

# Thames Gateway Evidence Base

## Initial comments by CPRE Thames Gateway

May 2005

1. CPRE Thames Gateway is a collaboration of CPRE's London, Essex and Kent Branches and the CPRE National Office. We welcome the initiative being undertaken by ODPM to develop an Evidence Base of key statistics relevant to the delivery of policy objectives set out in the Communities Plan. We see it as being crucial in allowing Government investment to be efficiently deployed and effectively monitored for progress towards achieving policy objectives to be effectively monitored. At this early stage in the development of the Evidence Base, this paper presents some issues for consideration in advance of the formal consultation.

### Strategic policy objectives

2. Accurate data will be crucial in order to allow action plans to be drawn up and for resources to be effectively targeted in line with the policy framework as established through the Communities Plan. It should also allow progress towards those objectives to be efficiently monitored. The key point is that the Evidence Base should be designed so as to demonstrate the current situation with regard to those strategic policy objectives and to then demonstrate progress towards achieving them. The first question, therefore, is what specific strategic policy objectives are, in fact, established through the Communities Plan.

3. The obvious strategic policy objectives are the delivery of 120,000 new dwellings and 120-180,000 new jobs between 2003 and 2016 within the five strategic development locations. The recent Thames Gateway 'strategy' *Building Sustainable Communities: Delivering in the Thames Gateway* established a minimum target that 'at least 80% of new homes' in the Thames Gateway should be built on previously developed land. Beyond those three targets, however, there appear to be very few (if any) specific targeted strategic objectives. Nevertheless, implicit in the Communities Plan and related Government statements are numerous other general policy objectives that could usefully be translated into specific, measurable targets and that ought to be represented in the Evidence Base. Those primary objectives should be identified before proceeding any further with identifying the requirements for subordinate statistics that might then be included within the Evidence Base. The following are examples of the key strategic objectives that are identified in the Communities Plan and that ought to be translated in to measurable targets that then form the basis of the Evidence Base:

- i. achievement of quality in urban design;
- ii. achievement of quality in the design of new housing;
- iii. access to adequate local services and amenities;
- iv. access to adequate local and strategic public transport;
- v. efficiency in the use of land (average development densities);
- vi. use of sustainable construction techniques;
- vii. achievement of effective engagement and participation by local people in local policy-making;
- viii. achievement of a safe and healthy local environment;
- ix. achievement of a well-integrated mix of homes of different types and tenures to support a range of household sizes, ages and incomes; and

x. a 'sense of place'.

4. Some of these criteria - such as design quality or a 'sense of place' - are clearly somewhat intangible and it is therefore not obvious how they can easily be 'measured'. It is, nevertheless, possible to devise numerical proxy indices which illustrate the extent to which developments achieve some relevant subjective standard or have been subject to a particular process aimed at achieving those intangible qualities (such as design coding or meeting *Building for Life* criteria).

### **Ongoing monitoring**

5. The evidence base should not be a one-off exercise. If appropriate statistics are developed and kept updated, it has the potential to develop into a facility for monitoring success in achieving policy objectives, monitoring trends, and informing periodic reiterations and refinements of plans and programmes. Such facilities - as 'regional observatories' - are already established at a regional level elsewhere in England, helping inform Regional Spatial Strategies, Regional Sustainable Development Frameworks and RDA economic strategies.

6. A regional observatory for the Thames Gateway would help provide accountability for the substantial Government funding being invested in the Thames Gateway and also help provide assurance that those resources are being effectively deployed. It would also help to rationalise the various disparate data-collection exercises that are underway in the Thames Gateway and provide the continuity that is necessary in order to refine the information that is collected.

7. The Evidence base project should lead to the establishment of a regional observatory for the Thames Gateway, tasked to develop, collect and maintain key statistics that will illustrate the extent to which social, environmental and economic policy objectives are being achieved. This will allow plans and programmes to be properly refined and informed. The observatory should be an independent body. It should be closely linked with and operated by academic institutions in the Thames Gateway so as to allow a high degree of academic rigour.

### **Local accountability**

8. A recent report by IPPR '*From New Towns to Growth Areas*' makes the point that one of the key weaknesses in the New Towns programme was the absence of any formal monitoring and evaluation. Despite the fact that the New Town Development Corporations (NTDCs) collected potentially helpful data through their own research and published it in their annual reports, that data was not collected centrally. The resultant effect was that much effort was duplicated and wasted, and it was not possible to manage progress towards strategic objectives.

9. The Evidence Base initiative has the potential to address that problem in the Thames Gateway Growth Area. The Local Delivery Vehicles are the modern equivalent (albeit with fewer powers) of the NTDCs and are tasked with preparing and periodically reviewing a Regeneration Framework and a Project Framework. It makes sense for those initiatives - or, indeed, for their annual reports - to be used to collect and present relevant local data to then be presented in the Evidence Base.

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