

A postcard from the future



HELP SHAPE THE FUTURE OF DARTFORD

Making Dartford a good place to live

Imagine a postcard from the future... What do you want Dartford to look like and be like in 2021?

Thinking about the future planning of an area isn't easy – remember the last time you planned a day out or a holiday. There's a long list of things to think about, more than one opinion about what's best, and after all your careful preparation - you know unforeseen events will pop into the picture along the way to make things more interesting!

Planning ahead for Dartford's growth however, can bring benefits, for you, your family and your neighbourhood. Planning affects us all – where we live and want to live, where we work, how we travel, where we shop and where we enjoy life – out in the countryside, along the riverfront or at the Theatre.

You might think that preparing planning guidelines now doesn't affect you. And it probably won't today, next week or probably even next year. But sooner or later, the planned growth in the Borough over the next 10 to 15 years will affect us all. Dartford is located in the heart of the Thames Gateway and is one of the biggest development areas in the country. So it's important to try our best to ensure that the effects of this growth are as positive as they can be and that the new growth brings benefits for the Borough – for its residents, businesses and visitors. There are different ways we could do this, and the following questions highlight some of the options we are considering.

The Council is beginning to prepare new policies to guide future developments in the Borough. This will be called Dartford's Local Development Framework. This will include an overall vision for the area, a list of sites where

development will be encouraged to happen and an action plan for Dartford town centre. The comments you give us at this early stage will help us make sure we address the issues that really matter to you.

The Council wants to ensure that Dartford is a place where people choose to live, work and enjoy their leisure time. The aim of planning policy is to create a better quality environment and strong links between new and existing communities.

Councillor Kenneth Leadbeater, Leader of the Council, believes that it is important for residents to get involved as planning policy will have a direct effect on the environment where they live. He said,

"It is crucial that local people take time to think about the issues surrounding growth and development and tell us what they want. We need to know what is important to residents so that we can create planning policies that meet those needs, and help shape the future of Dartford."

The Borough's planning policies also need to support the aims and objectives of the area's Community Strategy – in other words, making conscious linkages between strategies and policies – such as healthy communities and community safety – and areas on the ground – such as play-spaces and safe town centres. Being clear about how we want the Borough to develop and grow can help deliver a better place to live.

The Community Strategy was approved in 2003 and includes goals for 7 main subject

areas. Many of the subject areas overlap – reading the whole set will give you an overall flavour. The following lists some issues and spatial options to begin thinking about. All of these are reinforced and taken forward by the Council's own Corporate Plan. The Council's

existing planning policies have also supported these aims but with different degrees of success – we want to learn from experience and make future policies better at delivering development we can be proud of.



The environment is just one of a number of important issues where we need your views

Dartford's top priorities – we want you

Issue 1 – Regeneration and Transport

Regeneration can include many things to improve overall civic pride – options include making sure that Dartford Town Centre and other local centres provide a strong focus for community life, redeveloping 'tired' parts of a Borough's physical fabric – such as making the most of the River Thames and injecting new life into the heart of Swanscombe. It can also mean making the best use of our strategic sites (Ebbsfleet, Eastern Quarry, Ingress Park, Stone Castle, Swanscombe Peninsula and The Bridge at North Dartford) to build strong new communities. Regeneration is all about raising the quality of life in an area and creating interesting, thriving communities.

- Do you agree that the options listed above are priorities for regeneration in Dartford?
- Are there other priorities we've missed?
- Do you agree that the River Thames should be a focus for activity and draw people to it? Do you support making more of the River Thames and promoting it as a location for new activities and destinations?
- Most of our strategic sites are either substantially under construction, or have received planning permission or have detailed planning brief guidance. The Council still has to approve details – is there anything we could be doing differently to make these better planned communities?
- How can new development on our strategic sites benefit existing communities most?

Dartford's town centre performs many different roles for many different people. Its retail range is gradually improving and it is a significant employment centre. Options for the future include leaving the town to develop in a piecemeal fashion, or trying to be more positive in guiding new development to make the most of existing assets.

- Do you agree that Dartford Town centre should be the main focus of activity within the Borough?
- Would the town benefit from more positive planning guidance?
- How can we best improve the mix of uses and activities within Dartford Town Centre?
- Do you support making more of the River Darent and promoting it as a location for new activities and destinations? How can we make more of land around the Mill Pond area just north of the station?

- The Lowfield Street development has the opportunity to knit the town centre and the park closer together – what other benefits do you think the development could provide?

An effective transport system is crucial so that people can live their lives in a convenient manner and have access to their jobs, schools and leisure pursuits. In recent years, planning for transport has moved from a single option of planning for the private car to planning for choice ie a package approach based on flexible options - creating good public transport alternatives (the *Fastrack* initiative) and trying to plan for a network of local centres to serve the everyday needs of local communities so that they can walk or cycle to local shops for instance.



Bus for the future?

Car parking can be a problem in specific areas, in terms of the amount and its layout. There is great pressure to limit car parking provision for new developments across the Borough as a whole, but this option will only work if what is provided is practical to use and if there attractive alternatives for those who don't necessarily need to own a car – such as good public transport, close proximity to shops and services and innovative practices such as the availability of 'car clubs'.

- What transport / traffic issues concern you most, and how could these best be resolved?
- Is planning for a choice of transport modes a sensible starting point?
- What's the furthest anyone should walk to a local shop?
- Is parking an issue for you?
- Do you / could you live conveniently without a car? What makes this practical?



The River Thames could be a focus for new activities

Issue 2 – Lifelong Learning

Making sure that learning opportunities are easy to access and meet the needs of the local community is an important goal. Dartford Borough currently has a good network of sites for schools and other educational establishments (nurseries, cyber-places etc), libraries and other important learning resources – such as the Dartford Museum and Beacon Wood Country Park's interpretation services.

Many of these locate close to or with each other to provide 'one-stop' opportunities for their clients or for parents when dropping off their children. Others have to locate where the interest is located – as at Beacon Wood, or Swanscombe Heritage Park.

Some schools in the Borough may have to look at their physical provision in order to redesign and improve themselves to offer 21st century standards to comply with the objectives of "schools for the future".

- Is the 'one-stop' idea a key option which should be promoted?
- Are there any uses which are inappropriate for sharing facilities or being part of a 'one-stop' location?

- Should outdoor spaces and places have more of a role to play in life long learning?
- Are there any school provision issues which will need to be planned for spatially?



Dartford Museum

Issue 3 – Jobs and Business

A flourishing economy, providing jobs and services for the local community is important for the Borough.

Dartford is currently home to approximately 48,000 jobs – many of which lie in the retailing, health service, transport and distribution and manufacturing – including chemical products – sectors. This compares with an economically active population of some 44,000 resident within the Borough. While this might imply a good fit, out-commuting is still relatively high at around 50%, although many of these are within a 5 mile radius. The strategic sites will contain employment areas and these will largely be office based – meeting the needs of modern business. Many of these jobs will be centred on Ebbsfleet – the new international passenger station which is due to open in 2007.

Currently there is a good mix of employment sites within the Borough catering for a full range of business premises and start up units. There are also important river related uses along the River Thames – such as the aggregates wharf

and Thames Europort. There is enormous pressure generally to redevelop existing employment sites for residential or mixed use developments. Once sites like these are lost however, they are extremely difficult to replace.

If sustainable patterns of urban development are to be achieved, then journeys to work should be kept as short as possible and options for employment should not be overly constrained. In other words, the homes that will be built need to have access to as wide a range of employment opportunities as possible.

- Is this a key issue for you?
- Do you have to travel further to work than you would prefer?
- Is keeping a wide range of employment options available important?
- Would redevelopment of traditional employment sites concern you – either for housing or mixed use?
- Should sites for key river-related employment be safeguarded in any way?

Issue 4 – The Environment

The environment is important for the Borough in two main ways: Its primary spatial policy, the Green Belt, identifies the focus for future growth – the major urban area. By this it preserves countryside and villages largely south of the A2 – and directs growth northwards – concentrating on a series of damaged land and sites. This option for future development reflects existing planning policy guidance.

There is still enormous pressure to adopt another approach and release sites from the Green Belt for development – many sites were suggested during preparation of the Local Plan Review and some of these continue to be suggested today. Some sites – mainly institutions such as schools and hospitals have been included as major developed sites within the Green Belt – this policy approach allows redevelopment based on their footprint for specific purposes – often to achieve other policy objectives for example – re-providing sub-standard schools to satisfy the educational requirements of the 21st century.

- Is protecting the Green Belt a key issue for you?



Dartford Heath is part of the Green Grid

- Do you agree that the focus for new development should be located within the urban area on 'brownfield' sites?
- Are there any sites which justify major developed site status to satisfy their service provision needs?

Our views on these eight key issues

The environment, in the round, also defines our spatial characteristics from the riverside, through the town and out into the countryside. Protecting historic areas and buildings is a well-supported approach. In addition to this, for some years, the Council has been working with others to try and create a series of inter-linking green spaces and connecting routes – this is known as the Green Grid. Some of these spaces are easily recognisable – Dartford Marshes, the Darent Valley Footpath and Central Park, Dartford Heath, Stone Lodge, Swanscombe Heritage Park and many others. These areas are important green lungs and some have ecological interest which would preclude development. Others however can accommodate some degree of built development where other community objectives are being met.

Issue 5 – Health and Wellbeing

Health and well-being is not just about making sure that hospitals, surgeries and other healthcare sports and leisure facilities are available and accessible, although these are important considerations. It's also about translating preventative healthcare objectives into the creation of communities which can support healthy lifestyles – making sure that people have a practical option to walk to shops, schools and other services. It's also about providing adequate play-spaces close to homes so that children and young people have the opportunity for more active leisure time, and providing opportunities for shade within green spaces and along green routes so that the outdoors can be enjoyed safely.

In terms of controlling development – it's about ensuring safeguards are in place to make sure that water quality is preserved and that the occupiers of new development do not suffer from air or noise pollution, or other

The environment also acts as a constraint on new development most notably in terms of flood risk areas. This needs to be addressed as many of the strategic sites lie within flood risk areas. This does not preclude development - it means significant land-raising will be necessary for development to occur. A Strategic Flood Risk Assessment is currently being undertaken to ensure the policy approach provides adequate protection.

- What do you think are the key spaces and places to protect?
- What do you think are the biggest threats to the Borough's environment?
- Should the creation of a 'Green Grid' be a key objective?
- What sorts of benefits do you see the Green Grid providing?

sources of contamination.

Assessing the impacts of different planning policy approaches on the full range of health considerations can lead to significant improvements in the quality of life for the Borough's residents.

- Is creating healthy communities a key issue for you?
- Do you have access to facilities for enjoying an active and healthy lifestyle?
- Do you agree that a mix of uses can create more sustainable ways of living? Are there any mixes of uses that we need to be careful about?
- Are there enough parks and open spaces and good pedestrian routes and cycleways which encourage you to walk?
- Are there any health service provision issues which will need to be planned for spatially?



Adequate play space is an important consideration

Issue 6 – Community Safety



Well used streets allow for natural surveillance

Careful attention to planning and design early on in building developments can bring benefits in terms of minimising the opportunity for crime within communities. Well used or overlooked streets and spaces which allow for natural surveillance, especially around play-spaces and other communal areas can improve safety. Good lighting can help as well. Road safety issues can also be addressed through careful attention to connectivity and design.

Providing community facilities so that people have good access to safe and healthy activities can also reduce the opportunity for 'anti-social' behaviour to fill the gap.

- How do you think better design and planning can improve community safety?
- Are there particular areas where more attention to planning for safety is necessary?

Issue 7 – Housing and the Built Environment

Dartford is part of an identified growth area. This will provide many opportunities and many challenges as well. The Borough has a small number of very large strategic sites which are ideally placed to accommodate a large number of homes over the next 10 to 15 years – the Borough needs to provide 15,500 new dwellings up to 2021 to meet Structure Plan requirements. This amount of growth will bring with it fresh demands for transport and other community infrastructure. The delivery of these services and the timing of their delivery will be crucial in creating thriving, balanced communities. We need to build strong communities from the outset.

The existing approach is for new housing to make the best use of land and other resources – coupled with good public transport and accessible community services this can lead to opportunities for more compact development. This is a package approach and all the ingredients have to be delivered to ensure success. Recent experience has shown that compact growth can lead to problems where car ownership exceeds car parking provision, or where the lack of internal storage space is

compounding the parking issue by taking up garage space. Additionally, while individual building designs may be high standard – the provision of a community 'hub' – a shop or a school has lagged behind and communities have not bonded as well as expected. Options for dealing with this need to be explored.

- Do you agree that most new housing should be located on Dartford's strategic sites?
- Is the design of new development important to you?
- What options for providing car parking should we be exploring?
- Are 'car clubs' something worth pursuing – ie having a number of cars available for individual hire?
- What community and social facilities are needed in the Borough? Are there enough local shops and services near you? Are there enough places nearby that you can go to for public meetings or hire for social occasions?
- Should we be doing more to encourage resource efficiency in the way we design developments?



The restoration of Ingress Abbey as a focal point within Ingress Park

Issue 8 – Leisure and Culture

Leisure and culture are important for the vitality and viability of any town. Dartford already has the regionally significant Orchard Theatre, as well as other important performance venues a good network of libraries, leisure centres and other clubs. Each summer Central Park plays host to the Dartford Festival and the High Street is home to the annual Christmas lights extravaganza. The town also hosts two weekly markets and occasional special events such as the French Market and annual Remembrance Day Service.

The town is a hive of activity during the

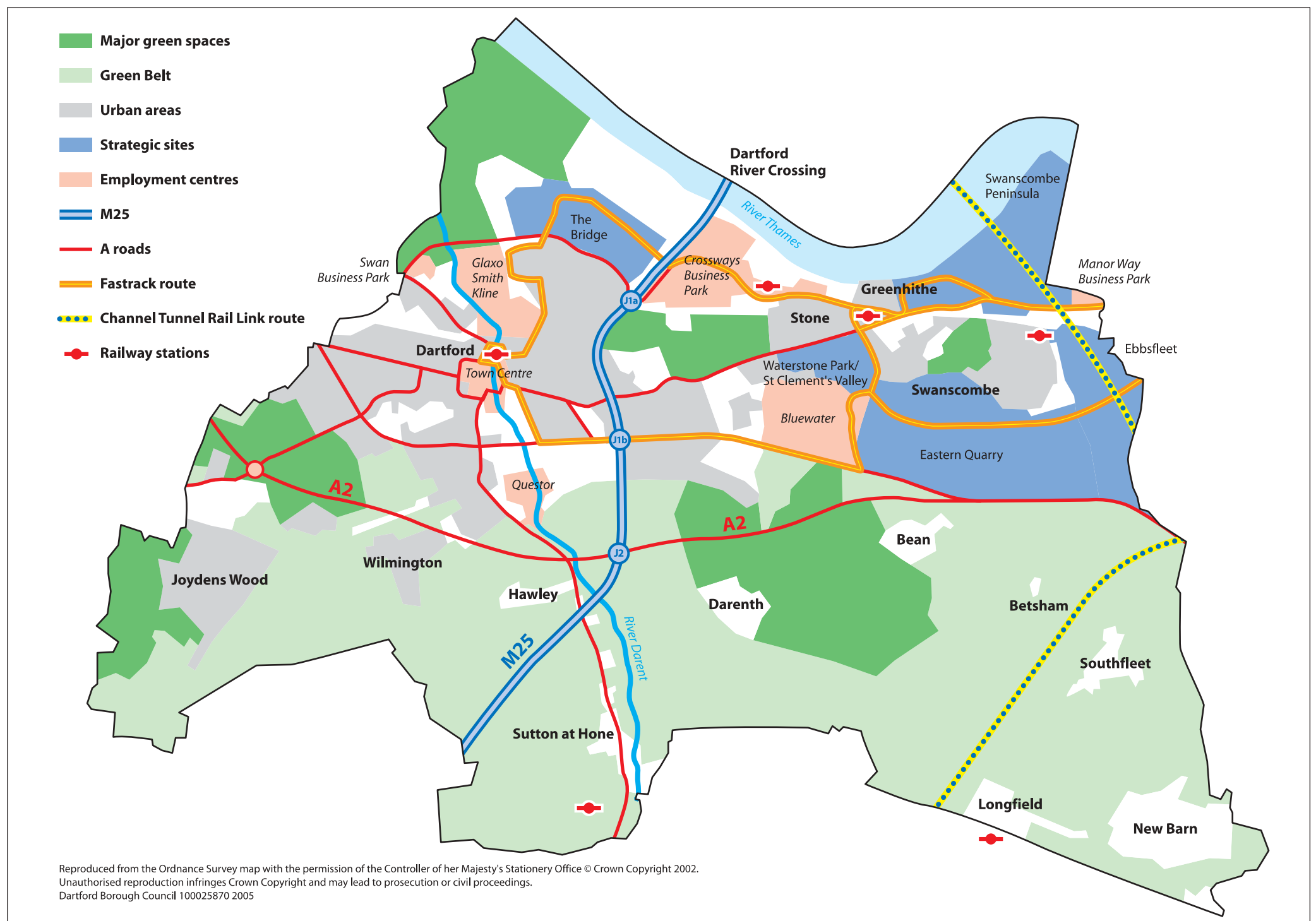
daytime and lights up again with the pubs and nightclubs. What seems to be lacking is a more balanced evening economy with some more family oriented activities.

- What sort of activities do you think are missing from the leisure and culture range?
- The Local Plan Review encourages a broader leisure base just to the north of the town centre at Mill Pond Road – is this the right place?
- What other options should we be exploring?



French Market

Shaping Dartford's Future



A number of issues and options have been highlighted here, but we want to know what's important to you. Have you remembered your postcard from the future? What's on it? What are the three most important things the Dartford of the future should be able to provide to give you a better quality of life? And what do you see as the biggest threats to your quality of life in the future? You can give us this short overview, or if you've got more time you can help by answering some or all of the questions listed here. We want to know what's important to you so that you can help us shape Dartford's future development so that the best possible outcomes are achieved.

Let us know your comments by the end of August. Send them to:

Planning Policy Team
Dartford Borough Council
FREEPOST (DT 26)
Dartford DA1 1BR
or email us at
LDF@dartford.gov.uk

Give us your views by the end of August and win £50 in Bluewater vouchers!

What are the top three issues to do with growth and development that affect your life in Dartford?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

What are the three most important things the Dartford of the future should be able to provide to give you a better quality of life?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

What do you see as the biggest threats to your quality of life in the future?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Any Other Comments On The Issues Listed? Have we missed any?

Please complete your details to enter the prize draw. If you would like to be involved in future consultations about the Council's Local Development Framework please tick here and we will follow this up.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone Number: _____

E-mail: _____

If you have any further questions on the Local Development Framework please contact the Planning Policy Team on 01322 343213