Thames Gateway

PARKLANDS

Vision

For further details on Thames Gateway Parklands see
www.communities.gov.uk/thamesgateway

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Foreword



Our commitment to the Parklands programme was set out in the Thames Gateway Delivery Plan last year, and its aims and ambitions are an integral part of the overall regeneration of the region. Enhancing the natural and urban environment across the Gateway is not only essential in making it a place where every person can achieve their full potential and develop a sense of belonging but also in making it a place that is attractive to investment.

The Parklands vision has been drawn together by Farrells based on a large amount of information and input from those already working in the Gateway and a number of 'critical friends'.

It provides a coherent framework for projects that form part of the Parklands programme. It suggests ways that public, private and third sector organisations can help deliver it. The vision focuses on the regeneration and development of urban and rural open spaces, which can be connected together to create an accessible and coherent landscape that will improve the quality of life for people living in the Thames Gateway, and those who visit and work in it.

There is already a great deal of commitment in the region to increasing the quality of the urban and rural environment. A huge amount of work has already been done, or is currently underway, in terms of physical improvements and the establishment of positive partnerships to make change happen.

We hope that the vision set out in this document will help increase this momentum and build on what has already been achieved.

I would like to thank all of you who have been involved in shaping the vision and I hope to see many Parklands projects coming forward over the next few years to help make it a reality.

The Right Honourable CAROLINE FLINT MP



I am delighted to present this report as part of my work as Parklands Design Champion. It is a privilege to have been asked by Government to create and develop a vision for this, the largest regeneration project in the UK.

For many years the Thames Estuary has captured my imagination. It is an inspiring landscape of rivers, wilderness, fields, villages, towns and the great city of London. We have based our work on these wonderful assets to paint a picture of a future based on landscape and environmental improvement, the mainstay of sustainable regeneration in the Thames Gateway.

The main purpose of the Parklands vision is to help ensure that people – those who already live in the Thames Gateway as well as its future residents and employees – experience Parklands as urban, rural and water based landscapes that form the core part of their daily lives.

In the course of this work it has been a revelation to find out about all the work that is already underway – we have identified more than 500 projects that exemplify Parklands aims – and I want to take this opportunity to thank everyone who met with and worked with us on the Parklands Spatial Framework.

I sincerely hope that everyone who reads this document can find a way to help realise the ambitions outlined here. The success of Parklands is dependent on the kind of enthusiasm and dedication we have come across thus far, and I believe that the Spatial Framework will help to change the River Thames Estuary as a place that we are happy to pass on to future generations.

SIR TERRY FARRELL

Preface

Communities and Local Government set out its ambitions and priorities for the Thames Gateway in the Delivery Plan which was published in November 2007.

All communities in the Gateway should benefit from its growing prosperity, and the department's ambitions reflect this. We want to:

- Build a vibrant economy with at least 225,000 new jobs that local people will have access to.
- Improve the quality of life for residents of the Gateway by providing 160,000 good quality homes at all levels of affordability, reviving town centres and providing a better built and natural environment.
- Establish the Gateway as an eco-region, leading the way for the rest of the country in low-carbon growth and sustainable regeneration.

These ambitions translate into the following specific outcomes:

- A sustainable improvement in the performance of the Thames Gateway economy.
- Improved economic and business performance through enhanced education and lifelong learning opportunities.
- A modern and efficient transport system.
- A sustainable increase in the number and quality of dwellings.
- An increase in the quality of life for communities throughout the Gateway.
- A showcase for ambitious environmental interventions.

The Thames Gateway Parklands programme is part of these wider regeneration outcomes. Parklands aims to provide a network of accessible, high quality and sustainable landscapes and waterways, which capitalise on existing natural, built, historic and cultural assets. It supports their conservation, enhancement and ongoing use. Parklands will boost Thames Gateway's rich biodiversity, strengthen its character and identity, and transform perceptions of the area into it being a great place to live, work and invest in. Parklands will be a key economic driver in the Gateway, encouraging investment and supporting regeneration.

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Introduction

Sunrise over Leigh-on-Sea looking out towards the North Sea



Introduction

This document sets out an aspirational vision, which will guide and support improvements to the environment and define Parklands' contribution to the UK's first 'eco-region' in the Thames Gateway.

The Parklands vision: Regenerate and develop urban and rural open spaces which are connected together to create an accessible and coherent landscape. This will improve the quality of life for people who live in the Thames Gateway, and the experience for those who visit and work in it. Parklands spaces should be sustainable and contribute towards the development of the Gateway as an eco-region. The vision can be implemented over time by a variety of organisations at national, regional and local level.

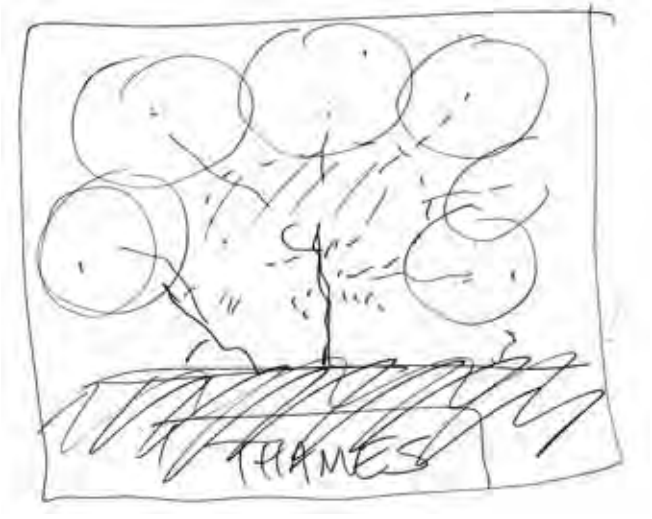
Parklands' aim is to help make the Thames Gateway a special place that draws on the Thames Estuary's unique landscape, its rich history and its vibrant mixture of cultures and communities. A vision has been created that connects these communities – both existing and new – to the river, its tributaries and the Estuary landscape.

Parklands will help to breathe new life into the area by contributing to a high quality environment. This in turn will help the Gateway's communities meet the challenges of the future. The environmental improvements described in the vision will encourage increased growth, economic development and investment in the region, by creating an attractive business and residential environment for both existing and new communities.

This is not a masterplan. It is a spatial framework that suggests ways in which public, private, third sector and local organisations can help shape the future of the Gateway through the development of its green infrastructure. It is intended to help in strategic decision-making and provide a context for the implementation of projects at local level. Parklands is designed to adapt to new challenges and change.

Parklands will make a contribution to the development of the Thames Gateway as the UK's first eco-region. The evolving landscape – including the urban landscape – can be a showcase for sustainability in response to climate change and the demand for finite resources. By drawing inspiration from nature, landscape and history, and by taking a respectful approach to the adaptation of existing resources including our built heritage and the culture of place, we are creating an environment within which low carbon growth can thrive.

Parklands is about improving a landscape that continues to inspire great writing, art and architecture. It is our aim – along with those that have participated in this process – to put forward an ambitious vision that is worthy of this special and diverse place.



An early sketch of the Parklands model



Crowstone, Westcliff



Estuary moorings, Leigh



Hadleigh Castle, Essex



Sheppey Bridge, North Kent

one

a coherent place…

The outer Thames Estuary looking north towards Southend in Essex



The Thames Gateway is a special place defined by its relationship to the tidal Thames Estuary and the landscapes that it has shaped. It is home to one and a half million people.

The area has an identity that extends from the Isle of Dogs in central London to Southend in Essex and the Isle of Sheppey in Kent. It is one coherent place.



Hadleigh Castle, 1829, Essex, with a view of Canvey Island and the River Thames in the background – painting by John Constable.



A living landscape

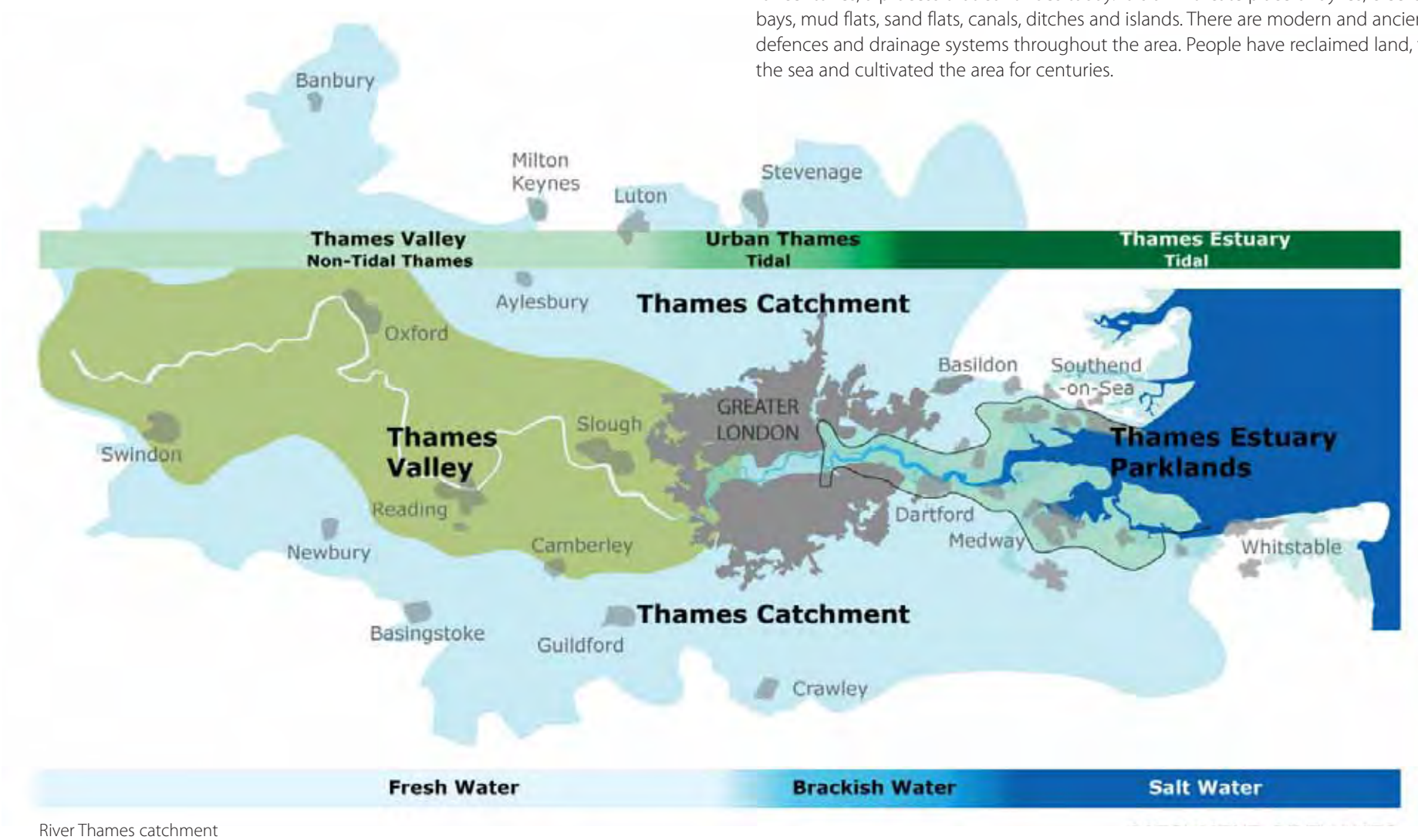
The Thames Gateway is located to the east of London, where the River Thames flows into the North Sea. On the north bank of the Thames it is typified by the open skies and the mainly low lying landscapes of Essex, to the south by a much more undulating landscape of quarries, downs, cliffs and outcrops in north Kent, and to the west by East London's dense pattern of docks, infrastructure and communities.

The area covers 120,000 hectares including the water, which constitutes a fifth of the total. Much of this landscape is exceptional and includes areas that are internationally designated as places of nature conservation importance. Over 40 per cent of the Thames Gateway area can be classed as 'wilderness' including the rivers.

The large tidal range gives the Estuary an ever-changing character. There are extensive wetlands including freshwater grazing marshes, intertidal salt marshes and mudflats.

The waters around the marshes are an important breeding ground for North Sea fish and marine life. The tidal foreshore is a productive feeding area and refuge for young fish. Sea horses have been found in the Thames Estuary and with the return of salmon and sea lamprey are indicators of good water quality. The Estuary has the largest collection of Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) sites in mainland Britain. These support the second largest number of wintering water birds of all estuaries in the UK. More than 120 species of birds can be found here as well as rare invertebrates and mammals.

Many of these special landscapes have been actively changed and managed by people for centuries, a process that continues today. It is an intricate place of dykes, creeks, inlets, bays, mud flats, sand flats, canals, ditches and islands. There are modern and ancient flood defences and drainage systems throughout the area. People have reclaimed land, farmed the sea and cultivated the area for centuries.



River Thames catchment

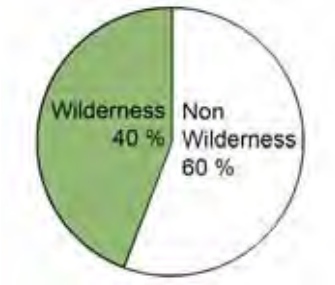


Marsh landscapes, Hoo Peninsula

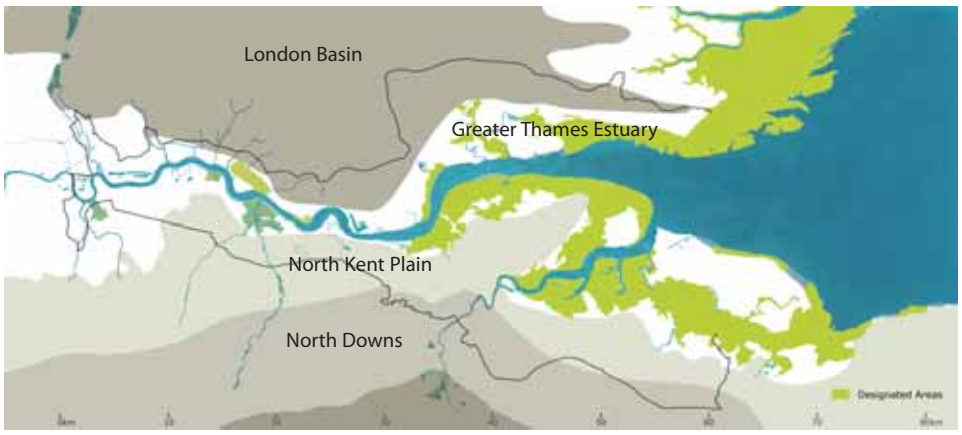
Ancient field layouts and agricultural practices are reflected in the landscapes of Essex and Kent today as well as within the urban areas of East London. The Estuary is known for sheep grazing within marshland.

Linear fields running perpendicular to the river are common and reflect ancient patterns of movement and use near the water's edge. There are less regular field patterns within marsh areas responding to local drainage patterns and tidal influence. On higher ground this pattern of land use relates to aspect, topography and the organisation of arable land and woods. Orchards, hop gardens and grazing land still exist within the Parklands landscape as a reminder of its continuing importance as a natural resource.

Some of the most biodiverse areas can be found on previously developed industrial land, for example, Canvey Wick Nature Reserve.



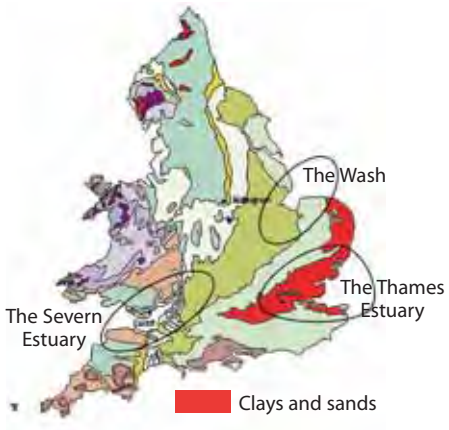
Forty per cent of the Thames Gateway can be regarded as wilderness. This includes designated areas and the Thames and its tributaries.



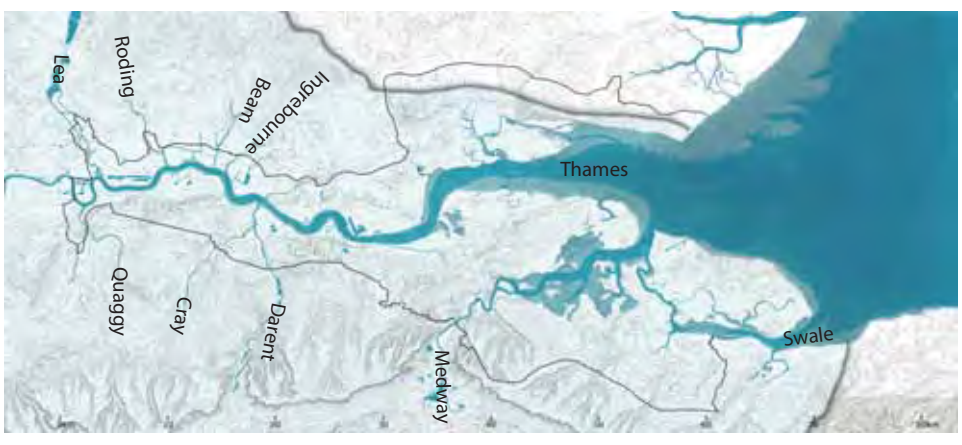
Landscape Character Areas



'Doggerland' 10000 BC

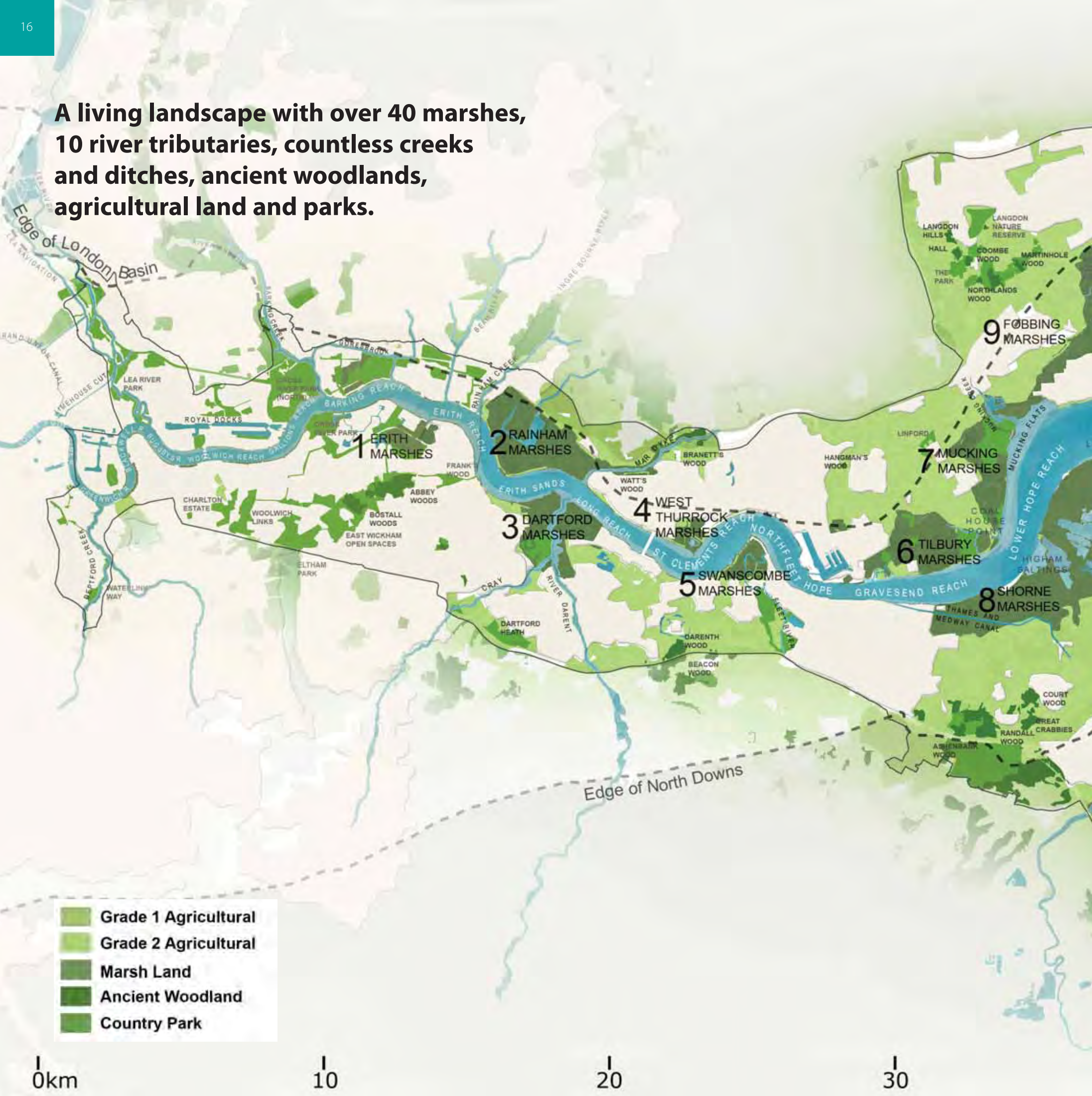


Geology map showing the underlying structure of the land and the major estuaries in southern England.



Topography

A living landscape with over 40 marshes, 10 river tributaries, countless creeks and ditches, ancient woodlands, agricultural land and parks.




RIVER CROUCH
32 WALLASEA ISLAND
33 FOULNESS ISLAND
31 POTTON ISLAND
RIVER ROACH
THE MIDDLEWAY
SHELFORD CREEK
WAKERING GREEN
30 RUSHLEY ISLAND
34 NEW ENGLAND ISLAND
POUND WOOD
THUNDERSLEY GLEN
WEST WOOD
GREAT WOOD
10 VANGE & PITSEA MARSHES
Edge of London Basin
11 BOWERS MARSHES
13 HADLEIGH MARSHES
BENFLEET CREEK
LEIGH CREEK
LEIGH SANDS
MAPLIN SANDS
PIGS BAY
12 WEST CANVEY MARSHES
SOUTHEND FLATS
CANVEY ISLAND
LEIGHBECK POINT
THE KNOCK
High Tide
SHOEBURYNESS
Low Tide
SEA REACH
SEA REACH DREDGED CHANNEL
EGYPT BAY
ST MARYS BAY
BLYTH SAND
YANTLET FLATS
14 CLIFFE MARSHES
16 ST.MARY'S MARSHES
19 GRAIN MARSHES
GRAIN SALT
MEDWAY APPROACH CHANNEL
RED SANDS TOWER
15 COOLING MARSHES
17 HALSTOW MARSHES
18 ALLHALLOWS MARSHES
THE CANT
NORTHWARD HILL
BELL WOOD
GARRISON POINT
HOO PENINSULA
BARTONS POINT
LODGE HILL
FISHER'S WOOD
WYBORNESS WOOD
GREAT CHATTENDEN WOOD
DEANGATE WOOD
STOKE SALTINGS
27 MINSTER MARSHES
DRAPERS POINT
BURNTWICK ISLAND
DEAD MAN'S ISLAND
ISLE OF SHEPPY
20 HOO SALT MARSHES
LONG REACH
23 GREEN BOROUGH MARSHES
25 CHETNEY MARSH
26 QUEENBOROUGH MARSHES
WINDMILL CREEK
CAPEL FLEET
21 NOR MARSHES
22 MILFORD HOPE
24 BARKS MARSH
28 MINSTER MARSHES
29 ELMLEY MARSHES
36 EASTCHURCH MARSHES
38 ISLE OF HARTY
AMBLEY WOOD
HAWES WOOD
GROVE WOOD
EAST HOATH WOOD
THE SWALE
Low Tide
High Tide
35 TEYNHAM LEVEL
39 CLEVE MARSHES
40 GRAVENEY MARSHES
37 LUDDENHAM MARSHES
ROUND WOOD
BYSING WOOD
COXETT WOOD
CROMER'S WOOD
Edge of North Downs
MITCHING WOOD
PUTT WOOD
SHARSTED PLANTATION
40
50
60
70

A human landscape

The landscape has been shaped by millennia of human activity. It is 70 kilometres of 'liquid history', a history which has left a great legacy of environmental and built heritage.

Several prehistoric artefacts have been found along the river, including the famous remains of early humanity at Swanscombe in Kent. It is rich in archaeology, and it has some wonderful architecture which draws visitors from all over the world. This heritage enriches local people's lives. Some of it is relatively unknown, for example Hadleigh Castle in Essex and the naval town of Sheerness on the Isle of Sheppey.

Traces of pre-industrial life are still evident within the landscape. The Roman road from Dover to London still influences the structure of the North Kent and East London settlements that lie along its course, and on both sides of the Thames there is a clear relationship between topography, river alignment and historic settlement. For example, Rochester in Medway is thought to have its origins in an Iron Age settlement on a strategic bend of the River Medway, and Grays in Essex is located on an ancient route that follows dry ground running parallel to the Thames. East London's development still reflects its focal role as a place of trade.

The great maritime complexes at Greenwich, Woolwich and Chatham show strong historical links to the outside world. The Estuary was Britain's first global gateway. The docks contributed to the intensification of development in East London. They changed the face of areas such as Bethnal Green, which was once a village focused on a village green. Urbanisation changed the nature of the relationship between people and open space throughout the Estuary in the 19th century. This is a major issue now being addressed by Parklands.

The enormous docks within East London and at Tilbury, Thurrock, Sheerness and Medway reinforce this into the future.

As a port, the area has been a place of exploration and migration for centuries and the area remains a place of great cultural diversity today. The Estuary will continue to be the UK's front door to the world and an important European port, with several major projects planned and under construction including the new deep sea container port at London Gateway.

Nineteenth and early 20th century growth was aided by the introduction of suburban rail services. This allowed places like Southend-on-Sea to thrive as seaside towns. Some 'utopian' planned settlements were also built at this time including cement workers' housing in Northfleet and the Bata Shoe Factory housing development at East Tilbury. At the other end of the scale, Essex became known for its 'plotlands', informal self-build housing originally promoted as weekend holiday homes.

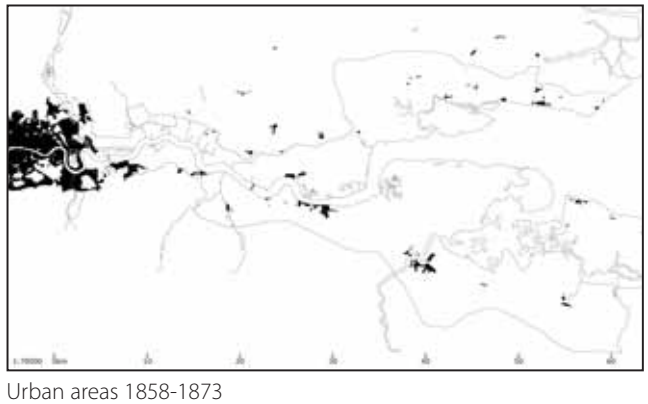


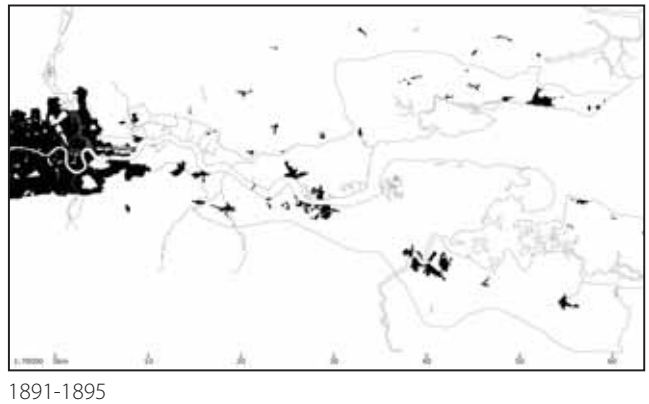
Gravesend High Street, Gravesham


Dutch Cottage – built when Canvey Island was reclaimed


Southend Pier, Essex


Paddle steamer on the Thames, Woolwich


Urban areas 1858-1873


1891-1895



Exploration



Trade



Migration



1800



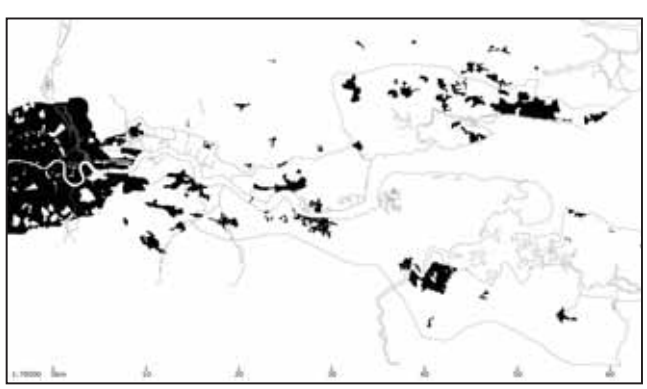
1850



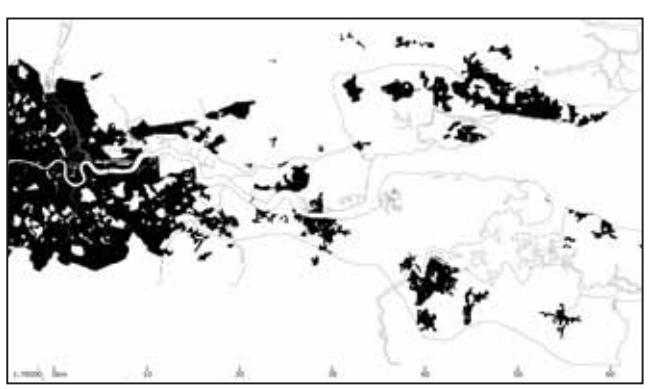
1900

Along with its practical functions the Estuary was, and remains to a lesser extent, a place of recreation. It has piers, jetties, cruise terminals, promenades, beaches, marinas, camping sites, nature walks, museums, theatres, funfairs, theme parks, country parks and gardens. Thorndon Park was originally designed by 'Capability' Brown in the 18th century and is now managed by Essex County Council. The formal gardens at Greenwich were designed by Le Notre with buildings by Inigo Jones. Repton designed part of the landscape at Cobham Park in Kent.

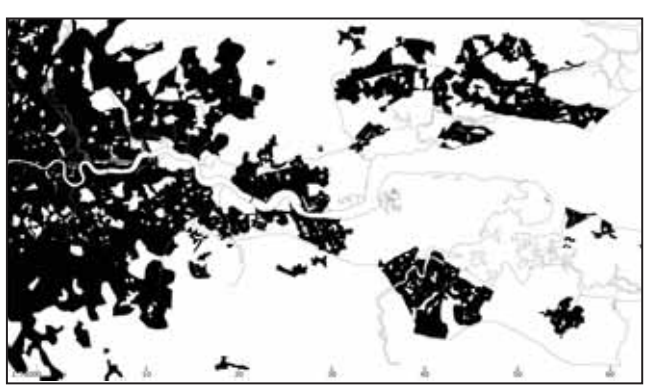
The area also has a long cultural history which expresses itself in major works of art and literature. Canaletto, Tillemans, van de Velde, Constable, Turner, Defoe, Dickens, Conan Doyle and Joseph Conrad were all inspired by this landscape and it remains an important place of cultural and artistic expression.



1905-1922



1931-1940



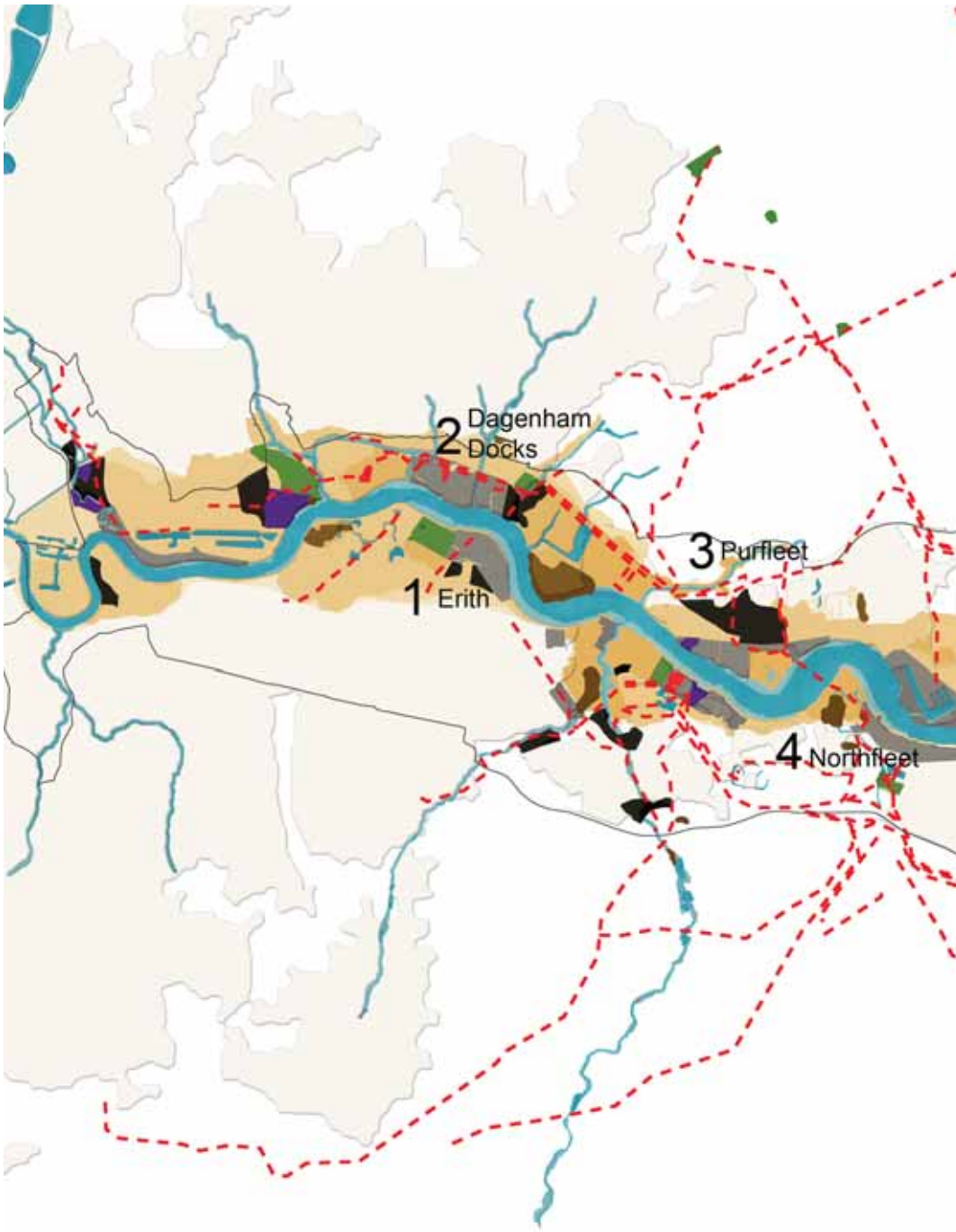
2000

Marshes and swamps have been transformed for over 2000 years to become a human landscape containing half a million homes, 11 major port clusters, freight yards, power stations, and large industrial complexes.

Because of its ports, power stations, pipelines and freight links, the Thames Gateway has a strategic importance as the region's 'engine-room'. Almost 10 per cent of the UK's energy is generated by the seven major power stations in the Thames Gateway.

It is a place of power stations, refineries, storage, distribution, water treatment, factories, goods yards, industrial complexes, overhead power cables, railway lines, and roads. This provides an industrial character to much of the landscape.

The Thames Gateway has seen major land reclamation. More than 40 per cent of the land has been reclaimed from the Estuary starting at least as far back as the Roman era. There continue to be strong visual links between working and living landscapes, which is an important part of the area's visual identity.





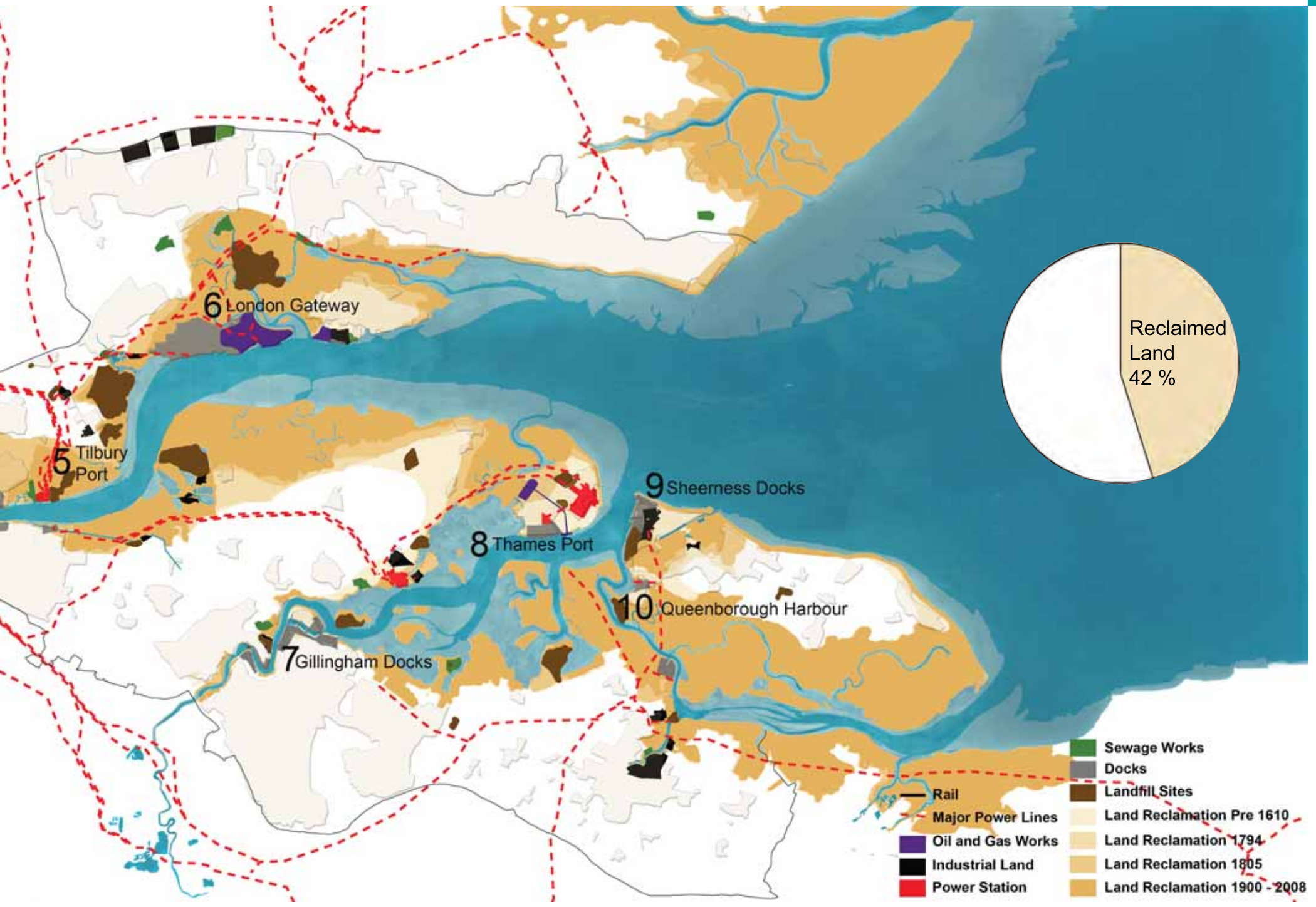
Old Rochester, Kent



View of the London Dock, 1805



Thames Estuary's extensive marshes 1805




Gravesend 1814, Gravesham


Tilbury Power Station


Powerlines near Kingsnorth Power Station, Kent

View of Thames Gateway within East London with the Royal Docks in the middle distance

two

the challenges...



The Thames Estuary faces significant challenges in a changing world

While much of the Estuary landscape is striking, it is a common perception that the Thames Gateway is wasteland to the east of London. It has been regarded as a place of relatively cheap land and housing, with few advantages other than its proximity to the City. This is because in the past much industry was located downwind and downstream of large population centres.

This perception stems from a lack of awareness, lack of access to some landscapes and in several places, the poor quality of the 'urban fringe' – the area which people have to move through to reach high quality landscapes. These are often hidden or dominated by industrial and post-industrial areas. In addition to problems of perception, the Thames Gateway faces significant social, economic and environmental challenges.

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEPRIVATION

London is a 'world city' and a major financial capital. The South East of England is generally a wealthy and successful part of Europe and it is known for its academic and cultural excellence. Its towns and countryside offer a high quality of life. Most of its problems – overcrowding, congestion, and relatively high prices – are the by-products of success.

Apart from pockets of wealth, this is not generally true within the Thames Gateway. The maps reproduced here show areas that are deprived by national standards, with some experiencing levels of up to 25 per cent worklessness.

AN INDUSTRIAL ENVIRONMENT

As the engine room for South East England, the landscape is criss-crossed by power lines and scattered with storage tanks, chimneys, land fill, waste tips, quarries, water treatment works, marshalling yards, derelict land and buildings.

To some, these give the general impression that the Thames Gateway is an undesirable place and the aesthetic qualities of the landscape are not always widely appreciated. Parklands has an important part to play in the improvement and celebration of the industrial landscape.

LANDSCAPE INACCESSIBILITY

We have described large areas of high quality landscape within the region. Much of it is not easily accessible to local communities especially within urban areas. This is a particular problem for the people of East London, who live in a densely populated and intensively used urban landscape.

Throughout the area, many of the industrial complexes, ports, and power stations are fenced in for operational reasons and their sheer size and number pose formidable obstacles to permeability and integration, particularly along the coastline and on river edges.

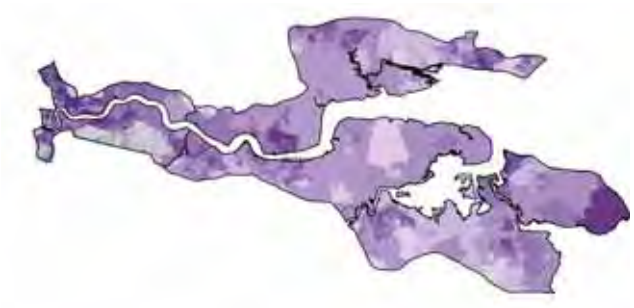
CLIMATE CHANGE

Global climate change has especially significant consequences for the Thames Estuary. South East England is predicted to experience increasingly warm, wet winters and hotter, drier summers this century. Climate change is likely to increase the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events such as heat waves, tidal surges and heavy rainfall. Hotter, drier summers will see increased demand for water, while warmer winters may mean a longer growing season and increased demand from plants. This reduces the winter recharge period for ground water.


Cliffe Pools gravel works, North Kent


Swanscombe brownfield site, Kent


Grays industrial waterfront, Thurrock



Index of multiple deprivation

20% most deprived
20%-40% most deprived
40%-60% most deprived
60%-80% most deprived
80%-100% most deprived

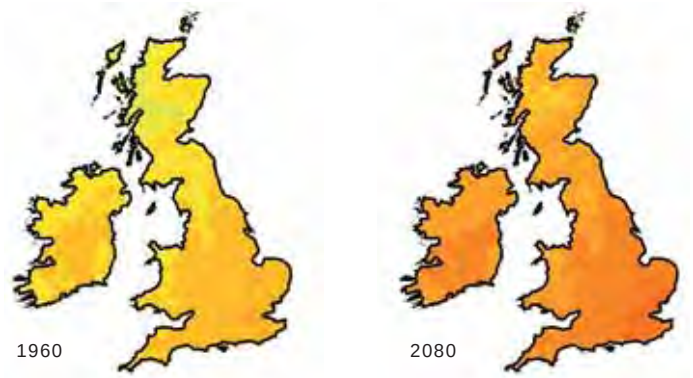
Source CABE / Communities and Local Government



Average house prices

£50,000 - £100,000
£100,000 - £150,000
£150,000 - £200,000
£200,000 - £250,000

Source CABE / Communities and Local Government



UK temperature predicted change

The urban 'heat island' effect may become more pronounced as summer temperatures rise. It may be possible to limit this rise by greening the city and reducing the demand for cooling buildings.

Climate change and sea level rise may increase the risk of flooding in the Estuary. The Thames Barrier and the defences upstream and downstream were designed with sea level rise in mind, and will continue to protect most of the Estuary to a very high standard for many years. The defences will have to be adapted as they age and the true scale of climate change becomes apparent.

As part of its Thames Estuary 2100 project, the Environment Agency is currently looking at how to manage tidal flood risk in the light of climate change and a changing Estuary. The final report will be published in 2010. Whatever its conclusions, it is clear that Parklands must be responsive to the possibility of future environmental change as a result of climate change.

GLOBAL ECONOMIC FORCES

Government has articulated high economic ambitions for the Thames Gateway. These include making the most of its economic potential, encouraging new investment and jobs, boosting the skills of local people, investing in more and better homes and ensuring that regeneration is supported by environmental improvement.

International economic change affects everyone, but it has particular relevance for those living in areas that have experienced decline. This applies above all to communities that have relied on traditional sectors including shipping, manufacturing and trade. The stakes have been raised by increased personal mobility, and modern businesses' ability to locate in the most advantageous places worldwide.

A key role of Parklands is to help ensure that the Thames Gateway can effectively attract new investment in an increasingly competitive economic environment.



Tibury Riverside Fort sea wall



Thames Barrier



Lower Lea Valley

View of the River Medway looking out towards the River Thames

three

the approach to Parklands…



The approach to Parklands

The Thames Gateway has seen major changes in the last decade. A large number of projects that focus on improving the environment are planned or underway. These include Olympic legacy projects, high street renewal, the rediscovery of 'lost' tributaries and waterways, and improvements to biodiversity and landscape quality.

A series of workshops was held with a wide range of stakeholders, to help create an understanding of the activity that has taken place and has helped to shape the Parklands vision. The proposals described in Chapter Four are intended to make the most of the momentum that continues to grow at a local level.

The Parklands vision has addressed the five key ambitions set out by Government in its Delivery Plan in November 2007 (shown below). In dialogue with partners, these have developed further to become the Parklands Spatial Framework:

Thames Waterfront: to develop a continuous Estuary Path that will ultimately run along both banks of the river, and to improve waterfront environments

Thames Gateway World Class Heritage: to support heritage improvement within the Thames Gateway, as well as to support the bid for a new World Heritage Site at Chatham Historic Dockyard

Thames Gateway Landscapes: to identify and support delivery of landscapes of regional importance

Thames Gateway Corridors: to support environmental improvements to strategic transport corridors; and

Thames Gateway Squares: to work with partners to identify and start work on two or three large squares.



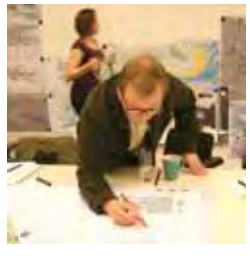


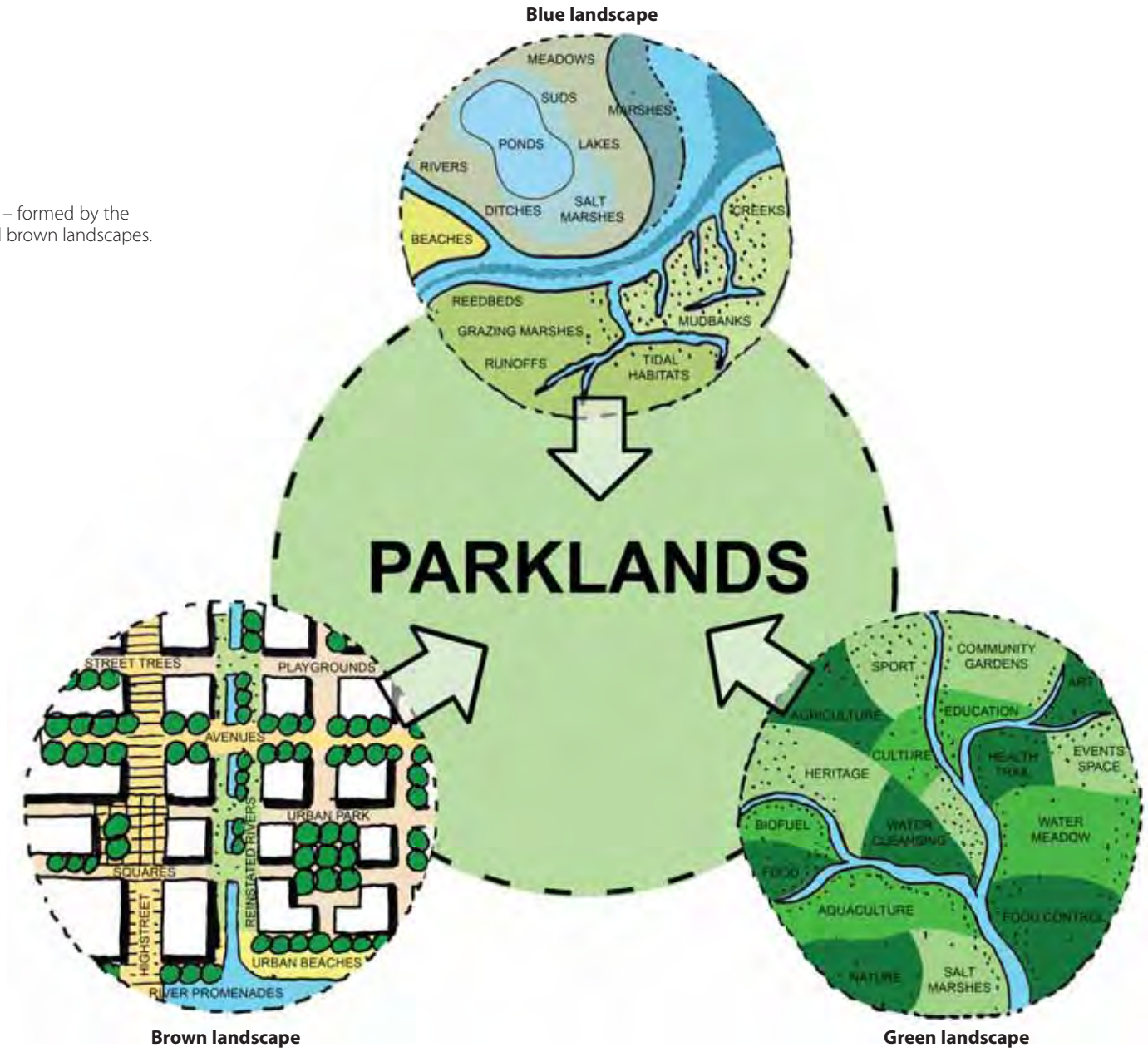








Conceptual sketch of Parklands – formed by the combination of blue, green and brown landscapes.



The River Thames from the Swale



Dartford Heath



East Tilbury

Parklands will help deliver varied, high quality, well-managed, accessible and sustainable landscapes in Thames Gateway. This will in turn connect to existing adjacent large scale landscapes – the Lea Valley Regional Park in East London, Thames Chase, the River Roach and River Crouch complex, the Kent Downs and the East London Green Grid.

The delivery of Parklands will enable the Thames Gateway to compete more effectively with other parts of the South East and Europe. It will be a place which attracts investment by offering a high quality of life.

The vision for Parklands is holistic. Water landscapes and urban areas are included as well as green areas that are more conventionally seen as landscapes. A continuous Parklands landscape that reaches into each Thames Gateway community is envisaged, and is about making green and open spaces part of people's everyday lives. The Parklands vision acknowledges the Estuary's industrial and functional past, and its strategic importance as the engine room of the regional economy, now and in the future.

The Parklands vision is intended to provide a strategic context for projects that can be implemented now as well as those that will be built in the future. Projects can be implemented in a variety of sequences while remaining true to the vision.

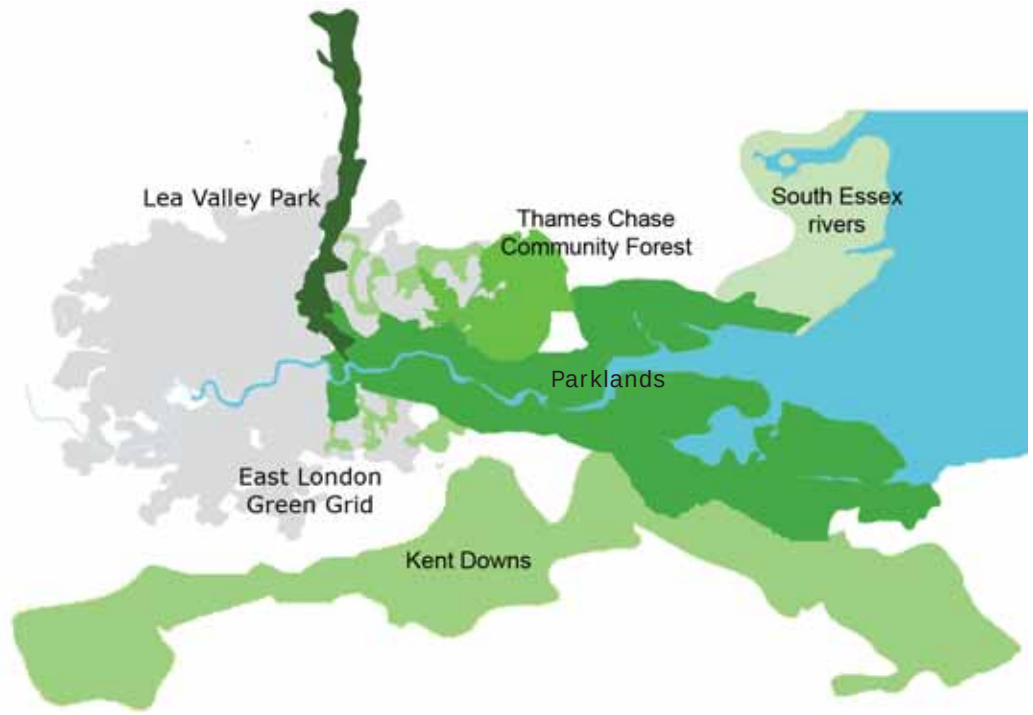


Diagram showing connections between Parklands and adjacent landscapes



Emscher Park incorporates large scale industry



Industrial heritage in Emscher Park

Emscher Park: Emscher Park is the largest implemented landscape regeneration project in Europe. This project serves as an exemplar model to other areas and regions with an industrial character, and was initiated 20 years ago. The area now attracts visitors from all over the world who come to appreciate its natural and industrial heritage.

A. The Parklands vision builds on the special qualities of the Estuary landscape as a starting point. These include the river and its landscapes, its history, culture and heritage, its location and its strategic assets.



B. Opportunities to restore and enhance large scale landscapes have been identified in collaboration with partners and local organisations who are already working in the region. A simple 'Parklands model' has been developed which shows how these landscapes could be connected to communities. This model – illustrated in Chapter Four – can respond to local identity and character.



C. By looking closely at the city, towns and villages, opportunities to link communities to the Estuary have been explored, and opportunities for landscape to permeate urban areas from the 'outside' have been identified. Opportunities for heritage-led regeneration have been identified as well as opportunities to create a new high quality public realm in urban areas.



D. Ways in which landscapes can be connected have been investigated. This is based on the work that has been undertaken on the 'green grids' in South Essex, East London and North Kent. Environmental improvements to transport corridors have been made as well as proposals about the nature of the Thames Estuary Path.

