Thames Gateway Parklands Vision

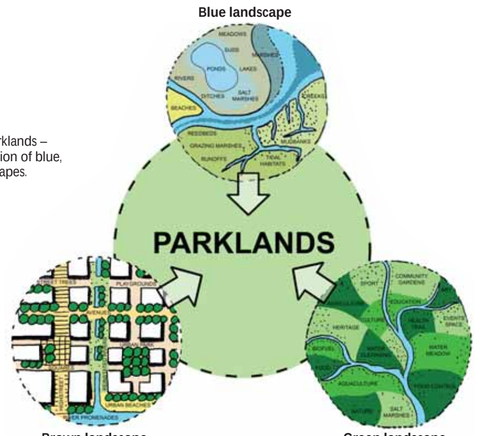
This document sets out an aspirational vision which will guide and support improvements to the environment and define Parklands' contribution to the UK's first 'eco-region' in the Thames Gateway.

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 – both existing and new – to the river, its tributaries and the Estuary landscape.

Parklands will help breath new life into the area by contributing to a high quality environment, which will in turn 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.

The Thames Gateway is a special place defined by its relationship to the tidal Thames Estuary and the landscapes that it has shaped, and 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.

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 and is home to one and half million people.



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

Blue landscape

The River Thames from the Swale

Green landscape

Dartford Heath

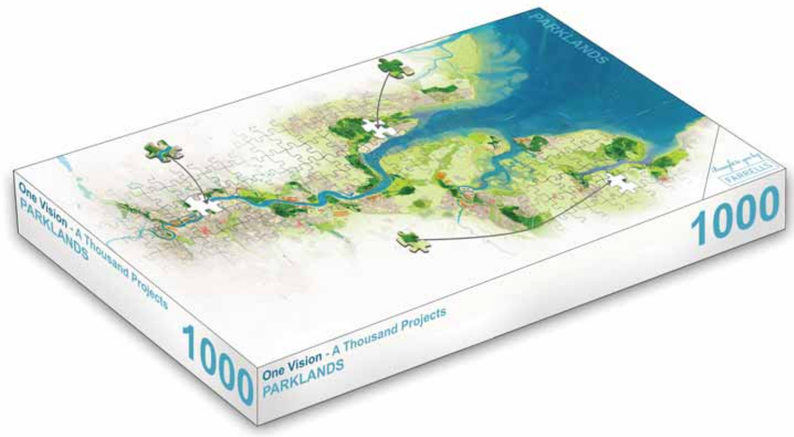
Brown landscape

East Tilbury

One vision, a thousand projects

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.

The Parklands vision provides a strategic context for green and open space projects in the Thames Gateway. It is the picture on the box which helps everyone to work towards a common goal. It is intended that organisations in the public, private and third sectors will deliver new 'pieces of the jigsaw puzzle' to help realise the vision. The Parklands vision is – above all – about reinforcing links between communities and the environment.



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

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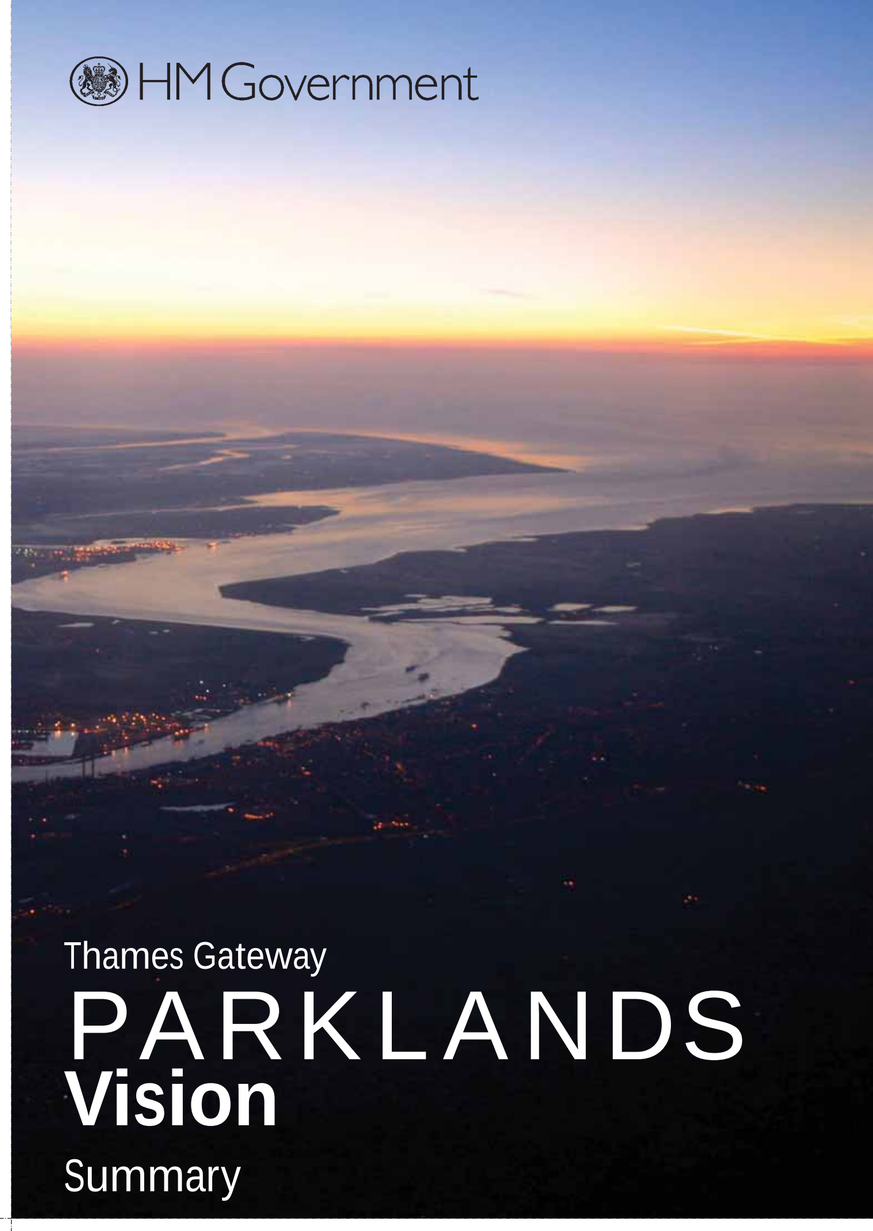


Thames Gateway

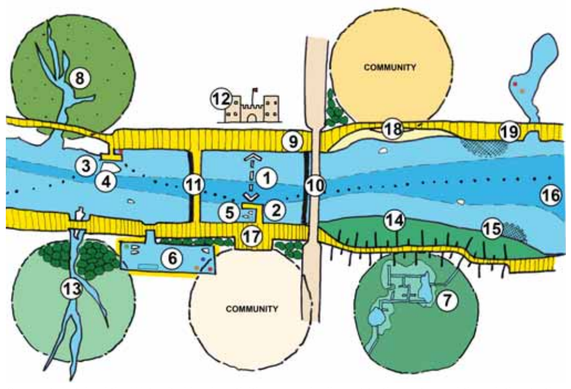
PARKLANDS Vision

Summary

Water Parklands

Reinvigorate the blue landscape as a major environmental, recreational, transport and economic asset – a key to sustainable development in the Thames Gateway.

The blue landscape should be reinvigorated as a positive feature of the landscape which everyone within the Thames Gateway can relate to and experience. As well as providing opportunities for recreation – including reactivating promenades, piers and waterfronts – Water Parklands has a role to play in improving biodiversity, protecting and enhancing the Estuary and helping with flood control. It can also help to focus activity on reactivating under-used docks and canals and new connections across rivers and the estuary.



1. Cross river ferry
2. Leisure centre
3. New jetties
4. Ocean cruise terminals
5. New marina
6. Reactivated dock
7. Reclaimed marshland
8. Wetland restoration
9. Thames Path
10. Connection
11. Thames Path connection
12. Heritage regeneration
13. Revealed tributaries
14. Sandbanks
15. Fisheries
16. Deepwater channel
17. Urban waterfront
18. Urban beach
19. Rural waterfront

Concept sketch of the Water Parklands activities on and adjacent to the water and the relation to the surrounding communities and landscapes

- **Medway river front:** The River Medway has the potential to be one of Britain's most important rivers for leisure activities and has a fascinating and illustrious maritime past. Many of the attractions and historical buildings on the river reflect this heritage.
- **Cliffe Pools restoration:** The restoration plan for Cliffe Pools will allow it to fulfil its wildlife potential. The restoration work requires hundreds of thousands of cubic metres of Thames dredging to be pumped into the pools, supporting the development of the port facilities at London Gateway.
- **River Quaggy:** The recent restoration of the River Quaggy in Greenwich is an excellent example of river restoration. As a result of regeneration and flood defence improvement, featureless playing fields at Sutcliffe Park have become a haven for grey heron, jack snipe, wagtails and dragonflies. New paths and boardwalks bring people close to reed beds, wild meadows and trees.

Medway river front

Cliffe Pools, North Kent

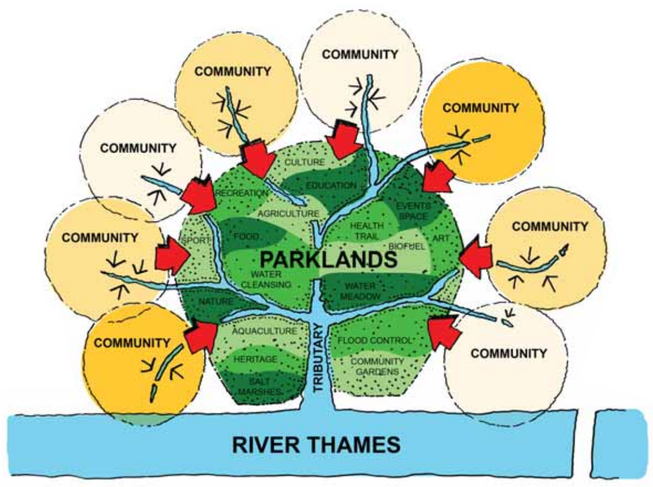
Restoration of River Quaggy, Greenwich

Community Parklands

Improve access for existing and new communities to significant landscapes.

There are a number of significant landscapes within the Thames Gateway. These have the potential to exert a strong and positive influence on the surrounding areas and help to strengthen a sense of pride and identity within local communities, as spaces such as Green Park and Blackheath do currently. Each of these landscapes has their own identity, is rich in heritage and character and could be used as a place of recreation, culture and education.

Community Parklands encourages the regeneration of these landscapes, to increase accessibility and making clear links between spaces and local communities, and between communities themselves to increase social and cultural benefits.



The Parklands Model linking communities to Parklands and to the River Thames and its tributaries

- **Rainham Marshes:** Rainham Marshes will provide opportunities for people of all ages to learn about the wildlife living on the marshes as well as the area's history.
- **Greenwich Peninsula:** Three community parks created by English Partnerships.
- **Shorne Woods Country Park:** Large ancient woodland, with a new eco-friendly visitor centre now offers woodland and heritage exploration, making it one of Kent's most popular country parks.

Rainham Marshes, Thurrock

Ecology Park, Greenwich Peninsula

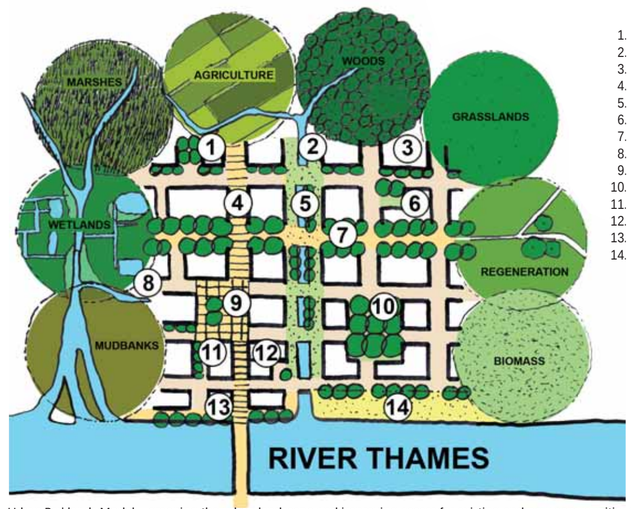
Shorne Woods Visitor Centre, Gravesham

Urban Parklands

Regenerate and develop urban environments as places of culture and social interaction.

As well as improving blue and green landscapes, Parklands proposes improvement to urban landscapes, which range from dense urban areas to self-contained villages in rural areas.

Urban spaces can improve the quality of life for local communities, in terms of improving cultural, social and environmental values. There are also particular health benefits in creating green and open urban areas that provide opportunities for outdoor exercise.



1. Playground
2. River edge habitat
3. Allotments
4. High street
5. Revealed tributary
6. Pocket park
7. Parkland avenue
8. Urban farms
9. Parklands square
10. Urban park
11. Street trees
12. Heritage regeneration
13. Urban waterfront
14. Urban beach

Urban Parklands Model – greening the urban landscape and improving access for existing and new communities to significant landscapes

Rainham Village High Street, Havering

- **Rainham Village High Street:** Rainham village's strong historic identity has been a vital asset in driving the regeneration of the surrounding area. English Heritage works with local authorities in historic areas to restore buildings, streets and public realm.
- **Barking Town Centre:** MUF Architects are proposing a number of improvements to important civic spaces. This includes creating an arboretum; filling one open space with a forest; extending the existing walkway to form an arcade; creating a new pedestrian connection; and marking the area in front the Town Hall with a single mature magnolia tree.

Barking Town Centre

Parklands historic environment

Build on the rich history of the area by regenerating the historic environment to provide a clear identity for each community in the Thames Gateway.

The historic environment in the Gateway includes some world famous places and some hidden gems and can be an important expression of local history and culture. The historic environment can play an important role in transforming the economic fortunes of the Thames Gateway.

Heritage-led regeneration throughout the Thames Gateway has shown how creative and cultural activity can help to bring life to previously declining places.

Tilbury Fort, Essex

Rochester Castle, Medway

- **High House, Purfleet:** In 2004, the groundbreaking 'Visionary Thurrock' programme set out to involve local people in the regeneration of Thurrock through a culture-led consultation. One of the most exciting developments is the relocation of the Royal Opera House's (ROH) production facilities from Stratford in East London to a new state-of-the-art Production Campus in Thurrock. As well as housing new purpose-built facilities for the ROH, the campus will provide workspace for other creative industries and artists.

High House Dovecote, Purfleet

- **Gravesend High Street:** Conservation-led area regeneration schemes have transformed the look and feel of Gravesend town centre and the surrounding areas. Commercial and residential properties have been refurbished while major work has been carried out on streets and public spaces, including the refurbishment and repair of Town Pier. The conservation area work carried out in parallel has altered people's perceptions of Gravesend and has led to economic revitalisation. The renewed vibrancy of the town centre has led to further improvement and regeneration across the rest of the borough.

Gravesend High Street, Gravesham

A connected Parklands landscape

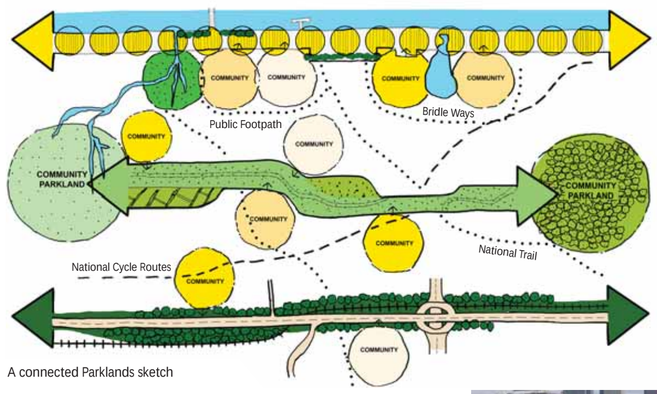
Create a connected Parklands landscape with the 'green grid', the Thames Estuary Path and visual and environmental improvements to major transport corridors.

Connecting landscapes can link existing and new urban settlements and communities to one another and to green and open spaces, and provide them with an environmental context.

Thames Estuary Path – a continuous walking route and cycle path that links London to the sea, passing along the north and south banks of the Estuary, including circular loops along the pathway to link communities to the water front.

Green Grid – the development of a continuous 'green grid' in East London, South Essex and North Kent is well established, and provides the foundations for Parklands as a large scale regional landscape by connecting green and open spaces together.

Transport Corridors – greening the major transport corridors that run through the Thames Gateway will improve perceptions of the region and the experience of travelling through it. These could be seen as large scale landscapes in their own right, and could fulfil a similar role as the green grids.



A connected Parklands sketch

- **National Cycle Routes:** The National Cycle Network is a comprehensive network of safe and attractive routes to cycle, running throughout the UK. 10,000 miles have recently been completed (2005), one third of which are on traffic-free paths. It is delivered through the policies and programmes of local authorities and other partners, and is coordinated by Sustrans.

National Cycle Routes

- **Coastal Path:** Natural England will increase the opportunities available for people to make the natural environment an enriching part of their daily lives. As well as increasing people's enjoyment and understanding of this environment, the aim is to also bring improvements to wildlife and the landscape. To achieve this, Natural England will work with farmers, land managers and public authorities to maintain and develop access and to assist them to successfully manage and benefit from increased public access to the natural environment.

Coastal Path

Agriculture as Parklands

Appreciate agricultural landscapes, enhance their biodiversity and provide opportunities for more local food production in Parklands landscapes.

All landscapes provide visual interest whether they can be actively used by the general public or not. There is value in taking advantage of the visual benefits that agricultural and productive landscapes can provide. There are also economic benefits in local food production, and to its rural regeneration.

Medway Swale orchards scheme

- **Allotments:** Urban allotments promote and enhance local private food production and provide private open space in close proximity to dwellings.

Allotments

- **Medway Swale orchards scheme:** The project will focus on restoration/creation of community orchards including: planting, restoring and managing orchards using traditional varieties and techniques; providing advice to landowners through the development of guidance notes and community workshop training; celebrating local heritage through a variety of events and activities to enjoy the horticultural and social tradition of the area. It will also develop management plans and sustainable end-uses for the fruit, help to conserve and enhance our environment, save on food mileage and support the rural countryside economy.
- **Ranscombe Farm:** Ranscombe Farm is one of the richest botanical sites in the British Isles and home to the single most important arable flower field in the UK. The Ranscombe Farm landscape includes arable habitats, extensive ancient woodland and relict fragments of chalk grassland. It provides opportunities for quiet walks among attractive countryside with fascinating flora.

Ranscombe Farm, Cuxton, North Kent

Parklands and the eco-region

Parklands can contribute to the development of an eco-region in the Thames Gateway.

The Government recently established ambitions for the Thames Gateway to become the UK's first eco-region, and an exemplar of sustainable development. This ambition will greatly benefit from the delivery of the Parklands vision, which aims to improve environmental quality, enhance biodiversity, reduce flood risk, and use resources more efficiently, responding and adapting to climate change.

- **Salt Marsh Regeneration in South Essex:** Over the last 25 years up to 40 per cent of Essex salt marsh has been lost. The coastal realignment project at Abbotts Hall Farm was designed to allow for the regeneration of salt marsh on the Essex coast. The sea wall – constructed over 300 years ago – was breached in October 2002. Two counter walls have been constructed at either end of the site to protect neighbouring land.
- **Cliffe Pools RSPB Site:** Cliffe Pools is a new RSPB reserve. Tightly-packed blue lagoons on a bend in the river are perfect for water birds. It is particularly renowned for wading birds, with massed flocks moving here from the adjacent Thames Estuary in winter.
- **Sustainable urban drainage systems:** SUDS such as ponds, wetlands and swales provide additional green areas and interesting features, particularly within the urban environment. SUDs can be useful for urban recreation and also be designed to provide places for wildlife.

Vange Marshes, South Essex

Cliffe Pools RSPB Site, North Kent

SUDS, Greenwich Millennium Village