

## **“Fit for purpose? Multilevel 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.

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**1. Introduction: Thames Gateway, governance and sustainable communities**

The concept of multi-level governance has gained increasing currency in recent years, with a growing recognition of the overlapping and interlocking networks of political authority and power at different spatial scales of governance. No more so is this the case than in the Thames Gateway, the area to the east of London where different levels of governance at various spatial scales have come together in the context of the regeneration of the area, one of the UK Government’s Growth Areas and a potential site for the creation of ‘sustainable communities’.

The role of governance forms an integral part of the policy narratives surrounding sustainable communities and poly-centric cities, with governance seen as one of the essential factors that lead to the successful realisation of such spatial forms. At a wider level it is encapsulated in the ideology of New Localism which informs new Labour’s approach to governance and which calls for multi-level, networked governance and a shift to stakeholder and participatory democracy. The notion of effective, networked participatory governance has thus become both a description of emerging policy and institutional arrangements and a prescription for regeneration and growth.

However, a range of challenges and contradictions also accompanies this role, as evidenced by the widespread criticism of the governance of the Thames Gateway (see National Audit Office, 2007; Urban Taskforce, 2005, Hornagold and Hills 2006 and 2007). These challenges and contradictions form the focus of this paper. The following Section 2 explores the different ways in which the challenges of multi-level governance have been characterised and understood. Section 3 outlines the methodology for the study, while Section 4 examines the governance contradictions within the Thames Gateway. Section 5 then explores the reality of multilevel governance through the eyes of developers working in the Gateway, and examines some of the deficiencies that are appearing on the ground. Section 6 draws some conclusions from the study, in particular in relation to the possible ways forward for policy-makers to overcome the challenges of multilevel governance.

**2. Governance, Sustainable Communities and Poly-centric cities: Contrasting Narratives.**

*2.1 New Localism*

A variety of different approaches and perspectives exist which attempt to understand and characterise the governance of sustainable communities. Many writers have commented on the crystallisation of academic and policy debates around what has been termed the New Regionalism or New Localism (Lovering, 1999; Jones, 2000) and the sustainable communities narrative can be seen clearly in this light. Underlying the narrative is the assumption that governance mechanisms are ‘essential in achieving the goals of sustainable development’ (Jones and Evans, 2006 p1492) and creating a virtuous circle reconciling the competing claims of economic competitiveness, social inclusion and environmental sustainability that lie at the heart of such policies.

This draws on interpretations of governance that see the development of networks of agencies involving government, the private sector and citizens as producing systems of ‘good governance’ (Corry and Stoker, 2002; Filkin et al, 2000). In policy terms this is merged with a view that places, be they cities, regions or sub-regions, are becoming (or should become) increasingly important in terms of economic growth and prosperity. Within this scenario the importance of governance is stressed in a variety of ways. The role of governance to ensure competitiveness is seen as an important element of innovation and economic growth with new forms of ‘reflexive self-governance’ being required to secure advantage (Amin, 1999). This in turn demands greater flexibility and autonomy at the regional and local levels to enable cities and regions to respond to circumstances and opportunities. Such forms of governance also need to involve a range of stakeholders, particularly those from the economic sectors seen as generating growth. New forms of networked governance are therefore part of the recipe for local and regional success and the way of ensuring sustainable communities (Stoker 2004). Governance is also seen as the mechanism to resolve the issues of ‘joining-up’ the potentially competing elements of sustainable communities and of providing the requisite services to support them.

## *2.2 Alternative approaches; the contradictions and hybridity of governance*

This view is challenged from a number of perspectives, all of which point to the inherent contradictions within this approach to the governance of spatial development. Firstly, there are those that criticise the ideal typical and normative prescriptions contained in this version of sustainable communities. Morgan for example calls on us to explore the ‘very important issues’ behind the beguiling language of the new regeneration narrative such as the gap between devolutionary rhetoric and central control. Buck et al (2005) refer to the ‘new conventional wisdom’ (NCW) in policy– the idea that for places to succeed they need to combine economic competitiveness, social inclusion and good governance. This they argue is in response to an interpretation of contemporary economic trends which sees globalisation as placing increasing emphasis on places (be they cities, regions or sub-regions) being able to compete for economic investment. Sustainable communities are the latest manifestation of this wisdom and underline additions to it such as environmental sustainability and connectivity. Rather than these policy objectives being amenable to ‘joining-up’ they are seen as being in tension. A central feature of such an approach is therefore ‘the way the uncertain relationship between competitiveness and social cohesion can be mediated and shaped by institutional arrangements’ (Thornley et al 2005). These tensions present inherent problems for governance, particularly in terms of joining up different levels and agencies (Stoker, 2004; Boddy and Parkinson 2001; Buck et al, 2005).

These critiques are extended by those that see such networks, not as empowering more effective forms of governance but as a response to the imperatives of governance in a neo-liberal era – what Swyngedouw (2005) refers to as neo-liberal governmentality. According to this alternative reading the strategies and forms of governance associated with projects such as sustainable communities and the TG are examples of neo-liberal governance (Brenner and Theodore, 2002). By neo-liberal is meant the commitment to markets as the optimal way of achieving economic development with minimal state regulation. It is expressed in the form of the competitiveness agenda which concentrates on the supply-side features necessary for cities and regions to attract economic growth. It is also typified as an unwillingness to interfere with the market. Rather, policy is to create and facilitate the conditions necessary for economic restructuring and globalisation. Issues of social inclusion and other welfare policy programmes are not totally excluded from this agenda. However in this form of ‘rolled-out’ neo-liberalism as opposed to the ‘rolled-back’ form of previous decades which sought to reduce state activities and interventions (Peck and Tickell 2002) they are subsidiary to economic competitiveness.

In terms of forms of governance associated with this, Jessop (2002) characterises them as promoting competitiveness, subordinating social to economic policy; favouring the private sector in decision-making and taking shape in new forms of partnership and networking. A further feature of neo-liberal governance is that it occurs at a variety of spatial scales. This notion of ‘multi-level governance’ and the ‘hollowing out of the state’ is taken up by a variety of writers who stress the way in which governance functions are increasingly shifting from the central state to a variety of agencies at various spatial scales.

Inherent in these governance forms writers such as Jessop argue, are various contradictions and tendencies towards ‘governance failure’ centring round the conflicting priorities of competition and co-operation and the constraints placed by the operation of wider economic processes. In this sense, current governance arrangements can never be fit for purpose as they will always come up against the tensions contained within neo-liberal governance forms.

As a result of these governance failures, according to Jessop organisations involved in regeneration are faced with a number of dilemmas including:

- Co-operation versus competition or the fact that various agencies and partners are urged to work together but are also in competition for resources, inward investment etc
- Governability versus flexibility – the desire to have systems to allow negotiation and response to changing circumstances conflicting with meeting strategies and targets.
- Open-ness versus closure – who is involved and are the desires to ensure only those who are needed to deliver are excluding other interests? Are all those needed involved in the first place.
- Accountability versus efficiency – priorities between interests and objectives which opens up a dilemma between economic growth and social inclusion and development.

From the above analysis it is clear that these interventions are themselves fraught with contradictions and dilemmas making it unsurprising that questions have arisen over whether governance is fit for purpose. As we shall see in the next section such questions are of particular relevance to the Thames Gateway. Therefore in what follows we focus on the underlying tensions and contradictions which run behind the ‘new regeneration narrative’ to explore governance arrangements in the Gateway.

### **3. Methodology**

The research for this paper comes from two sources: an evidence review undertaken by Oxford Brookes University for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM, now renamed Communities and Local Government - CLG), and empirical research undertaken through an EPSRC-funded project on sustainable urban brownfield regeneration.

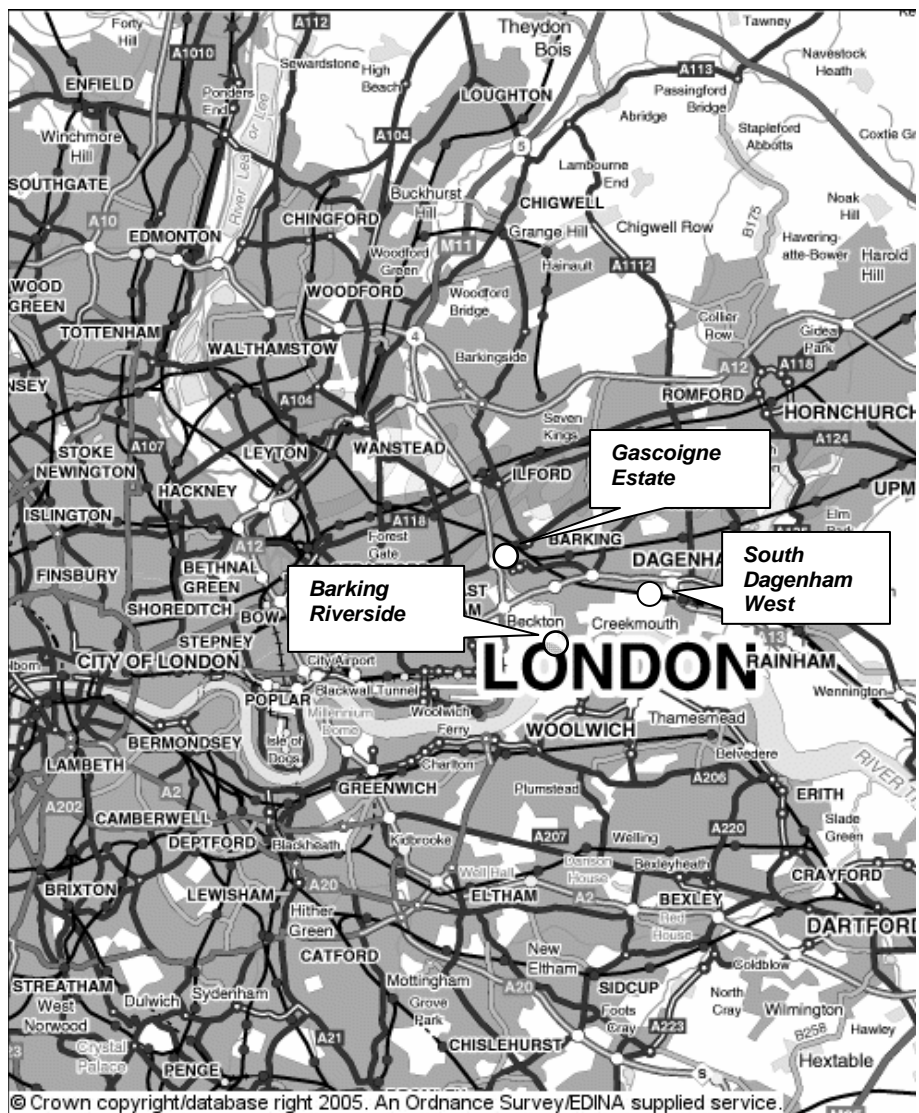
The evidence review was commissioned by ODPM in March 2005 as a desk-based study with the aim of reviewing the evidence base related to the Thames Gateway. The complete review looked at a range of themes including economic drivers, demographic and social issues, environmental aspects, housing, planning and transport, and identified over 2000 sources of relevance (CLG, 2006). In this paper, we draw on the aspect of the review that particularly focused on governance and delivery mechanisms, including decision-making, funding and the provision of infrastructure<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> The full report is available at the following web address: [www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1504589](http://www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1504589)

To complement the review, and provide evidence of some of the complexities that are emerging in the Thames Gateway, the empirical data is taken from research that was undertaken in parallel to the evidence review, from March 2004 to July 2006. It was based on three case study sites in the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham – Barking Riverside, South Dagenham (West) and the Gascoigne Estate - and the governance and policy context ‘above’ and ‘around’ those sites (see Appendix 1 and Figure 1). All three sites are included in Barking and Dagenham’s local development plan (LBB, 2005), and they are also identified in the Thames Gateway agenda. At a regional level, the case study sites were part of the London Riverside plan (Maccreanor Lavington and West, 2002), and so the GLA and its agencies have been overseeing the development of the master plan through the planning process.

**Figure 1: Location of Case Study Sites in Thames Gateway (adapted from Dixon, 2007)**



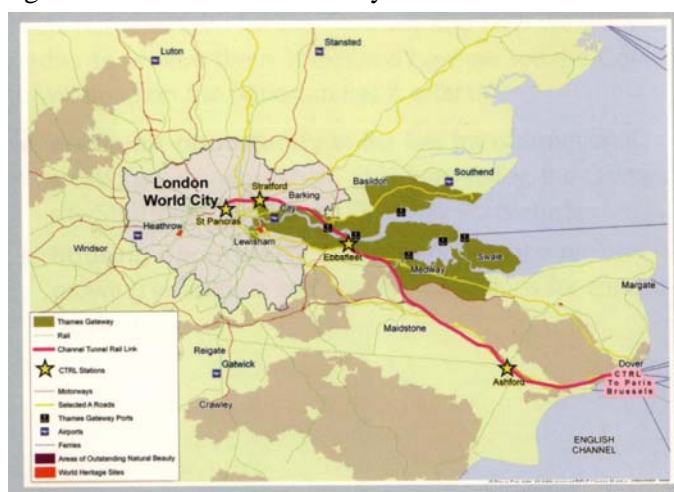
As part of the case studies, over 40 interviews were undertaken with actors from various organisations active in the Thames Gateway. These included central, regional, local and site level actors and individuals from the development industry. The full details of each interviewee are protected by confidentiality agreements but a broad description is provided in Appendix 2. The interviews explored actors' perceptions, attitudes and practice in relation to sustainable development on brownfield sites. Each interview was recorded and transcribed. The interviews were then coded to identify common themes and emerging issues prior to analysis and interpretation. A preliminary analysis of the interview transcript data produced a framework within which a more detailed analysis was undertaken<sup>3</sup>.

#### 4. Governance Contradictions in the Thames Gateway

##### 4.1 Background to the Thames Gateway

The Thames Gateway, to the east of London, represents fertile ground for exploring the challenges of governing polycentric city-regions. Described by the Minister then in charge of overseeing the Growth Areas, David Miliband, as 'a symbol and test case' of government policy on sustainable communities (Miliband, 2005), it offers the potential to analyse the tensions and complexities that arise in multi-level governance, in a 'live' case study area. Stretching over 40 miles (60 km) either side of the River Thames from London Docklands in the west to Southend in South Essex and Sheerness in North Kent, it covers 16 local authority districts (see Figure 2). Size brings with it diversity. The Gateway area includes a wide variety of localities, from major development sites such as Stratford, Ebbsfleet and Barking Reach, to declining/static industrial and port areas such as Thurrock, Dagenham and the Kent Ports. This raises questions over the suitability of an overarching strategy, as the difference between particular sites/areas is immense, each with its own development trajectories. For example, there is a considerable disparity between the needs and available resources for the Olympics site at Stratford or the development sites served by the high speed Channel Tunnel rail link, compared to the more deprived but less well resourced areas such as Barking Reach and Southend.

Figure 2 – The Thames Gateway



Source: DCLG, *Thames Gateway Interim Plan* 2006

<sup>3</sup> The findings from this work are based on joint research conducted as part of the SUBR:IM programme (Sustainable Urban Brownfield Regeneration: Integrated Management) (Grant No. GR/S148809/01) with Prof. John Henneberry and Dr Philip Catney of Department of Town and Regional Planning, University of Sheffield (see [www.subrim.org.uk](http://www.subrim.org.uk) and Dixon et al (2007)).

The population of the Thames Gateway is equally diverse with its 1.45 million inhabitants including those living in some of the most deprived areas in the country and others in areas of relative affluence. It also includes areas of environmental value such as Rainham Marshes and other areas suffering from intense environmental degradation in need of land remediation.

This diversity presents some interesting challenges for the vision of sustainable communities. Development in the Gateway is not just about accommodating economic growth but stimulating it and reviving the Gateway economy and neighbourhoods, within the context of sustainable communities. As stated in the Sustainable Communities Action Plan (SCAP), the Government's aim is:

*“to use growth to regenerate and develop the Thames Gateway in a sustainable way. We want to create an attractive environment where people will choose to live, work and spend their leisure time” (ODPM 2005 p7).*

Between 2003 and 2006, ODPM committed a total of £373 million (€50 million) of directly targeted resources towards developing the Gateway, with further investment planned for subsequent years (ODPM 2003: p47). This funding covers site assembly, remediation of brownfield land, delivery mechanisms, some affordable housing and local infrastructure, and will be complemented by transport investment and further public and private leverage.

With this and further funding, the Government aims to achieve by 2016:

- The construction of at least 120,000 homes across the Gateway, with at least 35% being affordable, for rent or purchase;
- The creation of 180,000 new jobs;
- A much higher proportion of residents achieving NVQ 3 skills levels;
- All residents having access to high quality healthcare; and
- A total of 53,000 hectares of green space protected and enhanced.

(Source: ODPM 2005: p6)

Along with these aspirations, Government also aims by 2016 to have “substantially developed all major strategic locations in the Gateway, providing a mix of homes, jobs and amenities in the new sustainable communities” (ODPM, 2005: p6). This represents a scale of activity never previously undertaken in the UK and according to the Government, makes it “Europe’s largest regeneration area” (ODPM 2004).

More recently, there has also been reference to the area’s potential poly-centric development, with the Thames Gateway Interim Plan (CLG, 2006) describing the area as:

*“A well-connected network of regional cities, large towns and revitalised urban centres, forming a Gateway to the world” (CLG, 2006: p15)*

However, given the current interest in the Gateway it is easy to forget that the planning and development of the area has a long history. From the late 1980s onwards, local authorities in what is now the London Gateway area joined forces to devise a strategy for the area and lobby government in an attempt to spread the momentum of the emerging success of Docklands further east.

This resulted in 1993 in the designation by Government of the East Thames Corridor and an accompanying strategy for the area. At the time, the focus of development was largely economic, aiming to rebalance the economic strength of London more towards the east of the capital, as opposed to the west. In 1995, an inter-regional planning statement (Regional

Planning Guidance 9a (RPG 9a) entitled “The Thames Gateway Planning Framework”) was published covering the three regions included in the Thames Gateway area (London, South East and East), and which is still seen by some as the definitive strategy for the Gateway (Hall, 2006).

The current strategy for the Thames Gateway places the area within the sustainable communities narrative and also means that unlike the other ‘Growth Areas’, the Gateway also includes an emphasis on regeneration and tackling deprivation.

#### 4.2 Governance and complexity in the Thames Gateway; The Challenges

As alluded to above, given the size of the Thames Gateway, the area covers a large number of jurisdictions working at different spatial levels, and at times overlapping. One of the key issues to note regarding governance in the Thames Gateway is the sheer number of governance and delivery agencies that are operating in the area. Figure 3 (see end) illustrates just how many different bodies are involved in the governance of the area, from local and regional bodies, to central government, and government-appointed quangos. Overall coordination is provided by CLG (“Communities and Local Government”, the Ministry responsible for planning and regeneration), led by a Chief Executive, Judith Armit, who was appointed by the Government in November 2006 to provide leadership for the Thames Gateway that many claimed was missing from the project (John et al, 2005).

Below the national level, there are three regional partnerships, three Regional Development Agencies (RDAs), three Regional Planning Bodies, as well as the Government Offices within each region. And below them, a plethora of agencies are working at the local level, including 16 local authority districts, 7 local partnerships and 2 Urban Development Corporations. Additionally, there are a myriad of other national bodies, site-specific partnerships and quangos, including English Partnerships, the national regeneration agency that is involved in many of the Thames Gateway sites. As part of a recent report on the governance of the Gateway, the NAO undertook a mapping exercise to illustrate the different sectors involved (see Figure 4). They highlighted the interdependence between different levels of government and different sectors, and the need for coordinated strategies and delivery. Given this institutional thickness it is unsurprising that criticisms have arisen. The NAO concluded that:

*“the complexity of the decision-making and delivery chains makes it difficult for potential investors, developers and Government itself to understand the programme and integrate investment as a whole” National Audit Office (2007: p5)*

Richard Rogers has labelled the situation unworkable with too many agencies, a lack of joining-up and no leadership. ‘The plethora of overlapping, but differently funded and monitored, regeneration bodies has reduced the effectiveness of public-sector regeneration schemes.’ (Urban Task Force 2005 p3). As a result ‘we are squandering the opportunity we have now with a piecemeal free-for-all development’ (Regeneration and Renewal 18 Nov 2005 p19).

The justification from government for this complexity leans heavily on the discourse of New Localism previously outlined: ‘to make a success of the Gateway we need to take a tailored and flexible approach, working on a local basis to agree local priorities and meet local needs (ODPM 2005 p52). Echoing the view that no ‘one size fits all’ model is applicable, different parts of the Gateway have different governance arrangements dependent on conditions and histories. For areas with pre-existing partnerships and development momentum, such as North Kent, RDAs and local partnerships are seen as adequate. For more complex areas of brownfield development, Urban Development Corporations (UDCs) with more power and



resources were implemented (ODPM 2003b). Speaking to counter the criticisms of the Gateway the then Minister asserted that a complex institutional structure is a response to ‘a complex set of projects; complex in joining economic, social and environmental objectives ... and a number of communities.’ (Miliband, 2005).

Therefore the rhetoric of government is that delivery arrangements are ‘fit for purpose’ and best reflect local conditions while at the same time they promote partnership between the range of different actors seen as necessary to achieve the TG vision. However, the contradictions in New Localism already outlined are clear when the reality behind this rhetoric is examined. It is these issues of complexity in multi-level governance and the impact on delivery that we explore in the rest of this paper.

#### *4.2.1 Cooperation versus competition*

Joining-up is one of the major challenges facing multi-level governance and no more so than in the Thames Gateway. Here we explore two such aspects of the tensions between cooperation versus competition: issues of strategy and leadership; and the joining of different policy objectives within the sustainable communities agenda.

The sustainable communities rhetoric suggests that different levels of government, at different spatial scales, will cooperate through joined-up strategies and collaborative implementation. However, we have already seen how the complexity of governance arrangements makes this problematic in the Gateway. Prior to the publication of the 2006 interim strategy there was no clear strategic articulation of the aspirations for the Gateway other than the outdated RPG9a. It remains to be seen whether the recent framework can fulfil this objective with some commentators remaining sceptical (Hall, 2006).

In addition the competitiveness at the heart of the New Localism agenda means that in effect different locations and sub-regions within the Thames Gateway are in reality competing against each other to achieve the aspirations of their strategies. For example, each of the three main sub-regions of the Gateway have identified remarkably similar priorities for economic growth in their Regional Economic Strategies. Most include “retailing and leisure” “manufacturing and engineering” and “financial services”, environmental industries and transport and logistics as key growth sectors. The North Kent Area Investment Framework goes further and identifies Shellhaven in South Essex, across the Thames, as a potential threat to its own strategy and vision, and as a possible barrier to its own development potential (TGKP, 2002: 3). In addition, the LDA, through its East London Sub-regional Framework, has indicated that it can exceed the targets for jobs and housing included in the TG strategy. Such a strategy would impact on the ability of other parts of the Gateway to achieve their aspirations and have inevitable consequences in terms of creating sustainable communities or commuter settlements for London workers. And the Thames Gateway itself, as just one of the Government’s Growth Areas, is pitted against other Growth Areas, and other locations in the rest of the South East with equally ambitious aspirations and targets for employment and housing. This competition is heightened by the fact that the SCAP explicitly states that government will not intervene in economic location decisions.

Evidence of a lack of joining-up the contradictory policy objectives of the sustainable communities agenda is also clear. In the case of the TG one of the ways in which this becomes manifest is the tension between achieving economic objectives and those of social inclusion. The delivery agencies’ aims are primarily to secure brownfield development in terms of property-led outputs which will contribute to ‘growth’, but they are also charged with addressing local needs in partnership with other agencies. Some have thought through how they might achieve this, for example in North Kent, local area renewal plans for ‘deprived’ areas have been drawn up looking at what needs can and cannot be met by new developments. However there was also a tendency in many of the Gateway strategies for

inclusion to be marginalised. Often put together with consultation, it becomes an add-on rather than having a specific role in an 'engine of growth', or left to other agencies such as Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) to achieve. Significantly, other research has noted the inability of LSPs to reconcile economic growth with social inclusion (ODPM 2005b).

The inherent contradiction between the desire to create mixed inclusive communities and the economic imperative to promote growth and competitiveness within the sustainable communities agenda has been commented on by a number of writers. Raco (2005b) in his analysis of the prioritisation of key-worker and low cost home ownership within efforts to meet housing need, notes that this defines a 'sustainable citizen' as 'one who actively contributes to the (economic) well-being of a community' (p339). Keith (2005) similarly questions whether the emerging spatial forms in the Gateway are truly reflecting the diversity of the area as opposed to a more limited view linked to particular strategic and economic priorities. Recent debates over the environmental impact of building in the Gateway points to similar problems in joining up across policy areas. It appears the sectors that characterise the National Audit Office wheel (Figure 4) remain discrete, rather than work together as the image of a circle would imply.

#### *4.2.2 Governmentality and Flexibility*

These problems in joining-up are related to the further dilemma between the desire to have governance arrangements which can take account of different circumstances while at the same time maintaining government influence and meeting strategic objectives. Stoker (2004) identifies different models by which government can join up. One is to empower local governance agencies to do it (community leadership) and the other is to provide central direction with local agencies having autonomy to deliver an agenda agreed from the centre (constrained discretion). The sustainable communities rhetoric contains both of these within an uneasy tension.

One way that central government can exert influence is through performance management and targets. The NAO report highlighted the deficiencies in the current mechanisms to achieve this within the Gateway. Currently programme management centres on administering project investment linked to the £400m plus Gateway funding. As with most government programmes this comes down to authorities bidding for projects and CLG then monitoring them. However, the state of the art computerised management system devised to monitor this concentrates on outputs and spending on time, not on how these projects are going to contribute to the overall Gateway strategic objectives. With so many delivery agencies and bodies, the task of ensuring that the different components add up to more than the sum of the parts is fraught with difficulties and there is no evidence as yet that the structures and processes are in place to deliver this, a view confirmed by the NAO in its call for better programme management (NAO, 2007).

#### *4.2.3 Openness versus closure - Who's Involved?*

In bringing together the different elements of the sustainable communities vision the ability of 'good governance' to be open, accountable and to involve a full range of stakeholders is part of the sustainable communities narrative. An examination of the representation of different sectors in the governance of the Gateway calls into question whether this is happening in practice. Brownill and Carpenter's (2005) analysis of a limited number of TG partnerships revealed that there is an overwhelming predominance of public sector representatives (71%) including elected members (46%), chief executives (3%) and other public sector agencies such as Business Link, RDAs, Health Authorities and Housing Associations. The much lower percentage of private sector representatives (25%) is striking as is the almost total lack of community and voluntary sector representatives (only 4%). A similar pattern is revealed in the NAO report (pp44-45).

#### 4.2.4 Accountability versus efficiency - Service provision and tension over infrastructure funding

A further tension identified is that between accountability and efficiency, which opens up dilemmas between economic growth and social inclusion and development. There are major tensions over infrastructure funding, and what is needed to promote economic development, while at the same time promoting social inclusion.

The funding of infrastructure is seen by many as the major barrier to implementing the sustainable communities vision (Power 2004, BURA 2005, Roger Tym et al 2005). Yet calls for central government to fully assess the costs of infrastructure and identify how this will be met over the lifetime of the TG strategy have been persistently resisted. Estimates exist for some areas of the costs of implementing the sustainable communities vision in the TG. The Kent Area Investment Programme estimates that £11.6b gross investment is needed between 2002-21 of which £4.3b is public sector funding. As the document says 'achieving this requires a different view of how to make things happen. Traditional public and private sector mechanisms are not adequate'. In the London part of the Gateway the estimate is £16b to support housing targets of which £8b will be provided by the private sector. A further £3.5b is needed for economic development. Levels of funding to the new UDCs are modest in comparison with the levels given to the LDDC. The Thurrock UDC has £60m over 7 years of which £2m a year will be spent on administration etc compared to the total LDDC's figure of £2b over 17 years. This leaves relatively small amounts for the task of land reclamation and servicing. As Morgan (2002) has pointed out in relation to RDAs, they have had responsibility devolved to them to deliver, without the power in the form of resources to implement the vision. The same can be said of the TG governance and delivery agencies.

The picture is complicated by government's desire that the private sector should be involved in funding:

*"A measure of our success in regenerating the TG will be the extent to which it attracts private investment. For the most part, the improvements in the TG will be delivered by the private sector without any public sector financial support. Government's role will be to create confidence in the Gateway by appropriate infrastructure investment and by helping to remove obstacles to development. Where the scale of the regeneration required is beyond the private sector's ability to deliver on its own, we will work on public-private partnerships to develop major projects such as Barking Riverside"* (ODPM 2005a p 57).

*"One of the ways in which we can help increase the resources available to help meet the costs of growth is through capturing development contributions and a proportion of the increases in land value arising from growth"* (ODPM 2003b p26).

However, as we have seen, the private sector is not embedded in TG governance structures to any great extent and how the hoped for increase in land values can be captured is largely still to be resolved at a national and TG level (see eg. LGA 2005). In fact the establishment of UDCs is put forward as one way of effectively capturing this and providing a body which can negotiate with developers. Other arrangements such as revised planning gain agreements and a 'roof tax' on new housing developments to pay for infrastructure have also emerged. However there is no evidence to date of their effectiveness in closing the infrastructure funding gap. The infrastructure-hungry Olympics development is leading to further tensions between agencies competing for scarce resources and as a result is likely to lead to the skewing of Gateway development to Olympic sites.

Research carried out on the growth agenda in Cambridge (While et al, 2004) has highlighted the conflicts that emerge between the different actors and levels of governance involved over

the socialisation of the costs of infrastructure provision. These conflicts are likely to be repeated in the Gateway.

## 5. The reality of multilevel governance

In this section we explore the main findings from the EPSRC-funded work by focusing on two key deficiencies which stakeholders raised in the interviews that were conducted:

- Institutional complexity; and
- Regulatory delays.

### 5.1 Institutional complexity

As shown in the earlier part of this paper TG is distinguished by its institutional complexity, but what effect does such a complex MLG system have on private developers and other actors in TG? New institutions require time for their agendas to develop and mature. Throughout this ‘establishment’ period there is uncertainty for the actors that need to work with these organisations. For example, on the Barking Riverside site, the plans for the development were being drawn up at the same time as the UDC for the area was being established. The vision that the UDC might have for the site was not clear at this time (see below).

However, regional level actors differed significantly in their views of the institutional landscape. Some downplayed the level of complexity suggested by stating that:

*‘Developers complain... We have various panels that we call in, lots of kind of development support in development projects which they benefit from as well. Our development managers are dedicated to particular projects... I think we’re pretty clear. There is a perennial complaint from developers about the planning process. They’d like there not to be a planning process.’ (Interview, London Development Agency Official, July 2006)*

From this perspective, considerable institutional support is offered to help developers learn more about the parts of the system that affect them directly. This is designed to overcome any ‘bounding’ effects caused by the increasing complexity of the institutional structure. However, others argued that a review of the structure in the Thames Gateway was:

*‘...something that has been overdue for a long time, I think, and needs a big sort of overview, but at the same time I think what should have been coupled with it, personally I think, is a marginal cull of some of the organisations because what you end up with is you get more layering and it’s a bit like sort of an archaeological dig. You know, you’re building on the ruins. It’s all down there and it’s all part of the foundation and still trying to operate...there are an awful lot of agencies working here.’ (Interview, Government Office for London Official, July 2006)*

Various evaluations of the Gateway’s governance structures have identified a lack of overall leadership, and a practitioner summarised the general state of stakeholder engagement during the planning process as follows:

*‘There is not a clear chain of command from the ODPM down to who is meant to be doing what, who is driving what process, and the different stakeholders do not know between themselves what is meant to be happening.’ (Interview, regeneration consultant, 2005)*

## 5.2 Regulatory Delays

The proliferation of institutions and policies within the Gateway has produced, not unsurprisingly, considerable delays in decision-making processes. Negotiating planning permission on brownfield sites in the Gateway involves more than merely satisfying the local London borough's planning committee. Bodies such as the Mayor and the Greater London Authority (GLA) and the URCs are also involved. One practitioner summed up the administrative constraints on action that surround the South Dagenham West scheme:

*'Bureaucracy is the only main barrier. It goes between different agencies responsible for each of [the type of] public infrastructure – each of the bodies is independent. There is a difference between the aspirations of the Borough and the GLA, and all of this just takes a long time to resolve itself.'* (Interview, planning consultant 2005)

Significant variations in the perspectives of governance institutions extends and complicates the development planning and control processes, much delaying the submission of planning applications. However, the conflicting interests, values and beliefs of the various organisations operating in TG still need to be taken into account. Delays in the planning application process, lack of clear guidance on dealing with contamination, and a lack of commitment to the provision of infrastructure all create blockages in the development process. In TG, the continuing debate over the Crossrail link and the DLR were recurring features, and the importance of schools, hospitals, and other infrastructure components was recognised by interviewees. Higher development densities on brownfield developments can only be sustained by good infrastructure. One regeneration manager stated that central government rules on infrastructure provision were a major barrier to the successful development of sites:

*'You can't wait until the community's all in place and then say "We've now got all these people. Let us have the money." We've got to have the money ahead and we've got to be building it and then not only is there a capital concentration, but if we deliver it before the rest of the development there's going to be a space where there's not full occupancy and there's going to be a space when say the school is only half full and we will need the revenue for that and that is an [issue] that's not really been addressed. So that's where I'd like a bit more clarity.'* (Interview, local authority regeneration manager, 2004)

Frequently, planning agreements have played a major role in driving the regeneration of large sites in Barking and Dagenham. However, the current development conditions there are problematic. Some sites are heavily contaminated and in need of expensive remediation work, and the resourcing of transport infrastructure has not yet been resolved. Such circumstances may constrain the ability of smaller and medium-sized developers to redevelop the other sites in the Borough. There was a very strong feeling among developers that government needed to make strategic decisions regarding infrastructure for successful development to occur. As one developer said:

*'[The site] is desperate for public transport, we have got DLR [Docklands Light Railway] coming across the site, the East London Transit buses, the A13 with major works required... so those bits are going to make 11,000 dwellings and a new town workable, but it is the decision-making on that as well [which is needed to make them workable].'* (Interview, developer, 2005)

The issue of infrastructure is hence critical to the success of various brownfield projects in the Gateway. The large investment required for projects like Cross-Rail and DLR can only be made by central government. Yet central government delays have created a 'ripple' effect

across brownfield projects with several developers saying that it would affect the way they would invest in the Gateway.

## 6. Conclusions

Our study of governance in the Gateway has highlighted the contrast between the Government's rhetoric of sustainable communities, and the reality that is emerging on the ground. The evidence from the Thames Gateway suggests that there are strong tensions and contradictions within the ideal of a 'virtuous circle' of joined up levels of governance and strategic interventions, which is implied by the Government's sustainable communities rhetoric.

Overall, our study has identified tendencies to governance failure through contradictions between competitiveness and cohesion, conflict over the socialisation of infrastructure costs, questions about who is involved, whether governance structures are fit for purpose and doubts over whether the 'aspirations' included in the strategies are taking account of the economic reality of the TG.

From the perspective of developers, there is a need for a clearer and more responsive governance system. The key issues appear to be integration and joining-up, with the need for stronger leadership and strategy, while having a governance system that is responsive to changing conditions on the ground. Possible ways forward could include clearer mapping of different policies and regulatory bodies and how they relate to one another at the local and sub-regional level. This would provide a framework for actors in the Gateway to understand the different levels of decision-making and ways through the complex institutional structures in the Gateway.

What is clear is that current governance arrangements in the Gateway are providing a major obstacle to delivery and implementation, and risk putting the whole Gateway project in jeopardy. While the Olympics sites are currently the focus of much attention and investment, due to the looming and non-negotiable deadline of 2012, the rest of the Gateway risks falling behind in its targets and aspirations as a centre for sustainable communities. Stronger leadership and greater joining up between strategies, sub-regions and sectors would contribute to a more effective multi-level governance system, and set the framework for the creation of sustainable communities in the future.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Case Study Sites (based on Tixon forthcoming Nov 2007) and other sources)

#### *Barking Riverside*

Barking Riverside is a very large brownfield regeneration project on the north bank of the River Thames. It is a joint venture between Bellway Homes and English Partnerships. The site is approximately 200 hectares in size. It has been largely derelict for over 20 years, but is now part of a major housing scheme. The London Mayor has also identified the site as a strategic development for London because it is London's largest housing opportunity, with 12,000 new homes and a community of 25,000 being created.

#### *South Dagenham (West)*

The South Dagenham site covers approximately 80 hectares of land, including the Merrilands Retail Park and Chequers Corner but excluding the Ford Body Plant, which is still in operation and divides the site into East and West plots. The regeneration scheme of South Dagenham West comprises residential and commercial uses, the provision of social infrastructure and greenspace, and the establishment of canals and flood prevention measures. It is a joint venture between the LDA and Axa Sun Life. The initial master plan envisages a total of 1,562 housing units, of which 32% will be individual houses, and 68% will be flats.

#### *The Gascoigne Estate*

The Gascoigne Estate was constructed between 1966 and 1971 following a slum clearance programme. It comprises 2,400 units, primarily in the form of high- and low-rise flats, of which about 98 per cent are social rented housing. The site covers around 84.7 hectares and is part of the Barking Town Centre area. The first phase of the development is completed, and at the time of the interviews the lead developer(s)/ partner(s) for the phased regeneration of the Estate were being appointed.

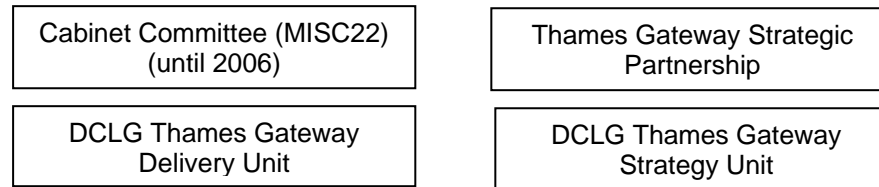
**Appendix 2: Interviews with key stakeholders (details anonymised): Thames Gateway  
(based on Dixon (2006) and other sources)**

	<b>Interviewee Type</b>	<b>Number</b>
<i>Barking Riverside</i>	Local authority	5
	Government agency	1
	Development industry	3
	Consultant	1
	Community	1
<i>South Dagenham West</i>	Local authority	1
	Government agency	1
	Designer	1
	Development industry	1
	Community	1
<i>Gascoigne Estate</i>	Local authority	2
	Developer	1
<i>Regional</i>	London Development Agency, Government Office for London, Environment Agency	4
<i>National</i>	Defra, ODPM/DCLG	3
<i>General (all three case studies)</i>	Local authority; agencies; development industry; housing associations; surveyor; estate agents; consultants.	16
<i>Total</i>		<b>42</b>

**Figure 3 – Levels of governance in the Thames Gateway**

**LEVEL**

*Strategic level / coordination*



*Regional / sub-regional*

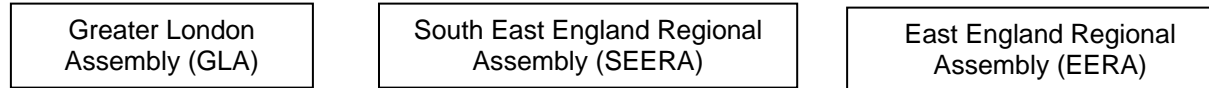
*Partnerships*



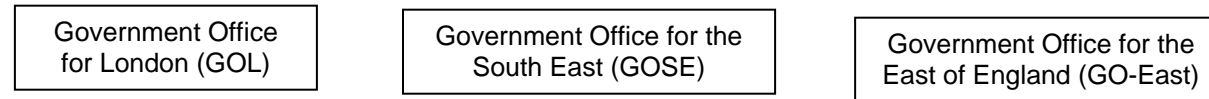
*RDAs*



*Regional Planning Bodies*



*Government Offices*



*Local*

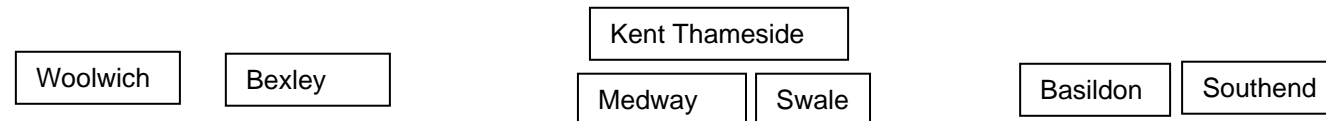
*Local Authorities*



*UDCs*



*Local partnerships*



*Other bodies*

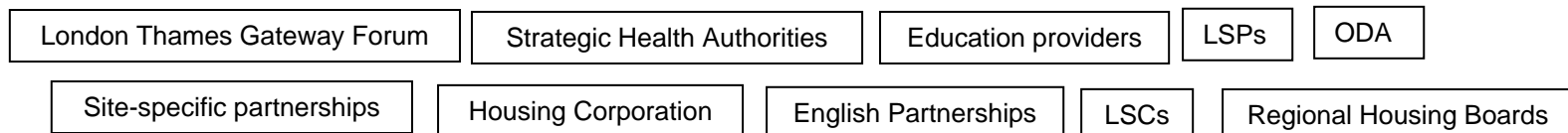
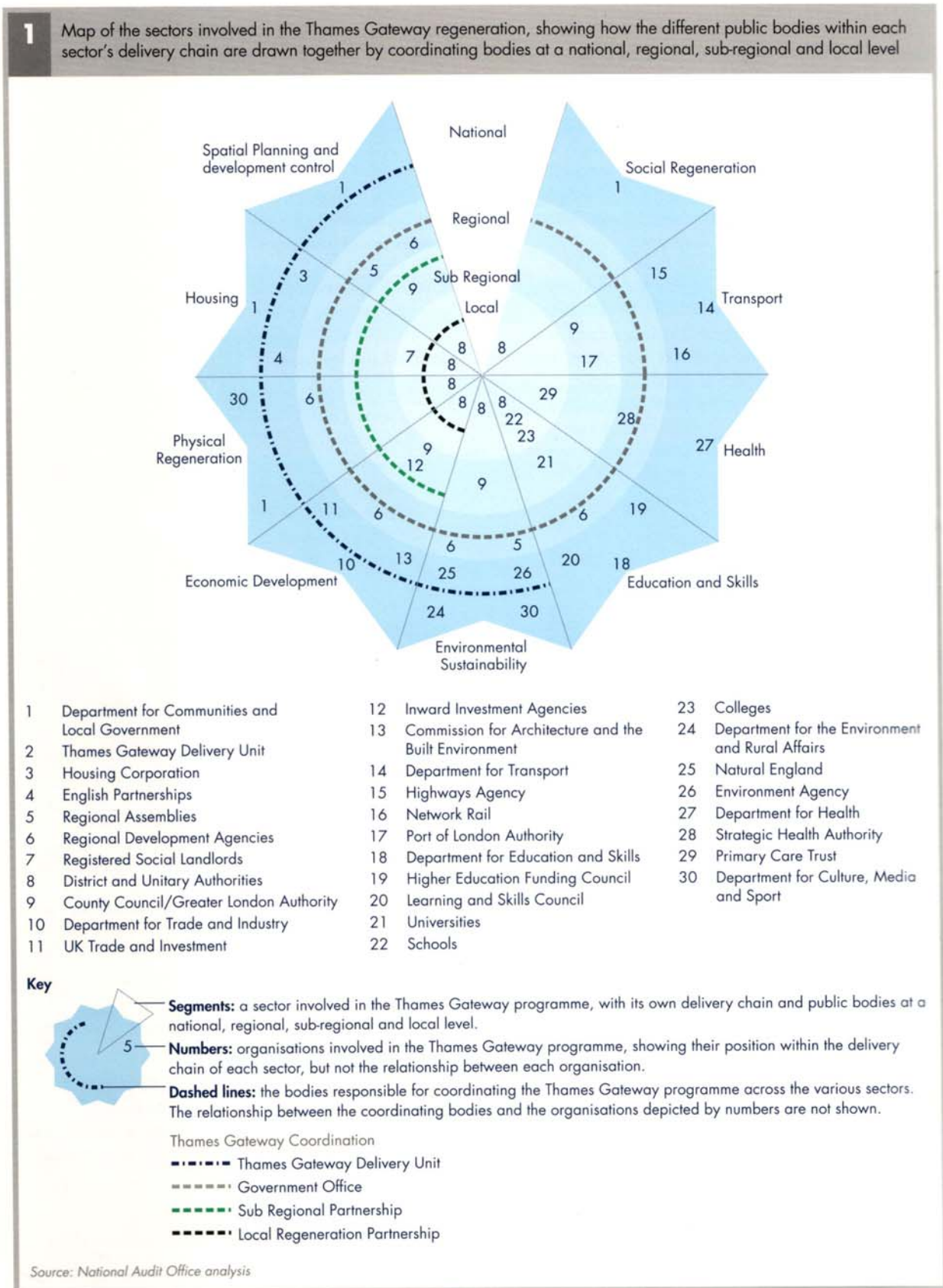


Figure 4 – Map of the sectors involved in the Thames Gateway



Source: National Audit Office, 2007