

KENT THAMESIDE LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNESHIP

Towards The *Futureplace*

A Community Strategy for Kent Thameside

Final Draft

January 2003

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Foreword

The economic, social, and environmental well-being of everyone living, working and investing in the Boroughs of Dartford and Gravesham is the central purpose of all the organisations that have come together to form the *Kent Thameside Local Strategic Partnership*.

Together we share a vision: to co-operate and work with local people to make Kent Thameside a thriving, attractive, inclusive and successful community, a high quality place to live, work, invest and visit – a *Futureplace*.

We now have a unique opportunity to make that vision a reality. Through the government's Thames Gateway initiative, Kent Thameside is recognised as a priority area for regeneration and investment. To take full advantage of the opportunities this offers, it is essential that we all work together – residents, businesses, service providers and the statutory and community organisations.

We are therefore preparing this Community Strategy which – based on extensive consultation with local people - will set out the kind of place we want Kent Thameside to be and how we aim to achieve it. We will then commit our organisations to co-operating closely to make it happen.

However, the publication of this strategy is just the start of the process. Over the next year the Partnership will produce action plans required to implement the objectives set out in this strategy. This cannot be done just by those presently on the partnership - the knowledge, skills and energies of other organisations and communities outside of the present partnership structure also need to be utilised. To this end over the next year the partnership will review its structure. If you would like to be involved in taking the strategy forward we look forward to hearing from you.

Cllr John Muckle
Leader, Dartford Borough Council

Cllr Rosemary Leadley
Leader, Gravesham Borough Council
Chair of the KTLSP Board

The Kent Thameside Local Strategic Partnership Board (which meets in public) is made up of representatives of:

Dartford Borough Council

North Kent Police

Dartford, Gravesham & Swanley Primary Care Trust

Gravesham Borough Council

Learning and Skills Council, Kent and
Medway

Groundwork Kent Thameside

University of Greenwich

North West Kent College

Dartford and Gravesham NHS Trust

Kent County Council

North West Kent Racial Equality Council

North West Kent Council for Voluntary Service

Kent Thameside Association

Kent Thameside Chamber of Commerce

Gravesham Chamber of Commerce

Sevenoaks District Council and Swanley Town Council have observer status on the Board

Overview

Situation: Sitting on the south bank of the River Thames, next to London and beside some of Kent's most outstanding countryside, Kent Thameside (the area covered by the Boroughs of Dartford and Gravesham) is centrally located within the government's Thames Gateway regeneration area, and lies astride strategic road and rail corridors to Europe, London and the regions.

Past Legacies: The traditional towns of Dartford and Gravesend with their established neighbourhoods and attractive villages have a strong sense of history and identity of which local people are rightly proud. However, for some years, this heritage was interwoven with the legacy of industrial and environmental decline, with huge former industrial sites, poor transport and communications; levels of educational achievement and life expectancy below the norm; a shortage of affordable housing; some neighbourhoods facing social and community safety issues; and town centres having to re-define their roles in the regional economy - whilst rural communities face increasing pressures on village services and the countryside.

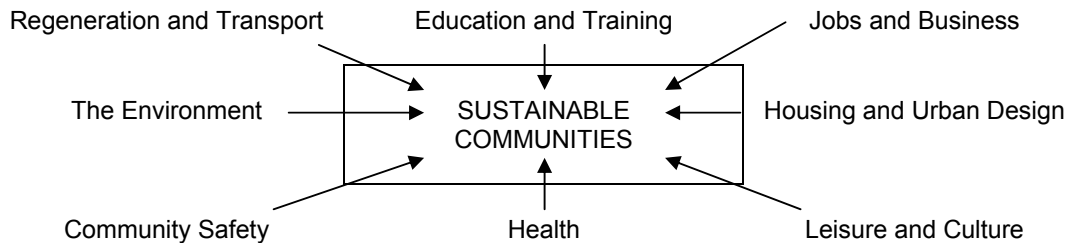
Changing Times: This image and reality is now changing rapidly. The leading-edge developments at Bluewater and Crossways Business Park, award-winning schemes such as Gravesend Town Centre regeneration and the Ingress Park development, the restoration of several old quarries, and the creation of new green spaces, together with innovative new projects in health, education, crime reduction and environmental protection are all helping this transformation.

The next decade will see the pace of change accelerate dramatically. For example, the new international and domestic station at Ebbsfleet (due to open by the end of 2006) is already giving a strong impetus for regeneration across all of North Kent. Some will see these huge changes as a threat to the environment, to familiar places and established ways of life. But we also have a rare and exciting opportunity to shape a new kind of physical, economic and social environment - combining the best of both old and new: a *Futureplace*.

What Sort of Futureplace? We think that most people living and working in Kent Thameside would like it to be a place that is home to a vibrant mix of communities – both old and new – where people want to invest in home, work and the family; lead safe, healthy lives with excellent opportunities for personal and collective fulfilment; enjoy culture and heritage and celebrate the diversity of the local population.

In this document, we use the term '**sustainable communities**' to describe the sort of neighbourhoods and groups that people like to belong to and remain within. How well we succeed in making this kind of future possible will in large part depend on how well local communities, businesses, and governments can work together to deal with the key issues facing us.

Key Issues: We have identified several key issues that need to be tackled to make this sort of future possible. They are:



Local Priorities: This is not a 'menu' where we can take our pick – they all have to be tackled together if we are to make a lasting difference. However, we appreciate there are some issues that have an especially high priority with local people. During the summer of 2002 questionnaires were sent to all residents of Kent Thameside. Over 2,000 responses were received and analysed. Those who responded placed the greatest importance on Community Safety and Health, which were ranked number one and number two priorities respectively. The information gained from this survey has given the organisations involved in delivering services to the public valuable information about the main issues for the people of Kent Thameside. The priorities identified will be reflected in more stretching targets being set for priority issues and through the action planning process which flows from this strategy.

However, it is also recognised that the responses did not fully represent the diverse nature of the population in Kent Thameside. The majority of responses were from people aged over 45 and there were very few responses from ethnic minority groups. To this end the partnership focused its attention during a second phase of consultation on those groups that were under-represented in the initial questionnaire consultation. A successful Community Assembly was also held to which a wide range of local people and representatives of interested groups and organisations were invited. These people participated in shaping the final form of the Strategy. A summary of the Strategy has also been produced and will be distributed widely.

Priority Communities: We also know that, when measured by a variety of indicators, some neighbourhoods and groups experience particular economic, social or environmental issues that may make it more difficult for them to share in the new opportunities change will bring. We will therefore pay particular attention to working alongside these communities to help find solutions that work for them.

Partnership: The issues facing us today often require complex solutions and co-operation across several organisations. The Local Government Act 2000 gives local authorities a key 'Community Leadership' role in promoting the economic, social and environmental well-being of their communities. Given the unique nature and scale of the regeneration challenge in this part of North Kent, the local authorities in Dartford and Gravesham have taken the bold step of jointly establishing the Kent Thameside Local Strategic Partnership (KTLSP), which brings together the major public, business and voluntary communities representing the various aspects of community life in both Dartford and Gravesham to focus on:

- meeting local people's priorities and needs;
- better planning, co-ordination and delivery of services; and
- improving quality of life for everyone, not just the majority.

The purpose of this strategy is to give a lead to organisations working in the area. By setting out objectives and actions to which partners are committed, partners and other organisations can then "bend" their plans and mainstream finance towards these objectives and actions. This will also apply to funding available from outside of Kent Thameside, including funding programmes from government and the EU: there is now a clear set of priorities and actions, which has been shaped by consultation, that the partnership and other organisations can refer to when applying for funding.

The partnership is also committed to learning and developing by sharing best practice and relevant expertise and experience. It will also monitor its activities and review its performance.

The Wider Picture: With so many things happening in the area, the KTLSP will also play a crucial part in a wider network of partnerships working at regional level to achieve much-needed investment and service improvements. These include:

- Thames Gateway Strategic Partnership - The Thames Gateway Strategic Partnership is the Ministerial Team which plans and co-ordinates delivery of the government's regeneration proposals for the Thames Gateway. Local partners actively participate in a variety of strategic forums to ensure the social, economic and environmental regeneration of Kent Thameside are at the heart of the government's proposals.
- Thames Gateway Kent Partnership - which as part of the programme for the whole North Kent area, has developed the North Kent **Area Investment Framework** (AIF) to inform decisions about the nature, scale and timing of investment and to make the case for funding coming to North Kent;
- The Thames Gateway Priority Communities Initiative (PCI) - which will focus on achieving a step change in the quality of life of the most deprived neighbourhoods across the whole of the Thames Gateway region – including localities within Kent Thameside – and contributing to the aims of the government's national **Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy**.
- The Kent Supporting Independence Programme – Evolving out of Kent County Council's ground-breaking Public Service Agreement (PSA) contract with central government, the fundamental aim of this programme is to support, co-ordinate and re-focus the County Council's work and that of its partners in the public, private and community sectors to help people achieve greater independence, including a focus on some neighbourhoods within Kent Thameside.
- Bending Mainstream Programmes – The government has identified that for neighbourhood based regeneration to be successful and sustainable, targeted government programmes on their own will not be sufficient. The key will be to redirect the main programme resources of public agencies such as local authorities, the police, health trusts etc to focus on the needs of the most deprived neighbourhoods. This will be a significant challenge but may be assisted by using funding streams such as the Urban Thames Gateway Programme, Sure Start etc for pump-priming.

An Agenda for Action: "Towards the *Futureplace*" is not a detailed blueprint – it is a signpost and an agenda for action by all the partners in the KTLSP. In it, we outline where we aim to get to and the things we need to do to get there. More detailed strategies and plans exist for key services and issues (see page 27). These strategies and plans will be reviewed regularly to ensure they are consistent both with the broad direction outlined here and with each other. In addition, the KTLSP will now be looking to develop more detailed Action Plans for particular neighbourhoods and groups as identified in this strategy.

To implement the actions in this strategy in all communities, it is vital that the interrelation between all themes is properly noted. For example providing more leisure and cultural activities, designing areas to minimise the opportunity for crime, and increasing job opportunities and training can all contribute to increasing community safety. When action planning, these links need to be utilised to create strong and sustainable change in all communities

Delivering the Strategy: Although members of the Local Strategic Partnership are committed to the delivery of the strategy, much of the important work in planning and delivering will rest with the communities themselves and the voluntary and community organisations in the area. These people and organisations are already working hard to deliver improvements to

everyone's quality of life. With the launch of the strategy the work will only have just begun. The partnership will endeavour to fully utilise the energies of the communities and organisations of Kent Thameside during the action planning process, providing training where necessary. This can be further enhanced through the development of a community compact with the voluntary and community sector.

Information Technology: The aims, objectives and actions contained within this strategy will be supported by the use of information technology (IT) which will enable new ways of working, improve the integration of services and facilitate closer working between partners.

Each of the local authorities within the partnership will produce annual statements setting out how they will make services available electronically by 2005. Accessibility to and take up of these services is critical and the Local Strategic Partnership will therefore focus on the promotion and provision of information technology facilities within the communities.

Current initiatives that provide access to IT for residents, such as 'People's Network', are presently concentrated in Urban areas. However the potential benefits of using IT to access services are greater for those living in isolated rural areas and those unable to travel large distances.

Collaboration with Kent County Council through the Kent Connects project will deliver a connective highway linked to a number of targeted services. This will provide consistent County-wide access to these services for Kent residents and businesses thereby making a major contribution to the electronic delivery of public services.

Kent Thameside Maps

Major Regeneration Sites

Key Issues

1. Regeneration and Transport

Where are we now?

The boroughs of Dartford and Gravesham cover some 22 sq. miles, of which around 5.5 sq. miles (1,424 hectares) is zoned for regeneration - making Kent Thameside among the largest regeneration areas in Europe. The task of regenerating such a large area is likely to take over 20 years, but already projects such as the world-class retail and leisure destination at Bluewater are putting Kent Thameside firmly on the map and changing perceptions of the area. At the same time, there is an important task in conserving important urban heritage assets and large areas of high quality countryside with several villages of exceptional character. Well-placed on the motorway network, Kent Thameside's rail transport connections are less good - although the new international and domestic station at Ebbsfleet (due to open late in 2006) and planned cross-London rail services will bring a dramatic improvement.

The Shape of the *Futureplace*

Our aim is for Kent Thameside to be a thriving, attractive and valued place where people will want to live, invest, work, relax and raise their families – a genuine *Futureplace* with:

- a strong focus both on nurturing neighbourhood identity and on integrating old and new – including conserving and upgrading existing facilities to match the new;
- a transformed visual environment, combining a major reduction in 'eyesores' with exceptional new quality of design and conservation;
- a varied, harmonious and efficient mix of land uses, with increasing environmental care in the way urban areas are designed;
- reducing reliance on the car through a dramatically improved public transport system offering more connections, reduced journey times and superior quality and frequency of services;
- adequate capacity, quality and efficiency in the road network to meet the needs of both people and business whilst also encouraging clean fuel technology;
- an expanding network of attractive urban public spaces, corridors and vistas linking the surrounding countryside and the River Thames;
- conservation and enhancement of existing heritage assets, green spaces, countryside and water;
- a vibrant yet relaxed 'feel' to the pattern and pace of the urban scene.

Key Points for Action

The Thames Waterfront

Establish and implement a strategy for shaping a new waterfront along the south bank of the River Thames, ensuring that the river is enhanced as a major public asset.

The Major Regeneration Sites (see Map page 6)

Ensure these sites are "sustainable developments" that:

- include good local centres, a substantial proportion of genuinely affordable housing and new 'Schools of the Future' to minimise car journeys and encourage a strong sense of community;
- are well-integrated with neighbouring communities and have a mixture of uses suited to each site's location and transport capacity;
- have excellent public transport connections and services with facilities for cyclists and pedestrians so that roads are not dominated by cars and lorries;
- comprise buildings, public spaces and vistas of exceptional quality linked into the Green Grid;
- utilise, as much as possible, local labour for their development; and
- are designed with health, safety and accessibility in mind.

Town Centres

Ensure that the traditional town centres of Gravesend and Dartford, the regional centre at Bluewater and the new centre at Ebbsfleet each continue to develop and thrive on a "sustainable" basis with distinct roles in the area's economic, social and

cultural life, as well as providing housing opportunities. A key aspect of the development of town centres will be environmental improvements, such as improving the river Darent through Dartford.

Neighbourhoods and Villages

Ensure that neighbourhoods and villages across Kent Thameside continue to thrive as “sustainable communities” and with strong neighbourhood identities.

Quality Urban Design and Conservation

Promoting good design and sensitive conservation by: working with bodies such as the Kent Architecture Centre and the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) and by maintaining an on-going dialogue between local people, developers, property owners, Registered Social Landlords and other partners and professionals to help inform development proposals and decisions.

Heritage Conservation

Continue to secure the conservation and restoration of Kent Thameside’s extensive heritage assets through an effective heritage policy framework and initiatives to encourage owners and the wider public, including education, exploiting visitor potential, financial support, and where necessary, enforcement.

The Public Realm

Encourage a high quality public realm of new and existing public spaces, squares, streets, gateways and vistas incorporating public art of a quality and scale sufficient to impact decisively on Kent Thameside’s identity.

The Countryside

Adopt a pro-active approach to safeguarding and enhancing Kent Thameside’s outstanding countryside and villages and, where possible, create new recreational and landscape assets as part of the Regional Park and Green Grid concepts (see the section on *The Environment*).

Public Transport

Secure a dramatic improvement in public transport, and in particular –

- major improvements to the existing North Kent Railway Line, stations and interchange facilities;
- establishing Ebbsfleet Station (linked with Northfleet Station) as a key regional rail transport hub;
- frequent international and domestic CTRL services; cross-London services (Crossrail and Thameslink 2000); and upgraded North Kent Line services;
- the *Fastrack* rapid-transit network with affordable, comfortable and frequent high quality services running mostly on dedicated track, with good quality, frequent and affordable feeder services especially from rural areas;
- local bus service patterns, schedules, interchanges, waiting and information facilities, should be functional and attractive to encourage increased usage;
- better use of the River Thames as a transport corridor along its banks and on the river itself;
- full accessibility for people with disabilities to all public transport and Green Grid networks;
- consider the need for additional Thames Crossings to improve connections with Essex and further north, (subject to no unacceptable impacts on peoples’ homes and jobs or on important natural assets).

Road Transport

Ensure the road transport network works efficiently and in particular -

- Complete the planned improvements to major roads (A2/M2/A282 and STDR4); make good progress towards completing the remainder of the Kent Thameside network; and so remove most large lorries from residential streets;
- Implement a programme of local road improvements and maintenance to improve safety and amenity for pedestrians and disabled people – particularly in residential, shopping and school neighbourhoods;
- encourage a progressive shift from cars to public transport, cycling and walking;
- ensure sufficient safe-off-street car parking to sustain the economic vitality of town and local centres and minimise long-term on-street parking in residential areas.
- secure substantial improvements to the network of dedicated cycle paths across Kent Thameside and linked into the Green Grid and the National and London Cycle Networks.

2. Lifelong Learning

Where are we now?

Traditionally, much of Kent Thameside's economy was based on industries that did not demand large numbers of highly educated and skilled workers, and many of those who went on to higher levels of education found jobs in London or left the area. This legacy is partly reflected in levels of adult literacy and in the proportion of adult residents that have achieved Level 3 and 4 qualifications (advanced and degree levels or equivalents) – which, although above the Kent average in Dartford as a whole, for example, are significantly below the Kent average in neighbourhoods facing social and economic stresses.

However, these issues are being addressed vigorously in response to the changing needs of a modern community where the demand for knowledge and skills of all kinds is constantly growing. Early years provision is now developing through Sure Start and other programmes, initiatives such as Family Learning Centres are engaging more families into the learning process, and the range of post-16 courses available locally has increased – including initiatives such as the Learning Shop at Bluewater. At the higher education level, the University of Greenwich is consolidating its campuses in Medway and London, with the Dartford Campus being taken over by North West Kent College, a partner college of the University. This presents an opportunity to explore innovative ways of encouraging more local people into higher education, such as the 'Partnership with a Purpose' initiative that brings together education providers from all across Kent, providing adults and young people with clear routes into learning.

As the average age of the population increases, employers will need to place more reliance on older workers who will need to re-train or update their skills to take up the opportunities available. To overcome recruitment and skills shortages, greater participation in employment and training should be promoted to women, people from ethnic minorities, those aged over 45 and those traditionally excluded from formal education.

Learning in the *Futureplace*

As Kent Thameside develops rapidly over the next decade, learning will be a critical factor for the area's existing communities seeking to take advantage of the new work and leisure opportunities. We will therefore be seeking to realise the ambitions set out in the *Kent Thameside Learning Charter* and establish Kent Thameside as a leading "*Learning Region*" in which –

- a wide variety of learning opportunities are available and easily accessible to people of all ages;
- a large and growing proportion of people take part in both formal and informal learning activities;
- a large and growing proportion of local people have jobs in knowledge-based industries;
- schools and colleges are a major focus of community life in each neighbourhood;
- businesses and public bodies are learning organisations;
- effective learning networks and ICT links exist to make learning resources and expertise readily available to individuals and organisations at all levels of learning;
- learning networks function to ensure educational institutions provide training opportunities that respond to the needs of employers;
- innovation in approaches to learning is encouraged.

Key Points for Action

Thames Gateway "Multiversity"

This will bring together all learning providers in Kent Thameside into a common network linked with providers across North Kent and beyond. Based in existing schools, colleges and other sites, using e-learning and sharing resources, the Multiversity will improve community access to learning at all levels - from basic skills through to postgraduate provision.

'Schools of the Future'

The 'Schools of the Future' initiative will create high quality learning facilities that are easily accessible for all neighbourhoods, using innovative methods not only to improve attainment levels for school students, but also to involve the whole local community in learning - for themselves and with their children, grandchildren and friends. Through the Multiversity, they will also provide links into further and higher education opportunities.

Early Years

Through *Sure Start* and other programmes we will ensure that every child – and especially those living in disadvantaged households - has the best possible start to life. We will also focus on helping parents to give their children a solid foundation for later learning by ensuring the provision of high quality early years and childcare - including workplace nurseries.

Priority communities

Through the European Union Urban Programme and other initiatives, we will focus attention on learning needs at all levels in neighbourhoods and community groups with below-average attainment – e.g. through initiatives such as community learning chests (to fund small grants for learning); encouraging small-scale innovative learning projects; improving local knowledge about opportunities available; training for community leaders and professionals involved in these neighbourhoods; and training trainers.

Family and Community-Based Learning

We will establish a coherent network of Community Learning Resource Centres (e.g. at Darent Valley Hospital) and Family Learning Centres to develop community-based learning and engage all the family in learning, both in and out of school, including a strong focus on using e-learning together with dedicated support for families. Alongside this, there will be action, through the Urban Programme, to improve practical literacy and numeracy standards and to develop stronger links between learning at work and learning in the community.

A Learning Ethos

We will promote positive attitudes to learning and take them from school into the workplace by focusing on improving overall attainment levels at age 16. This will include: aiming for all young people at age 16 to achieve a minimum standard with the majority achieving NVQ Level 2 or equivalent (e.g. 5 GCSEs at grades A-C); encouraging all young people to continue their learning beyond age 16, whether in work or in full time further or higher education; strengthening links between businesses (particularly smaller firms), schools and colleges to enrich the experience of learning; encouraging person centred improvements, such as social skills and confidence building, so as to produce well rounded individuals; through the *Connexions* Youth Service, promoting success at school, along with support for impartial careers guidance, with particular attention to the needs of the most disadvantaged youngsters, and encouraging schools to secure *Investors in People* status.

Post-16 Learning

We will encourage all providers of learning - Schools, Further Education Colleges, Adult Education, Work based learning providers and Universities - to work together to widen participation in learning, raise the basic literacy and numeracy skills of people over the age of 16 and increase progression to higher level skills. This will include the University of Greenwich and North West Kent College jointly creating a centre of excellence at Dartford making learning opportunities available through a range of subjects. To meet the needs of the modern economy, we shall encourage young people and adults to gain ICT skills and to achieve higher level skills at NVQ Level 3 or equivalent (e.g. 3 A levels or supervisory level qualifications) and above. Able young people aged 16-19 who are in work will be encouraged to take up an Advanced Modern Apprenticeship. More people will be encouraged to take up the wider range of degree level qualifications available.

Learning Organisations and Learning Networks

We will promote “learning organisations” and community learning networks by encouraging employers (particularly small businesses), unions and others to be involved in developing the skills required by the future workforce. We will also seek to increase the number of employers with *Investors in People* accreditation and encourage small and medium-sized businesses to use e-learning approaches to help overcome the problems such firms often have with using traditional methods. We will also facilitate out-of-school activities through a network of community learning forums with dedicated support.

Knowledge Management and Innovation

We will work with the Kent Learning Partnership and others to establish a database of critical information trends in education and skills throughout Kent Thameside to ensure that strategies and action continue to be soundly based and effective. The setting up of an Information Exchange Bureau for learning providers and a research programme to identify new areas for development will complement this. There will also be a focus on activities to develop “emotional literacy” and programmes to break down barriers to learning.

Strengthening Partnership Working

The kinds of imaginative learning envisaged in Kent Thameside will rely on strong partnership working between all the key players – schools, students, parents, employers, local community groups and the statutory agencies. Many of these partnerships are already well-established, such as the North West Kent Business Education Partnership, but we will work continuously to strengthen people’s commitment to them.

3. Jobs & Business

Where are we now?

During the past decade, Kent Thameside's economy has grown by nearly a third – to around £2 billion - with over 11,000 new jobs and more than 1 million square feet of extra business floor-space. And with over 66,000 people in jobs, unemployment has fallen from over 10% to less than 3%.

Kent Thameside has just under 6,000 employers, the great majority of whom (69.2%) employ 4 or less people, whilst at the other end of the range just over 100 employers employ over 100 people each. The dominant employment sectors are distribution, hotels and catering (19,200); public administration, education and health (15,300); manufacturing (10,400); and financial services (8,900). Compared with the rest of Kent, the area has a *greater* proportion of employment in manufacturing, construction, and in distribution, hotels and catering; but a *lower* proportion of people employed in primary industries, financial services and in public administration, education and health. There is a need to balance the occupational profile of Kent Thameside. There are recruitment difficulties in a number of existing sectors and as the average age of the workforce increases, existing businesses will need to draw on the skills of their existing workforce to remain competitive. Untapped sources of skills and labour will need to be drawn upon, such as women and non-employed people over the age of 45.

Jobs & Business in the *Futureplace*

Over the next 10 years, we want to create a varied, thriving and inclusive local economy in Kent Thameside that provides good jobs for local people, is sustainable for the longer term, and where:

- unemployment is below the Kent and SE average and good progress continues towards creating a total of 50,000 new jobs by 2021;
- Ebbsfleet becomes a significant new business location - where some 20,000 people work in the new high value businesses – a substantial and growing proportion of them living in Kent Thameside;
- 'Smart Development' has attracted new modern industries whilst also encouraging local people to start small businesses and building on the strengths of existing businesses and staff;
- a wide range of companies are located, including not only successful business and financial services, retailing, leisure, tourism and logistics firms; but with growth industries (including life sciences, high-technology and precision engineering) prospering as the new developments help strengthen local supply chains and consolidate mutually-beneficial business clusters on key business sites;
- the growth in knowledge industries and associated local supply chains creates more environmentally compatible live/work opportunities in both urban and rural areas, so helping to reduce out-commuting and promoting sustainable communities;
- 'Green Growth' is encouraged across all businesses, local authorities and other organisations - promoting sustainable economic growth that enhances, not damages, the environment
- there is a strong focus on improving deprived neighbourhoods and opening up access to new job opportunities for people who live in them;
- people are trained in advance of new development work so that they can benefit from the associated job opportunities;
- a learning culture has developed amongst both individuals and organisations; strong education-business partnerships have developed through initiatives such as 'Schools of the Future'; and a wide range of job brokerage and learning opportunities exists at all levels and for all ages;
- more graduates from Kent Thameside are attracted by the opportunities and stay in the area; and more people have their own businesses.

Key Points for Action

Supporting Small Businesses and Entrepreneurs

We will encourage innovation and an increase in small businesses through a range of measures, including:

- flexible workspace to encourage and to help fledgling companies start up and develop;
- helping small businesses to become established and grow by providing quality business support and advice services;
- business - education initiatives to develop a culture supportive of enterprise;
- encouraging local people (particularly from disadvantaged communities) to start community enterprise schemes;
- encouraging local supply chains to enable buyers to source products and services locally;

- encourage more businesses to improve the managerial skills of their employees.

Attracting Larger Businesses and Aftercare

Over the next 10 years, we will aim to attract a range of larger employers and ensure they are happy to remain in Kent Thameside in a variety of ways, including:

- promoting the advantages of Kent Thameside as a place to do business;
- through regeneration of the Major Sites (see Map p. 6), creating and marketing a network of attractive new business locations with world class facilities, good transport connections and green environments;
- promoting the advantages of the traditional town centres of Dartford and Gravesend to a range of established smaller and medium-sized enterprises;
- establishing first class business support and aftercare services to support the relocation of employers into Kent Thameside.

Capitalizing on the Knowledge Economy

We will encourage strong growth in the 'knowledge' industries of the future through, for example:

- ensuring the availability of broadband infrastructure and other ICT services so as to provide essential capabilities to businesses and to facilitate working from home.
- as part of the Thames Gateway Kent Partnership promoting the development of University and/or company based Centres of Excellence for key industries;
- establishing Technology Transfer Programmes aimed at stimulating new products and services as a key factor in maintaining the area's long-term competitiveness;
- providing a New Technology Institute to develop a number of ICT and new technology centres to deliver training and consultancy to meet the needs of the local economy;
- supporting and encouraging the development of work opportunities for people with disabilities.

4. The Environment

Where are we now?

A good deal has been achieved to conserve and improve the quality of Kent Thameside's environment over the past 10 years. Perhaps the most dramatic example of this is Bluewater which includes 50 acres of parkland and, along with the reclamation of waste tips (e.g. Northfleet Urban Park) and the redevelopment of old mineral workings (e.g. Johnson's Quarry), has made a significant impact on the area's image.

New initiatives to conserve and enhance Kent Thameside's nature and countryside are also starting to make an impact. The number of Country Parks (e.g. Darenth) is increasing; the Cobham-Ashenbank Management Scheme and the Rail Link Countryside Initiative will bring high standard landscape design to historic parklands and areas affected by the CTRL; a quality environment has been created at Crossways Business Park and international recognition was granted in 2000 to the North Kent Marshes under the RAMSAR wetlands convention.

Although the old industries have largely disappeared, there are new challenges – e.g. from vehicle emissions. Measures to combat pollution are now increasingly coming forward, such as Local Air Quality Management and implementation of an Air Quality Strategy. The recent decision to move the A2 further away from the built-up area between Pepper Hill and Singlewell ('the Red Route') will make a major contribution to reducing noise and air pollution for those living along the route and provide an opportunity to establish an open space corridor.

A growing proportion of household waste is being recycled and a more sustainable approach being taken to development and regeneration schemes. Focussed on the Major Sites (see Map - pg 6) and Town Centres, this involves a balanced mix of uses to reduce trips, and with higher densities being concentrated near local centres and public transport, pedestrian and cycle links to encourage a reduction in journeys by car. Yet much remains to be done – to deal with past legacies, save energy and reduce harmful emissions, protect and improve established environmental assets, and exploit opportunities to create new ones.

The Environment is an area where there are numerous voluntary, community and non-profit organisations, such as Groundwork Kent Thameside and Quality Environment for Dartford, whom are already doing a great deal to improve the environment. The energies and resources of these organisations should be effectively utilised and added to so as to make Kent Thameside an attractive and environmentally sound place to be.

The *Futureplace* Environment

The changes occurring as part of Kent Thameside's regeneration could be seen as a new environmental threat. But a good quality of environment is potentially Kent Thameside's greatest asset, and the coming changes are a rare opportunity to achieve some big environmental gains. Over the next 10 years we will enhance Kent Thameside's environment so that –

- established countryside, green urban areas and other natural assets are conserved, enhanced and, where possible, extended using the highest standards of conservation and design and within the context of a Biodiversity Action Plan;
- the quality of the street scene (e.g. litter, fly tipping, quality of the environment), is improved so that residents and visitors are proud of their environment and work to protect it themselves;
- development and regeneration schemes increasingly encourage people to work, shop and play close to where they live;
- good progress has been made with remedying past environmental damage;
- the impact of current environmental problems such as air, noise and light pollution is reduced;
- increasingly effective energy conservation and waste minimisation/recycling measures have been adopted;
- our environment is well managed and maintained, with local communities involved in protecting and improving their local environments and identifying with Kent Thameside's unique sense of place.

Key Points for Action

The Green Grid

The Green Grid will be a high quality network of open spaces with linked green corridors, footpaths and landscapes connecting new and existing communities and reaching out to connect with the surrounding countryside and the River Thames. It will also provide wildlife habitats and corridors and promote sustainable transport through a close association with *Fastrack* and pedestrian and cycle paths. A key aspect of the Grid is involving local communities in learning about and caring for their environment. There will also be a focus on protecting and improving existing green space in urban areas.

Countryside Conservation and the Thames & Medway Regional Park

Together with established policies for conserving the character of the settled countryside along the agricultural belt south of the A2, the Thames and Medway Regional Park will be a bold framework for managing, conserving and enhancing the outstanding countryside and wildlife habitats of Kent Thameside's rural areas and - linked with the Green Grid - improving

sustainable access for urban residents and visitors. Conservation and management needs to also look at maintaining the countryside as a viable and sustainable place to live and work.

Overhead Power Lines

We will use the opportunities presented by new development and changing patterns of demand for power to secure a significant reduction in the eyesore of pylons over the next decade. This will include removal of redundant lines, undergrounding of cables in critical locations and, where this is not feasible, consolidation to reduce pylon numbers.

Land Remediation

The regeneration and redevelopment of sites across Kent Thameside will resolve much of the legacy of past quarrying and industrial activities as well as making a major contribution to safeguarding 'greenfield' land from development pressures. In those cases where the development process cannot provide a solution, we will seek special targeted measures in partnership with the relevant government agencies to deal with them.

Energy Conservation, Emissions and Cost

We will promote action to improve energy conservation and reduce harmful emissions in housing, buildings, transport and all forms of machinery and appliances through a range of measures, including education, regulation and where appropriate, direct support. Through private sector renewal policies and the achievement of Decent Homes, those on low incomes will be assisted in combating fuel poverty and, at the same time, minimising energy use.

Waste Minimisation & Re-cycling

Kent Thameside has a strong commitment to increasing the proportion of household waste that is recycled through household collection schemes and other measures. In addition, the new developments will create opportunities for innovation in reducing and recycling waste (e.g. rainwater recycling), and this will be strongly encouraged in discussions with developers and the utility companies.

Air Quality

We will act to address local air quality issues where necessary and traffic pollution in particular. This will include promotion of clean fuel technology, Green Travel Plans and influencing the pattern of developments to help reduce the numbers of dwellings impacted by poor air quality. In addition, we will continue to work with firms to monitor and control industrial emissions.

Managing Noise and Light

New developments will provide an opportunity to create environments in which unwanted noise and intrusive light sources can be minimised without compromising security or enjoyment through careful attention to design and layout; whilst also using light creatively to create a heightened sense of place in key locations. Attention will also be focussed on how noise and light can be managed within established communities.

Flood Prevention

We will take steps to ensure that future new developments are not exposed to flood risks or dramatically increased water run-off rates and channelling effects.

Utilisation of resources

The Environment is an area where voluntary, community and non-profit organisations, are already doing a great deal. The energies and resources of these organisations will be effectively utilised and added to so as to make Kent Thameside an environmentally pleasant and sound place to be.

5. Housing & the Built Environment

Where are we now?

Kent Thameside has a rich architectural heritage in its historic towns and villages and although some of this has been lost through industrial activity and redevelopment over the past century, the underlying form of much of the area's built environment retains a character that is reflected in the area's neighbourhoods, villages and housing.

The newer knowledge-based industries coming to Kent Thameside require a strong growth in housing supply to meet the needs of a growing and more varied workforce. Whilst the market is responding well to this demand, there are some critical issues emerging, including -

- maintaining a balanced local housing supply that caters adequately for lower income households, people with a need for adapted or supported housing and key workers;
- integrating the new with the old to promote social inclusion and sustainable neighbourhoods;
- addressing the need for substantial investment in those homes and neighbourhoods that have problems associated with their design or construction and/or with economic and social stress.

Housing & the Built Environment in Futureplace

Over the coming decade, we will promote improvements in the quality of the area's housing and built environment, so that in all neighbourhoods -

- new developments, regeneration and conservation schemes demonstrate innovative and high quality design;
- infrastructure is developed in parallel with new housing and is available to both new and existing communities;
- local communities are sustainable in terms of the mix of economic uses, diversity of housing tenures, access to public transport and the availability of local facilities and services;
- the overall quality of housing is good, in terms of condition, amenities, heating and thermal efficiency;
- new and renovated houses and buildings meet good environmental standards;
- low income households, the homeless, other vulnerable people and key workers are able to secure accommodation of a decent standard suited to their needs at an affordable price;
- a large and growing proportion of houses, public and commercial buildings and public spaces are able to accommodate the needs of wheelchair users and the mobility impaired;
- steady progress is being made in reducing the risks from traffic, crime, fire, accidents, disease and pollution in local neighbourhoods, buildings and individual homes;
- a large and growing proportion of households have easy access to local green spaces, cycle paths, learning, leisure and other services and facilities that help support healthy lifestyles.

Key Points for Action

Involving Local People

Provide training for and, at an early stage, regularly involve local people in discussions, about how to improve the public environment, the quality of housing and when planning new developments, renovation and conservation schemes in their localities.

Quality Homes and Buildings

Promoting good quality construction, renovation, management and maintenance of homes and buildings by -

- Ensuring that all social housing meets the "Decent Homes" standard by 2010;
- Introducing by July 2003 policies and funding mechanisms to ensure the provision of safe and well maintained housing in the private sector;
- Taking enforcement action, where necessary, to ensure that property meets required standards;
- Developing specific policies to tackle empty and under-utilised properties.

Quality Property Management

Promoting good standards of housing and property management by –

- Ensuring that the management of housing in the social rented sector meets current good practice requirements and supports Best Value principles;
- Encourage private property managers and landlords to adopt management practices that aspire to best practice and meet statutory requirements;

- Working with property managers (e.g. of Residential Homes, sports and public entertainment venues, shops and other public buildings) to ensure that their management of buildings meets relevant statutory requirements and, if necessary, taking appropriate enforcement action.

Sustainability:

Promoting high standards of care for the environment in housing and building design by -

- Encouraging developers to adopt the best practicable standards of care for the environment - e.g. through facilitating tele-working, energy-saving and waste recovery/recycling provision, and innovations designed to reduce car use, noise, etc.;
- Promoting a reasonable mix of housing types and tenures in each neighbourhood through planning agreements.

Housing Availability and Affordability

Promoting the availability of suitable accommodation at an affordable price for all households by -

- Making regular assessments of housing demand and needs to inform policy and investment decisions; and ensuring that policies and decisions respond appropriately to identified needs;
- Securing an appropriate level of affordable housing provision within residential and mixed use developments through planning agreements;
- Mixing tenure and value of homes to achieve viable, dynamic and sustainable communities;
- Working with Registered Social Landlords and others to secure adequate levels of investment to meet the needs of those unable to obtain decent, affordable housing on the private market.

Effective Help for Households in Housing Need

Ensuring that effective provision is made for the homeless, other vulnerable people and key workers through e.g. –

- good quality housing advice and assistance for the homeless and others in housing need;
- measures to ensure people from ethnic minority communities can access housing services easily;
- adequate provision for wheelchair users and the mobility impaired; and for people needing supported housing (e.g. the elderly, people with a physical or learning disability, women fleeing violence, and other vulnerable people);
- efficient and sensitive administration of national schemes for housing assistance (e.g. Housing and Council Tax Benefit, Disabled Facilities Grants, etc.);
- investigating and encouraging innovative solutions to meeting housing and related needs – e.g. co-operatives, community banks, and other community-based schemes;
- supporting older people to maintain their independence in their own homes and within the community, through continued support for the local Home Improvement Agency and the development of appropriate sheltered housing schemes.

6. Health and Well-being

Where are we now?

The legacy of past industrial decline and associated social and environmental issues has left its mark on the health and well-being of people in Kent Thameside. On average, the area's people have shorter lives than people in West Kent as a whole; deaths from cancer are above the national average; and heart disease and diabetes are above average in Kent Thameside's large ethnic minority communities. This picture is reflected particularly in less advantaged neighbourhoods, where there are also more childhood accidents; lower rates of breastfeeding (which leads to poorer health); and in two of the most deprived wards, a high rate of pregnancies in the under-16s.

Over recent years, however, a good deal has been done to address these issues by –

- strengthening local accountability for healthcare - e.g. through one of the first Primary Care Trusts nationally and through a joint Mental Health and Social Care Trust to provide co-ordinated mental health and social care;
- strong partnership working involving health trusts, local authorities and communities – e.g. through a multi-disciplinary Health Improvement and Modernisation Board that meets bi-monthly to focus on community health issues and which sets the local Health Improvement and Modernisation Plan;
- a strong multi-disciplinary and multi-agency focus on community health and preventing illness – e.g. through a Public Health Team co-ordinating action to improve community health, and Health Action Teams using innovative ways of working with communities to promote health and lifestyle changes and social inclusion;
- improving access to healthcare for groups who find it difficult to use traditional facilities – e.g. through an Ethnic Health and Social Care Forum to help better meet the health needs of ethnic minority communities; and through a new Healthy Living Centre in Gravesend and one being developed for Dartford;
- supporting vulnerable adults in the community through a combination of domiciliary care, day care and community meals, with a focus on safe and independent living;
- the provision of integrated and social care pathways through projects such as The Limes/Livingstone Hospital at Dartford and the proposed Gravesend Hospital Project.

Although such initiatives, together with the regeneration of Kent Thameside's economy and environment, can be expected to lead to long-term improvements in health and well-being, much remains to be done. For example, there are still too many young people starting to smoke and not enough smokers are giving up; poor educational attainment affects health in some areas (e.g. diet and exercise); waiting times for accident and emergency treatment are sometimes too long; and most GPs have more patients than the national average – which is of particular concern in an area with an expanding population.

A Healthy Futureplace

The health and well-being of Kent Thameside's people will depend not only on a healthy economy, but also on addressing the many social and environmental influences that affect people's lives – e.g. through crime or poor housing causing higher rates of illness, or unhealthy lifestyles due to lack of knowledge or facilities – all of which are part of our partnership approach. And, when preventative measures and lifestyle choices do not prevent illness, rapid and easy access to healthcare services will be essential to provide assistance.

Therefore, alongside the steady transformation of Kent Thameside's economy and environment over the coming decade, we will be aiming bit by bit to throw off the area's legacy of poor health and to ensure that all communities and groups of people –

- are significantly healthier than today;
- are well-informed about health issues, preventative measures and lifestyle choices;
- are able to exercise effective choices over issues having a major impact on health, such as housing, work, environment, diet, and leisure activities;
- minimise anxiety and stress by being supportive of each other, and particularly of the most vulnerable;
- have access to good quality health services when they need them;
- are supported to maintain their independence as long as possible.

Key Points for Action:

Involving People

We will involve communities and patients in the on-going development and delivery of services affecting health, so that health improvement issues are considered and addressed in policies and programmes across the board, together with a particular focus on issues impacting on poor health in particular groups and Priority communities.

Raising Awareness and Reducing Risks

- Develop a Public Health Strategy to identify and address the key factors impacting on the health of local communities;
- Involve a wide range of agencies and partners in raising health awareness in priority communities and groups, particularly where low levels of awareness contribute significantly to poor health and illness;
- Continue to support a community-based approach to improving lifestyles and health – e.g. through the work of Health Action Teams, and Social Service provision for the elderly and other vulnerable groups. In addition to Healthy Living Centres in both Dartford and Gravesend, this will include projects dealing with (for example) cooking, hygiene and healthy eating, the Kent Heartbeat Award and innovative work with children on sports, activity and reducing childhood obesity;
- Ensure effective regulation of a wide range of issues impacting on health and the quality of life, including e.g. - public health nuisances (such as dog fouling and noise); food safety; health and safety at work; air quality and other environmental protection issues; standards of care in homes for the elderly; and the responsible use of public spaces.

Quality Health Care

- Provide new and improved acute, community and primary healthcare facilities in new and existing communities to cater for the needs of Kent Thameside's rapidly-growing population;
- Secure and maintain the best standards of clinical care and a deserved reputation for excellence in the provision of primary, community and acute healthcare services, with the focus on providing services at the local level;
- Establish new and innovative diagnosis, treatment and advice centres to provide routine diagnosis and elective surgery and reduce waiting times;
- Given the projected growth in the number of older people in the population, appropriate and adequate health and social care needs to be planned for and delivered;
- Promote continuous improvement in the delivery of all services impacting on health and well-being, whether provided by the NHS, other statutory agencies (such as local authorities and the Police), or businesses and voluntary groups (e.g. providers of leisure services and services for the elderly).

Improving Access to Healthcare

- Improve access to hospital emergency services through various actions, including integrating the Minor Injuries Unit and improving co-ordination between hospital departments to reduce waiting times for patients;
- Improve access to out of hours GP services so that people can make best use of hospital Accident and Emergency services;
- Continue and develop initiatives to make access to health care services easier for groups who, for various reasons, have difficulty using traditional facilities, through e.g. Healthy Living Centres and community-based work with 'hard to reach' groups and individuals.

Working Well Together

Developing further the existing organisational and partnership arrangements to ensure there is a co-ordinated approach to the systematic protection of adults and children from health risks and dangers; promoting healthy lifestyles; enhancing social inclusion; delivering healthcare services; and tackling health inequalities.

7. Community Safety

Where are we now?

Kent Thameside is a very safe place for the vast majority of people, and although there have been significant successes in tackling crime and anti-social behaviour over recent years, concern about these issues is nevertheless widespread, with many people rating it as their most important issue for community action. Other key safety concerns include child protection and road safety.

For the year 2001-02, there were around 21,000 crimes reported across the whole North Kent Police Area (which includes Swanley as well as Kent Thameside). This was down 6.4% on the previous year. Violence - which is most people's greatest concern - accounts for around 9% of all reported crimes, with most victims falling into one of two groups: women affected by domestic violence and young men in public places. A little over 200 racist incidents were reported across the whole of the North Kent Police Area in 2001-02. Domestic burglaries accounted for 6% of crimes, but the biggest categories were vehicle crime, criminal damage and theft - each of which accounted for around one-fifth of reported crimes.

Crime is unevenly spread, with some neighbourhoods experiencing significantly more problems than others – particularly those areas with higher levels of deprivation and social exclusion. Some crimes are also much more likely to happen at different times of the day or week, with Friday and Saturday evenings seeing a peak in assaults, for example, whilst shoplifting peaks in the middle hours of the day.

A Safer Futureplace

Over the next decade, we will work closely together with local communities to make Kent Thameside not only an even safer place than today, but ensure that people *feel* it is a safe place where:

- the number of reported crimes per household has fallen steadily and is significantly below the national and regional averages;
- people in all neighbourhoods, whether at home, work or play, *feel* safer and *are* safer and racist incidents are extremely rare and declining;
- businesses and other organisations can conduct their affairs without suffering persistent losses due to theft, fraud, criminal damage or other crimes;
- the number of children in care is steadily declining;
- significantly fewer young people are drawn into criminal activities, thus reducing their likelihood of drifting into a life of crime;
- there is a strong commitment by all to maintaining respect for other people and the law regardless of individual, social or cultural differences.

Key Points for Action

Analysis of Crime

We will work with communities, organisations, families and young people to identify the locations and people most at risk from criminal activity and the key risk factors involved by -

- regularly analysing patterns of crime and criminal intelligence from all sources;
- identifying the factors currently encouraging, causing or contributing to criminal activity, such as drug or alcohol misuse, vehicle abandonment, etc.

Building Community Confidence

Through regular dialogue, and support where appropriate, we will help build the confidence of local communities and individuals – particularly in Focus Areas¹ and with young people generally - to work together with the Police and other agencies to resist criminal activity; help identify and bring offenders to justice; and create positive conditions for ensuring safe neighbourhoods.

¹ in Dartford – Stone, Temple Hill and the Town Centre, whilst the Tree Estate is an area of consolidation; in Gravesham – Northfleet West, Denton, Town Centre

Crime Prevention

We will contribute to preventing crime by working with local communities, developers and landlords, other organisations and individuals to -

- design-out features in new buildings, renovated buildings and neighbourhoods that make crime more likely;
- assess and remedy security weaknesses in existing buildings and neighbourhoods;
- encourage good intelligence about suspicious activities.

Tackling Crime

Through intelligence-led and community-based policing and co-ordinated multi-agency work, we will work to reduce the levels of all crimes, with a particular focus on –

- crime against individuals - particularly domestic violence, crimes on young people; racially-motivated and homophobic crime;
- crime against property – particularly burglary, vandalism and graffiti;
- anti-social behaviour and nuisance – particularly in priority communities;
- drug related crime.

Working with Young People and Families

Through a multi-agency approach with communities, particularly in priority communities and through social service directorate family centres, we will develop and maintain programmes that -

- build an understanding of the issues involved (e.g. with drugs);
- provide co-ordinated help, support and protection for families, children and vulnerable people in severe difficulties;
- create real alternatives for young people and others at risk of slipping into crime.

Working with Victims

Through a multi-agency approach, we will support the victims of crime, family stress and break-up.

Working with Offenders

We will work together to provide community-based rehabilitation for offenders in suitable cases to reduce re-offending.

Safe and Healthy Neighbourhoods and Homes

Promoting safe and healthy neighbourhoods, buildings and homes by working with local residents and appropriate partner agencies to encourage positive health and safety measures; and to identify, reduce, and where possible remove, significant risks, including for example -

- Extending the coverage of 'Home Zones' with 20 mph speed limits and other traffic calming measures; and good quality, but non-intrusive, public lighting;
- Encouraging appropriate security and crime prevention measures following "Secured by Design" principles and involving residents in targeted anti-crime initiatives;
- Ensuring appropriate precautions are taken to prevent fire and accidents in public buildings, and encouraging occupiers to take suitable measures in their homes (e.g. through smoke detectors, schools' programmes, etc.);
- Making sure effective action is taken to safeguard occupiers and users of homes and buildings from exposure to significant pollution or disease risks;
- Improving access to safe and healthy activities in each neighbourhood (e.g. through local green spaces, cycle paths, learning and leisure facilities).

Building Partnership Strength

We will work hard to ensure that all the agencies involved in improving community safety focus clearly on agreed objectives; co-ordinate resources and action to achieve them; maintain effective operating arrangements; and work well with local communities to ensure that action makes a real difference to local neighbourhoods.

8. Leisure & Culture

Where are we now?

Kent Thameside has extensive leisure opportunities for people to enjoy, including -

- many urban Parks and open spaces which, together with large areas of attractive countryside, offer wide scope for recreational and sporting activities;
- modern sports centres and pools which, together with facilities at schools and colleges, provide many varied opportunities for participation in indoor sports and leisure pastimes;
- the Orchard Theatre, Bluewater's cinema complex, and the Woodville Halls which, together with neighbourhood and village centres, provide important venues for a wide range of cultural, social and entertainment activities;
- numerous pubs, clubs and restaurants for family and social relaxation to cater for all tastes in town centres (including Bluewater) and villages;
- a strong network of clubs and societies catering for people of all ages and interests.

However, whilst these extensive opportunities cater well for large numbers of people, there are still those who may feel excluded from many of these possibilities – e.g. some for whom income and/or disability may be a barrier; others for whom time and/or motivation is a constraint; and some neighbourhoods where facilities for local leisure activities and/or transport connections to other centres are limited. The development and regeneration of Kent Thameside therefore presents a rare opportunity not only to conserve and improve established leisure provision, but also to fill gaps, meet new needs and enable people to make significant improvements in their lifestyles.

The *Futureplace* Leisure, Heritage and Cultural Scene

As a key element in the social, economic and environmental renaissance of Kent Thameside, we wish to foster a kaleidoscope of leisure opportunities characterised by:

- a comprehensive range of good quality recreational, sporting and cultural facilities meeting both neighbourhood and area-wide needs and contributing to a coherent pattern of regional provision;
- easy access to facilities and activities for people of all ages, abilities, budgets and interests;
- high and growing rates of participation by every section of the community in social, sporting, recreational and cultural activities of all kinds;
- support for, and celebration of, the area's cultural diversity;
- encouragement of both physical exercise and mental development as essential elements in building and maintaining learning skills, healthy lifestyles and self-esteem;
- celebration of individual and collective achievements as important ways of developing and maintaining community pride and identity;
- encouragement of voluntary, community and individual initiative in developing the area's social, recreational and cultural life.

Key Points for Action

Quality Amenities and Facilities

Through a combination of voluntary effort, private investment and public provision, develop, improve, conserve and maintain a comprehensive and well-sited range of good quality, safe and accessible leisure amenities and facilities, including -

- the River, parks, open spaces and countryside, enabling ready access for all to varied and attractive areas for informal recreation and relaxation through the Green Grid and other initiatives;
- a network of neighbourhood play spaces for children;
- a range of both outdoor and indoor recreational facilities for young people in schools and other suitable locations, particularly in areas with high levels of deprivation;
- facilities catering for both participants and spectators across a wide range of indoor and outdoor sports activities at all levels of ability;
- modern, accessible and attractive facilities for a wide range of both amateur and professional artistic, cultural and entertainment activities;
- to provide a wide variety of cultural facilities including museums, theatres and galleries, including the provision of new amenities and the improvement of existing ones;
- a network of neighbourhood and village centres, and other community hubs, catering for a wide range of family, social and community functions for both new and existing communities;

- allotment sites enabling people (particularly those without gardens or on low incomes) to grow fresh produce in support of a healthy diet, greater physical health, waste recycling, biodiversity and more.

Access for All

Remove and reduce barriers to the enjoyment of leisure and cultural activities wherever possible, including by: encouraging and supporting community organisations and networks (e.g. through premises, help with funding applications, ICT facilities, etc); developing awareness of leisure and cultural opportunities; improving affordability; promoting the benefits of facility-sharing; and encouraging high standards of customer care.

Cultural Richness and Diversity

Capitalise on the varied contributions that various sections of the community can bring to the recreational, sporting, and cultural life of the area, including, for example: children and young people; minority ethnic and faith communities; people with disabilities; older people; and the lesbian and gay communities.

Widespread Participation:

Promote the benefits of active participation in social, sporting and cultural activities, including the major contributions they can make to wider goals, including -

- the prevention of illness - through healthy physical and mental exercise at all ages, especially during retirement given the ageing population;
- crime reduction through the provision of constructive alternatives;
- educational and economic success - through the development of mental, physical and social skills and knowledge;
- increases in environmental quality through encouraging people to cherish the natural and built environments;
- increase social cohesion - by promoting an understanding of other cultures and traditions, and by building individual and community confidence and self-esteem.

A Thriving Local Leisure Industry

Encourage the development and vitality of quality businesses serving the leisure, tourism and visitor markets – e.g. restaurants, pubs, clubs and other ‘quality of life’ facilities and services.

Imaginative use of Public Space:

Promote good urban design that encourages people to value and enhance the uses of their neighbourhoods and town centres, for example through the creation and conservation of good quality and appropriate buildings and public spaces; public art, exhibitions and performances; markets and commercial leisure activities; sporting and social events; and events/promotions (e.g. those promoting learning, health, business development, local clubs and societies, etc.)

A Major Regional Facility

Together with the relevant regional bodies, investigate the potential for locating a key sporting or cultural venue of regional significance within Kent Thameside; and if viable, seeking funding to achieve this.

Strong and Sustainable Communities

Bringing it all Together

To make a lasting difference to people's lives, the key issues we have identified and the actions we propose all have to fit together. Therefore, as well as focussing on these key Issues for the whole of Kent Thameside, we will also focus on the way they impact on neighbourhoods and groups of people.

A Sense of Belonging

Everyone likes to feel at ease within their community and to feel they 'belong' – to a circle of family and friends, to a local neighbourhood, to work, school or college, or to a group of people sharing the same interests. Most people belong to several such 'communities'. A key aim of this Community Strategy is to develop and support all the communities within Kent Thameside because evidence suggests that strong and sustainable communities are also successful communities.

Strong and Sustainable Communities

A strong and sustainable community is more likely to exist where -

- Homes, jobs and leisure facilities are within easy reach of each other;
- Careful attention to conservation and design ensures a sense of place;
- Public transport connections and services are good;
- There is a good range of decent housing available to households of all types, sizes, ages and income levels;
- Everyone is able to develop their abilities through ample opportunities for lifelong learning and exercise;
- A wide range of decent work opportunities - suited to all abilities and circumstances - are available within easy reach;
- Standards of behaviour and respect for the law, other people and the environment are all at high levels;
- People in all groups within the population are enabled to live healthy lifestyles and enjoy a better quality of life;
- There is a wide range of constructive and enjoyable leisure opportunities available to all;
- Good family and social support networks exist for people struggling to cope with problems.

Focus on Communities

These are the outcomes that will flow from action on the key issues in this Strategy. However, given the scale and pace of the changes facing Kent Thameside over the next 20 years, it will be especially important to focus on the way these issues impact on neighbourhoods and community groups. This will include:

Integrating New Communities

We will ensure that the extensive new development is planned, both individually and as a whole to:

- be sustainable in economic, social and environmental terms;
- integrate well with neighbouring communities; and
- enhance the quality of life for all communities and neighbourhoods across Kent Thameside.

Investing in Existing Communities

We will also take care to ensure that traditional town centres and well-established neighbourhoods, villages and community groups are supported in:

- maintaining their economic, social and environmental vitality; and
- dealing with problems and threats to their quality of life.

Supporting Communities

Although the face of Kent Thameside is changing rapidly, with new jobs, homes and green spaces and the regeneration of areas previously faced with industrial and environmental decline, there are some neighbourhoods and groups that, when measured against national indicators, still face significant disadvantages. If steps are not taken to help overcome these problems, this could prevent these neighbourhoods and groups sharing fully in the area's future prosperity.

Priority Communities

Kent Thameside has a number of neighbourhoods that have significantly greater problems than most parts of the county - and which are therefore a special focus for action as "Priority communities". With a couple of exceptions, these lie in the belt between the River Thames and the North Kent Railway:

- Temple Hill (Dartford)
- Swanscombe (Dartford)
- Christianfields & King's Farm Estates (Gravesham)
- Area around Alamein Gardens, Stone(Dartford)
- Northfleet High Street area (Gravesham)
- Westcourt Estate (Gravesham)
- Tree Estate (Dartford)
- Northcourt Estate (Gravesham)

These are the areas where extra need has been identified to date. However, there will also be smaller 'pockets' of need at either the street or rural level, which will also require extra attention. There are also some groups who are more likely to face particular difficulties wherever they live – whether because of their age, ethnicity, disabilities or other circumstance. We will work alongside people from these neighbourhoods and groups, to improve their opportunities for sharing fully in the better quality of life that we hope the coming years will bring. In doing so, we will also look particularly to working with young people for whom the longer-term future is especially important.

Funding Matters

Securing investment in Priority Communities has and will continue to be a priority for all partners in Kent Thameside. There have been a number of successes in this regard over recent years. For example:

- 10 of Kent Thameside's most deprived wards, home to 45,000 people, are to benefit from £7.4 million of European Union funds secured from its Urban programme. To this a further £10.8 million of public and private sector funding will be added, all directed at improving social and economic conditions. Aims of the programme include promoting social cohesion, developing community access to learning and improving business infrastructure and regeneration. A Community Chest fund is also available, providing easier access to grants of up to £4,000;
- The government has approved a £5.4 million Sure Start programme for Kent Thameside. This will run from 2002 to 2007 at the Tree Estate and Temple Hill areas of Dartford and in the Northfleet West, King's Farm, Riverside and Westcourt areas of Gravesham. The funds will be focused on children up to the age of four and their families so that the children can flourish by the time they start at school;
- £1.1 million has been allocated by government in 2001 to Dartford and Gravesham from the Children's Fund, to be spent by 2004. The objectives of the fund, aimed at 5-13 year olds, include better school attendance, improved health and educational performance and discouraging youth crime;
- Health Action Gravesham accessed £550,000 from the Lottery in 1999 to develop a Healthy Living Network providing outreach to deprived areas and the establishment of The Gr@nd as a one-stop town centre Cyber Café, health and information centre;
- The government's Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) has brought some £7.7 million to Kent Thameside for a variety of projects since 1996. These have included Denton Relief Road, training and jobs initiatives, Dartford Foyer offering accommodation and skills training for young single homeless people, and the provision of community development workers in some priority communities.

Whilst significant, these programmes on their own will not be sufficient to ensure lasting regeneration of all our priority communities. A key aim of this Community Strategy will therefore be to make best use of such funding to develop best practice in neighbourhood regeneration, to make sure these programmes become embedded in mainstream budgets and wherever possible to focus the mainstream budgets of all agencies on tackling the thematic, geographic and community priorities identified in this strategy.

Focus on Action

We will give priority to the issues facing these neighbourhoods and groups in a variety of ways, including:

- **Involving residents, employers and others** with something to contribute in identifying barriers to improving the quality of life;
- Ensuring that the strategies and programmes of all our partners have a **special focus** on tackling the problems facing these neighbourhoods and groups;
- Ensure that we make **best use of existing programmes and resources** (e.g. Sure Start and the Urban Programme) to make a difference;
- Developing and implementing **co-ordinated neighbourhood Action Plans to tackle the issues in the priority communities**;
- Regularly **reviewing the effects** of these actions to ensure they have a substantial and lasting impact on the quality of life for these neighbourhoods and groups.

Following Through

Measuring Success

There would be no point in forming a Local Strategic Partnership if it does not make a positive difference to the quality of life in Kent Thameside over the next few years. So, to help us follow through with this task, we need to: ensure that more detailed strategies and action plans exist for each of the key issues and priority communities and Groups; set some targets against which to measure progress; assess whether things really are improving; and ensure that strategies and action plans are reviewed in the light of progress. We also need to make sure that what we are doing reflects what local people really want, but at the same time keep things reasonably simple to avoid excessive bureaucracy.

As a Local Strategic Partnership, we are therefore setting some “**Strategic Targets**”. We will not only be aiming at overall progress across Kent Thameside, we will be focussing particularly on how well things are going for priority communities and groups within the community.

But we will also be looking to the organisations leading action on each of the key issues to focus more detailed attention (through development of their existing strategies, targets and plans) on how well things are going in that particular field. Information about where to find these more detailed strategies, targets and plans is given on page 27 (*Where to Find More Details*).

Strategic Targets

Regeneration and Transport

1. Between 2002 and 2010, to facilitate the creation of a net 20,000 new jobs and 10,000 new homes - typified by high standards of design and landscaping on Kent Thameside's major regeneration sites, with Fastrack and Green Grid components forming integral elements;
2. By 2010 to secure substantial improvements to Kent Thameside's public transport, including the introduction of CTRL international and domestic services; new cross-London rail services; a major upgrading of the North Kent Line; completion of at least 25 kilometres of the *Fastrack* network; and substantial further improvements to the bus network and services;
3. By 2005 to have developed and commenced the implementation of Action Plans for the continuing renaissance of Dartford and Gravesend Town Centres alongside the newer centres at Bluewater and Ebbsfleet; and by 2010 to demonstrate further significant improvements in a range of indicators, including retail turnover, commercial floorspace, visitor numbers and crime levels.

Lifelong Learning

1. To increase the percentage of 11 year olds achieving level 4 or above in English and mathematics to at least 78% by 2004;
2. To increase the percentage of pupils obtaining five or more GCSEs/GNVQs (or equivalent) at grades A*-C, to at least 80% overall and at least 25 per cent in every school by 2006 (20 per cent by 2004);
3. To increase the percentage of (a) 19 year-olds and (b) adults achieving level 3 or above in English and Mathematics to at least 58% and 44% respectively by 2006.

Jobs and Business

1. Over the period to 2006, to reduce the proportion of the local workforce who are unemployed to at least 0.5% below the SE regional average;
2. Over the period to 2006, to have increased the average income of Kent Thameside residents (taking into account inflation);
3. Over the period to 2006, to have narrowed the gaps between the small business start-up rate (based on net VAT registrations) for Kent Thameside and the South East region as a whole.

The Environment

1. Co-operate with government and national agencies to work towards achieving the National Air Quality Strategy objectives;
2. To increase the percentage of household waste recycled or composted to 20% by 2006 (17% by 2004);
3. To complete and make available an increase in planned open space and links between them as part of Green Grid (detailed target to be developed within 12 months).

Housing and the Built Environment

1. To ensure that all social housing in Kent Thameside meets the "Decent Homes" standard by 2010;
2. To achieve the annual targets for new affordable housing provision set out within the Housing Strategies for Dartford and Gravesham over the period to 2010;
3. To ensure that, by March 2004, no homeless families are placed in bed and breakfast accommodation except in an emergency, and then for no longer than 6 weeks.

Health and Well-Being

1. By 2010 to reduce by at least 10% overall the gap between life expectancy at birth for Kent Thameside and England as a whole;
2. By 2010 to achieve a reduction of 20% in the death rate from cancers of people under 75 (from 120 to 96 deaths annually per 100,000 population); and a reduction of 40% in the overall death rate from Coronary Heart Disease and Strokes (from 129.9 to 77.9 deaths annually per 100,000 population);
3. By 2010 for the average number of patients registered per General Practitioner in Kent Thameside to be no higher than the SE Regional average;
4. To reduce the rate of conception for women and girls under 18 by 50% by 2010 (15% by 2004).

Community Safety

1. To achieve a reduction of 3% annually in the number of recorded domestic burglaries with no ward having a burglary rate of more than 3 times the overall rate for Kent Thameside;
2. To achieve an annual reduction of 1% in repeat victims of domestic violence and an annual increase in the number of victims seeking help and advice in the period to March 2005;
3. To achieve a year-on-year increase in the detection rate of racially motivated crimes over the period to 2005;
4. By 2010 to achieve a 10% reduction in the rate of accidents resulting in admission to hospital (from 329.5 per 100,000 population to 280.7 per 100,000).

Leisure and Culture²

1. By 2010, the numbers of sports pitches and courts per 1,000 households (across a range of key sporting activities) to be not less than the SE regional average.

Targets for priority communities and Groups

1. By the end of 2006, to reduce the 'gap' between the indicators (across all relevant key issues) for those Kent Thameside wards in the most disadvantaged fifth of wards in the country and the Kent Thameside average by at least 25% (10% by the end of 2004);
2. By the end of 2006 to ensure that the indicators (across all relevant key issues) for Priority Groups in Kent Thameside are at, or better than, the SE regional average for that group;
3. Capacity building/involvement in priority communities - *details to be confirmed during the action planning phase.*

² *It will clearly be necessary to develop additional leisure and culture targets and this will be taken forward on the basis of the Kent Thameside Cultural Strategy.*

Where to Find More Details

Lead Organisation(s)	Contact Details	Key Strategies and Plans, etc.
<p><i>Regeneration & Transport:</i> Kent Thameside Association (a public-private partnership comprising local authorities and key companies involved in regenerating Kent Thameside)</p>	<p>Kent Thameside Association Cygnet House 132 Windmill Street Gravesend Kent DA12 1BQ</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thames Gateway Planning Framework: [RPG Note 9a (1995)] • <i>Looking to the Future</i> (1995 and 1997 Update) and <i>Looking to an Integrated Future</i> (1999) • <i>Kent Thameside Rail Passenger Strategy</i> (2002) • Dartford and Gravesham Local Development Plans (2nd Stage and Review Deposit Versions) 2000-02 • <i>North Kent Area Investment Framework</i> (2002) • <i>Vision for Kent</i> (2000) • Realising the Potential (Winter 2002/03 Update)
<p><i>Lifelong Learning:</i> Kent Thameside Learning Steering Group (comprising learning providers and other stakeholders)</p>	<p>tbc</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Kent Thameside Learning Charter • Strategic Plan of the Learning and Skills Council for Kent and Medway • Kent County Council Schools Strategy • Strategic and Operational Plan of North West Kent College • Urban Programme Action Plan
<p><i>Jobs and Business:</i> Kent Thameside Association (a public-private partnership comprising local authorities and key companies involved in regenerating Kent Thameside)</p>	<p>As above</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Kent Thameside Economic Development Strategy • North Kent Area Investment Framework (2002) • South East Regional Economic Strategy • Kent Prospects (the Economic Development Strategy for Kent County) • Urban Programme Action Plan
<p><i>The Environment:</i> Kent Thameside Association (a public-private partnership comprising local authorities and key companies involved in regenerating Kent Thameside)</p>	<p>As above</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LA21 Strategies for Dartford and Gravesham • <i>Looking to the Future</i> (1995 and 1997 Update) • <i>Looking to an Integrated Future</i> (March 1999) • North Kent Area Investment Framework (2002)
<p><i>Housing and the Built Environment:</i> Dartford BC and Gravesham BC</p>	<p>tbc</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Strategies for Dartford and Gravesham • Regional Housing Statement (GOSE)
<p><i>Health and Well-being:</i> Dartford, Gravesham and Swanley Primary Care Trust</p>	<p>tbc</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The West Kent Health Improvement and Modernisation Programme 2002 - 2005 • Dartford, Gravesham and Swanley PCT Business Plan 2002-2003
<p><i>Community Safety:</i> Dartford & Gravesham Community Safety Partnerships</p>	<p>tbc</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Safety Strategies for Dartford and Gravesham
<p><i>Leisure and Culture:</i> Dartford BC and Gravesham BC</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: fit-content;">tbc</div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kent Thameside Cultural Strategy

Appendix A

The Community Strategy Process

November 2001 -	First Meeting of Local Strategic Partnership (LSP)
March 2002 -	LSP terms of reference agreed
July/August 2002 -	Initial consultation: All residents in Kent Thameside were sent a questionnaire asking them to rank their priorities for the area. Both Community Safety and Health were identified as the key priority areas for the population of Kent Thameside.
September 2002 -	Initial draft strategy produced and presented to LSP
November 2002 -	Further consultation including presentations to the Ethnic Health Forum, Kent Thameside Chamber of Commerce and the Dartford Youth Council.
December 2002 -	Further consultation: Community Assembly held. 500 local community and voluntary groups invited and sent summary of strategy. 100 groups attended and participated in workshops aimed at improving the content of the strategy and providing information for the action planning stage of the strategy. Full draft strategy also sent to
December 2002 - /January 2003	Strategy edited with comments included from community assembly and statutory consultees.
February 2003 -	Launch of final strategy.