

**FIRST STAGE STATEMENT OF COMMON GROUND (SoCG)  
BETWEEN BEXLEY LONDON BOROUGH AND DARTFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL  
January 2020**

**Summary**

This is an early (or partial) SoCG, which will be updated as matters progress. It sets out the how the two authorities intend to work together to address cross-boundary matters, the issues to be addressed and the programme for doing so. The government's planning practice guidance recommends early publication of a draft SoCG, which is updated over time.

**Strategic geography**

Maps of the two authorities' areas showing physical connections  
*TO BE ADDED.*

**Cross-boundary relationships**

In summary, whilst the two authorities are within separate administrative areas, functionally, there are strong cross-boundary relationships. Most salient commonalities are:

- The Thames Estuary area identified for growth and regeneration;
- Strategic direction:
  - 1) focus of development in both authorities along the North Kent line in the northern half of respective areas;
  - 2) development in sustainable locations enabling shift to non-car modes, higher density and mix of uses to support reduced need for travel by car;
- Need to support proposed development with shared transport infrastructure, in particular potential Elizabeth Line (Crossrail1 extension);
- Shared radial transport routes out of London, road and rail with strong commuting flows into Central London on the North Kent line;
- Traffic mitigations particularly in respect of A206/Jct 1a of M25;
- Strong migration flows from Bexley to Dartford
- Strong cross-boundary journey to work flows;
- Other economic connections e.g. supply chain, sub-contracting, freight movements.
- Green Belt along boundary to south of both boroughs, and small but strategically significant cross-boundary Green Belt land at the Marshes; and
- Significant flows across boundary for range of community services including schools and hospital.

Further information is set out below with respect to essential aspects of strategic matters outlined in NPPF paragraph 20:

- **Migration and Commuting Flows, and Housing Markets**
- Clear trends are distinguishable between Bexley and Dartford, found within the overall regional context of London and the Southeast. The Dartford and Ebbsfleet Residential Needs Assessment 2019 shows the outward and inward migration flows for Dartford.

People moving out of Dartford were most likely to move to Bexley in 2017 (12.6% of those leaving, equating to 811 people). A far higher number of people moved from Bexley to Dartford in the same year (1,817 people), amounting to nearly 23% of all people moving to the Borough.

- The Dartford and Ebbsfleet Residential Needs Assessment 2019 shows the patterns of commuting into and out of DBC. Whilst one third of DBC's working residents are employed within the Borough, over 12% commute to work in Bexley. In terms of those who work within DBC, nearly 30% of those who work in the Borough also live there. Slightly more people travel from Bexley to Dartford to work (5,948 people) than vice versa (5,065 people).
- **Transport**
- *Rail:* Dartford and Bexley share three train lines into central London and therefore have a common interest in the provision of rail services both in terms of commuting into Central London and Kent and for intermediate trips between the boroughs. The Government has aspirations, through the franchising process, for those services to be simplified, rationalising which London termini are served on which line. Simplifying service patterns will increase the need to change trains, increasing journey times and, potentially, making overall journeys less reliable – as well as the added inconvenience. Signalling alterations proposed in Network Rail's Kent Route Study [May 2018] implemented as soon as possible, in order to enable 12-car trains to operate on Cannon Street 'loop' services
- *Highways:* M25 junction 1a and A206, A2- Dartford and Bexley share a number of radial routes out of central London eastwards towards important destinations in north and central Kent, the channel ports and the M25. The efficient flow of traffic on these routes is of mutual interest. The daily traffic build-up on the approach to the Dartford Crossing from the south regularly backs up past the Darent Interchange (A2/M25/A282 – M25 junction 2). When incidents occur at the crossing, the resultant traffic queues and rerouting have a significant impact on the wider highway network in both Dartford and Bexley.
- *Buses:* The main bus corridor between Bexley and Dartford follows the A207 Watling Street with the 96 service connecting Welling, Bexleyheath, Crayford, Dartford town centre, Darent Valley hospital and Bluewater. The 428 connects into this route at Crayford. The 492 service starts at Sidcup and runs to Bexleyheath, before taking a circuitous route to Dartford town centre via Crayford. It then runs to Greenhithe before dropping south into Bluewater. The 233 runs between Eltham, Sidcup and Swanley. The B12 connects Erith, Bexleyheath, Bexley village and Joydens Wood. There are also three school buses on the 601 service linking Thamesmead and Erith with schools at Wilmington. Recent proposals by TfL to curtail a number of these services have been opposed by both Councils.
- *Long distance footpaths and cycleways:* The main walking route connecting Bexley and Dartford is the Thames Path, which follows the river bank before diverting south to cross the Rivers Cray and Darent at the A206 before re-joining the Thames. National Cycle Route 1 follows the Thames Path but from the A206 Thames Road, it follows Burnham Road into Dartford town centre. The green spaces of Dartford Heath and Joydens Wood offer a network of walking and horse riding routes.

- **Community Services**
- There are a number of cross boundary infrastructure issues that have an impact on both authorities, including health and schools. The principal hospital for the sub-region is Darent Valley Hospital located in the centre of Dartford Borough; and there is also a cross boundary flow of primary care patients.
- For health and education infrastructure, many patients and pupils travel across the border to access important services. For instance, a number of secondary schools are located close the Boroughs shared boundary. 1,121 pupils that are Bexley residents go to Dartford schools. This is 2.55% of total Bexley pupils.
- **Green Belt and Green/ Blue infrastructure**
- The Metropolitan Green Belt is a significant designation that impacts both authorities and plays a key role in the separation of settlements. This includes: the relatively small and non-contiguous Crayford and Dartford marshes which separates Crayford / Slade Green / Erith from Dartford; Dartford Heath which separates Bexley and Dartford; and countryside further south which separates Footh Cray / Ruxley from Joyden’s Wood. 54% of DBC is constrained by the Green Belt.
- Both are Thames-side authorities and moreover, the Darent and Cray Rivers are shared along the Borough boundary.

### Local Plan Progress

The stage each authority is at and broad timetable:

Local Plan Stage	Dartford Council	London Borough of Bexley
Formal public consultation: Reg 18	Jan-Feb 2019 (R18 2 <sup>nd</sup> phase )	February/April 2019
Publication: Reg 19	Autumn 2020	June/July 2020
Submission: Reg 22	Winter 2020/21	Spring 2021
Timescale for examination and subsequent potential adoption in the hands of the Planning Inspector to be appointed.		

Current uncertainties:

- Bexley housing requirement figure dependent on London Plan outcome.
- Dartford: further information required on phasing and capacity of principal regeneration areas at Ebbsfleet and Dartford Town Centre.
- Rail capacity will be large determinant for both authorities as to levels of housing and jobs that can be delivered. In the longer term, due to densities that can be achieved (high capacity/quality link such as Crossrail will facilitate higher densities) and which can be deliverable (without Crossrail or equivalent, land values may not be sufficiently strong to bring forward potential high density redevelopment sites).

### Current housing delivery levels

Dartford – need, as per government methodology, of 797 per annum. Currently being exceeded. The majority of this capacity arises from large former quarry sites identified as part of Thames Estuary strategic development sites. Due to small size of the borough, the one-off availability of this land

source, and limited historic urban area, the capacity for sustainable development will be much reduced once these are developed out. Likely that capacity later in Plan period will be reduced, unless there is an uplift in the Ebbsfleet area and the acceleration is sustained over the period.

Recently delivered large new communities cannot be expected to yield any significant scope for intensification for many decades e.g. Ingress Park development, Eastern Quarry.

Bexley – current housing requirement of 446 per annum set out in the existing London Plan with spatial approach based on Core Strategy, which is currently being delivered. However, the draft new London Plan would increase significantly Bexley’s housing requirement to 1,245 per annum if published as currently written. Panel report recommends a ten year housing target for Bexley of 6,850, with the small site component at 3,050. (This is less than 50% of new homes coming forward on small sites). A requirement of 685 units per annum would likely be deliverable, particularly in the later part of the plan period.

Large-scale opportunities for redevelopment, which are needed to bring forward the numbers required, are likely to have long lead-in period and not come to fruition till late in the Plan period.

### *Potential for further mutual cooperation*

Extensive cooperation has occurred so far between Bexley and Dartford, notably in the C2E partnership (along with TfL, EDC, KCC & GBC inter alia). A route from Abbey Wood to Ebbsfleet would run through the whole of Bexley and Dartford Boroughs. This cooperation will be depended further through further project joint working, and pursuant to the signed partnership Memorandum of Understanding.

A programme of work will be undertaken to explore the issues to be addressed and whether additional cross-boundary collaboration/ sharing is achievable. A roadmap for the agreement of matters will be prepared to inform a full Statement of Common Ground signed agreement.

Any relevant issues are discussed and explored at the regular Duty to Cooperate meetings held between DBC and Bexley. They are also discussed with other agencies / stakeholders such as Highways England, Kent County Council (KCC) and the health and environmental agencies:

- Infrastructure planning particularly around transport interventions but also community infrastructure and utilities. DBC and Bexley Council will continue to liaise and work together with the infrastructure providers on all cross boundary infrastructure matters, including through infrastructure delivery plans and planning applications.
- DBC and Bexley Council are committed to continued partnership working with the relevant stakeholders, including TfL, GLA, Kent County Council and the two Clinical Commissioning Groups/ NHS Trust, with the aim of ensuring the necessary improvements to support sustainable growth are delivered in a timely manner over the period of the DBC and Bexley Local Plans. This includes exploring opportunities for joint bids to unlock funding.
- In relation to transport infrastructure, and in particular the A2 and the relief of congestion at the existing A282 Dartford Crossing /delivery of proposed new Lower Thames Crossing, DBC and LBB<sup>1</sup> are committed to continue working together in partnership with the relevant stakeholders, including Highways England and KCC. This should ensure that the necessary improvements to support sustainable growth are

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<sup>1</sup> Original incorrect references in this paragraph to ‘GBC’ were replaced by ‘LBB’ in February 2020.

delivered in a timely manner over the period of the DBC and LBB Local Plans. DBC and LBB both recognise that securing sufficient funding to deliver transport improvement schemes is essential. The two authorities are committed to working together to secure the necessary funding and will positively consider all available mechanisms.

*Dartford Borough Council,*

*Bexley London Borough,*

*January 2020.*