



Medway Core Strategy Examination 2012

Background Paper

The Thames Gateway



THAMES GATEWAY

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This is one of a short series of background papers prepared by Medway Council to inform the independent examination into the Medway Core Strategy 2012.
- 1.2 The papers simply draw together elements of the 'evidence base' so that information about a topic can be seen in one place. They do not contain any new information but it is hoped that they will assist all participants during the examination. Where appropriate, links are provided to source documents.
- 1.3 The series of papers cover the following topics:
 - Conformity
 - Cross Boundary Issues
 - The Thames Gateway
 - Spatial Strategy
 - The Plan Preparation Process
 - The Basis for Housing and Employment Growth Targets
 - Deliverability
 - Land Allocations and Development Management DPD.
- 1.4 Paragraph 1.3 of the Core Strategy states: *"...at its heart it (the Core Strategy) is about fully realising Medway's enormous potential and completing the immense regeneration programme that started over 10 years ago."* This regeneration programme is founded in the Thames Gateway and it provides a central theme throughout the Core Strategy. Accordingly the genesis and history of the Thames Gateway is summarised in this paper.

2. Background

- 2.1 An analysis of the history and development of London shows that the capital's poorer areas and most polluting activities were clustered in the East End. In large part this reflected the prevailing wind direction and access to the River Thames. Gradually this activity moved further downstream as the city expanded, larger ships were introduced, refineries developed and new power generating plants needed access to cooling water.
- 2.2 To a degree this was mirrored in Medway, which borders both the Thames and Medway estuaries. Over a long period the Chatham Naval Dockyard expanded downstream with associated heavy industries lining the riverbanks not occupied by the Navy. A major oil refinery was developed in the 1950's at Grain (later closed) and in the 1960's new power stations were developed on the north side of the estuary at

Kingsnorth and Grain. The Dockyard closed in 1984 and many associated industries shut down with it. In common with a much larger 'corridor' running eastwards from London there was therefore a legacy of derelict land, high unemployment, deprivation, low community confidence and despoiled landscapes.

- 2.3 In 1987 SERPLAN (the South East Regional Planning Conference) produced a report 'Development Potential in the East Thames Corridor' (RPC700)¹ responding to Government regional guidance issued in 1986 and which placed *"emphasis on the revitalisation of the less prosperous eastern parts of the region."* It noted *"much of the development potential of the region lies in the Eastern Thames Corridor, extending on both banks of the river from Tower Bridge to Southend and Sheerness."* It identified very large areas that could be developed but also the fact that much of it *"requires action to lift constraints caused by difficulties of access and other infrastructure problems and to improve the environment. The difficulties are substantial but by no means insuperable. Part of the problem is the poor image which the areas seems to have in the eyes of many developers and industrialists and what is needed is a concerted effort by the authorities involved to eliminate the problems and to promote the area's latent potential."*
- 2.4 The 1987 report was followed up by a number of other SERPLAN reports and then, in 1993, by what became known as the 'Llewelyn Davies Report' that was commissioned by the Government.²
- 2.5 Michael Heseltine, the then Secretary of State for the Environment, endorsed the work undertaken and re-badged the East Thames Corridor as the 'Thames Gateway'. He also established a small government taskforce to produce a planning framework as recommended in the 1993 report – led by Mike Ash, later, as Chief Planner, responsible for the introduction of the local development framework system.
- 2.6 This led to the publication, in 1995, of PRG9a The Thames Gateway Planning Framework³ that has strongly influenced spatial planning ever since. It also began to set in place specific delivery arrangements as summarised below.
- 2.7 As far as the Medway administrative area is concerned the boundary of the Thames Gateway was drawn along the M2 motorway, meaning the the great majority of the area was in the Gateway but not the Medway Valley parishes of Cuxton and Halling.

3. RPG9a

¹ Out of print but extracts, available from Medway Council on request

² 'East Thames Corridor: a Study of Development Capacity and Potential' HMSO 1993

³ See evidence base document RD12

- 3.1 The Framework remained in force until the South East Plan was adopted in May 2009. It was also endorsed by the Labour government and so strongly influenced the following local development documents over that period:
 - Kent Structure Plan, 1996
 - Medway Local Plan, 2003
 - Kent & Medway Structure Plan 2007.
- 3.2 The document set out a vision for the Thames Gateway and laid out policies to guide its future planning (para. 1.2)
- 3.3 The Planning Framework looks over the long term but not to a fixed date, recognising that the opportunity of Thames Gateway lies in the long term as in the more immediate future. (Para.1.13). Later it refers to a period of 20-30 years.
- 3.4 In the second (main) part of the document it breaks the Gateway down into a series of sub regional areas, including “Medway Towns and the Hoo Peninsula” and sets out a policy approach for each.
- 3.5 In relation to the Medway area its contents can be summarised as follows:
 - Main development opportunities at Chatham Maritime, Rochester Waterfront, Gillingham Business Park, Medway City Estate and the Hoo Peninsula
 - With the completion of the Medway Towns Northern Relief Road, a switch from road building to public transport
 - A need to protect Medway’s fine historic heritage, improving urban design quality and protecting locally valuable countryside, especially to the north and east of Gillingham
 - Recognition for the “green hillsides and backdrops” to the setting of the urban area
 - Recognition of the development potential of the Defence Estate at Chattenden and suggesting that if this land were to be released it could allow a more sustainable relationship to be fashioned between employment and homes on the Hoo Peninsula. Further that the existing barracks could be the basis for a campus style development but with scope for expanding the community into a new village.

4. Sustainable Communities Plan 2003

- 4.1 Following the change of Government in 1997 the priority afforded to the Thames Gateway continued to increase, resulting in the launch of the Sustainable Communities Plan in 2003. This led directly to the establishment of a dedicated Cabinet Committee (Misc 22) chaired by the Prime Minister and declaration of the Gateway as the first national growth area. It also prompted complex delivery arrangements to be put in place (see below) and substantial funding being reserved across

Government departments but led by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. It was described by Government at the time as the largest regeneration site in Europe.

- 4.2 A Strategic Partnership Board was set up, chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister with representation from the local authorities, business, the voluntary sector and key environmental organisations. Under this sub regional partnerships were set up to guide delivery on the ground. These covered London, South Essex and Kent Thames Gateway with the latter taking in Dartford, Gravesham, Medway and Swale.
- 4.3 The Sustainable Communities Plan indicated that the capacity for growth in the Gateway could be substantially higher than that indicated in RPG9a. John Prescott, the then Deputy Prime Minister, referred to 120,000 new homes. The relevant regional bodies were challenged to prove this and this led to the publication of 'Growth and Regeneration in the Thames Gateway – Interregional Planning Statement by the Thames Gateway Regional Planning Bodies' 2004⁴.
- 4.4 This report, to which Medway Council was a major contributor, confirmed that the physical capacity for higher levels of growth existed but that this could only be realised if sufficient pump-priming investment was available. In the case of Medway it concluded that the physical capacity existed for 15,000 homes and stated:

“Medway has a range of employment and housing opportunities on the river, in the existing centres of Chatham and Rochester and on the Isle of Grain. These would be assisted by the provision of CTRL domestic services to relieve the North Kent line and proposals that would increase public transport capacity and reduce congestion in the urban area. A mixed new community is envisaged at Chattenden/Lodge Hill in the medium to long term.”

- 4.5 This robust capacity assessment corresponds very closely to the current development 'pipeline' and it guided much of the work subsequently carried out by Medway Renaissance (see below).
- 4.6 In turn this strongly influenced the development of the Medway Sustainable Community Strategy, as did the wider Thames Gateway dimension.

5. Delivery Arrangements

- 5.1 Below the sub regional partnerships the Government set up a series of area specific delivery bodies. These included urban development corporations in London and Thurrock and arms length organisations in other areas, including Dartford and Gravesham (Kent Thameside) and Swale (Swale Forward). Medway successfully argued that an in house

⁴ http://legacy.london.gov.uk/mayor/planning/docs/thames_gateway_irps.pdf

arrangement would best ensure democratic accountability. The result was Medway Renaissance, a new Division within the Council but funded solely from Government grants.

- 5.2 This arrangement was unique in the Gateway and subsequent experience demonstrated its effectiveness. Over the period of its existence regular audits and in depth monitoring showed it to be consistently the best performing of the delivery bodies.
- 5.3 Initially over £1 billion of funding was allocated across the Gateway, primarily for key infrastructure projects but also covering land assembly on key sites and (in Medway's case) a substantial programme of masterplans and development briefs.
- 5.4 The table below summarises how this funding was spent in Medway up to the cessation of funding in March 2011 as a result of the national budget deficit reduction programme.

Project	Amount
Comprehensive Spending Review 2004-2007	
Community Cohesion in North Kent	£95,500.00
Chatham Centre and Waterfront: additional work	£1,365,000.00
Chatham Centre and Waterfront: bus station	£2,880,000.00
Chatham Centre and Waterfront: development framework	£201,993.00
Chatham Centre and Waterfront: project development	£698,007.00
Chatham Centre and Waterfront: road improvements	£3,610,000.00
Medway Strategic Studies: phase 2	£670,000.00
Medway Strategic Studies: phase 1	£300,000.00
Rochester Riverside: infrastructure costs	£37,600,000.00
Rochester Riverside: gateways design and development	£24,860.00
Rochester Riverside: site investigation	£600,000.00
Strood Riverside: land assembly	£13,624,000.00
Community Enterprise Hubs	£2,653,236.00
Innovation Centre	£3,500,000.00
Joiners Shop	£1,000,000.00
National Museums at Chatham	£1,400,000.00
National Museums at Chatham Part 2	£1,100,000.00
Chatham Centre and Waterfront Environmental	£550,000.00
Communities Learning Facilities	£300,000.00
Gillingham Town Centre	£814,268.00
Green Cluster Masterplans for North Kent	£170,000.00
River Medway Strategic Flood Risk Assessment	£384,026.00
Transport for Medway	£1,044,744.00
Total	£74,585,634.00
Comprehensive Spending Review 2007-2011	
A228 Ropers Lane to Grain	£10,428,850.00
Gillingham Station	£1,450,000.00
Medway Strategic Bus Corridor Improvements	£12,456,500.00
Medway Renaissance Partnership	£8,200,000.00
Great Lines City Park	£2,126,112.00

Project	Amount
Bus Facility	£5,963,934.00
Chatham Waterfront	£1,987,975.00
Corporation Street	£299,215.00
Development Briefs	£401,205.00
Highways Schemes	£8,178,682.00
Public Realm	£1,855,000.00
Queen Street Site	£578,744.00
Rochester Riverside	£1,840,000.00
Medway Park	£5,000,000.00
Strood Centre Infrastructure: Preparatory Studies	£400,000.00
Total	£135,751,851
Total for both periods	£210,337,485

- 5.5 The majority of these funds were channelled through the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) and they also levered in additional funds from a variety of sources, including the European Social Fund, Heritage Lottery Fund etc., plus the Council's own capital programme.
- 5.6 It is readily apparent therefore that there was strong Government endorsement for the spatial development strategy now reflected in the Core Strategy.

6. Current Situation

- 6.1 As indicated above, severe cutbacks in public expenditure have impacted across the Thames Gateway, including Medway. However it still has a dedicated Government Minister, Bob Neill MP, and it remains a priority project for the HCA.
- 6.2 Medway Renaissance, along with the other local delivery vehicles ceased to exist in March 2011 but the Thames Gateway is still one of four Strategic Priorities for the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP covering Essex, Kent and East Sussex), a key conduit for pump priming funding under the Coalition Government.
- 6.3 A key indicator of the success of local efforts made under the Thames Gateway banner is the scale of the development pipeline, which is detailed in the Delivery Background Paper. It is also evidenced by the upward trend in housing completions since 2001 and the fact that the local housing market has not seen a collapse like many other areas. The local economy is also holding its own, in marked contrast to earlier economic downturns, when Medway suffered disproportionately compared to much of the South East.
- 6.4 The transport investment has also provided additional capacity and limited the need for significant new investment to serve key developments.

- 6.6 Medway is now a much more self-assured place than was the case before the Thames Gateway Strategy and associated spending began to bite. However much remains to be done to complete the regeneration programme that is at the heart of the Core Strategy.

7. Conclusions

- 7.1 It is undoubtedly the case that the Thames Gateway project is of national significance and locally the most important driver of change and spatial thinking. Given the scale of the structural issues that it was set up to address, it was accepted from the outset that the scale of change sought could take 30 years or more to achieve. In 2012 Medway is 17 years into that period.
- 7.2 All of the very significant funding devoted to the Gateway has been utilised to realise the regeneration strategy originally set out in RPG9a and consistently refined since then. It has come from Government and is therefore a direct endorsement of the regeneration strategy that has been followed locally and is now enshrined in the Core Strategy.
- 7.3 Maintaining momentum will inevitably be more difficult in the current economic climate but the Thames Gateway remains an expressed priority for government and the LEP. The structural problems that led to the identification of first the East Thames Corridor and then the Thames Gateway manifested themselves over a period of many decades, if not centuries. Addressing them will not take nearly as long but it is still a long-term challenge that should not lose focus as a result of where we now are in the economic cycle.