

Statement of Common Ground

between


Dartford Borough Council and Thurrock Council

October 2021

1. List of Parties involved:

This Statement of Common Ground (SOCG) has been prepared by Dartford Borough Council (DBC) and Thurrock Council (Thurrock). It reflects the agreed position between the parties.

2. Signatories:

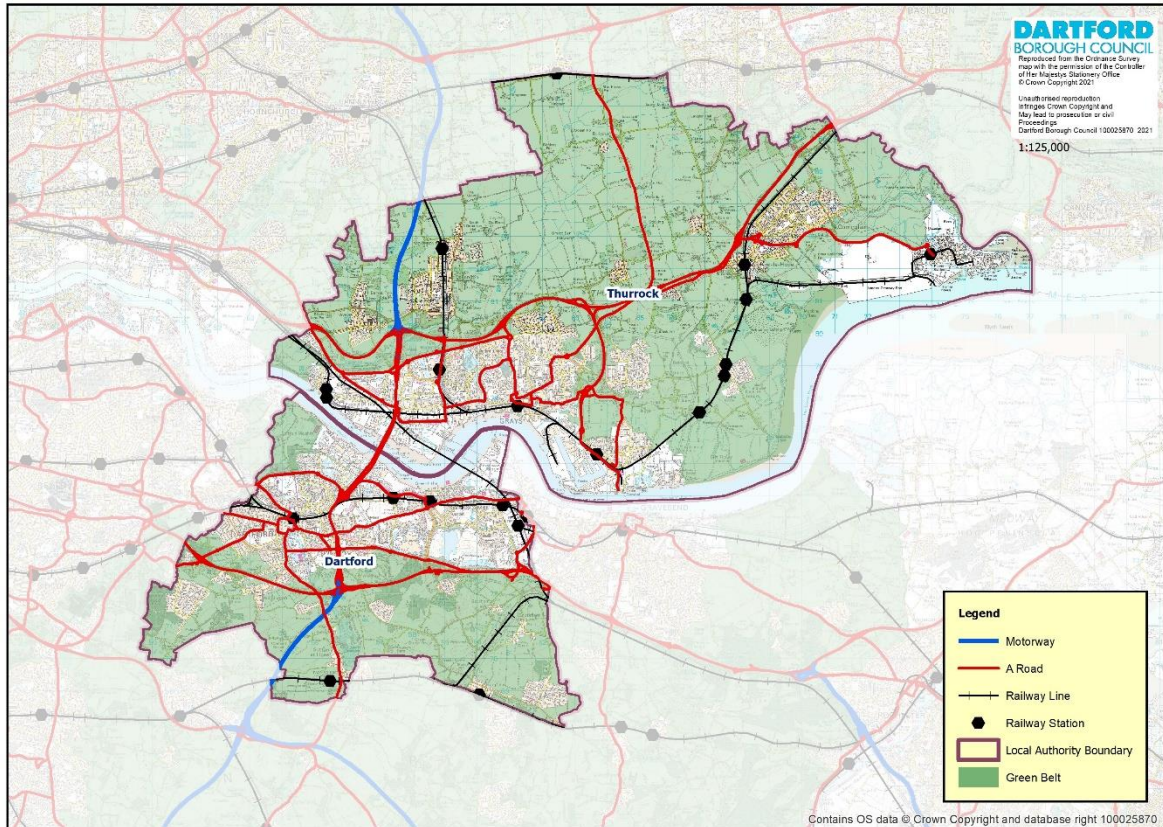
Signed on behalf of Thurrock Council	Signed on behalf of Dartford Borough Council
	
Position: Strategic Planning Manager	Position: Head of Planning Services
Date: 28/10/21	Date: 29-10-21

3. Strategic Geography

The administrative areas set out in the map below show that DBC and Thurrock share a common Borough boundary and hence work cooperatively on Local Plans in an effective way to address key strategic matters relating to these areas. The River Thames creates a significant physical barrier between the two authority areas. The only physical connection between DBC and Thurrock is via the A282/M25 Dartford Crossing which comprises two bored tunnels running northbound and the QEII bridge running southbound.

DBC is within a two tier authority area, with Kent County Council being the upper-tier authority responsible for highways, education and other matters. Thurrock is a unitary authority responsible for all local authority functions within its area. When regional planning arrangements were in place, Dartford was within the South East region, and Thurrock in the East Region.

DBC and Thurrock are both in the Thames Gateway/ Estuary areas. Both authorities adjoin Greater London.



4. Strategic Matters

Local Plan – Current Status

DBC republished the Pre-Submission (Publication) Dartford Local Plan in September 2021. Once adopted, this will replace the Dartford Core Strategy 2011 and the Dartford Development Policies Plan 2017. The new Dartford Local Plan is expected to be adopted in 2022 and will cover the period to 2037.

Thurrock Council intends to consult on a draft New Local Plan (Regulation 18) in 2022. A Pre-Submission (Publication) version of the plan will be published in 2023. It anticipated that Examination and Adoption would be in 2024 and the plan will cover the period to 2040. On adoption the New Thurrock Local Plan would replace the Core Strategy and Policies for Management of Development (as amended) of 2015.

The NPPF defines the topics potentially to be considered strategic matters (paragraph 20). Those potential strategic matters relevant to DBC and Thurrock are set out below.

Housing Agreement

The Dartford and Ebbsfleet Housing Needs Assessment 2019 shows the 10 authorities from which most people moved into DBC and moved to from DBC in 2017. Thurrock is not included which demonstrates that there is relatively little current overlap between the two authorities in terms of the housing market.

Travelling Showpeople Agreement

The Dartford Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) 2019 identified a need for one plot arising from an existing travelling showpeople's site in DBC. The Meeting the Needs of Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople Report (the Report) September 2021 by DBC indicates the likelihood that this need could be met on the existing site.

Since the Dartford GTAA was carried out, an unauthorised travelling showpeople's site has been established at Drudgeon Farm, School Lane, Bean within DBC. The Report indicates that the planning application for this site was refused and the site is currently subject to planning and enforcement appeals. It is understood that a number of families on the site moved from Thurrock.

The most recent Thurrock GTAA was published in 2018 as part of the Essex, Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock, Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople Accommodation Assessment and covered the period 2016-33. Due to the nature and scale of the issues at the travelling showpeople site at Buckles Lane, South Ockendon, Thurrock, a separate Travelling Showpeople Accommodation Assessment (TSAA) for this location was also published in 2018. The Council is currently reviewing and updating the Buckles Lane TSAA (to be completed by end of 2021) and is to commence work on a revised GTAA covering the rest of the borough. Both documents will cover needs to 2040.

Employment Development Agreement

The Dartford and Ebbsfleet Housing Needs Assessment 2019 shows the 10 authorities which were the most important for patterns of commuting into and out of DBC in 2017. Thurrock is not included which indicates that there is relatively little current overlap between the two authorities in terms of travel to work areas/employment provision. This is despite the fact that there are significant areas of employment immediately north and south of the A282/M25 Dartford Crossing – at Crossways Business Park in DBC and Purfleet riverside and the Lakeside Basin/West Thurrock industrial estates in Thurrock. This is likely to be because of the regular congestion which occurs on the A282/M25 Dartford Crossing which makes commuting journey times unreliable.

However, the Pre-Submission Dartford Local Plan includes a proposal to extend the Identified Employment Areas at The Bridge/ Littlebrook and Crossways Business Park, both of which have planning permission for employment development. These proposals, along with the anticipated completion of the Lower Thames Crossing in 2027/2028 (see Infrastructure section below), could increase the attractiveness of travelling between DBC and Thurrock for work and alter the commuting patterns between the two authority areas. DBC and Thurrock will keep this matter under review.

Retail and Commercial Leisure Development Agreement

Bluewater (in DBC) and Lakeside (in Thurrock) are regional shopping centres. Bluewater includes a cinema and other commercial leisure facilities. The Lakeside regional centre comprises the Lakeside shopping centre and a large retail park. The adopted Thurrock Core Strategy policies support the diversification of the regional centre to accommodate employment, leisure and residential uses in addition to additional retail floorspace. The emerging new local plan will review the levels of growth and mix of uses within the regional centre and the wider Lakeside Basin.

To some extent, residents of DBC and Thurrock use both Bluewater and Lakeside retail centre for shopping and leisure purposes as the retail offer is not duplicated between them; there is a regular bus link between the two. However, both retail facilities are suffering from retail restructuring resulting from on-line trading/ competition (accelerated by covid 19 restrictions).

Competition for expenditure is also felt at Bluewater and Lakeside from the last wave of new shopping facilities opened (for instance, Westfield Stratford City).

A Dartford & Ebbsfleet Retail and Leisure Study 2021 has been carried out for DBC. This found no Borough capacity for comparison retail floorspace to 2030 and a small amount of capacity from 2030 to 2036. It found some needs for commercial leisure uses, particularly in Dartford Town Centre. The Bluewater policy in the Pre-Submission Dartford Local Plan does not specifically allocate additional retail and commercial leisure development at Bluewater but sets out a criteria based approach which allows it to maintain its regional shopping centre role. The site allocation policies for Dartford Town Centre and Ebbsfleet Central in the Plan allow for the provision of retail and commercial leisure uses. In the case of Dartford Town Centre, DBC intend that this is part of the regeneration of the town and aim to improve its attractiveness as a place to shop and spend leisure time. In the case of Ebbsfleet Central, DBC intend that retail would be limited and proportionate to the scale of development. DBC and Thurrock agree that this policy approach will not have an adverse impact on the Lakeside shopping centre and retail park.

Infrastructure Agreement and Disagreement

A key issue for DBC is the operation of junction 1A on the A282/M25, immediately south of the Dartford Crossing. Traffic incidents on the Dartford Crossing commonly occur which adversely affect the operation of junction 1A and cause significant congestion on the A2 trunk road and local roads in DBC, in particular those around Dartford, Stone and Greenhithe. DBC is working with National Highways and Kent County Council to achieve improvements to junction 1A.

The Lower Thames Crossing is a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project being led by National Highways. It will involve a new motorway linking the M2/A2 east of Gravesend (within Gravesham Borough) to the A13 and M25 (within Thurrock). The original Development Consent Order application to the Planning Inspectorate was withdrawn in November 2020 due to insufficient information being submitted. A further round of Community Impacts Consultation was undertaken between 14 July and 8 September 2021. It is anticipated that the application will be resubmitted soon.

DBC supports the proposed Lower Thames Crossing as it is expected to relieve congestion and reduce traffic incidents on the existing A282/M25 Dartford Crossing, leading to improved free flow of traffic on the local road network in the Borough.

Thurrock Council objects in principle to the current proposed Lower Thames Crossing and its impacts on Thurrock and considers alternative options have not properly been assessed. Thurrock has submitted further representations following the latest consultation raising concerns that the consultation period was insufficient; the technical evidence was inadequate to justify the proposal and overall the draft DCO and supporting documentation provided inadequate mitigation to address the impact of the proposal across a wide range of matters.

DBC and Thurrock Council both support other measures to relieve congestion on the A282/M25 Dartford Crossing by improvements to the existing highway network including the road junctions immediately north and south of the crossing.

There are no current river transport connections between DBC and Thurrock but there may be opportunities to create these. DBC and Thurrock support opportunities to promote enhanced movement on and alongside the River Thames, including travel for passengers, products and the transportation of construction materials and waste (see also Swanscombe Peninsula section below).

Flood Risk Agreement

The River Thames forms the northern boundary of DBC and the southern boundary of Thurrock. There is a particular longer term issue in terms of growing risk of tidal flooding, and the TE2100 plan has been produced by the government to manage tidal flood risk in the Thames estuary until the year 2100. The initial part of the plan is to improve the existing flood defence system within DBC and Thurrock. Both authorities support this and will ensure that riverside developments take on board the need to improve flood defences now or in the future, in discussion with the Environment Agency. In the longer term, the TE2100 plan includes options to improve the existing Thames Barrier at Woolwich or to construct a new downstream barrier between Long Reach (in DBC) and Purfleet (in Thurrock). The government has not yet decided which option will be taken forward. DBC and Thurrock agree that their Local Plans cannot safeguard land for this purpose until there is more certainty that this is the option which will be implemented and there is a clearer indication of the land required for the provision of such a barrier.

Swanscombe Peninsula Agreement

A proposal for London Resort on Swanscombe Peninsula is being dealt with as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project. The Development Consent Order application was submitted to the Planning Inspectorate in late 2020 and has been accepted. The site largely straddles land within DBC and Gravesham Borough Council's area but the proposal also includes transport provision on land at Tilbury within Thurrock.

The Pre-Submission Dartford Local Plan does not assume that the London Resort will be implemented. However, in the event that the London Resort is granted consent and is implemented, DBC have committed to review the Local Plan to consider whether there is a need to revise policy in response to the projected impacts. In response to the proposal, DBC has highlighted various matters that need addressing including its impact on infrastructure, local communities, the environment and the delivery of development at Ebbsfleet Central.

Thurrock Council has submitted representations on a number of matters regarding the London Resort and highlighted concerns in particular of the impact of the proposal on landscape, heritage assets, the loss of employment land and levels of traffic on the highway network. The Council seeks further clarification on mitigation to reduce impact of the proposal.

5. Governance Arrangements

Officers of DBC and Thurrock meet regularly to discuss cross boundary strategic matters under the Duty to Cooperate. The narrative and outcome of these discussions is demonstrated in this Statement of Common Ground.

It is intended that the Statement of Common Ground will be updated going forward, particularly as both DBC and Thurrock progress their Local Plans.

6. Timetable for review and ongoing cooperation

The expected timetable for Plan review, update and submission for DBC and Thurrock is as follows:

	Present Adopted Plan	Target Reg 18 Date	Target Reg 19 Date	Target Submission Date
DBC	Core Strategy 2011	Preferred Options consultation Jan / Feb 2020	Pre-Submission (Publication) Local Plan Feb 2021	Autumn 2021

	Development Policies Plan 2017			
Thurrock	Core Strategy and Policies for Management of Development (as amended) 2015	Draft New Local Plan consultation 2022.	Pre-Submission (Publication) New Local Plan 2023	Late 2023