

## **13. River Thames**

## 13. River Thames

### Local Plan Aim

To maximise the opportunities for housing, transport, economic regeneration and environmental improvement along the waterfront and recreation on the River Thames subject to nature conservation and sustainable development considerations.

### Key Objectives

1. To achieve a balance between competing uses along the riverside, including housing, recreation and commercial, while safeguarding areas of heritage and nature conservation interest.
2. To protect the waterfront from developments which neither contribute to, nor benefit (through a riverside setting) from a riverside location.
3. To ensure that new development makes the best use of the riverside setting through siting and design.
4. To seek the provision of key landmark features and focal points beside the River.
5. To identify strategic locations along the riverside where footpath and cycle links would be of greatest benefit to help achieve long term continuous access along the River.
6. To conserve and manage key areas of riverside greenspace with recognised nature conservation value.
7. To promote green links and green corridors between riverside open space and inland areas for public access and enjoyment.
- 7a. To contribute to Integrated Coastal Zone Management.
8. To seek greater use of the River as a means of transport for both freight and passengers, subject to ensuring infrastructure needs and consistent with the development strategy for Kent Thameside.

### 13.1 Introduction

13.1.1 While the River Thames has helped shape the historic development of Greenhithe, in general, the remainder of built development in Dartford Borough remains remote from the river. The Dartford stretch of the Thames today includes a mix of recent developments such as Crossways, Thames Europort and the Queen Elizabeth II Bridge, and longer standing development such as Littlebrook Power Station, wharves and an aggregate depot. This development is interspersed with expansive areas of vacant land, open marshland and foreshore, parts of which are important wildlife habitats. The Thames forms the focus for the regeneration of Thames Gateway and offers considerable scope for improving the visual landscape of the area, its accessibility and the key areas of riverside greenspace. At the same time, there is potential for making greater use of the River for transport, for leisure use and as a setting for new development.

### 13.2 Policy Context

13.2.1 Two of the principles of the Thames Gateway Planning Framework (RPG9a) are to bring life to the River Thames and the riverfront, and to create a new environmental standard. Specifically, the Guidance stresses the need to avoid the loss of waterfront sites to developments that do not need to be at a riverside location, and the important role of encouraging the transport of freight by water.

13.2.2 "Strategic Planning Guidance for the River Thames" (RPG9b), published in February 1997, sets out the Government's overall objectives for the River and provides guidance for land use planning along its banks. One of the clear messages

from this guidance is the need to ensure a high quality of development and landscaping, and the importance of taking full advantage of riverside locations. An important overall objective is to avoid the loss of the waterfront to development that neither contributes to, nor is appropriate for, a riverside location. Guidance also stresses that, in the light of flood risk in this area and rising sea levels, development schemes should allow sufficient space on the riverside margin for the possible strengthening of flood defences. The Environment Agency (EA) has stated that they will be reviewing the level of flood defences in the light of global warming predictions. The present defences are now 25 years old which is about their half-life, and the review by the EA is intended to ensure a high the continuance of a high level of protection is provided to land and property for the next 25 years.

- 13.2.3 The Kent Structure Plan includes a strategic policy (S5) requiring an upgrading of the quality of the environment in Thames Gateway in Kent. The policy also states "decisions affecting the environmental quality of the area should take into account the cumulative impact of the proposal in question, in the context of other development and proposals". Policy NK1 identifies the major development opportunities at Kent Thameside and includes a requirement to uplift the quality of the built and open environment. "This should include the adoption of high environmental standards and restraint upon, or careful location of, uses which would adversely affect the appearance and potential of the area". Policy ENV11 supports the conservation and enhancement of the environment within river corridors.
- 13.2.4 Policy P9 of the Kent Structure Plan supports growth at Dartford International Ferry Terminal (now Thames Europort), subject to the impact on the setting and functioning of adjoining business park development. The Small Ports and Wharves section of the Structure Plan notes that, over time, some small ports and wharves may cease to function and become available for redevelopment. These are likely to be located within urban areas in north Kent giving rise to the possibility of environmental improvement along the river frontages. Policy P10 permits small ports and wharves "subject to adequate provision for access, including linkage to the rail network where practicable, and to other planning considerations, providing there is no overriding conflict with the Plan's environment policies".
- 13.2.5 Policy CA4 of the Kent Minerals Local Plan: Construction Aggregates (December 1993) permits proposals for wharves and/or depots to receive and despatch aggregates at Stone Marshes, Dartford.
- 13.2.6 Kent County Council's Ports Strategy (May 1996) notes that the location of Dartford International Ferry Terminal (now Thames Europort) would be particularly suited, under European Union combined transport policies, for long ferry crossings.

### **13.3 The River Thames in Dartford Borough**

- 13.3.1 In recent years the nature of the use of the River Thames in Dartford Borough for freight transport has changed considerably with a move away from small facilities towards bulk handling facilities and containerisation. A notable feature of this change in Dartford Borough has been the development of Thames Europort within Crossways Business Park. This trend has also led to changes in the types of commercial uses found beside the river in Dartford Borough.
- 13.3.2 While the use of the River for freight and passenger transport is clearly important, it is only one element amongst many to be addressed in considering land use, transport and environmental issues and their inter-relationships along the riverfront.

A balance needs to be struck between the realisation of major development opportunities and the retention and promotion of river-related activity.

- 13.3.3 Within this context is the need to identify adequate land supply within Dartford Borough to meet the Kent Structure Plan requirement of 10,500 dwellings. These significant levels of growth will need to be accommodated in a way that maximises the achievement of sustainable objectives, in particular by utilising brownfield sites, such as previously developed sites along the riverfront. This will involve the development of more balanced mixed-use urban communities with good social and educational facilities.
- 13.3.4 Developers will be expected to take full advantage of the attractive setting of the grand sweep of the River Thames. The significant housing requirement for the Borough over the next 15 years means that many undeveloped and redundant sites along the waterfront suitable for development will need to be considered for residential use. The River remains an under-utilised recreational resource. The creation of a new cycle route through funding assistance from Sustrans, and new riverside walks can help establish the River Thames as an attraction in its own right.
- 13.3.5 All these competing demands need to be catered for if the River is to fulfil its main functions as a major river, a setting for development, an open space and ecological resource, a transport artery (principally for freight) and a recreational and tourist facility.
- 13.3.6 The character of the western end of the riverside frontage within Dartford Borough is open grazing marsh. Eastwards, the character changes to one of a more industrial nature - the Longreach Sewage Treatment Works and the Littlebrook Power Station. The Dartford Crossing, the associated infrastructure and movement of traffic are the dominating features approximately mid way along the Dartford stretch of the Thames. East of the Crossing, the riverside provides an attractive backcloth for the low-density commercial units on the Crossways Business Park, set in landscaped grounds. Within the Business Park, the Thames Europort represents the importance of freight transport use of the river within the Borough.
- 13.3.7 Today, although much of the original village has gone, Greenhithe remains a place of character with some recreational activity, one of the few locations in the Borough currently with direct access to the river. Immediately east of Greenhithe lies the Ingress Park site. Planning permission has been granted in principle for a new urban village comprising some 900 units and the restoration of the Grade II listed Ingress Abbey.
- 13.3.8 The landscape character of the remaining eastern stretch of the Riverside within the Borough at Swanscombe Peninsula is generally open and low lying with few distinctive features. Parts are still used for arable farming and grazing and part is home to people who reside on boats moored in a creek by the river's edge.
- 13.3.9 In general, there is very little public activity along the riverside, due to its relative inaccessibility. The flat, open landscape comprises areas of inter-tidal mud and marsh, dissected by a network of drainage channels, which introduce an element of 'wildness' into the river landscape. The Thames foreshore provides important roosting sites for migratory estuarine birds and represents a valuable wildlife habitat.

#### **13.4 Riverside Development**

- 13.4.1 There is a particular need to ensure a high quality of urban design beside the Riverfront. At the same time developments need to fully exploit the riverside locations to their best advantage. In the past, many buildings backed on to waterways and so discouraged public use and lessened security on the water. Future development should face on to the waterway in order to encourage access and security. Historical, archaeological and cultural features of the River Thames, including small items such as mooring bollards, provide reminders of the river's past which should be preserved and displayed wherever possible.
- 13.4.2 The riverside location of major development sites such as Swanscombe Peninsula and Ingress Park also provides the opportunity to create new focal points of riverside activity. The visually impressive Queen Elizabeth II Bridge, in terms of scale and design, is probably one of the most dramatic features of Kent Thameside and Thames Gateway, and demonstrates the ability of skyline features to become important landmarks beside the River. The need to protect the integrity of the tidal defence system of the River Thames in any new built development is dealt with in policy RT6.

#### **RT1 Riverside Development**

**Proposals for development on sites adjoining the River Thames will only be permitted if they:**

- 1a contribute to and/or benefit from a riverside location;**
- 1. incorporate a high quality of urban design and landscaping;**
- 2. face on to the river in order to encourage access and security;**
- 3. promote sustainable transport options and, in particular, provide access to public transport routes;**
- 4. incorporate a public riverside footpath and cycleway;**
- 5. protect existing views and skylines, and incorporate the creation of new focal points, spaces, vistas and viewpoints as opportunities arise;**
- 6. protect and enhance the nature conservation value of the river and its shoreline;**
- 6b have no material adverse impact upon the functioning and amenity of neighbouring sites and uses; and**
- 7. protect and/or incorporate waterside features of historical, archaeological or cultural interest in the design.**

- 13.4.3 There may be scope to reduce the scale of the visual impact of the existing industrial uses beside the River. The colour treatment of prominent structures can either help make them more recessive or provide much-needed colour in the landscape. At the same time, planting around the margins of industrial sites can help soften their harsh appearance.
- 13.4.4 The impact and location of industries that can, by their very nature, be a source of localised environmental problems and nuisance are dealt with in the Employment chapter (policy E5).

#### **13.5 Ports, Wharves and Navigation**

- 13.5.1 Thames Gateway Planning Framework (RPG9a) notes Thames Gateway's "pivotal location" for access to the markets of the continent and of Britain and local authorities are to identify suitable sites "for the needs of modern distribution". However, sites that have the potential to accommodate other regional needs should not be used for these "space extensive and often low employment uses". In relation to port operations, RPG9a notes that "deep water is important, as are compatible, neighbouring land uses, the availability of a rail connection and satisfactory access

to the primary road network." The essential theme of government policy for Kent Thameside is one of environmental regeneration and the need for a more critical appraisal of bad neighbour uses. In the section on Kent Thameside, Guidance emphasises the need for environmental improvement. In particular it states that local plans should provide fewer sites for those uses which have both less exacting environmental requirements and adversely affect the appearance and potential of the wider area.

- 13.5.2 Strategic Planning Guidance for the River Thames (RPG9b) asks that planning authorities in the lower Thames area consider the need for accommodating growth in port and river traffic and to safeguard appropriate sites. It recognises, however, that in different stretches of the lower Thames a balance needs to be struck between the achievement of major development opportunities and the retention and promotion of river-related activity. This is an issue especially for Kent Thameside, where it is policy to achieve an uplift in environmental quality consistent with the area's identification as a focus for growth and where both the Structure Plan and RPG9a establish challenging quantitative targets for new housing provision. RPG9a asks the Kent Thameside planning authorities to review their development plans on the basis of accommodating 30,000 additional dwellings.
- 13.5.3 The Government's White Paper, "A New Deal for Transport: Better for Everyone" (1998) establishes the following policy aims for ports:
- promote UK and regional competitiveness by ensuring reliable and efficient distribution;
  - enhance environmental and operational performance by encouraging the provision of multi-modal access to markets;
  - make the best use of infrastructure in preference to expansion; and
  - promote best environmental standards for port design and operation, including where new development is justified.
- 13.5.4 On environmental grounds, the ports industry will be encouraged to invest in measures to deal with increased demand whilst avoiding the physical expansion of port land.
- 13.5.5 West of the Dartford River Crossing, Littlebrook Power Station occupies a substantial river frontage, with a wharf facility. It lies to the north of a major development opportunity - North Dartford - released from the Green Belt for the development of high quality growth industry with an advanced technology base. National Power, the operators of the station, describe the facility as a "strategic site in the south for long term generation to meet electricity demand and as such will remain in the long term."
- 13.5.6 East of the Dartford River Crossing, Crossways Business Park is a strategic opportunity for employment development. The area is being developed in phases on the basis of the original concept for the development of this area (formerly known as Stone Marshes) of a package of port and employment uses, with the port being set within a context of landscaped areas and built development. Stone Marshes is the only part of Dartford's river frontage identified in RPG9a as having potential for port operation. Thames Europort (formerly known as the Dartford International Ferry Terminal) occupies the central part of Crossway's river frontage and has been extended. The remainder of Crossway's river frontage has planning permission (granted in 1995 with a 10-year life) for B1, B2 and B8 uses and it is the landowners' intention to continue to implement this permission. On the basis of Structure Plan policy and government guidance, however, it would be appropriate, subject to safeguards, to facilitate the growth of business through the existing port.

- 13.5.8 To the east of Crossways and west of Greenhithe Village lies the Johnsons Wharf aggregates depot where sea-dredged aggregates are imported. In planning terms, the depot is an important existing, established facility within Kent Thameside. Aggregates and other materials vital to the regeneration of the area are delivered in a sustainable manner and, consequently, the depot should be safeguarded. Should the present operations cease, however, there may be opportunities to relocate this facility to a location less sensitive in terms of its inter-relationship with neighbouring uses and its environs but which could still serve Kent Thameside needs, for example, at Swanscombe Peninsula.
- 13.5.9 To the east of Greenhithe and at the western end of the Swanscombe Peninsula lies the former Empire Paper Mills site. Ingress Park, a predominantly residential development is under construction. A jetty at this site has not been used for some time and has fallen into disrepair. It is currently being dismantled.
- 13.5.10 The area of Swanscombe Peninsula falling within Dartford Borough is identified in RPG9a as a "riverside opportunity for (an) urban village." Guidance notes that "the commanding views offer a valuable opportunity to secure quality development. Although in the short term, part of the peninsula will be affected by construction works for the CTRL, this should not influence longer term proposals. Planning policies should encourage upgrading of the environment."
- 13.5.11 There is an existing, but disused, wharf facility on the Dartford side of the Peninsula (Bells Wharf and Whites Jetty) and active wharves on the Gravesham side. Bells Wharf and Whites Jetty are safeguarded through the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Act for bulk materials handling in connection with construction of Stage 2 of the Rail Link (currently programmed for 2001 to 2007).
- 13.5.12 Swanscombe Peninsula, together with Ingress Park, represents a substantial component of the package of sites which can help achieve the potential 30,000 new dwellings for Kent Thameside referred to in RPG9a. Alongside this new development, however, there may be the potential to accommodate new port uses, including the relocation of the existing aggregates depot at Johnsons Wharf (referred to above). Proposals for riverside development at Swanscombe Peninsula will also need to take account of the navigation radar station at Broadness Point, the northern part of Swanscombe Peninsula (see the Major Development Sites chapter).
- 13.5.12a RPG9 recognises that the ports industry has changed considerably over the last 30 years and consequently, the importance of some ports in the South East has changed. The growth in development within Kent Thameside expected over the next 20 years will generate considerable demands for the importation of goods, including minerals. The efficient use of the Borough's existing ports and wharves will also help reduce freight road traffic. The following policy therefore safeguards the existing ports and wharves operations from prejudicial development. Bells Wharf and Whites Jetty are safeguarded specifically for bulk materials handling for phase 2 of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link.
- 13.5.12b In the event that the current operations at any of the ports or wharves ceases, proposals for each site will be judged against the criteria set out in policy RT1. In respect of Johnsons Wharf, the options for providing an alternative facility to serve local needs will be taken into account. Proposals for the development of Swanscombe Peninsula in the long term as an urban village, as set out in policy MDS7, should take account of options for accommodating port uses, including the possible relocation of the existing Greenhithe aggregates facility.

## **RT2 Ports and Wharves**

**The current operational requirements of the following ports and wharves are safeguarded from development which would be likely to prejudice their continued working:**

- 1. Thames Europort**
- 2. Littlebrook Power Station**
- 3. Johnsons Wharf**
- 4. Bells Wharf**
- 5. Whites Jetty**

**Proposals facilitating the growth of trade at, and the more efficient operation of, these facilities will be permitted if:**

- (a) there is no significant impact upon the setting and functioning of surrounding uses; and**
- (b) there is provision for good access arrangements including public transport.**

## **13.6 Passenger Transport**

13.6.1 As development within Kent Thameside progresses, there may be opportunities to create new passenger transport services on the River, such as "Park and Sail". If such services are to operate successfully, however, they will be highly dependent upon demand. Potentially, passengers are only likely to use a service if both their places of residence and their destination are very close to the River and if the service is perceived to be reliable, fast and provides value for money. The river piers will need to be located at focal points of activity along the River, which allow for good access to both the road network and to public transport.

### **RT2a Passenger Transport**

**Proposals for passenger transport facilities will be permitted where they and their associated land-side infrastructure:**

- 1. can be provided with foot, cycle, public transport and, where necessary, car borne access;**
- 2. will not occupy excessive areas of land relative to the need to accommodate other land uses and built development in the riverside area;**
- 3. will not have a material adverse impact on neighbouring uses; and**
- 4. will not cause harm to any land-based nature conservation interest or to that of the fore-shore or inter-tidal zone.**

## **13.7 Recreation**

13.7.1 To date there has been little recognition of the recreational potential of the River Thames and its frontage. While there is relatively little use made of the River, other than a small amount of sailing and fishing at Greenhithe, there is an increasing interest in water-based recreational facilities. Subject to safety, flood defence and navigational requirements, opportunities may occur for provision of new facilities on Thameside sites. Such activities depend on the retention of existing and provision of new slipways and other access points to the River. The use of the River for active recreation should not prejudice its nature conservation value. The PLA should be consulted on all proposals for moorings in the interests of navigation, safety and impact on the river regime.

### **RT3 Recreation**

**Proposals which enhance the accessibility of the River Thames and which help to realise its potential for recreation will be permitted, subject to consideration of the value of the River Thames and its shoreline for wildlife. Such proposals should not conflict with nature conservation interests, especially those pertaining to Dartford Marshes and should not compromise opportunities for the quiet enjoyment of wildlife and natural features. Existing facilities such as slipways and other access points to the river will be safeguarded.**

#### **13.8 Access**

- 13.8.1 At present, there is little to attract the visitor other than the River itself and the wildlife interest of the marshes and mudflats. Continuous pedestrian riverside access is a long-term objective, but in the short-term, the priority is to improve the quality of existing paths and provide links from the urban area to the River. Proposals for development adjoining the River will be required to define a route for such provision and for ensuring that routes are both safe and convenient.
- 13.8.2 Pedestrian riverside access and new development will also need to take account of the need to protect access to the foreshore and the Thames Tidal Defences.
- 13.8.3 RPG9a encourages local authorities to develop a "Green Grid" network which would join the main open areas with river frontages and link with both existing and new communities (see the Development and Design chapter). The River Thames frontage can be opened up for public access with walkways, cycle paths, parks and viewing areas. At the same time, there may be scope for the provision of small-scale facilities, such as seating areas, cycle parking, car parks or interpretation centres, to encourage greater use, where compatible with landscape and wildlife interests. Policy LRT16 sets out the criteria against which proposals for footpaths, cycleways and bridleways along the river frontage will be determined.
- 13.8.4 Part of Route 1 of the proposed National Cycle Network between Dover and Inverness includes provision for a new cycle route along part of the riverside at Dartford which will help open up the waterfront for recreational activities.
- 13.8.4a Access to the foreshore, which is primarily in the ownership of the Port of London Authority, can have both a recreational and educational value. There is a right of access for fishing, navigational and other customary purposes. Public access must be considered in the context of the environmental and archaeological importance of the foreshore, and particularly safety considerations in the tidal reaches. The PLA's access survey has identified two existing access points within the Borough at the White Hart pub and at the causeway in Pier Road, Greenhithe. More may be provided within the Green Grid initiative and as development proposals for the riparian lands are realised.

### **RT4 Public Access to the Riverside**

**Public access to the riverside will be promoted through the protection of existing rights of way and the provision of new footpaths, bridleways and cycleways, including Green Grid connections.**

#### **RT4a Public Access to the Foreshore**

**Existing access points to the foreshore will be safeguarded from development that will be likely to prejudice their use. Proposals for development or the use of land adjacent to the River will only be permitted where they facilitate additional access, subject to environmental and safety considerations.**

### **13.9 Natural Environment**

13.9.1 The lower Thames at Dartford is a valuable ecological resource, including important roosting areas for estuarine birds, notably at Dartford Marshes and along the foreshore. These issues are considered in the draft Thames Estuary Management Plan, published in July 1996 by a partnership of public and private sector organisations with an interest in the Thames. This non-statutory Plan will provide a framework for the estuary as a whole and develop policies to protect and develop the economic and recreational importance of the Thames while conserving the natural resource.

13.9.2 The Local Plan gives strong protection to these areas of nature conservation interest. The emphasis should be on conserving and managing those areas which have been least spoilt, with recognised nature conservation importance, and improving the quality of the other areas of greenspace to maximise their landscape, amenity and wildlife potential. The ecology and nature conservation value must be fully taken into account in any proposals for landscape enhancement of greenspaces, particularly in areas of marshland, such as Dartford Marshes, where tree planting would be inappropriate, for example. The foreshore and inter-tidal zone have a particular importance for nature conservation.

#### **RT5 Nature Conservation Interest**

**Planning permission will not be granted for any riverside development that would be liable to cause demonstrable harm to sites and features of nature conservation interest along the River Thames including the foreshore and the inter-tidal zone.**

### **13.10 River Defences**

13.10.1 In order to protect people and property from the effects of inundation by the River Thames, it is essential that the integrity of the tidal defence system is maintained. All types of development that may affect the sea wall directly or indirectly, including that on adjacent land or affecting watercourses, which penetrate the sea wall or affect flood gates and water courses, need to be properly assessed and controlled. All works in, under, over and adjacent to the Thames Tidal Defences and adjoining watercourses needs to be appropriately managed, designed and implemented to the satisfaction of the Environment Agency. This will ensure that there are no adverse effects, such as structural erosion of the defences, that adequate access is maintained for maintenance purposes and that improvements can be carried out to the existing defences if this becomes necessary. Issues relating to the Tidal Flood Zone are dealt with in paragraph 11.3.12 and policy NR7 of the Natural Resources chapter.

#### **RT6 Thames Tidal Defences**

**Planning permission will not be granted for proposals which are likely to:**

- 1. adversely affect the integrity of, or impinge on access to, the Thames Tidal Defences;**
- 2. exacerbate existing problems of coastal protection or result in altered patterns of erosion, deposition or flooding elsewhere along the River Thames to the detriment of important habitats or coastal features; or**
- 3. compromise opportunities for alternative measures to protect development from flooding and coastal erosion where these would have additional benefits in terms of protecting or enhancing wildlife and natural features.**

### **13.11 Estuary Management Issues**

- 13.11.1 The Thames Estuary Partnership has prepared Management Guidance for the Thames Estuary. The Guidance sets out a strategy, principles for action and an action plan which seek to promote sustainable development within the estuary and to conserve its resources. The Council is a member of the Partnership and will pursue the implementation of the guidance through the planning process.
- 13.11.2 The Council is aware of the need to take proper account of river safety issues. Where these have implications for the exercise of its planning powers, the Council will look to the appropriate bodies, including the Port of London Authority, to provide advice.

This page is intentionally blank.