

Wednesday August 9th.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS KEY CHALLENGES IN THE THAMES GATEWAY

The Government's ambitious plans for one of the world's biggest urban regeneration projects – Thames Gateway, in and around East London – are in danger of being blown of course.

The warning comes with CPRE's publication today of a report highlighting 10 key environmental, social and economic indicators for the Thames Gateway Growth Area. The indicators give a snapshot of current conditions affecting quality of life. They suggest that Government aspirations for the Gateway's transformation will not be met without more focused intervention and leadership on the economy, planning and building and protecting the environment.

The data - which is collected from official sources - is presented in *Focus on the Thames Gateway*. This is the first in a series of reports which CPRE will publish to illustrate progress towards the Government's aspirations under its 2003 Sustainable Communities Plan[ref1]

A copy of <i>Focus on the Thames Gateway</i> is attached

Key conclusions

The data suggests that:

- Investment in new jobs is most urgently required in the more urbanised areas within and close to East London.
- Tertiary educational attainment (from universities and colleges) is generally well below the national and county averages.
- Several local councils within the Gateway but outside London are failing to support the Government's target[ref2] that 80% of new housing should be built on previously developed 'brownfield' sites.
- The average density of new housing in several boroughs is falling well below acceptable urban densities that make efficient use of land. If this trend continues, the Thames Gateway will not achieve its full growth potential, greenfield land will unnecessarily threatened throughout south-eastern England and local authority revenue streams risk falling below levels which can adequately support community infrastructure and public services.
- Almost universally, very little regard is being had to the management of parks and green spaces to the national Green Flag Award standard. **[REF 3]**
- Much of the data required by the Government's new system for monitoring local authority performance is not being collected. This is particularly so for data

concerning the accessibility of new housing to shops, services and amenities; and the proportion of new retail facilities built in town centres.

Nigel Kersey, CPRE's Thames Gateway project leader said:

“There is a great deal of rhetoric from the Government and local authorities about how the Thames Gateway will become an exemplar of regeneration and planning practice. It is now time to start looking closely at how well the rhetoric is being matched by the reality. Our future progress reports will highlight key social, economic and environmental trends, illustrating how effective the investment by councils and the Government is in making a positive impact on the quality of people's lives.”

Focus on the Thames Gateway is published shortly after the Government announced an apparent intention to scale back on the reporting requirements that it places on local authorities[Ref 4]. CPRE is concerned that this could seriously undermine the accountability of local government and undermine the likelihood of improvements in performance.’

Nigel Kersey continued:

‘Even within the official monitoring regime, there are serious gaps in the available information about changes that are taking place on the ground. These gaps undermine the accountability of local authorities and need to be filled.

‘We're therefore concerned about recent Government statements that suggest a major retreat from effective monitoring and we fear that this may usher in a new era of declining standards, declining transparency and declining accountability at all levels of Government.’

[ENDS]

- [1] *Creating Sustainable Communities: Making it Happen*. ODPM, July 2003
- [2] Target published in *Sustainable Communities: Delivering the Thames Gateway* (March 2005)
- [3] The Green Flag Award is the national standard for parks and green spaces in England and Wales. It is managed by the Civic Trust and supported by the Government. As long as a site is managed to the required standard, it does not actually have to have received the award to be identified within the data below.
- [4] For example, DCLG News Release 2006/0048 (5 July 2006) ‘*Kelly ushers in an era of trust between central and local government*’ states that ‘80% of the performance reporting produced by councils is information required by Whitehall and only 20% is for direct local benefit. This has got to change.’