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2 December 2005

Thames Gateway Strategic Delivery Framework

As I mentioned at last week's Thames Gateway Forum, CPRE is very pleased to hear your announcement concerning the forthcoming Thames Gateway Delivery Framework. The initiative should provide an excellent - and, for many, a long awaited - opportunity to demonstrate that the Government's Thames Gateway 'project' is coherent, adequately resourced and will deliver the welcome policy objectives of the Communities Plan. In her speech, Yvette Cooper confirmed that the framework will include a spatial plan, and we welcome that: it will provide the opportunity to demonstrate that the regional strategies of the three regions are mutually consistent - particularly in respect of strategic transport infrastructure - with regards to the scale of anticipated growth in the Thames Gateway.

Your comments regarding the Government's intention to engage the private and voluntary sectors and the public in the development of the framework were particularly welcome. Clearly, if the initiative is to encourage the confidence of, for example, private sector investors and financiers, urban regeneration professionals and local communities, then the concerns of all those groups should be identified and their expertise brought to bear on this process. Confidence in the framework will be especially important in respect of those individuals and organisations that will have a role in implementing its delivery. As well as pro-actively seeking the engagement of relevant group and individuals, I suggest that a commitment to publish the framework in draft for consultation would be widely welcomed.

We hope that the challenge of integrating economic, public service and housing development will be well served by the forthcoming framework and, to that end, I should like to draw your attention to the key issues outlined in the attached paper. I also enclose our recent report *Thames*

Gateway: From Rhetoric to Reality, which provides further detail on the issues raised in that paper and which I hope you will find to be a constructive contribution to the Government's thinking on the way forward.

I should be pleased to be kept informed of progress with the Thames Gateway Strategic Delivery Framework and for an opportunity to meet your officials to discuss it an appropriate point.

Yours sincerely,

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CPRE Thames Gateway Project Leader

Thames Gateway Strategic Delivery Framework

Initial comments by CPRE Thames Gateway

December 2005

Introduction

1. CPRE very much welcomes the Government's intention to produce a Strategic Delivery Framework for the Thames Gateway. The initiative should provide an excellent opportunity to demonstrate that the Government's Thames Gateway 'project' is coherent, adequately resourced and will deliver the welcome policy objectives of the Communities Plan. The following comments address a number of key issues which should guide the development of the Framework.

Overarching objectives

2. The fact that the Government now considers the Thames Gateway as a 'distinctive social and economic unit' - rather than simply as a geographical entity - is an important and reassuring step forward. Indeed, in view of the range of Thames-Gateway-specific public sector structures that exist, it comes as a surprise to many that the Government has not - until now - recognised its programme for the Thames Gateway as being a discreet 'project', albeit subject to policy development at a regional and local level. It follows that any such project ought to be guided by an explicit set of public policy objectives and the issues that the delivery programme addresses should be explicitly linked to achieving those objectives.

3. The Government has adopted a set of characteristics defining a 'sustainable community' (for example, in the January 2005 Five Year Plan statement *Sustainable Communities: People, Places and Prosperity*). These should be given prominence in the delivery framework. The overarching objectives should recognise the need for new development in the Thames Gateway to be and remain a destination of choice for individuals and families who are likely to move into the area (especially from London) in the future. It should also include the explicit objectives of realising the maximum urban regeneration potential of the area - requiring a strong stance against unnecessary greenfield development - and achieving an exemplar of high quality urban design.

Transport infrastructure

4. The plan should include a comprehensive, integrated transport infrastructure delivery programme, again with the specific objective of realising the maximum urban regeneration potential of the Thames Gateway. Transport Ministers have expressed strong support for such an approach¹, although little progress appears to have been made. The framework should be clear about the phasing of the housing growth trajectory and the provision of additional transport infrastructure capacity.

Housing growth

5. The framework should specify the required rate at which new housing is expected to be built at a local level throughout the Thames Gateway, demonstrating that those rates are consistent with the likely availability of sites and transport infrastructure capacity. The Government should be ready to raise substantially the anticipated level of housing growth if new commitments to transport infrastructure provision mean that a higher number can be accommodated on urban brownfield sites. The Government's target of providing 120,000

¹ For example, Karen Buck MP speaking at the Thames Gateway Forum, London, November 2005 and Tony McNulty MP speaking at the Thames Gateway Forum, November 2004

additional homes by 2016 would be a long way short of the area's potential urban capacity if new investment in transport infrastructure could be secured. Recent work in London has indicated that urban capacity is frequently grossly underestimated by local authorities.

Economic development

6. Achieving even 120,000 additional homes depends on a substantial number of new employment opportunities being created close to housing developments, thereby reducing demands on transport infrastructure². The delivery framework should therefore set out the broad location and rate of provision of new business premises that are likely to accommodate new jobs in the Thames Gateway, together with an explanation of the measure which the Government proposes to take in order to promote the area's economic regeneration.

Brownfield land reclamation strategy

7. In order to provide investors and developers with confidence that new development can be provided in the anticipated locations and at the anticipated rate, and without encroaching unnecessarily in greenfield land, the delivery framework should set out the rate at which new sites will be brought on stream and explain where the necessary funding will be derived.

Flood risk management infrastructure

8. There is a need to reassure developers (and the general public) that the necessary enhancements of flood defences in the Thames Gateway will be forthcoming in good time and consistent with the anticipated housing growth trajectory. The fact that the Environment Agency is not expected to issue the report of its Thames Estuary 2100 project until 2008 may create difficulties here, but it should be possible to demonstrate where certain areas are already served by adequate flood defences and those areas where other flood risk management techniques can be applied in order to reduce residual risk to an acceptable level.

Community infrastructure delivery

9. The perceived lack of commitment among other Government departments (for example, Education & Skills; Health; Culture, Media & Sport and, not least, the Treasury) is widely held to be a major barrier to delivering the Government's objectives for the Thames Gateway. The delivery framework should demonstrate that all relevant departments are committed to making available the necessary funding in time for public services to be delivered or enhanced in tandem with population growth.

The built environment

10. Good quality architecture and thoughtful, intelligent design have emerged as a fundamental pre-requisite of successful urban areas. However, these considerations are, unfortunately, not yet the norm in the Thames Gateway (as elsewhere). Despite the excellent work of CABI and the major stride forward represented by PPS1, a key barrier remains in the lack of awareness, expertise and strong political leadership at a senior level in local planning authorities (LPAs). The Strategic Delivery Framework should address this problem by encouraging all LPAs to adopt Design Champions at a senior Member level, clarifying the level of technical design expertise that is necessary, and explaining the Government resources that are available to that end.

² Relationship between Transport and Development in the Thames Gateway. Llewellyn-Davies, 2003.