Executive Summary

The Green Cluster studies set out an ambitious vision for the Green Grid public realm and provide an Action Plan to support its delivery across north Kent. Seven Green Cluster Studies have been undertaken to date, and a further Cluster Study is planned for the Isle of Sheppey. Each one focuses on areas of intensive regeneration and change where there are superb opportunities to create strategically sited new greenspaces which will raise expectations, add value to existing investment and create high quality green infrastructure for future development. The Cluster Studies have adopted a partnership approach to co-ordinate discussions amongst key stakeholders in each cluster. Many are engaged in developing ideas and drawing up plans for individual sites and the Cluster Studies' workshops have provided a valuable opportunity to focus attention on the relationships between projects and the wider landscape setting.

Sliced by roads and railways, the Ebbsfleet Valley is easily missed by rail travellers sweeping past on the new Channel Tunnel Rail Link (CTRL). Yet the area has an exceptional archaeological resource and a rich industrial heritage. The pristine 'international landscape' of new roads, railways, car parks and security is in sharp contrast to the natural meandering stream and sequence of wetlands along the Ebbsfleet River. The whole area is in a state of transition and the new emerging landscape will look very different in 20 years time, when new communities in Ebbsfleet, on the Swanscombe Peninsula and at Northfleet Embankment will include approximately 22,000 new homes, as well as extensive office, retail, community, education and leisure development. The existing communities of Northfleet and Swanscombe are surrounded by construction activity as the large scale re-development projects get underway. The landfill sites will be transformed into public parks, Blue Lake will become a centre for recreation and the Ebbsfleet River will be the focus for a network of informal paths and cycleways. To the south, part of the A2 is being widened and relocated to run immediately alongside the CTRL. There are proposals to turn the old carriageway and some of the open space sandwiched between the new A2 and the urban edge into a recreational linear park which will be a regional centre for cycling.

The Green Cluster Studies' vision for Ebbsfleet Valley and the A2 Corridor draws together and expresses a common vision for the Cluster as a whole. The area is a centre for regeneration, with urban development projects in Ebbsfleet Valley, Swanscombe Peninsula and the Northfleet Embankment. The Green Cluster's vision will forge strong, long lasting connections between existing and new communities in Ebbsfleet Valley, Northfleet, Greenhithe and Swanscombe through programmes of proactive community participation and awareness, new and enhanced greenspace links and an innovative land art and design theme that reveals local character and re-connects communities and places. Key stakeholders responsible for leading and influencing the ongoing projects in the Ebbsfleet Valley & A2 Corridor Cluster include Gravesham Borough Council, Dartford Borough Council, Kent County Council, Kent Thameside Delivery Board, SEEDA, the Environment Agency, Natural England, Sustrans, Groundwork Kent & Medway and the major private sector developers, including Land Securities and LaFarge.

The Ebbsfleet Valley & A2 Corridor Green Cluster Study makes the case for strategic, targeted investment in the links between the Ebbsfleet Valley & A2 Corridor and the existing communities of Northfleet, Swanscombe, Greenhithe and Gravesend. Key actions are: co-ordinating feedback from programmes of community engagement; applying for funding; delivering key greenspace links and art and heritage projects; and establishing a programme of long term landscape maintenance across the whole cluster. The aim is to build long term confidence and ensure a sustainable high quality public landscapes as befits this international gateway landscape.

The Green Cluster Vision for the Ebbsfleet Valley & A2 Corridor Cluster is accompanied by a separate Action Plan for its delivery. The Action Plan demonstrates how the delivery of various components of the vision can be facilitated - by Greening the Gateway Kent & Medway and by a range of other partners. It also sets out broad capital costs for the investment required to achieve the vision and an overall timetable for its implementation which demonstrates the inter-relationships between proposed and ongoing projects throughout the cluster.
1 What are the Green Cluster Studies?

The Green Cluster studies set out an ambitious vision for the Green Grid public realm and provide an Action Plan to support its delivery across north Kent. Seven Green Cluster Studies have been undertaken to date, and a further Cluster Study is planned for the Isle of Sheppey. Each one focuses on areas of intensive regeneration and change where there are superb opportunities to create strategically sited new greenspaces which will raise expectations, add value to existing investment and create high quality green infrastructure for future development.

'Clusters' or groupings of planned and aspirational green space projects were identified during the Green Grid stakeholder workshops held in Kent Thameside, Medway and Swale in 2007 and the areas selected for the Green Cluster Studies take account of this earlier work. The Green Cluster Studies have:

- identified a coherent sense of place for each cluster area
- captured what is already happening
- identified stakeholder aspirations and updated existing studies
- identified inter-dependencies, gaps and opportunities
- articulated a common vision for each cluster area
- developed an outline action plan which set out actions, governance and phasing for delivering the vision
- made the business case for investment
The Cluster Studies have adopted a partnership approach to co-ordinate discussions amongst key stakeholders in each cluster. Many are engaged in developing ideas and drawing up plans for individual sites and the Cluster Studies’ workshops have provided a valuable opportunity to focus attention on the relationships between projects and the wider landscape setting. Two workshops were held for each cluster: the focus of the first workshop was to collate information, define objectives and understand stakeholder aspirations; the second workshop was a creative session in which the stakeholders worked together to develop a common vision for the cluster.

The overarching Green Clusters vision for the Ebbsfleet Valley & A2 Corridor Cluster captures stakeholder aspirations and visions and inspires an ambitious and creative approach. It is not a proposal or a bid, but is intended to be a helpful tool to prompt creative discussion and joined up thinking in future discussions between stakeholders as the various projects in the cluster are taken forward. Ultimately the Green Cluster Studies will increase confidence, make the case for investment and provide a lever to bid for further funding.
2 Ebbsfleet Valley and A2 Corridor Green Cluster

Sense of place

The River Ebbsfleet flows a short distance from Springhead to the River Thames. The legibility of the valley is hampered by major roads - the A2/Channel Tunnel Rail Link (CTRL) to the south and the North Kent Railway to the north - while the natural connection to the River Thames has long been buried in culverts under the roads and industry of West Northfleet.

Most people pass through the Ebbsfleet Valley without recognition. They are experiencing the 'international gateway' landscape of new roads, railways, junctions, car parks and security associated with Ebbsfleet International Station. But there is also a secluded sequence of wetlands along the narrow river floodplain, where lines of mature trees mark the meanders of the stream and the wetlands widen at intervals to form reed-beds. The river floodplain often seems hidden between slip-roads and behind embankments, but is an attractive, natural contrast to the pristine roadscapes. The whole area is in a state of transition. The valley contours are demarcated by waves of plastic tree shelters and views are often partially screened by tall security fencing. It is a temporary version of an emerging new landscape, which will look very different in 20 years time, when new communities in Ebbsfleet, on the Swanscombe Peninsula and at Northfleet Embankment will include approximately 22,000 new homes, as well as extensive office, retail, community, education and leisure development.

The valley has an exceptionally rich archaeological heritage, with sites from every period of human occupation. The Ebbsfleet River cut through the underlying chalk bedrock and a combination of easy access to chalk and flint outcrops and the confluence of two rivers would have provided an attractive environment for early human occupation. Quarrying activities continued over the centuries, leading to the industrial development which has shaped the identity of the Ebbsfleet Valley. The odd landforms on the valley sides are the legacy of quarries and land-fill and the dramatic chalk cliffs at Blue Lake and alongside many roads indicate the scale of past operations.

1 & 10 Photos courtesy of Jennifer Winters, North West Kent Countryside Partnership
12 Photo courtesy of Kent County Council
But land use in the valley is currently undergoing a step change in response to the arrival of the CTRL and a series of extensive regeneration projects. The communities which worked the quarries - at Northfleet and Swanscombe are surrounded by construction activity as new communities are developed in Ebbsfleet Valley. The landfill sites will be transformed into public parks, Blue Lake will become a centre for recreation and the Ebbsfleet River will be the focus for a network of informal paths and cycleways.

The A2, which cuts a straight line between London and Canterbury, is the former Roman Road (Watling Street) and principal east-west link to the south of the Ebbsfleet Valley. The area between Springhead and Marling Cross is currently a construction site as the A2 is widened and relocated to run immediately alongside the CTRL. There are proposals to turn the old carriageway and some of the open space sandwiched between the new A2 and the urban edge into a linear park (see Forces for Change section). To the south, there are long views across open arable farmland. The landscape pattern of large fields, hedgerows, tree belts and small woodlands is relatively fragmented and degraded, but a series of rural roads and tracks lead southwards towards the Kent Downs. To the south east, the rolling wooded landscapes of Ashenbank Wood and Cobham Park have a more enclosed character, with woodland, ancient woodland, historic parkland, a golf course and small areas of arable farmland providing a distinctive landscape setting for the Elizabethan Manor House of Cobham Hall and the traditional buildings of Cobham village.

A short history of the Ebbsfleet Valley

Together the Ebbsfleet Valley and the Swanscombe area have produced an outstanding array of Palaeolithic archaeological evidence. The 300,000 year old ‘Swanscombe skull’ is world famous. It was that of a young woman from a tribe of nomadic hunters (from the Acheulian Culture) and has provided valuable insights into our knowledge of the evolution and life of early man. Riverside sites like that at Swanscombe seem to have been especially favoured by these early humans because wild animals came to drink on the banks of the river channels, and could be easily hunted. The river environment also provided a rich variety of plants and aquatic species. The evidence suggests that these Acheulian tribespeople lived in relatively open grassland conditions and lived by scavenging, hunting and food-gathering. The tribe of people frequenting the Swanscombe area would have been limited to twenty to fifty people at the most and would normally need a considerable range of territory in order to survive - distinctive Acheulian hand-axes have been found throughout the Dartford area, suggesting that these early tribespeople hunted over a wide area. The Roman Watling Street, which linked London, Rochester and Canterbury was constructed soon after the invasion of Emperor Claudius in AD43 and may have followed the alignment of an earlier prehistoric route. An early ritual site (dating from the Iron Age period) which straddles Watling Street at Springhead, was developed by the Romans as a rural religious centre. Remains of a small Roman settlement on the slopes of the Ebbsfleet Valley appear to have incorporated a waterfront, suggesting that the Ebbsfleet was navigable as far as Springhead.

A Roman Villa site at Northfleet (adjacent to the Ebbsfleet River) was also found to contain the remains of a tidal Anglo Saxon watermill - the best preserved example of its kind in the country. Chalk quarrying associated with the production of lime during the 17th and 18th centuries completely removed the chalk cliffs to the north east of Northfleet, altering the Thameside topography. This was a centre for early experiments in cement production and became the site of the Thameside Portland cement industry, which spread rapidly along the south shore of the Thames. A mid 19th century bottle kiln (one of the oldest surviving kilns of its type) has been reconstructed on part of the modern Northfleet Cement Works and is preserved as a Scheduled Ancient Monument. This nationally important structure is part of the cement works complex which, together with the 19th century terraced streets in Northfleet and the Factory Club (a recreational hall built for employees of the industry on Northfleet High Street) remain dominant landscape and cultural features in the valley today.

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1 This section is based on material in: - Burns & Nice (with Haley Sharpe, Planning Solutions and Gifford & Partners), 2004, Everyone’s Valley - Landscape Heritage and Archaeology Study of the Ebbsfleet Valley
The Ebbsfleet Valley & A2 Corridor Cluster is set to become an international gateway and one of the largest regeneration areas in Europe. The principal built development sites are:

- **Ebbsfleet Valley** - 10,000 new homes in a series of urban villages with ancillary social, community, retail and leisure facilities. Ebbsfleet Valley covers an area the size of five Hyde Parks! The developments incorporate a range of formal and informal open spaces, including lakes, parks, woodland, sports pitches and ecological areas, linked by pathways and cycle tracks. The residential development at Springhead Park is well underway and Ebbsfleet Valley now has outline planning permission (Eastern Quarry consent granted in November 2007). Ebbsfleet Valley will incorporate mixed use high density development including residential, offices, hotels, bars and restaurants, retail, leisure facilities, community facilities and education provision together with high quality public realm and landscaping. Development will also encourage better links out to Northfleet station, the River Thames, existing footpaths, cycleways and bridleways. A £2 million public art commission to create the 40m high Ebbsfleet Landmark Project will deliver a prominent landmark sited on elevated land at the southern entrance to the valley.

- **Northfleet Embankment** - 87ha of mixed use development along the Thames waterfront. The area is subdivided into 3 zones comprising an industrial core (in the centre) flanked by two areas of mixed use development with an extensive network of open spaces. A riverside promenade will run along the entire waterfront, providing additional open space, footpaths and cycleways.
Swanscombe Peninsula - This extensive partially brownfield site has a long industrial history. It is subdivided into two distinct zones: Swanscombe Peninsula West, which covers 90ha and includes the area known as Black Duck Marsh; and Swanscombe Peninsula East, which covers 115ha, including Swanscombe Point and Botany Marshes. Various uses are being looked at dependant on environmental constraints of the site including residential, leisure, opening up the waterfront more and continued industrial.

All the above development sites incorporate extensive areas of public space, with footpath and cycleway links which together create and enhance the Kent Thameside Green Grid. Key recreational and open space developments are:

- **Ebbsfleet Valley and Blue Lake** - a sequence of extensive parks at the heart of the regeneration zone. Ebbsfleet Valley has 40% of open space running through it and a number of park type environments are proposed. One such is the former landfill site adjacent to Ebbsfleet International Station and Swanscombe which will act to link existing and new development with formal and informal open spaces with recreational facilities. New habitats which connect to the sequence of wetlands along the Ebbsfleet River will also be created as development progresses. The deep, water-filled quarry of Blue Lake could be transformed into a landscape and recreational / leisure feature for the area.

- **Northfleet Urban Country Park & surrounding Green Grid links** - Northfleet Urban Country Park is a former quarry which was filled with domestic refuse and capped, before being adopted as an informal urban open space by Gravesend Borough Council. A number of studies are underway to explore the potential for enhancing the Park and for improving existing and potential Green Grid links between Northfleet Station and the new Ebbsfleet International Station, between the new and existing communities of Northfleet and Ebbsfleet. The aim is to establish a unifying pattern of footpaths and cycleways along and across the Ebbsfleet Valley.

- **Swanscombe Heritage Park & Craylands Gorge** - The Swanscombe Heritage Park is a public open space with a car park and heritage trail which focuses on the archaeological importance of the site (and which has been badly vandalised). The site is owned by Natural England and leased by Swanscombe & Greenhithe Town Council. Recent CLG funding has seen improvements in the park, including a children's playground, CCTV installation and general maintenance. Part of the site is a National Nature Reserve with a mosaic of secondary woodland, scrub and grassland. Craylands Gorge is a dramatic former tramway linking Eastern Quarry with the former Swanscombe cement works. The tramway runs along the floor of a spectacular narrow man-made gorge, which is cut deep into the chalk bedrock. The precipitous slopes are cloaked in dense scrub and woodland.

- **Jeskyns, Ashenbank Wood, Cobham Park & Shorne Woods Country Park** - the complex of ancient woodlands and historic parkland at Ashenbank Wood, Cobham Park and Shorne Woods has been extended and enhanced with the addition of Jeskyns, a new Forestry Commission owned community woodland and public greenspace which includes areas for children's play and picnicking, as well as footpaths and cycleways through woodlands, meadows and orchards. Extensive areas of woodland are newly planted, so parts of the site are quite open but it is already a popular family destination for informal recreation.

- **A2 Linear Park** - a 24ha multi-functional outdoor activity park. This project is the subject of a feasibility study, but preliminary ideas include a dedicated venue for local, national and international running and cycling events, a park and ride site at the Tollgate junction and multi-use cycle networks which link Gravesend to the Cobham-Ashenbank area.

The location of these major proposals, together with a range of other ongoing activities and forces for change, are shown on the aerial view.
Stakeholders

Key stakeholders within the Ebbsfleet Valley & A2 Cluster are:

**Gravesham Borough Council** - planning and delivery of forthcoming masterplans associated with the Northfleet Embankment, the A2 corridor and the eastern side of the Ebbsfleet Valley. Gravesham Borough Council has commissioned artworks to enhance pedestrian/equestrian/cycleway bridges and improve north-south links over the widened A2 corridor at Ifield Court and Church Road. Gravesham Borough Council is also developing an Open Space Strategy and is a partner in the delivery of the Kent Thameside Green Grid.

**Dartford Borough Council** - planning and delivery of forthcoming masterplans associated with regeneration projects in Swanscombe Peninsula West (which is within Dartford Borough). Dartford's Core Strategy is likely to include policies about the nature of development at Ebbsfleet Valley and will highlight the need for high quality greenspace and Green Grid links north to Greenhithe and the Swanscombe Peninsula, westwards through Ebbsfleet Valley, over the A2 and southwards through the countryside and eastwards towards the A2 Outdoor Activity Park. Dartford Borough Council has prepared an Open Spaces Technical Report and is a partner in the delivery of the Kent Thameside Green Grid.

**Kent Thameside Delivery Board** - aims to bring new jobs and homes to sustainable communities within the Kent Thameside area, with investment in excellent public transport and green spaces. Responsibilities include the delivery of the Green Grid throughout Kent Thameside and current Green Grid projects targeted for investment within the Ebbsfleet Valley & A2 Corridor Cluster include the A2 Outdoor Activity Park, Swanscombe Heritage Park, links between Swanscombe, Greenhithe and the new Ebbsfleet International Station and projects to explore option and feasibility of enhancing Green Grid connections in the Northfleet area.

**South East England Development Agency (SEEDA)** - SEEDA is leading and co-ordinating regeneration of the Northfleet Embankment. SEEDA identified the site as having potential to deliver, relatively quickly, some of the key priorities of the Sustainable Communities Plan and the Kent Thameside Framework. The current focus is on Northfleet Embankment East. Following the decision by one of the major landowners to rationalise its operations, SEEDA acquired a major part of the site and is developing a masterplan for an extensive mixed use waterfront development.

**Kent County Council (Highways)** - is a key partner is the development of proposals for the A2 Outdoor Activity Park and has contributed outline proposals for a park and ride scheme at the Tollgate junction.

**Highways Agency** - is responsible for delivering the A2 widening scheme and is a partner is the development of proposals for the A2 Outdoor Activity Park.

**Environment Agency** - shoreline & flood management, recreation & waterfront access, protection of controlled water quality, fisheries and contamination. The Environment Agency is responsible for the sustainability of the wetland habitats along the Ebbsfleet River and is currently working with the developers to explore the potential impacts of development on the local hydrology. The Environment Agency has also provided information on the status of the various landfill sites within the cluster, with timescales and criteria for remediation.

**Kent Wildlife Trust** - has applied to Biffaward for funding for a project focusing on the Local Wildlife Site at Alkerden Lane Pit and Craylands Gorge in the Swanscombe Heritage Park. The project will include research into the history and physical character of the site, development of a targeted habitat enhancement and management plan, a monitoring programme and promotion of the site’s biodiversity to local schools and the wider community.

**Natural England** - an overarching interest in promoting public access to the natural environment and in the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity throughout the cluster.

**Sustrans** - National Cycle Route One runs through the Cluster. A short section of the route to the south of Eastern Quarry is due to be resurfaced and edged to provide a safer route and better surface for both commuters and long distance cycling.
Groundwork Kent & Medway - Groundwork has undertaken a range of projects throughout the cluster and has specialist expertise in community engagement. Current projects include a detailed programme of enhancement works for the Swanscombe Heritage Park and ongoing work with local communities in the Swanscombe area.

Land Securities - is the principal landowner in the Cluster. Over the next 20 years, Land Securities will transform the area into a vibrant mixed-use community, with up to 10,000 new homes and the creation of up to 20,000 jobs. For instance, the 420 hectare Ebbsfleet Valley site will include 279,000 sq. m. of community, retail and leisure facilities, a business core of up to 557,000 sq. m. of offices, around 400 acres of open space, lakes and parkland (nearly 40% of Ebbsfleet Valley), five new primary schools, a secondary school and health facilities. Land Securities' vision for Ebbsfleet Valley is that of a truly sustainable community - a cosmopolitan development, where homes and jobs are side by side.

Lafarge Cement - is the major landowner in the Northfleet Embankment area, which will come forward for mixed use development as Lafarge Cement decommissions its Northfleet works. Lafarge is also a significant landowner (with Land Securities) of Blue Lake and has a strong interest in the redevelopment of this major feature as a focus for leisure and recreation.
The context maps have been prepared using GIS data. They illustrate our current knowledge of the cluster area and highlight key potential influences which should be taken into account in planning future activities.

The mini-maps below provide an indication of the range of context maps available; the full set of maps (at a larger scale) is available separately.

Key issues to note from the context drawings are:

- **Planning & Policy**
  - All the land to the south of the A2 is Metropolitan Green Belt in Gravesham Borough Council and Dartford Borough Council
  - Ebbsfleet Valley is a major development node in regional policy
  - The wooded countryside at Jeskyns and in the vicinity of Ashenbank Woods is designated as a Special Landscape Area in the Gravesham Borough Council Local Plan

- **Cultural Heritage**
  - There is a cluster of scheduled ancient monuments in and around the Ebbsfleet Valley

- **Access**
  - The Ebbsfleet Valley is a major international and regional hub for sustainable transport
  - National Cycle Route 1 links Dartford to Gravesend and is being realigned to pass Ebbsfleet International Station.

- **Statutory designations**
  - Blue Lake, parts of Swanscombe Heritage Park/Crayland Gorge and part of the Ebbsfleet River Valley is designated as a Local Wildlife Site

- **Ecological network model**
  - Many of the woodlands at Shorne Woods Country Park and in the Cobham/Ashenbank area are semi-natural ancient woodlands
4 Analysis

As a first step toward defining an overarching vision for the Ebbsfleet Valley & A2 Cluster, the Analysis drawing begins to focus on the way the area is perceived, by pedestrians, cyclists, residents, visitors and those who work in the area. It analyses the public realm, highlighting connections, gaps, barriers and the inter-relationships between existing projects and activities.
Ebbsfleet Valley and A2 Corridor Cluster - SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS

• Nationally significant archaeological interest
• Distinctive industrial heritage, with a legacy of dramatic landmarks - Northfleet chimneys, Blue Lake
• Ebbsfleet River and wetlands - provides a natural focus for an informal landscape at a perfect scale for pedestrians and cyclists
• Complex of woodlands and historic parklands at Jeskyns, Ashenbank, Cobham Park and Shorne Woods Country Park to the south east of the Cluster, accessible via the future A2 Outdoor Activity Park
• Complex of ancient woodlands and the Darenth Woods Country Park to the south west of the cluster
• Relatively unified land ownership throughout Ebbsfleet Valley and proactive developers, willing to work in partnership and with a strong community-based vision

WEAKNESSES

• Severance - major physical barriers - CTRL, railways and roads
• Physical isolation of Ebbsfleet Valley from the countryside to the south, the River Thames and surrounding existing neighbourhoods (the areas outside the 'red lines')
• Skylines dominated by overhead power lines and pylons
• Fragmented landownership along the A2 corridor
• Noise and restricted space are key issues for the development of the A2 Outdoor activity Park
• Relatively poor north-south links due to severance by A2 corridor
• ‘Hope value’ associated with farmland to the west of the Weald Way in Gravesend
• Relatively degraded character (visual and ecological) of the arable farmland landscape to the south of the A2

OPPORTUNITIES

• Sustainable transport hub at Ebbsfleet International Station, with links to Fastrack bus services and local stations at Northfleet and Swanscombe.
• Gateway location - new critical mass as lever for massive investment and an opportunity to demonstrate large scale sustainable development
• Landmark art projects to engage communities, promote the gateway and create a sense of place
• Major regional destinations - Blue Lake, the A2 Outdoor Activity Park
• Re-create a functional river corridor connection to the River Thames (via the Northfleet Embankment development
• Enhanced ecological networks - re-connect habitats along the Ebbsfleet River floodplain and valley slopes
• Innovative interpretation, linked to local art and community engagement projects to raise awareness of the exceptional heritage of the area
• Improved and extended network of footpaths and cycleways to link urban communities to the River Thames shoreline to the north, the countryside/AONB to the south, the Darenth Woods Country Park (to the west) and the complex of woodlands and parklands at Jeskyns/Ashenbank/Cobham to the east
THREATS

- Persistent socio-cultural barriers between new and existing communities fuelled by resentment, isolation and long periods of construction activity
- An imbalance between the quality of public open spaces and Green Grid links within existing communities and in the new developments due to contrasting long term standards of maintenance
- Potential lack of water in the Ebbsfleet River due the impact of changes in the quarry pumping regime as a result of the Ebbsfleet Valley development
- Blue Lake - contamination, structural and health and safety issues, all of which may prove prohibitively expensive.

The analysis drawing highlights issues of severance and transition. Perceptions of the Ebbsfleet Valley are completely dominated by major roads and railways (particularly the CTRL) so that the landform and Ebbsfleet River tend to be ignored. Roads, railways and some of the quarried cliff faces are barriers to pedestrian and cycleway movement and the skyline is dominated by pylons and overhead transmission lines. The existing communities of Swanscombe, Northfleet and Gravesend are distant and isolated from the Ebbsfleet Valley.

But this is a temporary snapshot of a landscape which is in a state of transition; it will be transformed as the new developments of Ebbsfleet Valley and Northfleet Embankment are implemented. But the transformation will take time, and one of the roles of the Green Cluster studies is to focus on how local people and newcomers experience the landscape. In the case of the Ebbsfleet Valley & A2 Corridor, this may mean considering timescales for delivery, identifying elements of planned green infrastructure which might be delivered 'up front' and focusing on perceived connections (physical and cultural) between existing and new communities.
Each one of the ongoing regeneration projects in the Ebbsfleet Valley and A2 Corridor will deliver high quality parks, open spaces and Green Grid links. The Green Cluster vision does not seek to intervene in this process, but rather to target future funding so that this massive investment is of benefit to everyone. The Ebbsfleet Valley Green Cluster vision will forge strong, long lasting connections between existing and new communities in Ebbsfleet, Northfleet, Swanscombe, Greenhithe and Gravesend. Emerging new greenspaces within key regeneration sites will be complemented and sustained through programmes of proactive community participation and awareness. Ebbsfleet Valley will be a place of surprise and excitement, delivered in part by an innovative land art and design theme which reveals local character and re-connects communities and places. A balanced, sustainable system for the maintenance of greenspaces within new sites and existing settlements will involve all stakeholders, set high standards and build confidence long term.
Key opportunities and components of the vision are:

- **Community engagement** - Establish long-term programmes to raise awareness and encourage pro-active community participation. Groundwork is pioneering some innovative approaches including the use of ‘Walkie Talkies’ - community members who are the ears and eyes of the community, passing on and collecting information of benefit to local people. Walkie Talkies have a dual role, as trusted members of the local community they make information available to people but also feed back the concerns, issues and sometimes misconceptions that local residents have, back to agencies that can act on this. It may be possible to make use of this approach to communicate proposals for new development, parks and open spaces. The key objective is to find out what local people really want 'on the ground' so that proposals can respond.

- **Art, heritage & interpretation** - public artworks, heritage trails and interpretation are planned within the new developments and these themes will be explored and extended within the existing communities of Swanscombe, Northfleet and Gravesend. The coordination of local art projects will link communities with their culture and heritage, with opportunities for new destinations, performance, events and outreach projects.

- **Public open spaces and Green Grid links** - investment in urban greenspaces within existing communities and Green Grid links will reflect the priorities promoted by local people (via the ongoing programmes of community engagement) and the need to create and enhance links between new & existing communities. Key routes highlighted through stakeholder consultation so far include connections between:
  - Ebbsfleet Valley and the A2 Outdoor Activity Park & countryside to the south of the A2 via urban areas and a new footbridge over the A2 corridor to the south of Wombwell Park (to avoid the Pepper Hill junction) and the other three road junctions
  - Northfleet and Ebbsfleet International Station
  - River Darent and Gravesend town centre, along the River Thames (City to Sea)
  - Swanscombe, Greenhithe, the proposed developments at Swanscombe Peninsula West and Ebbsfleet International Station
  - Gravesend and the A2 Corridor, particularly the bridge links over the A2 corridor to encourage access to the countryside to the south and east
  - Gravesend town centre and the Kent Downs AONB, via the Weald Way.

- **Landscape enhancement throughout the wider A2 corridor** - The long views across open and relatively degraded countryside to the south of the A2 do little to give a positive or distinctive first impression of Gravesend, Dartford and the Ebbsfleet Valley. Yet this stretch of open countryside between the woodlands of Ashenbank/Shorne Woods (to the east) and Darenth Woods (to the west) has the potential to be a positive gateway, legible in the 'view from the road' and an attractive destination for cyclists and pedestrians travelling from the urban areas to the north. A programme of targeted funding and landowner engagement will encourage positive landscape management and the restoration of locally characteristic and distinctive landscape patterns, including native hedgerow, woodland and shelterbelt planting designed to frame a diverse sequence of positive views and screen intrusive features. The existing network of rights of way will be extended and enhanced by small-scale planting so that a network of cycle tracks, footpaths and rural roads links urban communities to rural villages, Jeskyns, the Weald Way and ultimately to the Kent Downs AONB to the south and east.

- **Timing - 'early wins'** - Existing communities will be faced with ongoing construction, with associated disruption and a dysfunctional urban fabric for many years to come. A feasibility study will identify potential improvements to streetscapes and green infrastructure elements from a range of relevant masterplans, which might be suitable for implementation 'up front', creating a resource for local communities and a positive setting and interface for new development.

- **Long term management of open spaces** - Publicly accessible open spaces and Green Grid connections within the new developments are likely to be well funded, but there is a risk of establishing long term (perceived) social divisions between new and existing communities as a result of stark contrasts between standards of greenspace maintenance in existing urban areas and those associated with new developments. A system is needed for the long-term management of all parks and open spaces, through out the cluster as a whole. There are a number of possible models and a feasibility study will explore the options available. Key principles will include working with all stakeholders across the public, voluntary and private sectors, delivering in accordance with agreed landscape management plans and securing long-term 'ring-fenced' revenue funding.
6 The Bigger Picture

The Thames Gateway Parklands Programme is a strategic planning and development initiative, overseen by the Department for Communities & Local Government. It builds on the Greening the Gateway Strategy first set out in 2004² and aims to transform the identity of the Thames Gateway, increasing economic social and environmental value so that the area becomes a flagship for sustainable living.

In north Kent, the regeneration process is well underway, but there is much to be done to make the most of the current opportunities, raise expectations and articulate an ambitious vision to secure high quality environments for sustainable living. The Greening the Gateway Kent & Medway initiative (GGKM) is one of three partnerships engaged in promoting and delivering this vision in the Thames Gateway (the others are in East London and South Essex).

High level regeneration outcomes for the Thames Gateway: - The Thames Gateway Parklands Programme, providing the context for a network of accessible, high quality and sustainable landscapes and waterways, which capitalize on existing natural, built, historic and cultural assets, to support their conservation, enhancement and ongoing use, and boost the Gateway’s rich biodiversity assets, strengthen character and identity, transforming perceptions and making it a great place to live, work and invest. Thames Gateway Delivery Plan, December 2007.

The Thames Gateway Parklands Programme offers new opportunities for investment which will be delivered via five transformational themes:

- **Thames Waterfront** - a new estuary path, which will eventually run along both banks of the River Thames, waterfront projects featuring public access and an improved river environment
- **Thames Gateway World Class Heritage** - finance for the bid for Chatham Historic Dockyard and improvements on other heritage sites
- **Thames Gateway Landscapes** - large scale public green spaces of regional importance
- **Thames Gateway Corridors** - environmental improvements to some strategic transport corridors, including key rail routes and A-roads to provide carbon offsetting schemes, easier travel and an enhanced first impression
- **Thames Gateway Squares** - two or three large urban squares with a focus on cultural, economic and environmental activities.

² DEFRA and ODPM, Creating sustainable communities: Greening the Gateway, 2004
The Green Cluster Studies provide a framework for delivering Thames Gateway Parklands ‘on the ground’. The vision expressed in this Technical Report, captures many of the individual visions and ideas being promoted by stakeholders, combining them all into an overarching vision for the Ebbsfleet & A2 Corridor Cluster which all stakeholders recognise and can buy into. So far, we have a vision framework to help inform funding decisions, but it is only the starting point and will be followed by a rolling programme of consultation, planning, funding bids and, for some projects, design development and implementation.

**Action Planning**

This Technical Report is accompanied by a separate Action Plan which sets the broad agenda for the transformation of the Ebbsfleet & A2 Corridor Cluster, emphasising the scope for delivery of green infrastructure. The Action Plan sets out the issues to be addressed and the type of funding required to achieve the Green Clusters vision. Greening the Gateway Kent & Medway will establish a Cluster Steering Group for each of the Green Clusters. The Action Plan will be a working document, which will identify (for each project):

- who will be the lead partner (champion) and how stakeholder involvement should be broadened
- how it will be taken forward, in terms of funding, consultation, resourcing and procurement
- a clear timetable for planning and implementation which takes account of all other relevant projects plans and revenue funding for ongoing monitoring and management.

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