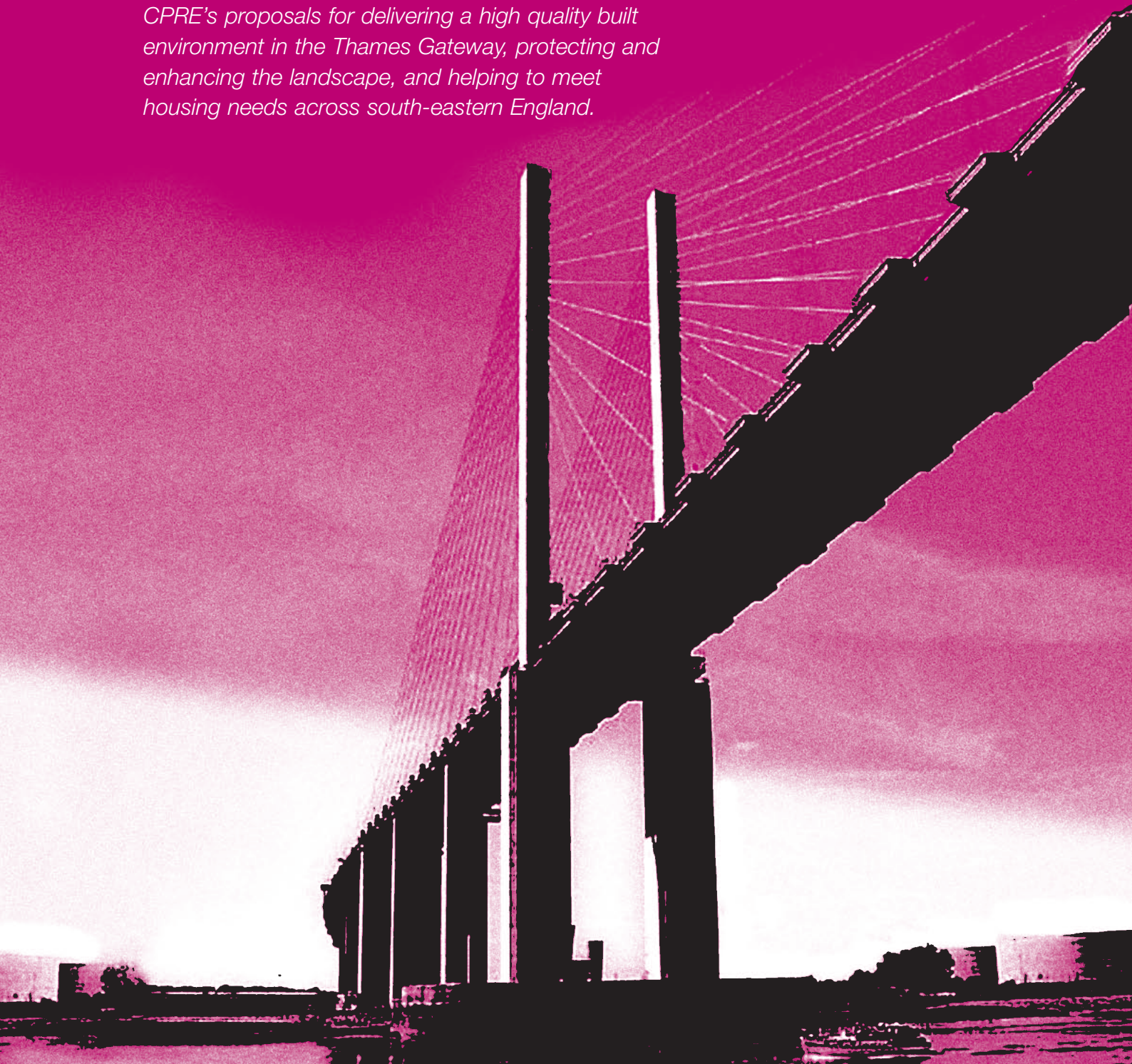




Campaign to Protect
Rural England

Thames Gateway: From Rhetoric to Reality Summary

CPRE's proposals for delivering a high quality built environment in the Thames Gateway, protecting and enhancing the landscape, and helping to meet housing needs across south-eastern England.



CPRE's *Thames Gateway: From Rhetoric to Reality* addresses significant concerns across a wide range of issues, including urban centre management, landscape protection, natural resources management and the quality of the built environment. It presents a detailed analysis of the current policy position with regard to those issues and the risks associated with them not being adequately addressed. This leaflet presents a summary of CPRE's key concerns.

Housing numbers

CPRE wants a high proportion of new housing developed in south-eastern England in the coming decades to be built on urban brownfield land available in the Thames Gateway, improving the urban environment and reducing urban sprawl and traffic growth. We recommend much more effective use of urban capacity studies in determining housing numbers, and, on the basis of identified urban capacity – especially within East London – we call for an immediate moratorium on greenfield development in the Thames Gateway.

Residential density

Increasing the average density of residential developments is now accepted in Government policy as being crucial to promoting urban vitality, sustaining local retail facilities and public services, minimising the need for public investment in infrastructure and making efficient use of land. If density requirements are not raised in the Thames Gateway, land will be squandered. It recommends an average density of 90 dwellings per hectare (net) for new housing in urban areas throughout the Thames Gateway.

The economy

We recognise that economic growth and housing needs are closely linked. Our report recommends an employment creation strategy for the Thames Gateway that addresses the need for:

- sufficient new housing that will be attractive to higher income earners;
- a pro-active approach to providing high quality new business accommodation;
- action to improve educational attainment and skills among the local population.

Mixed communities, key workers and affordable housing

While avoiding creating areas of predominantly low-income households, we acknowledge the need for sufficient affordable key worker housing to be made available to meet the staffing needs of frontline public services. It recommends:

- targets for the number of dwellings that are to be provided for key workers in the Thames Gateway.
- that sufficient market and affordable housing is provided to meet the needs of families with children.

Community infrastructure

In order to promote the long-term attractiveness of the Thames Gateway, and to avoid car-dependency, the challenge is to create places where people want to live. New development should avoid the creation of large, monolithic housing estates that engender no sense of community, have no amenities and facilities, and no sense of place. We recommend adopting standards for the proximity of all major housing developments to local services and amenities.

Transport

A key issue for the Thames Gateway is for transport infrastructure to cease to be a limiting factor to the area's redevelopment potential. Current major infrastructure proposals need to be carefully assessed against environmental considerations and the need to avoid car-dependency. We recommend a strategic, Thames Gateway-wide study with the objective of identifying the area's additional transport infrastructure requirements.

Urban design quality

Creating market demand for housing will be an essential part of ensuring the Thames Gateway fulfils its potential in accommodating new homes. This will require turning around the poor reputation of much of the area's urban environment. Despite encouraging recent developments in Government policy, there remains a skills deficit among planners which is a critical factor in preventing good design from becoming the norm. We recommend a design 'quality threshold' for the Thames Gateway and a strengthening of local authority policies and initiatives that promote better design.

Construction

The shortage of construction skills and the promotion of some unproven modern methods of construction carry with them significant risks. It is crucial that the mistakes made during the 'rush to build' in the 1960s and 1970s are not repeated and that residential areas and renewed town centres remain attractive and prestigious in the long term. We recommend that the Government addresses the ways in which building insurance practices and warranties may be preventing a more imaginative approach towards the use of new materials, techniques and designs.

We want the Thames Gateway to be an exemplar of the use of sustainable construction techniques, thereby reducing demand for landfill capacity and natural resources. The Code for Sustainable Buildings should be enhanced to promote the recycling of land and materials and made mandatory through Building Regulations.

Urban centre management

Lack of 'liveability' and the poor image of many of the urban centres is a significant impediment to the attractiveness of the Thames Gateway and therefore to the potential for the market to deliver regeneration. A range of initiatives for local authorities are needed to improve the condition and management of town centres, including making use of statutory powers to require owners to tidy up a property and sustaining an appropriate mix of land use in urban centres.

The historic environment

An area's strength of character can promote social and economic benefits by helping to create civic pride, a sense of place and belonging, and by attracting people and businesses. Culture can be a key driver in sustainable regeneration of communities. Research by English Heritage has challenged the presumption that the Thames Gateway is devoid of local historical character. We recommend the appointment of local authority champions for the historic environment, training for elected members and effective public participation in setting policy.

Landscape

Low expectations have in the past allowed a lack of good landscape management policy to harm the environmental quality of the Thames Gateway, for example caused the proliferation of overhead power lines, landfill sites and power generation industry. A degraded landscape may, in turn, seriously harm the ability of the area to attract inward investment. CPRE recommends the use of Landscape Character Assessment as a basis for landscape action plans designed to tackle eyesores, and active pursuit of opportunities to promote biodiversity.

Green Belt and the urban fringe

The perceived 'poor quality' of some Green Belt and other undeveloped urban fringe land is sometimes offered by prospective developers and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) as a reason to develop it. This ignores the purpose of the Green Belt, which is to promote urban regeneration and avoid sprawl and coalescence of urban areas by shutting off the easy option of greenfield development. Planning authorities should be required to adopt a target to increase the coverage of environmentally beneficial land management schemes in urban fringe areas so as to increase biodiversity and agricultural and social amenity value.

The River Thames and its tributaries

The river is the Thames Gateway's greatest asset, defining the landscape and historical and industrial character of much of the area, providing an important recreational resource and contributing to a sense of place. These functions are under threat from inappropriate development that is too close to the water's edge or unnecessarily restricts public access. CPRE is calling for policies that strongly discourage any development close to the waterside and better information about where public access to the waterside may be improved.

Flood risk

Flood risks should be managed responsibly to enable development to take place in existing urban areas – which already benefit from flood protection and will need to continue to do so as sea levels rise – while avoiding development outside urban areas. Some flood defences are in poor condition and there is serious public doubt that the Government's housebuilding programme in the Thames Gateway is deliverable while securing responsible flood risk management. The priority is to avoid the potential conflict between avoiding flood risk and prioritising urban brownfield land for redevelopment.

Water resources

There appears to be no clear plan in place setting out an investment programme and the necessary regulatory initiatives to meet increasing needs for fresh water arising from the anticipated scale of growth in the Thames Gateway. Without sufficient water, urban regeneration and the potential scale of housing provision in the Thames Gateway may be undermined. Lack of proper strategic planning is also likely to result in excessive abstraction, compromising the ecological or landscape value of surface water courses including internationally significant wetlands. There needs to be greater clarity in the new infrastructure and efficiency improvements that are required for the Thames Gateway.

Governance and delivery

CPRE makes the following recommendations for improving the way in which the Government's Thames Gateway project is developed and implemented, including:

- using Local Strategic Partnerships to help facilitate better public participation;
- a new 'regional park authority' with responsibility for developing and overseeing the delivery of a strategy for managing the area's cultural, historic and natural heritage; and
- a 'regional observatory' for the Thames Gateway to collect key data to monitor the extent to which social, environmental and economic policy objectives are being achieved.

Investment

There is widespread doubt that funding for community infrastructure and investment for regeneration in the Thames Gateway will come forward in good time. We call for:

- an assessment of the likely costs of the anticipated population growth to be taken into account in the determination of local authority budgets;
- a new tax to capture the uplift in value created by the granting of planning permission and investment in infrastructure along the lines recommended in the Barker Review,¹ and for that revenue to be re-invested in regeneration; and
- a brownfield land reclamation strategy for the Thames Gateway, addressing the obstacles and costs associated with reclaiming sufficient land to deliver Government targets.

1 *Review of Housing Supply, Final Report – Recommendations*, Kate Barker/HM Treasury/ODPM, 2004



Campaign to Protect
Rural England

Campaign to Protect Rural England

The Campaign to Protect Rural England exists to promote the beauty, tranquillity and diversity of rural England by encouraging the sustainable use of land and other natural resources in town and country.

We urgently need your help to protect the English countryside now...

There is really no time to lose. CPRE is a charity that relies on the general public for much of its funding. While we have many victories under our belt, there are many other battles we could fight and win, if only we had the resources.

Please help us by giving £3 a month – or more – to help us save our precious countryside from the diggers waiting to tear it up.

To find out how to support or become a full member of CPRE please ring 020 7981 2870 or go online at our website: www.cpre.org.uk/support-us

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The main report, *Thames Gateway: From Rhetoric to Reality*, is available free on request from: CPRE Publications, 128 Southwark Street, London SE1 0SW, email publications@cpre.org.uk, tel 020 7981 2856.

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