

Fit for Purpose? Multi-Level Governance in the Thames Gateway

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ABSTRACT

There is increasing debate about the role of governance within sustainable communities. Policy and academic literature present a number of different narratives around whether networked governance is 'fit for purpose' in their realisation. Drawing on a review of governance in the Thames Gateway and research into governance of brownfield sites from the developers' perspective, this article reveals the gap that exists between this policy rhetoric and the reality on the ground. The analysis points to the tensions and contradictions in facilitating sustainable communities including those between the conflicting goals of economic competitiveness and social and environmental sustainability which lie behind the sustainable communities agenda; between overall strategies and local conditions; and those that arise in attempts to 'join-up' agencies and strategies. We conclude that these tensions and contradictions and the resulting hybridity and complexity in governance forms and processes need to be the focus of enquiry as opposed to simple contrasts between networks and top-down governance.

Key Words: sustainable communities, brownfield, Thames Gateway