From Spaces to Places

Enabling Sustainable Urban Growth in South East England with a Practical Focus on the Queenborough-Rushenden Zone of Change

Detlef H. Golletz
Arno Schmickler

1 South East England – becoming part of a grander scheme

London and the Wider South East – a polycentric mega-city region[1]

London is the fastest growing city in Europe.[2] The current number of about 7.4 million inhabitants is expected to rise to eight million by 2016. The World City London together with the wider South East region with over eight million inhabitants in the South East and 5.4 million in the East of England produces 42 % of the UK's gross value added (GVA)[3] on only 16 % of the total UK area. Whilst London is one of three global economic centres[4], the surrounding region acts as integral hinterland in terms of skilled labour, housing, high quality environment and above all, as transport artery between the UK's and London's economy and the Continent. The concentration of global headquarters is reliant on an extensive network of supporting functions which cannot be accommodated within the administrative boundaries of Greater London. Therefore the city extends into the surrounding region and develops an interdependent relationship.

This de-centralised concentration, i.e. the concentration on a global scale (global cities) with simultaneous decentralisation and suburbanisation on the regional and local scale, leads to the introduction of the city-region. Understanding how the economy and communities interact within this city-region is important to keep the wider South East on the track of success. To enable London to continue its role as a global city, and to create the economic power needed to sustain the competitiveness of the whole country and Europe, it is crucial to further strengthen the regional economies around those hubs (economic equilibrium). The further spread of urban functions into rural and suburban territories has to be managed, if not reversed, as the increasingly emotional and politically charged protection of rural areas and their

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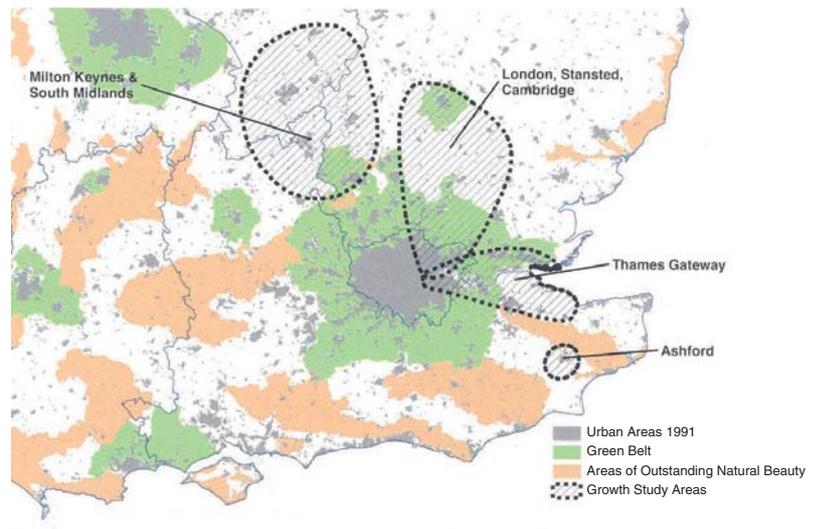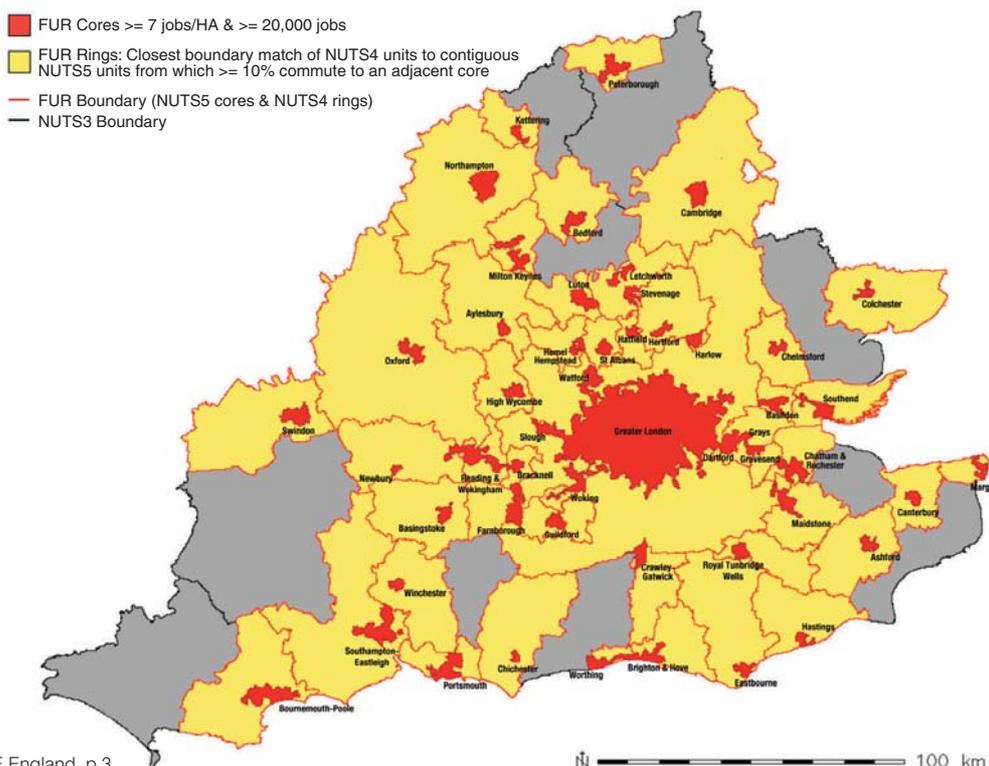

Source: ODPM: Sustainable Communities: Making it Happen: Thames Gateway and the Growth Areas, p.7

quality of life stand in contrast to the delivery of extremely ambitious quantities of housing and employment targets.[5]

In order to understand more about the interrelationship between a city and its region, a research programme called POLYNET has been developed under the lead of the Institute of Community Studies in London. POLYNET looks at the sustainable management of European polycentric mega-city regions. Funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the UK Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), POLYNET is carrying out studies in eight European Mega-City Regions: South East England, Rhine-Main, Rhine-Ruhr, Bassin Parisien, European Metropolitan Region Northern Switzerland, Central Belgium, Greater Dublin and the Randstad. The initial hypothesis was that "mega-city-regions are becoming more polycentric, although there is still a hierarchy to be observed with core cities accommodating higher-order service

Detlef H. Golletz
Dipl.-Ing., DipTP, MSc
Arno Schmickler
Dipl.-Ing., MSc
South East England
Development Agency – SEEDA
SEEDA Headquarters
Cross Lanes
Guildford GU 1 1YA
United Kingdom
E-Mail:
detlefgolletz@seeda.co.uk
arnoschmickler@seeda.co.uk

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South East England Functional Urban Regions

■ FUR Cores >= 7 jobs/HA & >= 20,000 jobs
■ FUR Rings: Closest boundary match of NUTS4 units to contiguous NUTS5 units from which >= 10% commute to an adjacent core
— FUR Boundary (NUTS5 cores & NUTS4 rings)
— NUTS3 Boundary

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

100 km

(1)
The concept of the polycentric mega-city region is based on the POLYNET project which will be explained below.

(2)
The City of London is strictly speaking only a very small but very important part of Greater London. Greater London consists of the City of London, the City of Westminster and 31 other London boroughs. In the context of this article whenever reference to London is made it shall mean Greater London.

(3)
National Statistics, 22 December 2004 (www.statistics.gov.uk)

(4)
Sassen, Saskia: Metropolen des Weltmarkts. Die neue Rolle der Global Cities. – Frankfurt/M. 1997

(5)
This is of particular importance in the South East since one third of the region is designated as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) – nearly one third of AONBs in the whole of England and another 15% of land is designated as Green Belt. This leads to 48% of the total land in the South East being the subject to at least one form of protective designation.

(6)
POLYNET presentation, London 4 February 2005

functions and other cities providing more routine functions. This network is highly symbiotic and highly interconnected."[6] The definition of polycentricity is scale-dependent. At the spatial scale of the POLYNET study polycentricity is defined by the outward diffusion of a core city to its surrounding smaller cities and towns.

For the wider South East region, POLYNET defines 51 functional urban regions (FURs)[7], 30 of which are located to the west of London and only 18 to the east. This division proves fundamental in understanding the region's functional structure: it clearly signifies that cities and towns to the west of London have developed as strong and independent centres to a far greater degree than those to the east. This innovative approach is going beyond the existing administrative boundaries which are no longer suitable to respond to increasingly regional planning challenges. The idea of the FURs is that they form a network of urban centres that is complimentary and synergic calling for non-competitive urban policies. This is very important to understand the role of small and medium sized towns in the proximity of a global city like London. Although London remains the key global European hub for international skills and global service providers, the region

is becoming more polycentric. POLYNET proved that London's global concentration is associated with regional polycentricity in which small and medium sized towns have an important role.

The transformation from resident communities into itinerant communities – small and medium sized towns losing ground?

Polycentric development is enabled (but not caused) by the ever increasing mobility of people and goods. Not only transport technologies but also information and communication technologies (ICT) have had an impact upon settlement structures and changed them considerably in the shortest space of time.[8] This rapid development of technology is leading to a new relationship between space and time and hence forces fundamental changes in the relationship between the city and the region. Ease of access – both physical and electronic – has now become a pre-condition for global and regional competitiveness.

Enhanced transport technologies increase the speed of transportation by upgrading infrastructure and thus shortening physical distances in time whilst at the same time increasing accessibility of more and more peripheral areas. People's association with

one specific place is eroded by high-speed mobility and the lack of distinctiveness and hence identification with 'their location' is weakened. One of the most substantial UK urban policy papers, the "Urban Task Force Report" states that "we have lost ownership of our towns and cities, allowing them to become spoilt by poor design, economic dispersal and social polarisation."[9] An ever increasing number of people understand themselves to be global commuters in a digital market place. Castells introduced the "network society" and "informational capitalism" to describe this process.[10]

Due to this transformation of resident communities into itinerant communities the fabric of the urban society and our towns and cities has often stretched beyond sustainable functionality – and broken into often highly self-contained mono-functional fragments such as industrial, retail, commercial, leisure and residential uses. During this transformation, particularly small and medium sized towns very often lost their economic base and mutated into dormitory towns lacking even the bare minimum of social infrastructure. They are likely to be found grouped around or dependent on mobility corridors linked only by road and rail networks, high-speed trains and increasingly new communication technology. Even these fragmented land uses are constantly changing due to the availability of open or reusable space and the often poor quality of buildings. Consequently, they are capable of being the subject of the most dynamic structural change. This separation of functions and socio-spatial fragmentation can be seen as the peak of the planning ideal of the industrial age (Fordism). But this ideal loses its strength when economic growth, as well as scientific and social progress, begins to demand a higher integration of functions and a more sustainable approach to dealing with scarce resources.

Urban and regional planning therefore needs to adapt mechanisms as well as the built environment and its infrastructure to the needs and requirements of post-industrial[11] regions. Addressing the intrinsic link between people, their environment and the economy is crucial to enable sustainable growth of urban regions. The pre-requisite to achieve this change is to recognise the importance for integrated urban development and the strengthening of locally

distinctive patterns of culture. The loss of distinctiveness that leads to a virtual interchangeability of urban places makes new demands on the quality of urban design and the quality of urban living.

In the context of large mega-city regions, it is vital for small and medium sized towns to build upon their intrinsic local potential and to develop an identity. A clear vision is needed which complements rather than duplicates existing or emerging urban patterns in polycentric city-regions. The contribution small and medium sized towns can make to a larger city-region goes well beyond providing cheap housing in easy commuting distance to employment centres. Particularly in times when the pressures resulting from the core city are increasing – both in terms of demand for housing and employment land – it is important to carefully mature the concept of a network of complementary small and medium sized towns. This can only be achieved through cross-regional co-operation between national, regional and local authorities. The POLYNET project states that "integrated approaches are needed to address the cross-cutting processes that help to build complementary (as opposed to competitive) inter-urban relationships."[12]

If a small and medium sized town continues to work only within its local peculiar boundaries competing against its neighbouring communities it will fail to become an integral component of the grander scheme. In the following chapter the Thames Gateway strategic regeneration corridor will be introduced with a focus on North Kent to illustrate how this integrated policy approach could be achieved.

2 The "Thames Gateway" strategic regeneration corridor – working in partnership

Need for further growth –
"Creating Sustainable Communities"

The "Creating Sustainable Communities" programme is a UK Government initiative that followed work on Urban Renaissance. The Urban Renaissance agenda calls for high quality design to respond to the dire state of many cities, towns and suburban areas.[13] The Urban Task Force, a policy initiative, spearheaded by Lord (Richard) Rogers of Riverside declares in its mission statement that

(7)
FURs "comprise a core defined in terms of employment size and density, and a ring defined in terms of regular daily journeys (commuting) to the core." POLYNET Action 1.1 Summary Report, p. 2 (www.icstudies.ac.uk/html/whatdo_A.asp)

(8)
Henckel, Dietrich; Nopper, Erwin: Einflüsse der Informationstechnologie auf die Stadtentwicklung. In: Die Städte in den 80er Jahren. Hrsg.: Friedrichs, Jürgen. – Opladen 1985; Institut für Landes- und Stadtentwicklungsforschung des Landes NRW (Hrsg.): Neue Informations- und Kommunikationstechniken und ihre möglichen räumlichen Auswirkungen. Dokumentation über eine Tagung am 13.11.1985 in Dortmund 1985; Bundesforschungsanstalt für Landeskunde und Raumordnung (Hrsg.): Technischer Wandel und räumliche Entwicklung. Themenheft. = Inform. z. Raumentwickl., Bonn (1989) 4; McLuhan, Marshall; Powers, Bruce R.: The Global Village. Der Weg der Mediengesellschaft in das 21. Jahrhundert. – Paderborn 1995; Albrow, Martin: The Global Age. – Cambridge 1996; Maar, Christa; Rötzer, Florian (Hrsg.): Virtual Cities. Die Neuerfindung der Stadt im Zeitalter der globalen Vernetzung. – Basel 1997; BBR (Hrsg.): Raumordnung und Städtebau in der Informationsgesellschaft. Themenheft. = Inform. z. Raumentwickl., Bonn (1998) 1; Madanipour, A.: Why are the design and development of public spaces significant for cities? In: Designing cities: Critical readings in urban design. Ed.: Cuthbert, Alexander R. – Oxford 2003

(9)
Urban Task Force (ed.): Towards an urban renaissance: Final report of the Urban Task Force. Chaired by Lord Rogers of Riverside. – London 1999, p. 8

(10)
Castells, Manuel: The rise of the network society. – Cambridge 1996

(11)
Instead of "post-industrial" Clarke has introduced the "corporate city". An overview of other theorems, such as the post-modern city, the post-justice city, the post-metropolitan region etc., is given in Cuthbert, A. R.: Designing cities (log. cit., footnote 8).

"the Urban Task Force will identify causes of urban decline in England and recommend practical solutions to bring people back into our cities, towns and urban neighbourhoods. It will establish a new vision for urban regeneration founded on the principles of design excellence, social well-being and environmental responsibility within a viable economic and legislative framework."[14]

According to the Urban Task Force report "in England, urban areas provide for 91 % of the total economic output and 89 % of all the jobs. Maintaining and improving the economic strength of our towns and cities is therefore critical to the competitive performance of the country as a whole."[15] It is also stated in this report that "more than 90 % of our urban fabric will still be with us in 30 years time."[16] Therefore the quality of new developments is decisive to achieve the shift towards building a sustainable urban environment.

The Urban Task Force report led to the development of the Urban White Paper "Our Towns and Cities: the Future" which, together with the Rural White Paper "Our Countryside: the Future"[17], forms the policy background for a subsequent substantial review of planning legislation and for a number of financial initiatives, such as the Creating Sustainable Communities programme.

In 2003, ODPM launched the Creating Sustainable Communities plan setting out policies, resources and strategic partnerships in order to address the increasing need for integrated development. Government's approach focuses on tackling "the challenges of a rapidly changing population, the needs of the economy, serious housing shortages in London and the South East and the impact of housing abandonment in places in the North and Midlands."[18] In addition to making substantial provisions for population growth in London (i.e. another 500,000 people over the next 10 years), the "Creating Sustainable Communities programme" aims to provide 250,000 new homes in the South East. These new homes will mainly be located outside the boundaries of London in four growth areas (see figure on page 549): Thames Gateway (from Docklands to the Thames and Medway Estuaries), Ashford in Kent, Milton Keynes and the South Midlands and the London–Stansted–Cambridge corridor.

Thames Gateway – London goes East

The Thames Gateway has already a well-known history that started with the development in the Docklands area. The benefits of Canary Wharf and the Isle of Dogs in London are becoming visible and accountable some 25 years after strategic decisions were made. This strategic regeneration approach was legally and financially supported by the establishment of an Enterprise Zone and the creation of a development corporation with direct planning and land purchase powers. With the shift of focus to the east, London is aiming to regenerate major areas of previously developed land and to provide space for further growth. The proposals for Olympia 2012 with the main facilities to be build in the east of London, centred around the new high-speed train station to be opened in Stratford is underpinning the new role of the Thames Gateway. But Thames Gateway extends well beyond the boundaries of London.

Thames Gateway stretches from the Isle of Dogs, in London, 40 miles east to Southend in Essex, the Isle of Sheppey and the Medway Estuary in Kent.

This regeneration corridor is defined by Government by its large quantities of derelict land, deprived communities and regeneration needs, not by specific, administrative boundaries. Hence public sector partnerships have been set up to jointly implement the strategic vision and the relevant sub-regional development projects. These and/or local authorities are for instance:

– in London: Tower Hamlets, Newham, Barking & Dagenham, Havering, Lewisham, Greenwich, Bexley in addition to the Greater London Authority, Transport for London and the London Development Agency;

– in Essex: Thurrock, Castle Point, Basildon, Southend-on-Sea in addition to the East of England Development Agency and Essex County Council;

– in Kent: Dartford, Gravesham, Medway, Swale in addition to Kent County Council, the Thames Gateway Kent Partnership and the South East England Development Agency.

Further strategic partners are relevant community representatives, environmental agencies, service providers and the national road, as well as the rail, authorities.

(12)
POLYNET Action 2.1 Summary report, p. 2 www.icstudies.ac.uk/html/what-do_A.asp

(13)
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM): Our towns and cities: the future. Urban White Paper. – London 2000
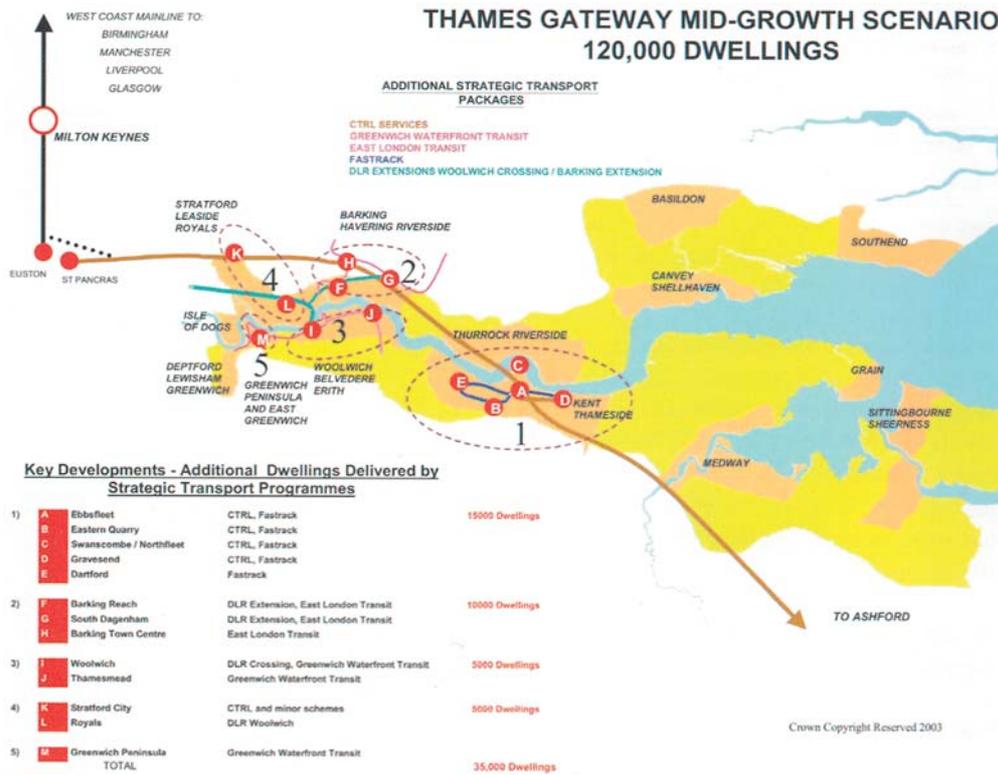
(14)
Urban Task Force: Towards an urban renaissance (Mission Statement); log. cit.

(15)
Ibid., p. 32

(16)
Ibid., p. 113

(17)
ODPM (ed.): Our countryside: the future. Rural white paper. – London 2000

(18)
ODPM (ed.): Sustainable communities: building for the future. – London 2003, p. 3

THAMES GATEWAY MID-GROWTH SCENARIO
120,000 DWELLINGS

The Thames Gateway

Source:
ODPM: Sustainable Communities:
Making it Happen: Thames Gateway and the Growth Areas, p.10

Thames Gateway is an area of approximately 80,000 hectares in size, measuring 40 miles long and up to 20 miles wide, containing approximately 700,000 households, home to around 1.6 million people, and providing about 500,00 jobs[19] and may be comparable in size and potential to the Rhine-Ruhr Region or the Rhine-Main Region.

Thames Gateway offers the greatest development opportunities in the South East, together with the major concentration of previously developed land and deprivation in the country. It has the potential to deliver around 120,000 new homes and potentially 200,000 new jobs by 2016, subject to the appropriate physical and social infrastructure being in place. The Gateway will play a key part in delivering sustainable growth for South East England. It also links London and the regions to Europe. As it has the largest collection of previously developed land (3,000 hectares) near any European capital city, it represents a major opportunity to address the housing shortage without large-scale release of greenbelt land.[20]

The high-speed Channel Tunnel Rail Link (CTRL) with its international passenger stations in Ashford, Ebbsfleet and Stratford can be seen as a prime regeneration catalyst in this corridor. Together with other major regional transport investments, such as Crossrail and Fastrack, CTRL will transform accessibility for the Thames Gateway area. An important precondition for delivering the sustainable communities in the Thames Gateway is the understanding that this large scale development cannot be accommodated through a purely car based transport system. Hence new river crossings for instance are designed to accommodate multi-modal traffic, making room for light rail based connections and cycling. Of strategic importance here are two new crossings of the Thames near the Royal Docks (Gallions Crossing) and near Thurrock (Lower Thames Crossing). Particularly the latter is seen as a major diversion of traffic away from the congested South East region and the M25 to take traffic from the Channel ports directly north, circumnavigating London completely. The proposal for a new, global hub airport in the Thames Estuary, with five new runways has been discarded on environmental grounds.

The Thames Gateway development is focused on five strategic development locations:

- the East London Gateway particularly around Stratford and the Lower Lea valley, accommodating the development needed to make the London Olympic bid for 2012 a success and building on the good existing transport infrastructure

(19)
ODPM (ed.): The Thames Gateway. – London 2004

(20)
Ibid.

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- the area South of the Thames from Greenwich Peninsula to Woolwich where there is potential for 20,000 new homes, developing the former military arsenal site and including a new use for the Dome site with its successful Millennium Community
- the area North of the Thames at Barking Reach – London's largest area of previously developed land
- Thurrock Riverside with a substantial development potential for employment land incorporating the Port of London and the proposal for a new container port at Shellhaven
- North Kent Thameside around Ebbsfleet International Passenger Station and the Medway Estuary.[21]

Further housing and employment will be allocated to key locations in the Gateway, such as Medway, Southend, Basildon and Sittingbourne-Sheerness. The above strategic areas and their respective development sub-areas are identified by the ODPM Creating Sustainable Communities Programme as zones of change.

One of these zones of change is Sittingbourne-Sheerness in the Swale district with about 125,000 inhabitants, located at the eastern end of the Thames Gateway. The vision for Sittingbourne-Sheerness, as set out in "Zones of Change", foresees: "The area has the capacity to accommodate significant economic and housing growth and to diversify into knowledge-based industries. A more skilled resident workforce will drive up incomes and generate demand for improved leisure and social facilities."

Sheerness Port, a major concentration of manufacturing industry around Sittingbourne, and a cluster of high-tech activities

at the Sittingbourne Research Centre give the area major strengths. During the recession of the early 1990s, the unemployment rate for Swale peaked at 12.4 %. On the Isle of Sheppey, the rate was even higher at 16.4 %. Since then, however, the unemployment rate in Swale has fallen faster than in the UK as a whole, reflecting the strengths of the local economy although pockets of high joblessness and deprivation remain.[22]

The key targets for the Sittingbourne-Sheerness zone of change are to create 12,000 additional job opportunities, 455,000 square metres of new floor space for business and up to 8,000 new dwellings to accommodate an estimated 23,000 people. The vast majority of this development will take place on previously developed land. One of the major development sites is located on the Isle of Sheppey at Queenborough, Rushenden and Neatscourt which will be looked at in more detail in the following chapter.

3 Development focus on North Kent – Isle of Sheppey: Queenborough-Rushenden

An important mobility issue for this area is the connection between the Port of Sheerness on the Isle of Sheppey and the Greater London area. This mobility corridor, and particularly the Isle of Sheppey, is characterised by large scale intermediate storage facilities for imported cars coming from the continent into the Port of Sheerness to be distributed to the whole of England. This intermediate storage and other port related facilities have a strong impact on the visual appearance of the Isle of Sheppey. The aim to create sustainable communities within the given environment therefore also needs to transform the general perception of the island. The identification of the Isle of Sheppey as a location within the Thames Gateway with the potential for 2,500 new homes and 5,800 jobs needs to be substantiated by multi-modal transport solutions and a high quality urban design.

A major infrastructure scheme, the Queenborough to Iwade (A249) Improvement Scheme, will provide the first permanent link between the Isle of Sheppey and the mainland area of North Kent replacing an existing vertical lift bridge. This unbroken link is crucial for releasing the full potential of major, but as yet undeveloped, em-

(21)
ODPM (ed.): Creating sustainable communities: Making it happen: Thames Gateway and the Growth Areas. – London 2003, p. 11-13

(22)
Thames Gateway Kent Partnership

Queenborough-Rushenden – Current site layout and aerial view

Source : SEEDA: Queenborough-Rushenden Development

ployment and housing sites within the Sittingbourne-Sheerness zone of change. The challenge for this infrastructure project is to avoid the mobility corridor becoming a one way road enabling out-commuting and further aggravating the "dormitory syndrome". Exploring the potential to highlight the regional connectivity and interdependency by providing public art installation in the mobility corridor, as well as to create environmental corridors along transport routes for vehicular, pedestrian and cycling uses, is attracting and strengthening non car based movements and will be key to encouraging ownership of place in this area.

Queenborough, a historic town on the Isle of Sheppey, has enjoyed an important maritime and industrial past including having one of the first registered industrial sites in Britain. From the early to mid 20th Century land to the south of the Creek became intensively developed for large-scale industrial use with a suburban style residential dormitory town settlement at Rushenden. This development has led to a disjointed sprawl with poor connectivity between the "centre", the industrial estate and the residential estate beyond. These problems have been compounded by the decline in the employment infrastructure, leading to a number of sites becoming vacant with no real prospect of redevelopment. This has resulted in serious social exclusion and deprivation issues in the community at Rushenden.

This area was a candidate for action by the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA), the regional economic development agency, whose task it is to intervene where market failure causes social, environmental and economic deprivation. In order to address these issues, SEEDA undertook an appraisal of land use and ownership within the area and produced an Area Action Plan as an early tool to help inform and guide future redevelopment. SEEDA is now leading a major master-planning exercise and intends the Queenborough-Rushenden Regeneration Project to be the catalyst for a major process of new development. The "Area Action Plan No. 8" (AAP8) identified in the Swale Borough Council Local Plan comprises some 161 hectares of land and buildings on both sides of Queenborough Creek, the existing residential and business communities at Rushenden and the employment land allocation at Neatscourt. It is identified as a ma-

SEEDA: its region and its profile

Source: SEEDA: The South East Region

The **South East England Development Agency (SEEDA)** is the Government funded agency set up in 1999 responsible for the economic and social development of the South East of England - the driving force of the UK's economy.

SEEDA's aim is to create a prosperous, dynamic and inspirational region by helping businesses compete more effectively, training a highly skilled workforce, supporting and enabling the communities, while safeguarding the natural resources and cherishing the rich cultural heritage.

SEEDA aims to be a catalyst for change within the South East, working with partner organisations - businesses, education at all levels, local authorities, Government agencies, voluntary and community organisations and many others - to produce clearly recognisable results.

Accountable to Government, SEEDA is a business-led organisation, governed by a Board whose Members have wide-ranging experience in industry and commerce, local government, education, trade, unionism and voluntary service.

In December 2002, SEEDA published a Regional Economic Strategy (RES) for the South East, based on extensive region-wide consultation. This Strategy sets out a detailed 10 year plan for the region's economic and social development and with detailed Action Plans for implementation, forms the framework for all SEEDA's activities.

The five key objectives of the Regional Economic Strategy are:
1. Competitive Businesses
2. Successful People
3. Vibrant Communities
4. Effective Infrastructure
5. Sustainable Use of Natural Resources

Sustainable development is at the Core of the Regional Economic Strategy: the RES recognises that economic success can only be maintained if development meets other targets too, in particular the need to improve the quality of life for all people in the region.

jor strategic opportunity for regeneration, through the introduction of new employment opportunities supported by new housing, to address both the current decline in the areas industrial base and acknowledged issues of social exclusion and physical isolation. Support for this approach is reflected in the Area Investment Framework (AIF) for North Kent and the current and ongoing investment in the area by SEEDA. The scheme represents a significant mixed-use regeneration project for the Isle of Sheppey."[23]

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The initial masterplan for the Queenborough-Rushenden redevelopment

Source : SEEDA: Initial Masterplan for Queenborough-Rushenden, 2004

Sustainable Communities Programme be made. Delivering not only the quantity of new homes as outlined in the programme but also delivering quality is important to position the development in the marketplace, change perceptions of place and create value. Addressing key themes of the Urban Renaissance Agenda, such as to recycle land and buildings, to improve the urban environment, to achieve excellence in leadership, participation and management and to deliver sustainable regeneration, will be at the heart of the Queenborough-Rushenden redevelopment project.

Urban renaissance and regeneration projects tend to consist of a combination of public and private sector funding. If projects are to be made viable, particularly in respect of infrastructure and open spaces, public sector money must be used to complement building costs. So the challenge arises to find a consistent method in order to decide which projects should be eligible for funding. Thanks to the Government's initiative to promote high quality urban development, it is increasingly recognised that decisions about a project's eligibility for public funding is more and more reliant on the quality of its design and its impact on the surrounding urban area. So a project must be assessed on its capacity to contribute to high(er) quality urban design and to add value to its area.

The Queenborough-Rushenden project is an example of how derelict sites can be used to develop a vibrant place linking the old town with the new town and focusing on the re-use of existing resources rather than continued greenfield land development and suburbanisation. Tackling major contamination and pollution issues, addressing social problems, unemployment, crime and vandalism and re-charging the former industrial site with the value of aesthetics by using the rich history can change the perception and enable the disjointed communities to re-integrate into the socio-economic fabric of urban society. Integration of commercial and residential use rather than segregation, provision of community services and parks, promotion of sustainability in terms of recycling and building efficiency and encouraging high quality design to become a flagship scheme in the Thames Gateway will make a difference to the existing urban environment on the Isle of Sheppey.

(23)
Swale Borough Council; SEEDA; Rummey Design Associates (eds.): Area Action Plan No. 8: Land at Queenborough/ Rushenden, Isle of Sheppey. – Guildford, March 2004, para. 1.3

(24)
Ibid, para. 3.1

The Area Action Plan includes proposals for 735 new homes, new employment opportunities, new social and community facilities and a new Rushenden link road that would provide a new crossing of the rail line connecting Sheerness with Sittingbourne and create a more direct route to the trunk road network by-passing the historic town of Queenborough. "The vision for the AAP8 is to create an exciting destination to live, work, invest in and visit that integrates the outlying settlement of Rushenden into Queenborough and the historic creek environment."[24]

Only by achieving a high quality, integrated urban development in Queenborough-Rushenden can a contribution towards the

4 Conclusion

The ambition of the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) is to create several dynamic zones of global economic integration and a network of internationally accessible metropolitan regions with an integrated hinterland. This vision can only be turned into reality by complementing international and national hubs with regional and local growth opportunities. In tackling the challenge of building sustainable urban spaces in growing metropolitan regions, we need to ensure that future growth is achieved with the maximum possible social cohesion and protection of the environment. Therefore, it is important to understanding the wider economic as well as social benefits and development opportunities offered by high quality urban projects integrated in the community. Particularly the role of small and medium sized towns, such as Queenborough-Rushenden, in the Thames Gateway and the focus on regeneration of previously developed land can be seen as a step change in tackling urban growth.

Hitherto many examples of European suburbia are characterised by a lack of identity and an often indifferent quality of the living environment. Former small towns and villages have mutated into dormitory centres of population without a minimum of social infrastructure or environmental quality, often due to the provision of good transport connections enabling to commute between work, leisure, education and home, hence "escaping" from the monotony and lifelessness of those living spaces. Traditionally many people understand the city as "culture" and the countryside as "nature". However, due to the fundamental change of settlement patterns in post-industrialised European countries in the last decades of the 20th Century this distinction has become blurred. The understanding that the two categories "city" and "countryside" is nowadays not sufficient any longer leads to the definition of the city-region. By adding value to those areas and building on inherent cultural and social qualities, further sprawl can be prevented and the environmental, ecological and social footprint of the whole urban system can be enhanced.

Key to delivering Government targets in a sustainable way is the partnership approach. Neither political configurations nor individual budgets are equipped to deal with regeneration of such large, strategic scale. The fact that the public sector input is achieved at all levels, from local authority to a specifically dedicated Government Department, ensures "linked up" policy changes and development implementation. Through this direct and co-ordinated public sector approach, the private sector is visibly encouraged to begin to invest considerable resources in an area which otherwise fails to attract private sector interests. In all undertakings in Thames Gateway, risks have to be taken and initial costs for remediation of previously used land are high. However, an extremely tight Green Belt policy and Government direction to re-use previously developed land before developing on greenfield sites, offers the private sector a real incentive to look at building on recycled land in Thames Gateway. A relaxation of that policy for the sake of achieving higher development profits would ultimately lead to the failure of the Urban Renaissance agenda.

Spaces, such as the former industrial site in Queenborough-Rushenden, are key locations to address and rebalance the spatial distribution of economic, social and environmental functions in city-regions. High quality, mixed-use places contribute to more attractive metropolitan areas in the global, European and regional context. Providing complementary nodes to existing centres of economic growth will lead to the delivery of well-balanced city-regions where people can enjoy living and doing business.

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