

The European Spatial Development Perspective proposes creating several dynamic zones of global economic integration and a network of internationally accessible metropolitan regions. Such a vision can only become reality by complementing international and national hubs with regional and local growth opportunities. How is this vision applied to the Thames Gateway Regeneration Corridor in the Greater South East region of England?



Sustainable development and growing mobility in the South East of England

Connecting the Greater South East

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 Illustrations: SEEDA (unless indicated otherwise)

The region around London in the South East of England is home to about 21 million people living on only 16% of the total UK territory. This economic powerhouse creates 42% of the UK's gross value added¹ and many global headquarters are located in this area. Key international gateways, such as Heathrow Airport, Southampton and Felixstowe seaports and the Channel Tunnel provide access to London as one of three world cities.² Strictly speaking, London itself is only a small but very important part of Greater

London; Greater London consists of the City of London, the City of Westminster and 31 other London boroughs. In order to better understand and reflect the intrinsic relation between London and its surrounding region, three Regional Development Agencies have recently joined forces in the Greater South East super-region, including Greater London, the East of England and the South East England regions.

ACCOMMODATING GROWTH IN THE GREATER SOUTH EAST

Major population growth needs to be accommodated within the Greater South East. London itself is expected to grow from currently 7.4 million inhabitants to 8 million by 2016, and further growth will take place in the East and South East. To respond to this challenge the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) launched the Creating Sustainable Communities plan in 2003. This document sets out policies, resources and

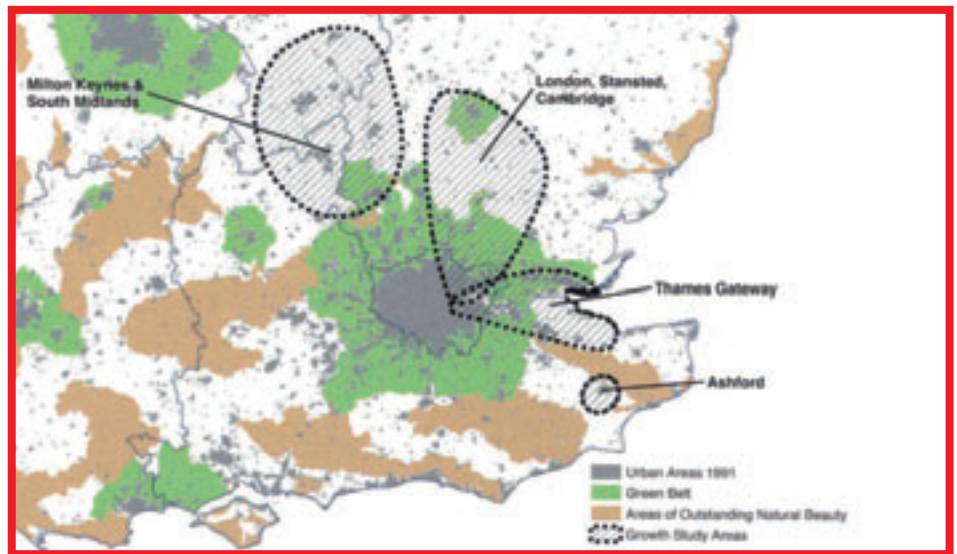
partnerships to achieve a step change in the Government's approach to tackling 'the challenges of a rapidly changing population, the needs of the economy, serious housing shortages in London and the South East and the impact of housing abandonment in places in the North and Midlands'.³

The Creating Sustainable Communities programme aims to take pressure off London through the provision of 250,000 new homes in the South East. These new homes will mainly be located in four growth areas: Thames Gateway, Ashford, Milton Keynes-South Midlands and London-Stansted-Cambridge. Alongside housing growth, an extra 120-180,000 jobs in the Thames Gateway and 120-150,000 in Milton Keynes-South Midlands are envisaged by 2016 as a key component of the programme.

Delivery of the Sustainable Communities programme can only be achieved by interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral working. The UK Planning Policy Guidance on Transport⁴ makes the case for a switch away from reliance on the private car and urban dispersal towards more sustainable modes of travel and urban growth. The key principles outlined in this guidance are important preconditions for urban renaissance and the delivery of the Sustainable Communities plan. They include promoting more sustainable transport choices and reducing the need to travel; promoting social inclusion, in part by revitalising towns and cities as places to live and work; focusing major generators of travel demand in urban areas near to public transport; giving more road space to pedestrians and cyclists, and giving priority to people over traffic in towns.

A POLYCENTRIC MEGA-CITY REGION

The Greater London area is undergoing a process of decentralised concentration – concentration on a global scale (global cities) with simultaneous decentralisation and suburbanisation at the regional and local scales. The ever increasing mobility of people and goods in particular presents a challenge to urban cohesion. Not only transport technologies but also information and communication technologies have altered



South East England: Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Green Belt land and the Growth Areas.

Source: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, *Creating sustainable communities: Making it happen, Thames Gateway and the Growth Areas, London 2003*, p.7

settlement structures. The combination of both – transport and communication technologies – is leading to a new correlation between space and time, and hence to fundamental changes in the relationship between the city and the region.⁵ In particular, transport technologies have enabled a transformation of resident communities into itinerant communities: an ever increasing number of people understand themselves to be global commuters in a digital market place. Castells introduced the concepts of the 'network society' and 'informational capitalism' to describe this process.⁶

Within a region like South East England the challenge is to better utilise the existing infrastructure and to encourage people to use public transport by improving the quality of the travel environment. The existing infrastructure, however, was mainly developed for the purpose of serving industry and followed the planning ideal of separating functions; for example, the rail network in the Greater South East is London-centric to accommodate historic commuting patterns from the urban fringe to the core city. This segregation of functions and socio-spatial fragmentation can be seen as the peak of the planning ideal of the industrial age (Fordism). But this ideal loses its strength when

economic growth, as well as scientific and social progress, begins to demand a higher integration of functions and a more sustainable approach to dealing with scarce resources. Urban and regional planning, therefore, needs to adapt mechanisms as well as the built environment and its infrastructure to the needs and requirements of post-industrial regions.

To achieve this change it is important to understand the economic and community relations within the region and beyond. A vital aspect of this is recognising the interdependency of London and the South East to keep the region on a successful track: the global city of London relies on the South East and vice versa. For London to be a global hub and to continue creating the economic power needed for the whole country – and for Europe – it is crucial to counterbalance the regional economies around those hubs (economic equilibrium). In this context the concept of a polycentric mega-city region needs to be looked at in more detail.

SPATIAL AND FUNCTIONAL POLYCENTRICITY

The European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) argues for polycentric spatial development and a new urban-rural relationship.⁷ The ESDP also calls for the →

creation of several dynamic zones of global economic integration and a network of internationally accessible metropolitan regions with an integrated hinterland – areas like the Greater South East England. The question that arises is how these zones of global economic integration develop in terms of their spatial and functional organisation. Recent research carried out in the Interreg IIB NWE POLYNET project led by the Young Foundation studied eight European mega-city regions in North Western Europe: South East England, Rhine-Main, Rhine-Ruhr, Bassin Parisien, European Metropolitan Region Northern Switzerland, Central Belgium, Greater Dublin and the Randstad. POLYNET emphasised that polycentricity is not only scale-dependent, but also that there is a very clear distinction to be made between spatial and functional polycentricity. One activity of the project focused particularly on business-to-business communication (virtual as well as physical/f-2-f) in advanced producer services in order to map spatial and functional polycentricity in the study regions.⁸

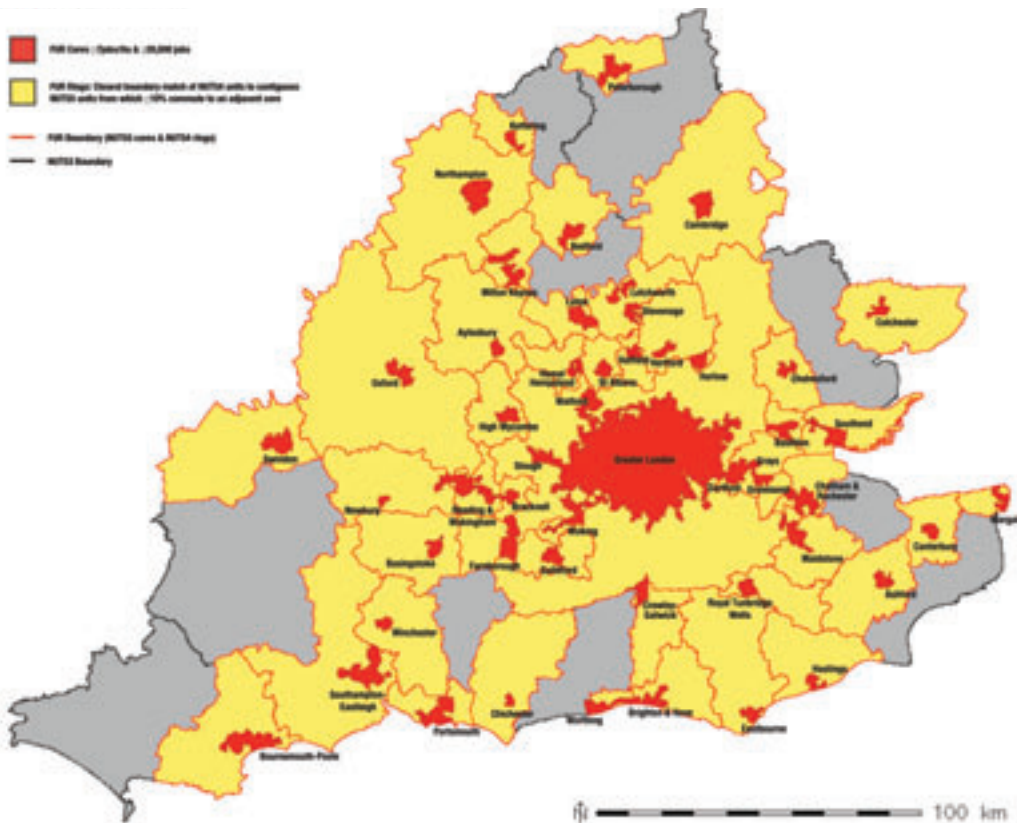
Based on this extensive quantitative and qualitative research, POLYNET defined 51 functional urban regions (FURs) in the Greater South East. FURs ‘comprise a core defined in terms of employment size and density, and a ring defined in terms of regular daily journeys (commuting) to the core’.⁹ Thirty FURs are located to the west of London and only eighteen to the east – this illustrates a greater dependency of the east on London and is an indicator of an increasing east-west imbalance. While the idea of strengthening regional economies should in principle lead to an economic equilibrium, there are still (and will always be) factors favouring certain locations above others. In the Greater South East the Western Corridor is economically very successful and buoyant (Thames Valley economy), whereas the Thames Gateway regeneration corridor in the East is struggling to realise some mixed-use development that would include higher-order businesses. This is why workers from the Thames Gateway still generally commute to business locations in Canary Wharf or the City of London.

CONNECTING HIGHER DENSITY WITH HIGHER QUALITY

Some key spatial policy questions can be derived from the polycentric development pattern in the Greater South East. How should policy respond to the increasing east-west imbalance? Current public funding is very much aimed at the east and north of London to achieve a shift of gravity in the Greater South East region – will the market follow the funding? And how can a shift to more sustainable modes of transport be achieved? Advanced functional polycentricity creates orbital and tangential movement patterns that are no longer dependent on a core city. Very often these movements cannot be accommodated by public transport using existing infrastructure networks that are centred on a core city; as a result the private car becomes an even more predominant mode of transport.

To respond to these challenges, changes in policy and subsequent implementation are needed. Decoupling gross domestic product from transport growth was formally introduced onto the European agenda at the Gothenburg Council in 2001, adding the environmental dimension to the Lisbon

agenda. This policy is of particular importance for developing the Greater South East, where the existing transport networks are being put under extremely high pressures. Sustainable transport and a shift from the private car to other modes of transport are at the heart of the Gothenburg Council and subsequent national/regional policies to address climate change and reduce greenhouse gas emissions (Kyoto targets). Together with the ESDP’s goal of develop dynamic, attractive and competitive cities and urbanised regions, providing a parity of access to infrastructure and knowledge, these aims can only be achieved by concerted action. Such a vision can only become reality by complementing international and national hubs with regional and local growth opportunities, particularly in locations that can provide sustainable mobility – in other words, public transport hubs. In tackling the challenge of building sustainable urban spaces in growing metropolitan regions, we need to ensure that future growth is achieved with the maximum possible social cohesion and protection of the environment. More self-contained urban areas can help to reduce commuting and bring about mixed



South East England: Functional Urban Regions.
Source: POLYNET report, Action 1.1 SE England, p.3

communities, but the integration of land use planning and transport is also essential to deliver that vision.

The aim of achieving higher densities around public transport hubs needs to be accompanied by high quality urban and architectural design. Higher density should not only be financially more attractive for investors but also provide a higher quality of life and support more sustainable patterns of development. This comes close to the American practice of Transit Oriented Development (TOD) or the idea of Transport Development Areas (TDAs) that the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) has been developing with key stakeholders for a number of years.¹⁰

Concentrating development and integrating land use and transport have also been identified as key actions to assist the Urban Renaissance agenda in England. 'In England, urban areas provide for 91% of the total economic output and 89% of all the jobs. Maintaining and improving the economic strength of our towns and cities is therefore critical to the competitive performance of the country as a whole.¹¹ The potential for change is limited since 'more than 90% of our urban fabric will still be with us in 30 years time.'¹² Therefore the quality of new developments is decisive to achieve the step change towards building a sustainable urban environment. 'Successful urban regeneration is designed.'¹³

THE THAMES GATEWAY GROWTH AREA

Within the Greater South East substantial public funding is being channelled into the Thames Gateway, a major regeneration corridor. A great challenge for this area is to avoid becoming a cluster of dormitory towns for people commuting into London. Therefore it is important to strengthen locally distinctive patterns of culture and integrate mixed functions. In the context of large mega-city regions, it is vital for small and medium-sized towns to build upon their intrinsic local potential and develop an identity. A clear vision is needed which complements rather than duplicates existing or emerging urban patterns in polycentric

city regions. The contribution small and medium-sized towns can make to a larger city region goes well beyond providing cheap housing within easy commuting distance to employment centres. Particularly in times when the pressures resulting from the core city are increasing – both in terms of demand for housing and employment land – it is important to carefully mature the concept of a network of complementary small and medium-sized towns.¹⁴

The Thames Gateway already has an established history, beginning with the development of the Docklands area. The benefits of Canary Wharf and the Isle of Dogs in London are becoming visible and accountable some 25 years after strategic decisions were made. With the shift in focus to the east, London is aiming to regenerate major areas of previously developed land and to provide space for further growth. The proposals for Olympia 2012, with the main facilities to be built in the east of London centred around the new high-speed train station to be opened in Stratford, underpins the new role of the Thames Gateway. But the Thames Gateway extends well beyond the boundaries of London.

REGENERATION NEEDS

The Government has not defined this regeneration corridor along administrative boundaries but by regeneration needs, including large areas of derelict land and deprived communities. The Thames Gateway is an area of approximately 80,000 hectares in size, measuring 65 kilometres long and up to about 30 kilometres wide. It contains about 700,000 households and is home to around 1.6 million people and provides about 500,00 jobs.¹⁵

The Thames Gateway offers the greatest development opportunities in the South East, together with the major concentration of previously developed land and deprivation in the country. It has the potential to deliver around 120,000 new homes and 200,000 new jobs by 2016, subject to the appropriate physical and social infrastructure being in place. The Gateway will play a key part in

delivering sustainable growth for South East England. As it has the largest collection of previously developed land (3000 hectares) near any European capital city it represents a major opportunity to address the housing shortage without large-scale release of green belt land.¹⁶

RAIL CATALYST

The high-speed Channel Tunnel Rail Link (CTRL), with its international passenger stations in Ashford, Ebbsfleet, Stratford and King's Cross/St Pancras, can be seen as a prime regeneration catalyst in this corridor. Together with other major regional transport investments, such as Crossrail and Fastrack, CTRL will transform accessibility for the Thames Gateway area. An important precondition for delivering the sustainable communities in the Thames Gateway is the understanding that this large-scale development cannot be served purely by car-based transport system. New river crossings are being designed to accommodate multi-modal traffic, making room for light rail and bicycle connections. Of strategic importance here are two new Thames crossings near the Royal Docks (Gallions Crossing) and near Thurrock (Lower Thames Crossing). The latter in particular will divert traffic from the Channel ports away from the congested South East region and the M25, leading it directly north, circumnavigating London completely.

FIVE STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT LOCATIONS

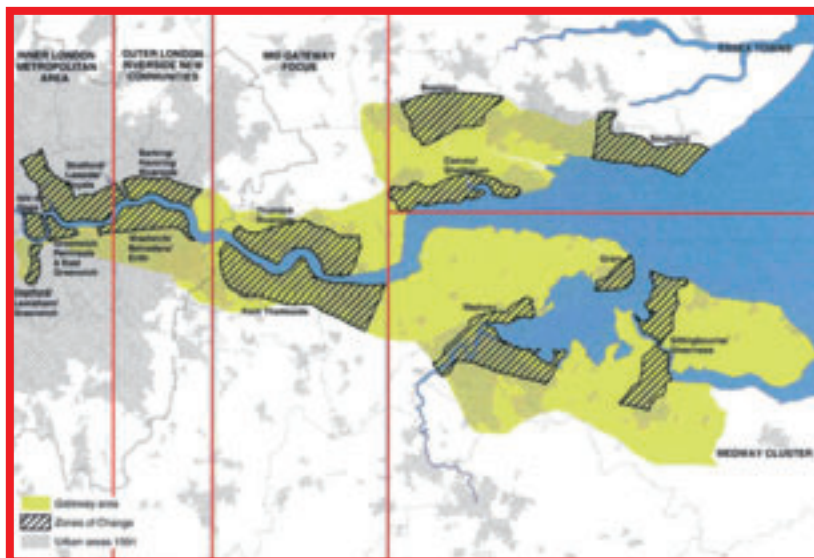
Within the Thames Gateway development is focused on five strategic development locations:¹⁷

- 1 The East London Gateway, particularly around Stratford and the Lower Lea Valley, accommodating the development needed to make the London Olympics in 2012 a success and building on the good existing transport infrastructure.
- 2 The area south of the Thames from Greenwich Peninsula to Woolwich, where there is potential for 20,000 new homes, developing the former Woolwich Arsenal site and including a new use for the Dome site with its successful Millennium Community.

- 3 The area north of the Thames at Barking Reach – London’s largest area of previously developed land.
- 4 Thurrock Riverside, with a substantial development potential for employment land, incorporating the Port of London and the proposal for a new container port at Shellhaven.
- 5 North Kent Thameside around Ebbsfleet International Passenger Station and the Medway Estuary.

Further housing and employment will be allocated to key locations in the Gateway, such as Medway, Southend, Basildon and Sittingbourne-Sheerness.

The Thames Gate



South East England: Functional Urban Regions.

Source: POLYNET report, Action 1.1 SE England, p.3

SUSTAINABLE GROWTH THROUGH PARTNERSHIP

The key to delivering government targets in a sustainable way is the partnership approach. Neither political configurations nor individual budgets are equipped to deal with regeneration on such a large, strategic scale. The fact that the public sector input is achieved at all levels, from local authority to a specifically dedicated government department, ensures ‘joined-up’ policy changes and development implementation. This direct and coordinated public sector approach visibly encourages the private sector to begin to invest considerable resources in an area which otherwise fails to attract private sector interests. In all undertakings in the Thames Gateway, risks have to be taken and initial costs for remediation of previously used land are high. However, an extremely tight Green Belt policy and government direction on reusing previously developed land offers the private sector a real incentive to look at building on recycled land. A relaxation of that policy for the sake of achieving higher development profits would ultimately lead to the failure of the Urban Renaissance agenda. Tackling major contamination and pollution issues, addressing social problems, unemployment, crime and vandalism, and recharging former industrial sites with the value of aesthetics by using the rich history can change perceptions and enable the disjointed communities to reintegrate into the socio-economic fabric of urban society. Integration

of commercial and residential use rather than segregation, provision of community services and parks, promotion of sustainability in terms of recycling and building efficiency, and encouraging high quality design will make a difference to the existing urban environment in the Thames Gateway.

Notes

- 1 National Statistics, 22 December 2004, www.statistics.gov.uk.
- 2 Saskia Sassen, *Cities in a world economy*, Thousand Oaks Ca., 1994.
- 3 Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, *Sustainable communities: Building for the future*, London, 2003, p.2.
- 4 Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, *Planning Policy Guidance 13: Transport (PPG 13)*, London, 1994.
- 5 See: Arno Schmickler, *From commuterland to regional citizenship. South East England – A growing region in Europe*, in: Christ, Wolfgang & Martin Fladt, *Jahrbuch der Modellprojekte 2003 / 2004*, Weimar, 2004.
- 6 Manuel Castells, *The rise of the network society*, Cambridge, 1996.
- 7 European Commission, *ESDP – European Spatial Development Perspective. Towards balanced and sustainable development of the territory of the European Union*, Luxembourg, 1999, p.11.
- 8 POLYNET project reports edited by Sir Peter Hall and Dr Kathryn Pain, *The Young Foundation*, London 2004/05, www.icstudies.ac.uk/html/whatdo_A.asp
- 9 POLYNET Action 1.1, *Summary report*, p.2.

- 10 Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, *Transport Development Areas – Guide to Good Practice*, London, 2002.
- 11 Urban Task Force, *Towards an urban renaissance: Final report of the Urban Task Force chaired by Lord Rogers of Riverside*, London, 1999, p.32.
- 12 Urban Task Force, *Towards an urban renaissance: Final report of the Urban Task Force chaired by Lord Rogers of Riverside*, London, 1999, p.113.
- 13 Urban Task Force, *Towards an urban renaissance: Final report of the Urban Task Force chaired by Lord Rogers of Riverside*, London, 1999, p.49.
- 14 See: Detlef H. Golletz & Arno Schmickler, *From spaces to places. Enabling Sustainable urban growth in South East England with a practical focus on the Queenborough-Rushenden Zone of Change*, in: Bundesamt für Bauwesen und Raumordnung, *Klein- und Mittelstädte in Stadtregionen. Informationen zur Raumentwicklung*, Heft 8, Bonn, 2005.
- 15 Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, *The Thames Gateway*, London, 2004.
- 16 Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, *Creating sustainable communities: Making it happen: Thames Gateway and the Growth Areas*, London, 2003.
- 17 Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, *Creating sustainable communities: Making it happen: Thames Gateway and the Growth Areas*, London, 2003.

