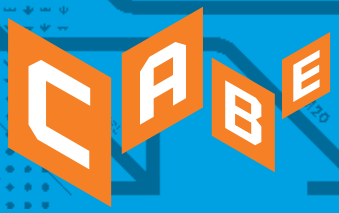
New things happen

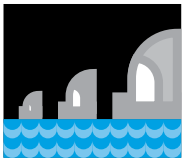
A guide to the future Thames Gateway



Contents

Love to Live – the CABE Thames Gateway identity map
The map, inside the pocket opposite, illustrates how the identity and character of the Thames Gateway is set to develop in the years to come. It is designed to show how this identity could develop, rather than project physical growth in strict geographical terms. The green shading locates the proposed Thames Gateway Parklands.

‘The Thames Gateway is a phenomenal place. It is where a global city meets a great estuary’



Throughout the 1980s, the Thames Barrier was closed no more than once a year. In 2003 the barrier was closed 19 times

Greenwich Park, early Saturday morning, overlooking Canary Wharf with the Gateway stretching east beyond

Foreword

JOHN SORRELL CBE
CHAIR, CABE

The Thames Gateway is a phenomenal place. It is where a global city meets a great estuary. A place of change: socially, culturally, economically and politically. This should be no surprise. An estuary landscape is dynamic, constantly changing with the rhythm of the sea.

How well you adapt to change is largely down to character. In this guide to the future of Thames Gateway, we show how very different places within a region can build a stronger relationship with each other and define a shared identity. Personally, I like the parallel it offers with the area around the San Francisco bay: lively, centred on water, post-industrial and looking good on it.

Right from the beginning, CABE has argued that the Gateway cannot be viewed in terms of the potential amount of new housing. It is just as important that we get serious about the benefits for existing communities. And we therefore have to recognise that innovation and enterprise matter just as much as physical development.

More important than what CABE thinks, though, is what people in the Gateway have told us. And, through a thorough and far-reaching research process over the last year, we have listened hard.

In one sense, this guide is a time capsule. It reflects the views of people connected with the Gateway on the future they hope for. They chose four themes, which set out what the Thames Gateway needs to be all about. They

start with redefining work, and reconnecting with nature.

The Gateway is defined by the river and its estuary. It provides the first opportunity to establish a regional environmental framework with a working landscape in the Thames Gateway Parklands. It provides unrivalled opportunities for environmental technology, low carbon communities, more localised food production, renewable energy creation, flood risk management and enhanced biodiversity. In the Thames Gateway, there could be a new type of environmental aesthetic in landscape design and architecture. In other words, a new kind of landscape to use, to visit, and to love living in and working in.

The future Gateway also needs to build on its distinctive culture: reasserting individualism is another core theme from our vision. Plotland developments in Canvey Island were the forerunners of self-build housing. People here have always sought influence over their surroundings, and the future Thames Gateway should find new ways to allow people to create the kind of communities that they actually want.

Finally, development in the Gateway will need to be about reinventing identity. With its strong trading tradition, new cultures have always joined the stream here. What has come through in this study is a pioneering culture. Perhaps this comes from living at the turning of the tide. It makes the Gateway feel less like a place and more like a journey.

‘The Gateway cannot be viewed simply in terms of the potential amount of new housing. To existing communities, innovation and enterprise matter just as much’

So just what are the benefits for the Gateway from setting down in one place its multiple identities? The truth is that identity defines us. It changes perceptions, markets and places. People invest in places for very different commercial and personal reasons: to make money, find decent employment, educate their children or improve their quality of life. But fundamentally, they are much more likely to choose to invest in places that have a clear and valuable identity.

Placemaking is the key economic driver for regeneration, as cities everywhere are finding. It is the key to creating value. So any project to shape the identity of the place needs to be built around an investment programme. Building coalitions matters more than a marketing message

Where it's at

ROBERT JONES, WOLFF OLINS

England made me. So did Gloucester, Cambridge, San Francisco, King's Cross, Norfolk, Europe. The places where I was born and educated, where I work and escape, shape my sense of who I am.

We've always known that places help make us who we are. But that power of place is under threat. Many of us live in, or travel daily through, non-places: ugly sprawls with no point and no spirit, the product often of industrialisation. And post-industrialism makes things worse. Anything can come from anywhere. Some things come from nowhere (my father's bank statement, for instance, comes from a call centre whose address isn't a town but a mere postcode). Young people form their friendships online, and some live their lives in online games or alternative realities, all of which take place out of their lives.

In reaction, people are once again championing the idea of place. For instance, most of the fresh produce in Marks & Spencer is now labelled with the farmer's name and county. People are rediscovering an interest in their local community: the only kind of newspaper in Britain whose circulation is rising is the local paper. Even online, place is reappearing in sites like plazes.com or village websites.

Politicians, planners, architects and property developers now talk constantly about 'placemaking' as the key to creating value. If you want people to come to your country, region, city, district or building, you'd better give it a strong sense of place. And because everyone's competing for investment, for businesses to relocate, for shoppers to shop, for tourists to visit, your sense of place in this region needs to be stronger than your neighbour's.

But what makes a place a place? A place is a location with a meaning. Take a raw location or map reference or postcode and add meaning – associations, ideas, history, a sense of identity – and

you have a place. London's Hoxton, at least until recently, was EC2 plus BritArt. Anyone who's interested in creating or magnifying – or changing – a sense of place should be searching for meaning, for idea, for identity.

That sense of identity varies hugely, of course. Sometimes there's a simple, positive idea shared by millions of people – Paris, for instance, as the city of romance. More often, the idea is complex (how could you sum up Los Angeles or Italy?) or negative (few feel drawn to Baltimore or Braunsweig).

Nevertheless, when it works, it works. A strong identity helps a place to flourish. When the people who live in a place share a sense of its identity, their collective energy makes it prosper: look, for example, at the success of Milton Keynes, whose residents are strong advocates, even if the rest of the world likes to scoff. When a city moves its identity on with the times, it attracts new employers: Seattle has shifted its meaning, with the help of Amazon, to a 21st century world city. Dubai and Cape Town have cleverly managed their identities to become fast-growing tourist destinations. Back in Britain, Newcastle, city of nightlife (and, more recently, art and music), finds it much easier to attract students than the more anonymous Norwich.

But finding or managing a sense of identity isn't easy. And the bigger and more complex and more interesting the place, the harder it becomes. The task is somehow to name and nurture the spirit of the place – that elusive thing that the Romans called the *genius loci*. And this is a very different task from the branding of a product.

First, the spirit of a place grows out of its reality. If you want to change the meaning of a place, you have to change its reality, not just its marketing message. Any project to shape the identity of a place must be built around an investment programme: any kind of communication programme comes second.

'Managing an identity is about seeding stories and thoughts and questions, not broadcasting a slogan'

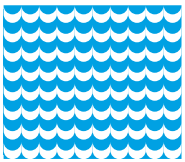
Second, places aren't corporations, with a CEO and a system of command and control. Managing the identity of a place is about building a coalition among its most influential people and organisations. When the city of Hull, for instance, developed a sense of identity around the idea of 'pioneering', the most valuable thing it did was to bring together the city council, its marketing department, the university, the big employers, led – interestingly – by the bishop. Shaping an identity means being open to many different views, not imposing a predetermined vision.

Third, a place identity can't be one-dimensional. Places are complex, changing things. A logo won't do the job: the

work that Manchester is doing around the idea of 'the original modern city' is designed to get lots of organisations and people to use that idea, and there's deliberately no logo. The vectors that create a place's identity are personal and elusive: word of mouth is much more powerful than an advertising campaign. Managing an identity is about seeding stories and thoughts and questions, not broadcasting a slogan.

But all of this depends on naming the spirit, on finding a core idea. The right idea can drive the investment programme and mobilise the coalition. And the right idea is usually about what people do in the place, under the influence of landscape and topography, rather than where it just happens to be. The right idea says something about how the place shapes its people: the strange way that location plus meaning changes lives.

'Anyone interested in creating a sense of place should search for meaning, for idea, for identity'



One of the largest wind farms in the UK is in the Thames estuary. It has 30 wind turbines and generates 82.4mW of electricity

A fisherman looks out to sea on the Isle of Sheppey – with the Gateway's wind farm on the horizon

So what is the identity of the Thames Gateway – and what are the elements that make it unique today and into the future?

New things happen

A VISION FOR THE FUTURE OF THE THAMES GATEWAY

The Thames Gateway is like nowhere else.

It's a cluster of cities, towns and villages around the Thames estuary. Each is different and individual, but they're networked together, and all share a belief that, however great their past was, the future will be better.

These are places where new things happen. Where journeys begin, inventions are made, and convention is challenged. Where London and mainland Europe meet – or even collide. Where London has grown, and will grow. Where, with new architecture, new infrastructure and a new confidence, Britain will welcome the world at the 2012 Olympics. New thinkers, new ideas, new industrial processes – all started here. But mostly, these new things aren't decreed from above – they happen organically, growing from the soil, the place and the people. It's wilful, unplanned innovation.

The Thames Gateway is like nowhere else, but if you want an analogy, think of the San Francisco bay area. It too is a set of places with their own strong identities, grouped around water – and it's also a place with a spirit of newness. Though it's no longer new, it still feels pioneering, still feels at the edge of the world.

At the Thames Gateway, new things happen in four particular ways.

First, **redefining work**. Modern factory production started here in the 16th-century dockyards. Now, people are pioneering new kinds of enterprise: they're starting new businesses as well as building conventional careers. Though close to London, it's not just commuter belt: thousands of people both live and work here. And education is raising people's skills, aspirations – and incomes. The world needs a way of working that's better than the drudgery of the factory and the tedium of the office: over the next 20 years, the Thames Gateway will invent it.

It's also about **reconnecting with nature**. The Thames estuary has a unique, often desolate, natural beauty. People here have always enjoyed the water – Southend, for example, has the world's longest pier. But they've also fought battles for centuries against its incursions into the land. Now, people have accepted that the climate is changing and they're choosing to work with rather than against nature. Letting the estuary take new shapes, adapting to the increased risk of flooding and making space for floodwaters. Because climate change is becoming visible here, this will be the place where Britain pioneers ways to save power and water. Expect amazing new ways to be green, making an eco-friendly life both natural and fun.

The Thames Gateway is about **reasserting individualism**. The area has a deep-rooted, rugged defiance – it's where people throughout the centuries have sought control over their own destiny. Now it's giving people more influence over their surroundings, to create the houses and communities they want: Thames Gateway is, after all, hundreds of individual localities, not one centralised monolith. This fierce sense of neighbourhood will grow stronger, with communities shaping their own development, personality and sense of self-sufficiency. There is the space and land here to grow food locally, generate electricity locally, and promote local enterprise.

And it's about **reinventing our identity**. Estuaries are where many things flow together: where conquerors arrive and depart, where new cultures join the stream. The Romans won Britannia here; the *HMS Victory* was built here; the *Windrush* touched land here. Through the centuries, the nation has been repeatedly reinvented here, and – in a world where nation states matter less and less – it's about to happen again. As a microcosm of Britain, the Thames Gateway will become a place that's classless, tolerant, outgoing and forward looking.

The Thames Gateway will attract people who want to make new things happen. And it won't put up with the same old stuff: its new houses, roads, railways, offices, factories and parks must all feel *now*, and help new things happen.

The Thames Gateway is more than a place, it's a journey: not creeping into the future, but creating it rapidly. A place where people now, and a hundred years from now, **love to live**.

'The Thames Gateway will attract people who want to make new things happen. And it won't put up with the same old stuff: its new houses, roads, railways, offices, factories and parks must all feel *now*, and help new things happen'

The vision *New things happen* is based on four themes that create a strong coherent image for the region. Over the following pages these are explored in more depth

Exploring the vision

From Joseph Conrad to Billy Bragg, the Thames estuary and the landscape around it has inspired countless poets, writers and artists. The historian Simon Schama has described how 'the low gull-swept estuary, the marriage bed of salt and water' of his childhood home of Leigh on Sea first fired his interest in the overlap of place, memory and identity.

No serious work on the identity of the Thames Gateway can ever be about creating a single identity for a place with multiple and distinctive identities. But it is driven by the need to create a clear and coherent vision for change in a place bound together by the river and its estuary.

Identity within the Gateway emerges from a distillation of memories and experience. It is not just about the past. It also twins an understanding of what has gone before with insight into the opportunities that change can bring. A strong identity drives investment and regeneration forward because of its powerful economic value added.

The proposed sustainable industrial park at Dagenham Dock is a significant project promoting the use of environmental technologies

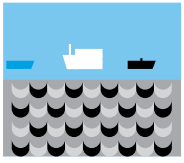
Vision is an overused word, but in this context it is the right one. Largely because of its industrial heritage, this area has long suffered from negative perceptions. For most of the 20th century, it was seen as the storehouse for gasworks, power stations and factories. Few people know that, during the 19th century, towns like Gravesend were popular tourist destinations, bringing Londoners downriver on paddle steamers from Westminster Pier.

Brownfield land covers 3,800 hectares in the Gateway. There are nearly 700 brownfield sites

Now the area has the potential for another great transformation, akin to the regeneration that has been so successful in the San Francisco bay area and old industrialised regions like the Emscher park in the Ruhr Valley.

This process of combining the old and the new to inspire regeneration is already under way. Historic places are transforming into university towns in Medway, while environmentally friendly industries are galvanising new ways of working.

The vision, *New things happen* (pages 12-13), has not been imposed from above. It is based on time spent in the area, talking to the people who live there, uncovering hidden and sometimes forgotten strengths, and crystallising hopes for the future. It draws on detailed research of existing places within the Gateway, including comprehensive mapping of landscape and urban character. This will ensure that future change is underpinned by a landscape framework that respects the distinctive estuary environment.

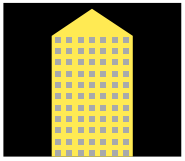


181 commercial fishing boats operate within the estuary, fishing for species such as sole, cod, bass, ray, sprats, plaice, herring and eels

‘This process of combining the old and the new to inspire regeneration is already under way. Historic places are transforming into university towns in Medway, while environmentally friendly industries are galvanising new ways of working’

‘The truth is that identity defines us. It changes perceptions, markets, places. People are much more likely to choose to invest in places that have a clear and valuable identity’

Commuters at Leigh on Sea head for the early morning train to London



In 20 years' time with the delivery of Crossrail, employment in Canary Wharf could more than double to 190,000

If growth in the Gateway is to benefit existing communities, then innovation and enterprise are essential. There is an opportunity to develop new sectors, and build on the expansion of universities in the area

Redefining work

The area around the Thames estuary has always been at the forefront of social and economic change. It has provided an entry and exit point for trade routes, new influences and ideas – not to mention invaders.

While the early English church may not normally be associated with employment, as a key administrative base and centre of learning it clearly was the main employer. The Thames estuary is where the church first established a foothold, with a dense network of religious houses and parishes. Rochester, with its magnificent cathedral dating back to 604, is the second oldest Bishopric in Britain.

Later the dockyards ensured that the region was at the forefront of Britain's naval prowess, with the building of *HMS Victory*. During the 20th century, what is often described as the 'Fordist' period of industrial production is epitomised by Dagenham, where the Ford car plant once employed more than 40,000 people.

Now the completion of the Channel Tunnel rail link – which first provided the impetus for planners and politicians to look at developing the area in the late 1980s – will provide a high-speed connection to central London, Paris and Brussels. It is creating new international centres at Stratford, where London 2012 is spearheading the regeneration of the Lower Lea Valley and beyond, and planned to go to Ebbsfleet, set to be an increasingly popular place to live and work with economic development there focused on financial and business services.

For growth centres to become sustainable, though, they will need local workers with the right skills, and vibrant local economies. Enterprise needs to be encouraged in new commercial sectors, such as those focusing on environmental themes.

Climate change has led to a growing recognition of the environmental impact from transporting goods, including food. This means that fulfilling local and London needs is now as important as trading with the rest of the world. Market gardening and a burgeoning self-build culture are already flourishing and there is demand for well-designed products using local skills and local materials.

Ford has located its European design and research centre in Basildon. Fiat, Case New Holland and Selex Systems are also based there

Every industrialised centre in Britain is undergoing this process of reinvention, with creative, knowledge-based industries and environmental technologies taking over. Ford is investing in a diesel research centre and a sustainable industrial park is proposed at Dagenham Dock. Broadband enables home working, and office environments are as likely to be in converted dockyards as city centre blocks.

What will mark the Thames Gateway out as a pioneer of world-class standing is if it can maximise the opportunities offered by the distinctive estuary and post-industrial landscapes. This can help shape what has been described as a new 'environmental aesthetic' for architecture, landscape design, engineering, construction, housebuilding and the management of the environment.

There are already indications that this is happening. The RSPB visitor centre at Rainham Marshes by architect van Heyningen and Haward blazes a trail for this type of aesthetic, where daylighting and natural ventilation cones on the roof add to the form of the building.

At the same time, rediscovering the waterfront, for so long occupied by industry, can mean creating the type of great public spaces enjoyed on Newcastle's quayside, London's South Bank, Portland's river walk or Charlestown's waterfront park. Locations within the floodplain bring the design challenge of incorporating new uses, including sustainable energy creation such as tidal regulatory exchange.

Stratford will become a major mixed-use location in the Lower Lea Valley. Up to 5,000 new homes will be delivered by 2012

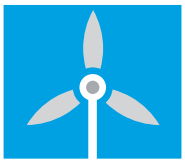
Roger Zogolovitch, developer and architect, points out that in every generation social and economic need drives fashion and desirability, from the Georgian square to today's experimentation with solar panels and grass roofs. 'We need to ask what's going to make housing fashionable in the Thames Gateway,' he says. He believes that the answer lies in low carbon living.

The area should be an arena for environmental ambition.

The development of an 'environmental aesthetic' will be linked to the Gateway's three growing universities: the University of East London, the University of Southend and the Universities at Medway, which have opened a new Urban Renaissance Institute in Medway. Alongside this, a re-awakening of the tradition of apprenticeship in construction and environmental management could appeal to school leavers who choose not to opt for university.

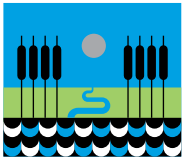
The estuary landscape is the defining characteristic of the Thames Gateway. It offers an incredible potential for research, innovation and employment. It could define a new paradigm for development, centred on sustainability and our collective ambition to restrain global warming.

'A new environmental aesthetic will be capable of inspiring innovation in architecture and landscape design'



Ford's Dagenham site has been turned into the Centre for Engineering and Manufacturing Excellence

Birdwatchers end a tour of Rainham Marshes at the new van Heyningen and Haward-designed RSPB visitor centre



The North Kent Marshes is one of 22 environmentally sensitive areas in the UK. Marsh harriers, nightingales and turtle doves are found here

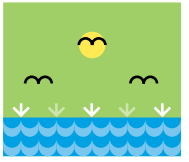
The energy of the Gateway comes from its unique setting. Here, the UK could seize its first opportunity to work at a regional scale to help restrain climate change

Reconnecting with nature

Although the river and the estuary do not impose a single identity on the Gateway, they do define the region as a network of places whose character is linked by being at the boundary between land and water, or adjacent to open marshlands and wetlands.

The eastern Thames is a tidal river that creates a landscape of wide shores and vast skies. These are in sharp contrast to the brooks, streams and rivers of the Thames to the west. You have only to think about the difference between the canvases of Turner and Constable to feel how much on the edge this landscape is, changing every time the tide turns. The result is a much more elemental, wild setting.

The writer Ken Worpole describes the effect of the tides on the psychology of local communities. 'Tidal communities have to adjust to two different worlds, operating to two different timetables and ground levels, thus retaining elements of a much older kind of human geography: time and tide.'



Ebbsfleet, with its easy access to unique landscapes, should from 2009 be just two hours from Paris and 17 minutes from St Pancras

Take the estuary at Leigh on Sea at low tide, with mud flats stretching out almost to the horizon, littered with shells and shrimps, nets and boats and every variety of gull and wader. At Shoeburyness, to the east of Southend, low tide allows you to walk into what feels like the centre of the Thames on what singer Billy Bragg calls 'the best beach in Essex'.

Of course, most of the estuary is on the flood plain. This is one of the most challenging aspects of development here, not only because of the very real threat of flooding but also because of the harsh impact of flood defences. High concrete walls sever connections with the landscape in some places.

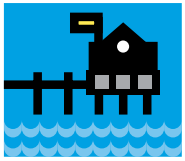
But recent developments such as Ingress Park, an award-winning housing scheme overlooking the Thames at Greenhithe, show how flood defence can be designed to retain a relationship with the river. New approaches to managing flood risk are also being pioneered through the breaching or realigning of sea walls. At Wallasea Island, the flood defence has been dismantled to create the largest man-made tidal wetland in Europe.

It still seems remarkable that the potential for actively enjoying the river itself has been largely overlooked. The river once represented a mix of the romance of the trade routes and the pleasure-seeking of Londoners escaping the city.

Today, there is no regular pleasure boat or commuter service running downriver from London. Lynne Jones, manager of Southend Pier, believes it's an opportunity waiting to be seized. 'The pier is the icon of Southend. It was built to serve a purpose – linking sea and shore for the pleasure boats. We get asked all the time about trips,' she says. Rejuvenating an iconic landmark like the pier could spearhead the town's renaissance.

For architect Sir Terry Farrell, transforming the way people use and enjoy the river is central. 'My vision is that people will be able to get on a boat at Westminster Pier and stop at quaysides eastwards down the river,' he says. 'The idea is to be able to travel down the Thames with the kids and mountain bikes and be out in the countryside in no time.'

How the river is used has an impact on the nature of entire settlements. In Barking, for example, a century of heavy industry has cut the river off from the town. By contrast, Rochester and even Gravesend, which are both centred on the water, benefit from the natural excitement generated by vessel movement.



Southend Pier, built in 1830, is the world's longest, at 1.33 miles. During the 20th century, visits to the pier peaked at seven million people

Now there is another chance for the river to take centre stage. The proposed Thames Path City to Sea project would create a continuous riverside path from the Thames Barrier to the outer reaches of both sides of the estuary.

But other aspects of the local environment, including the geology, topography and the prevailing marsh and wetland landscape systems, contribute to the characteristics of the region. These in turn support rich ecological systems of European importance, including the wildlife reserves at Rainham Marshes in Essex,

the wetlands of Cliffe and on the Hoo peninsula in Medway. In contrast, the dramatic chalk escarpments of Eastern Quarry and the Swanscombe peninsula provide a focus for development around Ebbsfleet.

This unique natural environment demands that a landscape framework drives development, to protect it. A new 'Thames Gateway Parklands' concept is set to underpin the spatial planning of the region: a working landscape that has many functions including renewable energy production, local food enterprises and water management systems.

And the Parklands will offer fantastic recreation minutes from everyone's front door.

Such an environmental framework will encourage a new model for living, with opportunities for partial self-sufficiency. In the Thames Gateway, we can go beyond carbon neutrality and could in time become a net energy producer.

'The unique natural environment demands that a landscape framework drives development, to protect it'

A bird watcher carries on as construction continues at the RSPB visitor centre

Joseph Conrad pointed out that the estuaries of rivers appeal strongly to an adventurous imagination. This reflects the character and identity of communities in the Thames estuary throughout the centuries

Reasserting individualism

The ever-changing tidal landscape of the estuary will always appeal more to a pioneering, adventurous spirit than the comparatively controlled, tamer countryside of the Home Counties. The tension is that, while new institutions and ways of working, from the church to seafaring, were pioneered here, so too was dissent.

The area was the cradle of the Peasants' Revolt in the 14th century, following the introduction of a poll tax.

It has also always been an area of immigration, with strong Jewish communities in Southend and Westcliff-on-Sea and Irish workers attracted by jobs in the newly industrialised plants and factories of south Essex. Later waves of migration brought entire communities from the slums of London downriver in search of a better life.

Billy Bragg describes how his mother left her Cable Street home in the East End of London in the 1930s for Barking's Becontree Heath Estate – then the largest new development in western Europe. 'In Barking the heritage of new build and new beginnings can refer back to a time our parents and grandparents remember, and remember benefiting from. If it's done right it can work.' Today, the area is once again attracting migrants, a process which, he believes, can be of enormous benefit if it is handled well.

The Watt Tyler Country Park is located in Pitsea, near Basildon. Watt Tyler led the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 from here

Often, these new communities developed in particularly individualistic

ways. Look at the plotland developments of the Canvey Islanders, the forerunners of self-build housing. This tradition of pioneering ideas and new influences stems directly from the connecting routes that characterise the Gateway. From the Imperial trade routes of Conrad's Thames to the trunk road of Billy Bragg's A13 in Essex, mirrored by the A2 in Kent. For the writer Iain Sinclair, the A13 is a secondary river and the A2 mirrors the river.

Rochester, with its cathedral dating back to 604, has the second-oldest bishopric in England after Canterbury

While waves of migration and travel have long characterised the area, today it is also becoming the focus for a new migration of young people, as parts of the Gateway acquire the characteristics of university towns. Greenwich University is relocating 6,000 students to Medway, finding new uses for the old naval buildings at the Chatham Royal Naval Dockyard and converting a drill hall into a learning and resource centre.

The first paper mill in England was set up in Dartford in the 18th century. The first iron splitting mill was also located there on the Darent

Rochester, with a cathedral and castle at its heart, already has the feel of a slightly quirky, relaxed university town, with its largely chain-free high street of second-hand bookshops interspersed with specialist retailers. Charles Dickens is very much in evidence, with the imposing Tudor building of Eastgate House featured in *The Pickwick Papers*. Further down Rochester High Street, a synagogue dating from 1869 signals another long-standing Jewish community.

'Look at the plotland developments of the Canvey Islanders, the forerunners of self-build housing. This tradition of pioneering ideas and new influences stems directly from the connecting routes that characterise the Gateway'

‘What has come through in this study is a pioneering culture. It makes the Gateway feel less like a place and more like a journey’

A former farm colony at Laindon has reinvented its early idealism by becoming an organic farm staffed by people with learning difficulties

Children play after school on the sand at Leigh on Sea

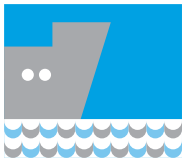
The Thames estuary, the first port of call for every new influence, distils much that is common to a more general national identity

Reinventing our identity

From the Roman invasion to the church, the military and naval traditions and later the might of industry, the Thames Gateway reflects every stage of the country's collective history, with its minsters and pillboxes, Roman forts and disused power stations.

In his 2006 book, *The Progressive Patriot*, Billy Bragg meshes his perception of English identity with the identity of his home town of Barking and his personal identity and family background. He emphasises just how much sense of place is a mix of collective and personal memories, blending traditions and oral histories.

Speculating that Barking was the site of 'Apollo's Camp', the first major settlement in the Thames Valley, he builds a sense of place for the town based on its pre-Roman history. He describes how, during the 19th century, the town quay was home to the country's largest commercial fishing fleet, and how the inspiration for the Simon and Garfunkel hit *The Boxer* is reputed to have come from local boxing legend Billy Walker.



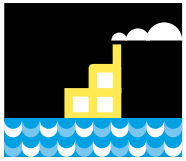
More than 80 port terminals are situated along the Thames, handling 18.3 per cent of England's total tonnage at all ports

The point of these stories is that they build a sense of identity and continuity which provide a basis for change. It places local people and their histories centre stage. As Bragg says: 'People do want change – they want the river bank back in Barking,

which was lost when it was industrialised. They're not trying to hold back development but they want to ensure that their presence is recognised by continuity.' This can come down to very simple things, such as naming streets, pubs, parks and buildings after local characters or to recall local events.

This mix of local identities with a continuous influx of new ideas and populations, is central to the Thames Gateway. It has the potential for enormous benefit if the expansion of existing communities carries the local population with it. These are tight-knit places with pride in their traditions which not only deserve to, but must be, part of the future of the area.

For this reason, a growing consensus of regeneration professionals are advocating that development be concentrated in and around existing settlements, to enhance the sense of attachment to place, rather than on sites which are not plugged into a local community.



Thurrock, with its riverside backdrop, has been the location for many major films, including *Four Weddings and a Funeral*

'Existing settlements have an ethos, and building close to them creates a debate about the economy, lifestyles, and viability of that settlement and what its sense of place and destiny is. Values and belief systems are ultimately strengthened by being challenged,' explains Ken Worpole.

This is crucial, because working with the grain of existing communities creates places with strong identities, rather than the soulless nature of suburban sprawl that characterises so much new development today.

It also means creating places attractive enough for people to choose to bring up their children there: neighbourhoods which support social connections, and decent local facilities, and good public transport, and which will in turn mean strong local economies.

And it is especially important in this region, because despite the existence of so many places that boast a rich and varied local culture, the huge expansion that came with industrialisation did little to nurture it. Now there is an opportunity to rediscover the particular type of spirited, pioneering identity which has always characterised the area around the estuary.

'The mix of local identities with a continuous influx of new ideas and populations is central to the Thames Gateway. It has the potential for enormous benefit if the expansion of existing communities carries the local population with it'

‘Local people want to ensure their presence is recognised by continuity. This can come down to very simple things such as naming streets after local characters’

Lollipop lady Mrs Sutton watches over the morning school run at Southend-on-Sea


STOP

About the Thames Gateway identity project

CABE studied the character and identity of the Thames Gateway for much of 2006, and our findings are summarised in this publication. We have listened to the people who live and work in the Gateway, to capture the character of the place, and see how the unique qualities of the landscape and existing places can be used to ensure new development there is of a high quality. The purpose of developing the identity is to create value, and drive investment.

We were asked to lead on the project by Yvette Cooper, the communities minister responsible for the Gateway, to inform the over-arching strategic framework for the Gateway. Our client was the Thames Gateway Strategic Partnership.

Our research was wide-ranging. In partnership with Natural England, we commissioned LDA Design and Alan Baxter and Associates to map the landscape and urban character. We consulted professionals engaged in change in the area. We held workshops in Kent, Essex and London, in partnership with Kent Architecture Centre, Essex Design Initiative and the Architecture and Urbanism Unit at the Greater London Authority. The workshops were facilitated by Henley Centre Headlight Vision. An advisory panel offered expert input.

CABE and others were helped in articulating the vision *New things happen*, (page 12), by Wolff Olins, whose head of consulting, Robert Jones, describes the value of identity for places on page 8. Thanks to Robert for working on a *pro bono* basis.

Journalist Anna Minton attended the workshops and interviewed people with a strong interest in the area, including Billy Bragg, Sir Peter Hall, Sir Terry Farrell and Professor Anne Power. Anna explores the four themes in the vision (starting on page 14) and her features based on the interviews are on our website, www.cabe.org.uk/gateway. (You can also read more about CABE's work here). Photographer Polly Braden, who had previously documented the nearby River Lea, toured the area.

Information graphics company Grundy Northedge produced our map setting out the identity and character of the different places in the Gateway. The identity pictograms included in the map feature throughout this publication and are linked to facts drawn from our research.

CABE was supported in this project by the Department for Communities and Local Government.

Publications

Billy Bragg: *The Progressive Patriot* (Bantam Press, 2006)

Simon Schama: *Landscape and Memory* (Fontana Press, 1996)

Iain Sinclair: *London Orbital* (Penguin, 2003)

Ken Worpole: *350 miles: An Essex Journey* (Essex Development & Regeneration Agency, 2005)

Patrick Wright: *The River: The Thames in Our Time* (BBC Books, 1999)

CABE publications

Creating Excellent Buildings (2003)
Creating Successful Masterplans (2004)
Start With The Park (2005)

All available from www.cabe.org.uk

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CABE is the government's advisor on architecture, urban design and public space. As a public body, we encourage policymakers to create places that work for people. We help local planners apply national design policy and advise developers and architects, persuading them to put people's needs first. We show public sector clients how to commission buildings that meet the needs of their users. And we seek to inspire the public to demand more from their buildings and spaces. Advising, influencing and inspiring, we work to create well-designed, welcoming places.

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New things happen describes the identity and character of the Thames Gateway. It defines the key ideas which should be at the heart of planning policies, investment strategies, design decisions and environmental projects for individual places across the region. *New things happen* sets out a vision for the future of the Thames Gateway and four themes which could help create a strong, coherent image for the region. An accompanying map illustrates how the different character of places, parklands and connections in the Gateway is set to develop, now and in the future. It is essential reading for clients and investors in both public and private sectors who have a role in shaping future development.

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