detailed, costed landscape proposals for the enhancement of the area as a historic asset and important open space facility. Works have already been undertaken to restore 'the Dell', originally the moat for the fort, and new public conveniences have also been provided.

A number of feasibility studies have been undertaken to explore the technical issues, opportunities and constraints associated with restoration of the Thames & Medway Canal. These studies are ongoing and will inform future works

¹ Gravesend Borough Council, 2005, Gravesend Riverside Leisure Area



Further to the east, the 159 ha Shorne Marshes & Higham Bight RSPB Reserve is part of one of the largest remaining blocks of lowland wet grassland in England and includes coastal grazing marsh, ditches, reed-bed, scrub and semi-improved grassland. The area is under active conservation management which aims to re-establish a thriving coastal grazing marsh eco-system. The area falls within the Metropolitan Police Authority's live firing range (associated with the National Police Training Centre on the eastern fringes of Gravesend) so visitor facilities are limited, but there is ongoing conservation work at the historic Shornemead Fort, which aims to conserve the historic integrity of the building, improve interpretation and eliminate health and safety problems.

The industrial sites in and around Hoo Junction are all in private ownership, but interest has been shown in the potential for some redevelopment consistent with the environmental sensitivity of their location, on the edge of the North Kent Marshes and within the Metropolitan Green Belt. A major pipeline for natural gas is due to be constructed across the marshes between April and October 2008, but the area affected will be fully restored to reflect the existing landscape pattern.

The other major development in the area is the new RSPB nature reserve at Cliffe Pools. This is a beacon project within the Thames Gateway which the RSPB is promoting as the gateway to the North Kent Marshes. The project will transform the pools associated with the former cement works into a national centre for wetland habitats. The profile of the pools is being reworked to provide wetlands with varied depths of water, islands and shallow margins for nesting and roosting birds. The reserve will also provide interpretation for visitors, who will be able to experience the North Kent wilderness spectacle of thousands of roosting and feeding birds at very close quarters.

The location of these major proposals, together with a range of other ongoing activities and forces for change are shown on the aerial view.



Stakeholders

Key stakeholders within the Milton Creek Cluster are:

Gravesham Borough Council - planning and delivery of forthcoming masterplans associated with the Thames Basin Canal Basin, the areas of industrial land to the east and the area associated with the North East Gravesend Area Action Plan. Gravesend Borough Council is also developing an Open Space Strategy and is a partner in the delivery of the Kent Thameside Green Grid.

Kent Thameside Delivery Board - aims to bring new jobs and homes to sustainable communities within the Kent Thameside area, with investment in excellent public transport and green spaces. Responsibilities include the delivery of the Green Grid throughout Kent Thameside and current Green Grid projects targeted for investment within the Thames & Medway Canal Cluster include the Gravesend Riverside area, Shornemead Fort and the Thames & Medway Canal.

Environment Agency - shoreline & flood management, recreation & waterfront access, protection of controlled water quality, fisheries and contamination. The Environment Agency is responsible for the sustainability of the Canal and is consulted on plans for the sustainable use of water in the Canal and on the surrounding marshes. Current proposals are to use some of the surplus freshwater from that is currently draining from the Shorne Marshes into the River Thames for keeping the Canal topped up with water (and therefore navigable). The Environment Agency has also provided information on the status of the landfill sites along the creek, with timescales and criteria for remediation.

RSPB - Shorne Marshes & Higham Bight is a RSPB Reserve The reserve covers 159 hectares of coastal grazing marsh, ditches, reed-bed, scrub and semi-improved grassland. The ditch system has nationally important plant and invertebrate communities and a series of explosion crater ponds hold great crested newts. The long-term vision for the site involves re-establishing a thriving coastal grazing marsh eco-system in favourable condition. Unlike much of the North Kent Marshes, the reserve has a plentiful water supply, allowing ditch levels to be raised and surface floods to be created during the winter. Management will include scrub removal, increasing water levels in winter and spring and cleaning out the silted up ditch system on a rotational basis. This will considerably increase the breeding wader population and that of wintering and passage waterfowl and will benefit the notable ditch flora and fauna. The RSPB is also developing a new flagship reserve at Cliffe Pools. The site is internationally important for wildfowl and breeding waders and the new reserve will include a range of wetland habitats, trails, view points and interpretation features. The reserve is within easy reach of hundreds of thousands of people and will raise the profile of the North Kent Marshes as a destination within the Thames Gateway.

Natural England - an overarching interest in promoting public access to the natural environment and in the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity throughout the cluster.

Sustrans - National Cycle Route One runs alongside the Canal.

Thames & Medway Canal Association - a voluntary group formed to promote the use of the Canal as a multipurpose amenity. The group aims to restore the Canal as a navigable waterway, with boat traffic from Gravesend to Higham Wharf.

Inland Waterways Association - campaigns for the use, maintenance and restoration of Britain's inland waterways. The Inland Waterways Association has led the development of the 1994 Thames & Medway Canal Restoration Strategy. The group promotes the navigable use of the Canal and highlights the economic benefits the restoration will bring - in terms of enhanced property values and employment.

Network Rail - part of the land to the south of the Canal is safe-guarded as part of the potential Cross Rail scheme. Network Rail may explore the potential for a loop on the Isle of Grain branch line and, if this were to go ahead, there would be further development at Hoo junction.

National Grid - planning the implementation of a major natural gas pipeline between Shorne and the port terminals on the Isle of Grain which is due to be constructed between April and October 2008.

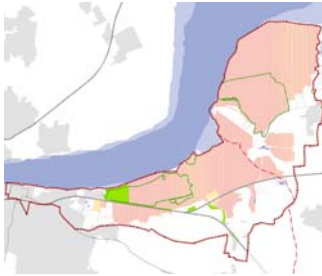
Private sector landowners - Nuralite site. The local landowners are planning ongoing development and enhancement of sites within the Nuralite industrial estate.



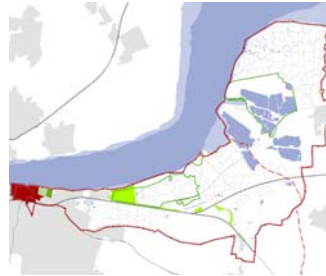
3 Policy Context

The context maps have been prepared using GIS data. They illustrate our current knowledge of the cluster area and highlight key potential influences which should be taken into account in planning future activities.

The mini-maps below provide an indication of the range of context maps available; the full set of maps (at a larger scale) is available separately.



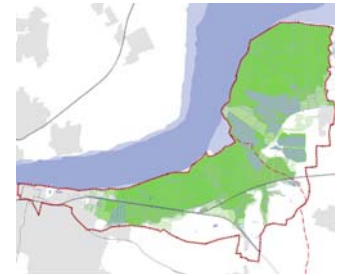
Statutory Designations



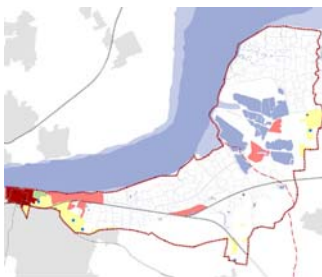
Accessible Greenspaces



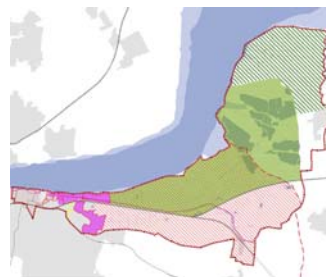
Cultural Heritage



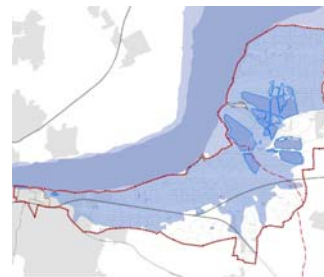
Ecological Network



Land Use



Planning & Policies



Topography



Destinations & Connections

Key issues to note from the context drawings are:

- **Statutory designations**

- Shorne Marshes and Cliffe Marshes are within the Thames Estuary & Marshes Ramsar/SPA site and the South Thames SSSI

- **Policy context**

- Shorne Marshes is the first point beyond the London conurbation where the Gravesham Borough Council Metropolitan Green Belt meets the Thames Estuary
- All of the rural landscapes (within the Thames & Medway Canal cluster) and the Hoo Junction industrial sites lie within the Gravesham Borough Council Metropolitan Green Belt
- Shorne Marshes and the Cliffe Pools area are within Areas of Local Landscape Importance (in both Gravesham Borough Council and Medway Council's Local Plans)
- The Cliffe Marshes are within a Special Landscape Area (Medway Council's Local Plan)

- **Cultural Heritage**

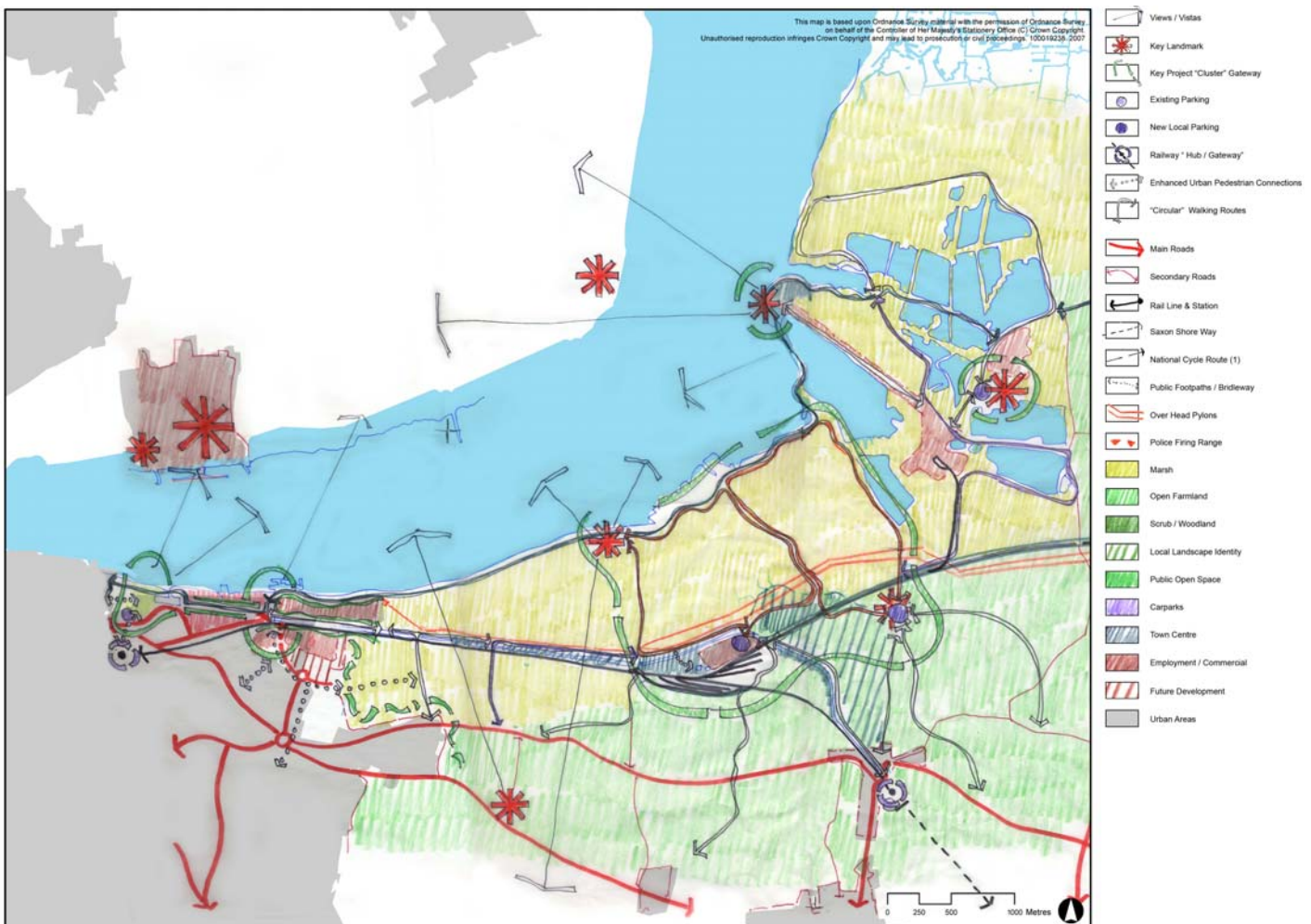
- Riverside Leisure Area and New Tavern Fort is, in part, a nationally important Scheduled Ancient Monument
- Shornemead Fort and Cliffe Fort are part of the series of defensive military forts along the Thames/ marine gateway to London
- High Church Street Conservation Area reflects the pattern of the medieval settlement on the fringes of the marsh

- **Access**

- The Saxon Shore Way follows the Thames shoreline along Gravesend's historic Promenade and out along the shoreline of the Shorne Marshes. The route turns inland across the centre of the Cliffe Pools RSPB Nature Reserve and into Cliffe village
- Sustrans' National Cycle Route 1 runs along the northern towpath of the Thames & Medway Canal, linking Gravesend station and Higham station
- The railway and the firing range (for police training on Shorne Marshes) are major barriers to the accessibility of North East Gravesend and the wider Shorne Marshes

4 Analysis

As a first step toward defining an overarching vision for the Thames and Medway Canal, the Analysis drawing begins to focus on the way the area is perceived, by pedestrians, cyclists, residents, visitors and those who work in the area. It analyses the public realm, highlighting connections, gaps, barriers and the inter-relationships between existing projects and activities around the Canal.



Thames & Medway Canal: Analysis

Thames & Medway Canal Cluster - SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS

- Connections between town centre and distinctive North Kent Marshes wilderness landscapes
- Circular walks linking to Saxon Shore Way to north and Shorne Wood Country Park complex to south
- Positive water management links between Shorne Marshes and Canal restoration
- Valuable nature conservation habitats
- Heritage links and interpretation - Church Street and the group of Napoleonic forts along the Thames

WEAKNESSES

- Severance of railway - restricts connections north-south throughout the cluster
- Sewage works and other major land uses (which are unlikely to change) on the eastern fringes of Gravesend
- Long distances - particularly on foot
- Police firing range - massively reduces potential for accessibility - physically and in terms of people's perceptions of the area
- Traffic generation from the industrial sites around Hoo Junction, given poor linkages to the main road network and the need to gain access by large goods vehicles.

OPPORTUNITIES

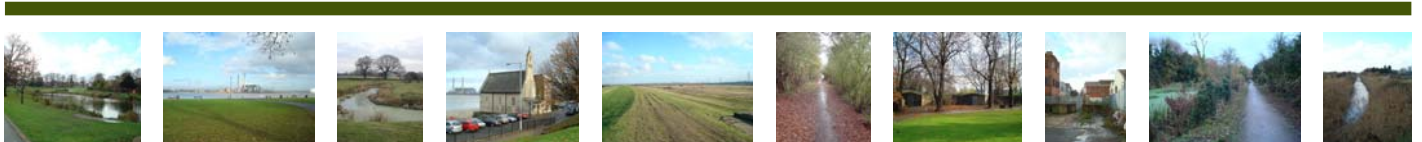
- Sustainable transport links to new RSPB flagship reserve at Cliffe Pools and Higham Station
- New canalside districts will provide critical mass of people - enhanced property values and economic benefits provided by Canal public realm
- Navigable canal - will provide major destination for recreation and boats (of regional significance)
- Promoted rights of way (national, footpath & cycleway routes)

THREATS

- Asbestos contamination in parts of the Nuralite site, which contaminates water in the Canal
- Lower Thames Crossing - an unspecific, rumbling threat

The analysis drawing highlights opportunities and constraints. The Canal presents a superb opportunity to connect the centre of Gravesend to the open marshes to the east and onto destinations at Higham and Cliff Pools. At this broad scale, the map highlights the sequence of key landmarks and views along and across the Thames estuary. The historic military forts are important local landmarks which together represent a unique group of historic features which link the north and south banks of the Thames. It also shows the location of the distinctive small-scale marshland landscapes on Higham Marshes and in the hinterland of the historic hamlet of Church Street.

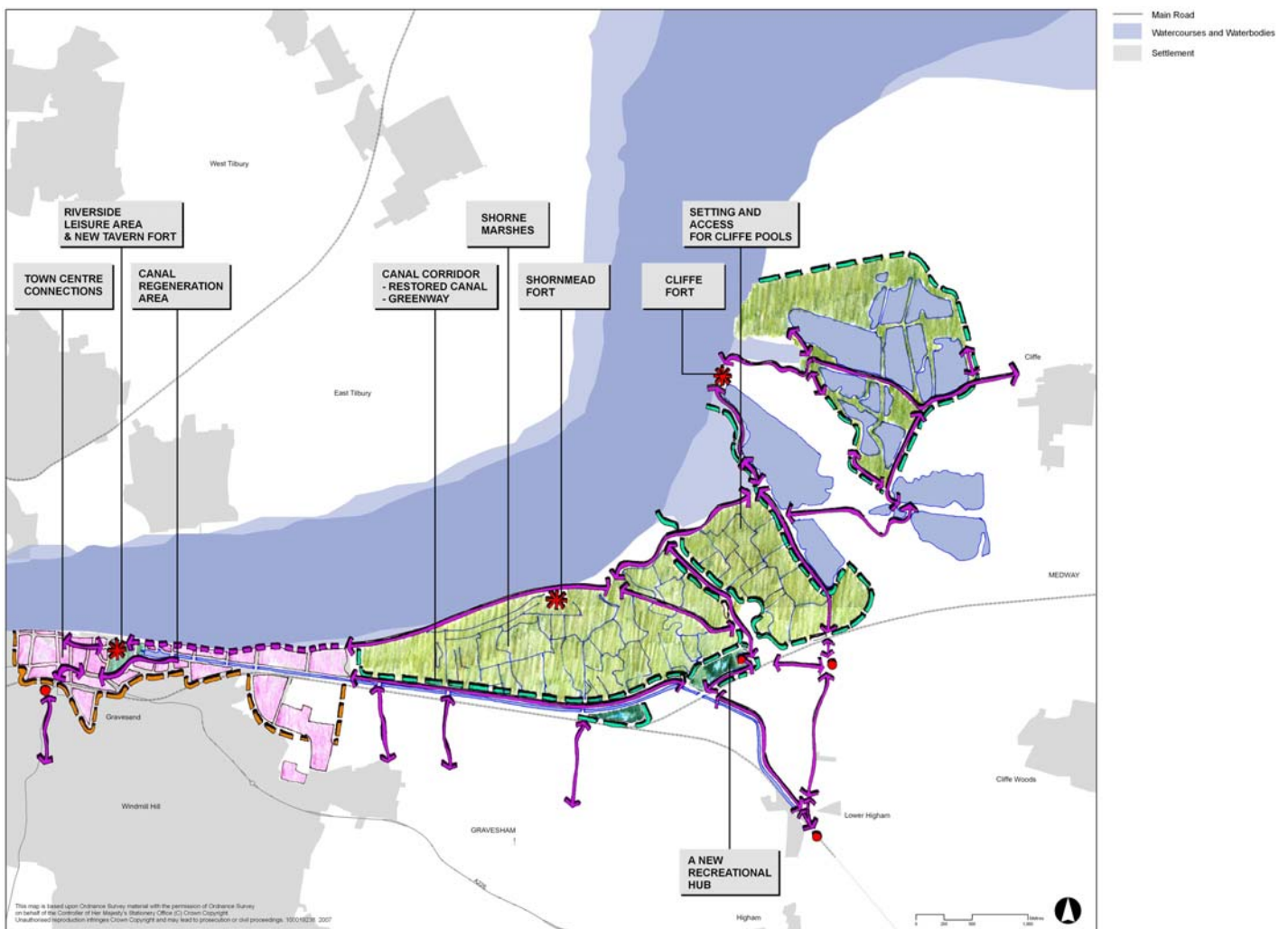
Within Gravesend, the railway line presents a barrier to pedestrian movement toward the waterfront area. The Canal has the potential to provide a key east-west connection through this area, which is currently an intimidating derelict industrial zone, but will soon be a new mixed use district which merits high quality landscape and recreational opportunities.



5 Thames & Medway Canal - Vision framework

The historic Thames and Medway Canal is the catalyst for the regeneration of north east Gravesend and a popular recreational destination.

A sequence of new waterfront spaces will lead from the town centre and a restored Riverside Leisure Area right out onto the Shorne Marshes, re-connecting Gravesend with its rural hinterland and its heritage. The restored canal will be a focus for water-based recreation and a superb 8km greenway along the towpath will connect right to the platform at Higham Station. An ongoing management regime will maximise biodiversity in the sequence of wetland habitats along the canal so that there is a managed dynamic balance between open water and aquatic vegetation throughout. The whole area is now in the spotlight as the gateway landscape for the new beacon RSPB reserve at Cliffe Pools and the canalside route will be the spine for connections to the Saxon Shore Way and military forts along the Thames to the north, and to the more secluded landscapes of the Shorne Woods Country Park to the south.

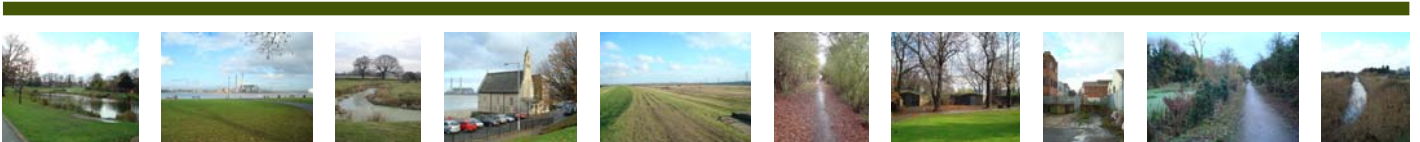


Thames & Medway Canal: Vision Framework



Key opportunities and components of the vision are:

- **Town centre connections** - Constructed on the edge of the historic town and adjoining marshland in the late C18th, New Tavern Fort was a key element in defending the maritime gateway to London and has strong, historic links with the Thames & Medway Canal. The fort is part of the historic Riverside Leisure Area, the most important recreational area in the town centre. Today this area has the potential to support both the regeneration of the town centre and act as a gateway to new development to the east and the open countryside beyond. The aim is to enhance the overall permeability of North East Gravesend, encouraging a natural flow of people from the railway station and town centre, along the waterfront to the Canal Basin and on along the restored Thames and Medway Canal.
- **Canal regeneration area** - The Thames & Medway Canal Basin is already the catalyst for an active, characterful waterfront development with a marina and mix of uses. The Canal Basin is adjoined by an area of traditional riverside industry, including the Port of London Authority operations at Denton Wharf, along with the Metropolitan Police Public Order and Firearms Training Facility at Mark Lane. The balance of uses and how this area will be regenerated is still under discussion through the planning process, but further development could be centred on a re-opened Thames & Medway Canal, connected to the Canal Basin by a lock. The Canal in this area will be a focus for boats and recreation, as well as a dramatic grand urban space, which tells the 'story' of Gravesend.
- **Rural sections of the Thames & Medway Canal** - Whilst some parts of the canal have been infilled, other sections have been partially restored by the voluntary sector and demonstrate what could be achieved by further investment. On-going feasibility studies will inform key investment decisions in this area, including the balance to be struck between recreational, heritage and nature conservation objectives. Water-based recreational activity will be encouraged, and a greenway (incorporating National Cycle Route 1) along the northern towpath will be designed for use by cyclists, walkers and wheelchairs alike. The canalside greenway will extend from the Canal Basin Regeneration area in Gravesend to Higham Station and will be complemented by links to the Saxon Shore Way to the north, the Shorne Woods Country Park to the south and footpaths into Gravesend and the surrounding smaller settlements.
- **A new recreational hub** - This is a relatively long route and a new informal public open space, with car park, café and picnic area will provide a popular destination along the canal. The Beckley Hill area is accessible from Higham along Canal Road and offers excellent footpath connections to Higham Marshes, Cliffe Pools and Church Street. It is currently an area of damp, regenerating scrub with potential to develop a rich mosaic of woodland, grassland and wetland habitats, with interpretation and trails. Beckley Hill is adjacent to the Nuralite industrial site, where there may be opportunities for environmental enhancement and a sensitive regeneration scheme accompanying the restoration of the canal. People will be encouraged to access Shornemead Fort from the Beckley Hill site, as a more desirable alternative to the existing public right of way across the firing range.
- **Ecological networks** - Much of the area is designated as a Ramsar/SPA for its nature conservation interest and it is particularly important for migratory birds. An ongoing management regime will aim to maximise biodiversity in the sequence of riparian and wetland habitats along the canal so that there is a managed dynamic balance between open water and aquatic vegetation throughout. Habitat connections to the grazing marshes of the Shorne Marshes Nature Reserve and the enhanced woodland/scrub habitats associated with the Nuralite site landfill area and the Beckley Hill site will enhance the biodiversity value of the South Thames SSSI.
- **Setting and sustainable access for Cliffe Pools** - The new Beckley Hill picnic area will be the focus for walks to the distinctive marshland landscapes to the north of Higham, with links to the Saxon Shore Way and the military forts at Shornemead and Cliffe. Gravesend and Higham stations are key gateways for the area and the canalside greenway will extend right alongside Higham's railway platform, making it easy to take bikes on the train between Higham and Gravesend so the canalside greenway becomes part of circular train/cycle routes between town and countryside. New cycle and footpath routes linking Higham Station and the Beckley Hill picnic area to Cliffe Pools will transform perceptions of the countryside in part of the North Kent Marshes which is likely to be a major focus for visitors.



6 The Bigger Picture

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 2004² 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 capitalize 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.

² DEFRA and ODP, *Creating sustainable communities: Greening the Gateway, 2004*



7 Delivery

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 Thames & Medway Canal 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 Thames & Medway Canal 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.

8 References

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