



Review of Gravesham Borough Council's Maritime Strategy

THE OVERVIEW SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



June 2021

Approved for publication by:

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Foreword

The Maritime Strategy Sub-Review Group was established by the Overview Scrutiny Committee back in July 2019, with the expressed purpose of exploring how this authority could better promote Gravesham as a riparian borough. Throughout the review process, non-Executive Members, assembled to explore areas such as Economic Development, Planning, Regeneration, Community and Stakeholder Engagement, Heritage and Tourism and Youth Opportunities.

It would be remiss of me not to mention that this review was undertaken against the backdrop of COVID-19, resulting in the delayed delivery of these recommendations to the Executive. Most of this review was conducted virtually and a special thanks should therefore be recorded to Chris Wakeford (Committee Services Manager) and to his colleagues in the Committee Section and IT department for their work in enabling this review to take place remotely. There can be no doubt at all that the pandemic fundamentally shifted our ability to go as in-depth as Members had hoped for when it came to engaging with external parties, however thanks to the flexibility of Members and the willingness of stakeholders to partake, I am confident that this review and its recommendations serve as a starting point from which the Executive can build a brighter future for our borough's unique relationship with the River Thames.

As the Council begins the process of leading the community through the Covid-19 recovery, it is now even more important, that the Executive takes time to reflect on the work of this review and the recommendations contained throughout this report. For if these recommendations are realised, they will not only enhance the delivery of the Council's services, but further allow this Council to deliver on the priorities contained within the Corporate Plan.

In the opening lines of Charles Dickens' Great Expectations, we hear young Pip describe a scene:

"Ours was the marsh country, down by the river, within, as the river wound, twenty miles of the sea. My first most vivid and broad impression of the identity of things, seems to me to have been gained on a memorable raw afternoon towards evening. At such a time I found out for certain, that this bleak place overgrown with nettles..."

Now it is universally acknowledged by historians and literacy folk alike, that it was the shoreline between Gravesend and Higham that inspired Dickens to set this scene, and indeed when walking the Saxon Shoreline as part of this review on a "raw" December evening, did this setting come alive for me and with it the realisation that we in this authority today are the custodians of this ancient bond between land and river. Now parts of our river front rightfully remain "bleak" and throughout the tough times of this pandemic this urban bleakness has served as a point of escapism and therapy for many of our residents. Further still and true to Dickens' words, many of River-side paths remain "overgrown with nettles", but this point aside, after this review, I am confident that there is much that we can do together to ensure the survival and enhancements of these important sites for generations to come.

It is therefore with a sense of hope, that on-behalf of the Overview Scrutiny Committee, that I now commend these recommendations to the wisdom and consideration of the Executive.



Cllr. Jordan Meade FRSA, Chairman of the Overview Scrutiny Committee.

Introduction and Summary of Recommendations

1.1 In July 2019, the Overview Scrutiny Committee selected the subject of Gravesham Borough Council's Maritime Strategy for a topic review. The terms of reference for the review were agreed in September 2019 and focused on the following areas:

- To undertake a review of how the Council promotes Gravesham as a riparian borough.
- To further explore how the borough can capitalise on the River Thames as a driver for economic development.
- To evaluate the effectiveness and review the delivery of the Council's existing Thames-based partnerships and scope out the potential for the creation of additional partnerships.
- In the context of planning, explore how access to the River Thames can be improved for both recreational and commercial purposes.
- To appraise existing infrastructure and how new developments can support riverside regeneration.
- To find greater opportunities for young people and the wider community to utilise Gravesham's river assets.
- To enable the Portfolio Holder and Senior Officers to brief and consult on any proposed policy and procedural changes that might affect the Council's Tourism and Planning Strategies in relation to The River Thames.

1.2 The review sub-group held eight evidence gathering sessions with various organisations including:

- the Port of London Authority
- Visit to the Rochester Riverside Development
- Riverside Clubs (Gravesend Sailing Club, Gravesend Rowing Club, Gravesend Regatta Society, PLA Community Outreach Manager)
- Young People from the Youth Democracy Scheme
- GBC Planning Policy Department
- The Ebbsfleet Development Corporation
- The Thames Estuary Envoy (Thames Estuary Growth Board)
- A Local Historian and the Assistant Director (Communities) GBC

Summary of Recommendations

- 1.3 In summary, the Scrutiny review of Gravesham Borough Council’s Maritime Strategy has identified sixteen recommendations for Cabinet consideration, as set out below:

	RECOMMENDATION	Report page
	<p><u>IMMEDIATE CONSIDERATION</u></p> <p>1. The lead Cabinet member should consider dedicating the Community & Leisure Committee agenda to the ‘river’ once per year and invite representatives along from various groups to update members on activity throughout the year and how such groups could work better together in events or bid funding.</p> <p>The purpose of the Group would be to encourage a joined up approach to the recreational and tourism aspects of the Thames - providing The Executive with a reliable group of stakeholders from which the Council may develop a better understanding of the needs of the river community</p>	11
	<p>2. The Leader of the Executive consider adding the oversight of matters relating to the River, under the portfolio of a single Cabinet Member</p> <p>This will demonstrate the Council’s desire to have a key-point of entry for members of the public, organisations and businesses whom wish to engage on maritime matters</p>	11
	<p>3. The Council should improve its engagement with Young People in matters relating to the river.</p> <p>The Council should work with the Port of London Authority and RNLI, acting as a facilitator to better communicate messages around River Safety to schools and local organisations.</p> <p>The Executive Member for Young People should ask the Youth Council to appoint a “youth representative for the River” who will act as a stakeholder for the Cabinet to engage and consult with on matters concerning the recreational use of the Thames.</p> <p>Councillors and Youth Councillors be provided with a tour (when conditions allow) of Northfleet Harbour and the Northfleet River frontage so that they can be better aware of the issues and opportunities.</p> <p>The Executive engages and consults with the Youth Council on the Lower Thames Crossing giving young people a chance to feed into the mitigation process.</p>	14

4.	<p>The Cabinet Member for Community & Leisure ensures that greater consideration is given to recreational/sport activities on the Thames and that these opportunities are communicated to young people across the Borough as part of the annual sports programme and listed on the Visit Gravesend website.</p>	15
5.	<p>The Council consider passing a motion (in the name of the Leader and seconded by the Leader of the Opposition) which communicates the unanimous desire of Members to protect and enhance the river.</p> <p>Whilst this could not be attached as an annex to the Council's Planning Policies it could be referenced as evidence to help inform planning decisions in the future</p>	16
6.	<p>The Council start to consider the real and immediate threat posed by global warming and the rise in water levels.</p> <p>The Executive should make sure that the Environment Agency is reporting back to the Council on this subject and that Planning Policy is considerate of the fact that greater flood defences will be needed in the near future. Disabled access should also be considered in relation to this matter.</p>	16
7.	<p>The Leader of the Executive appoint a representative from the Council to attend meetings of the All-Party Parliamentary Groups on Maritime and Ports, and the APPG on the River Thames</p> <p>This will ensure that Gravesham has a voice amongst parliamentarians at these meetings.</p>	20
8.	<p>Members of the Executive and Members of the Planning Committee be taken on a tour of the borough's river boundary (by boat)</p> <p>This will provide a greater appreciation and understanding of the borough's uniqueness from the river can be developed and help to inform future decision making. This should be done in collaboration with the Estuary Envoy, following her offer to facilitate such a trip.</p>	20

**TO BE CONSIDERED FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT APPLICATIONS
OR FUTURE BID APPLICATIONS TO APPROPRIATE FUNDING
SOURCES**

9. Plans be developed for the complete regeneration of the Promenade. 13

The Executive should consider a feasibility study on improving and regenerating river fronted recreation areas such as St. Andrews Garden and The Riverside area. This would then ensure that plans and scheme would be in place for when appropriate external funding becomes available.

This work should also include a commitment to making sure that all aspects of this space are DDA compliant.

For some bids this may be appropriate to join up its other users on the site such as the Gravesend Sailing Club, The Gravesend Rowing Club and LV21

10. The Council urgently look at ways to promote and improve the accessibility of the Saxon Shoreline. 15

Planning policy should reflect a desire for developers to contribute towards the upkeep and ongoing maintenance of this path.

The Executive may want to consider using the Community Payback scheme or the new Kickstart initiative to start clearing the pathway.

The Executive should explore the possibility of registering and administering the Promenade, Gordon Gardens and the Saxon Shoreway as a "Country Park" (Like Riverside Country Park in Gillingham).

11. When applying for grants it would be good to conduct a public consultation on how the river can play a much more important part in the life of the borough and the type of events or facilities that local people would wish to see if the council were successful in the bid funding. 23

<u>WORK ALREADY HAPPENING OR BEING DEVELOPED</u>		
12.	The Executive is now working with the Port of London Authority to promote and grow the Thames Visitor website, ensuring that it corresponds and complements the existing Visit Gravesend Website.	11
13.	The Executive considers all possible options to improve access to the Thames for passengers, including working to secure a commuter ferry service from Gravesend to London.	11
14.	<p>The Council should enhance their work with the EDC and the Northfleet Harbour Restoration Trust to preserve Rosherville assets and support the interim use of Northfleet Harbour for biodiversity and community use.</p> <p>The Council currently have good partnership working with the EDC and we are aware that EDC have already funded some work for the Northfleet Harbour Restoration Trust. If this trust is to be successful in its aspirations the work needs a project plan, with key stages, so that successful bids can be submitted for the various stages or when such funding becomes available. The Executive should consider if they could assist the Northfleet Harbour Restoration Trust with some in-kind help, so that they are in a better position to submit bids for funding.</p>	17
15.	<p>The Executive begin to work with the Thames Estuary Growth Board (Thames Estuary Envoy) and local education providers to understand how opportunities such as the London Resort will require the upskilling/retraining of the local workforce.</p> <p>Under the Council's commitment to Social Mobility an assessment should be carried out on the future skills gaps that we may have in the near future</p>	20
16.	<p>The Council take a much more active part in participating in partnership-programmes such as the Estuary Festival, using such events as a catalyst to promote tourism locally and in the wider area.</p> <p>The Council is very involved with this years Estuary Festival and has led on some art installations and also obtained funding from Arts Council for a Fringe Festival, we hope that this relationship will grow as the Festival becomes bigger.</p>	20

17. The Council consider sponsoring and/or facilitating a Maritime Festival weekend in which people from all backgrounds could have taster sessions in rowing, mud larking, sailing etc.

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A small festival has already started which celebrates the river and is currently being organised for this year at St. Andrews Gardens.

The organisers have been spoken to and are considering how they might better involve others from the river community into the event and make residents and visitors aware of the many clubs that exist within the borough that make use of the river.

- 1.4 Further information to support these recommendations is contained within the body of the report.

2. Review Findings

Evidence Gathering: Port of London Authority

2.1 On 20 December 2019, the sub-group held an evidence gathering session with Nadine Collins-Smith - Head of Thames Vision Delivery, Port of London Authority who outlined the goals of the Thames Vision:

- Port - Busiest ever Port of London, handling 60 – 80 million tonnes of cargo a year
- Inland Waterways Freight - More goods and materials moved regularly: +4 m tonnes, taking over 400,000 lorry trips off roads
- Passenger trips - Double the number to 20 million trips a year
- Environment - The cleanest river since the Industrial Revolution, with improved habitats
- Sport and Recreation - Greater participation in sport and recreation on and alongside the water
- Community and Culture - Thriving riverside, a magnet for visitors and locals

2.2 The sub-group discussed various aspects of the river and gleaned the following information:

- There are tensions between increasing sport and recreation and increased waterways freight. Consideration is needed for what's appropriate for each part of river.
- Thames Path – Woolwich to Grain should be launched in 2020. PLA will look to work with EDC.
- Thames Clipper Service from Gravesend is being considered.
- West Street Pier was recently sold, the main interest is for tugboats to utilise it.
- Retrofitting technology monitoring: PLA has the first hybrid pilot cutter
- Cleaner Thames Campaign: the Thames is improving, ecology is quite good and the Tideway Tunnel (25km Super Sewer) will help
- The Sub-group agreed that it would be good to find out which officers attend the Thames Estuary Partnership.
- A Thames Visitor Website is being developed to promote the Thames more (Tourism & Heritage)
- Estuary 2020 - Hopefully more events can be held in Gravesham.
- PLA are doing more work on engaging schools (e.g. Thames Skills Academy and Annual Careers Fair on Dixie Queen) and will keep GBC updated on events / opportunities.
- PLA Investment Plan: Commercial. Semi-Commercial and Public good.
- Air Quality Strategy is currently being updated
- PLA are working on a response to transport for the South East Strategy, there might be a chance for Cllrs to have their input in how the river should be used.
- The PLA will look at visitor mooring next year and will consider Gravesham's situation (e.g. Iron Pier, Clarendon Wharf, West Street. 42 Wharf, etc) and work with GBC regarding planning etc.

- The PLA does not envision Tilbury 2 adversely affecting its goals.
- The PLA will look into how big ships might affect sport and recreation on the river (e.g. small riverside clubs) and review section 106 opportunities.

2.3 Members of the sub-group felt that a more joined-up approach was needed in regard to the recreational and tourism aspects of the River Thames.

RECOMMENDATION 1 - IMMEDIATE CONSIDERATION

The lead Cabinet member should consider dedicating the Community & Leisure Committee agenda to the 'river' once per year and invite representatives along from various groups to update members on activity throughout the year and how such groups could work better together in events or bid funding.

The purpose of the Group would be to encourage a joined up approach to the recreational and tourism aspects of the Thames - providing The Executive with a reliable group of stakeholders from which the Council may develop a better understanding of the needs of the river community.

RECOMMENDATION 2 - IMMEDIATE CONSIDERATION

The Leader of the Executive consider adding the oversight of matters relating to the River, under the portfolio of a single Cabinet Member

This will demonstrate the Council's desire to have a key-point of entry for members of the public, organisations and businesses whom wish to engage on maritime matters.

RECOMMENDATION 12 - WORK ALREADY HAPPENING OR BEING DEVELOPED

The Executive is now working with the Port of London Authority to promote and grow the Thames Visitor website, ensuring that it corresponds and complements the existing Visit Gravesend Website.

RECOMMENDATION 13 - WORK ALREADY HAPPENING OR BEING DEVELOPED

The Executive considers all possible options to improve access to the Thames for passengers, including working to secure a commuter ferry service from Gravesend to London.

Evidence Gathering: Visit to the Rochester Riverside Development

2.4 On 7 February 2020; Members of the sub-group visited the Rochester Riverside Development Scheme and met with Peter Sofoluke, the principal Architect behind the scheme.

2.5 The following areas were discussed and noted:

- Member engagement, use of River assets and how members from across the Council were involved in the design of the scheme.
- Sustainability and how the buildings were being designed not only to compliment the environment but with the environment in mind.
- It was noted that as part of the initial design consultation, local councillors were given a Polaroid camera and told to go around Rochester taking snaps of architectural features of the town that they liked and felt would make the scheme more acceptable to local people. This worked well with the final design reflecting its surroundings well.
- It was further noted that this scheme was looking to create "communities within communities" in that local shop units had been leased prior to the occupation of residential properties being occupied.
- Members felt that while the scheme was strong in terms of design, sustainability and community engagement; opportunities for recreational access to the River Medway had not been realised.

Evidence Gathering: Gravesend Riverside Clubs

2.6 On 14 February 2020; the sub-group met with the following clubs: Gravesend Sailing Club, Gravesend Rowing Club, Gravesend Regatta Society, PLA Community Outreach Manager.

2.7 The following areas were discussed and noted:

- There was a general consensus that there needs to be "more joined up thinking" when it comes to the recreational use of the River.
- It was sometimes confusing which sports/recreational users of the River should contact for compliance/event support.
- There was a general consensus that club resources were limited and outdated.
- Clubs/Groups hoped that with the Lower Thames Crossing there might be an opportunity for funding from mitigation to improve recreational access to the Thames, but they did not know who to contact with ideas or how to feed back to the consultation.
- All agreed that it was challenging to allow young people to participate in water-based activity due to health and safety and lack of adult volunteers.
- All agreed that we could make so much more of the River and the heritage of the Thames.

- Gravesham has a lack of; changing facilities, exercise facilities and the club-based night-time economy offering that other riparian towns have.

RECOMMENDATION 9 – TO BE CONSIDERED FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT APPLICATIONS OR FUTURE BID APPLICATIONS TO APPROPRIATE FUNDING SOURCES

Plans be developed for the complete regeneration of the Promenade.

The Executive should consider a feasibility study on improving and regenerating river fronted recreation areas such as St. Andrews Garden and The Riverside area. This would then ensure that plans and scheme would be in place for when appropriate external funding becomes available.

This work should also include a commitment to making sure that all aspects of this space are DDA compliant.

For some bids this may be appropriate to join up its other users on the site such as the Gravesend Sailing Club, The Gravesend Rowing Club and LV21

Evidence Gathering: Young People from the Youth Democracy Scheme

2.8 On 21 February 2020; the sub-group met with Young People from the Youth Democracy Scheme

2.9 The following areas were discussed and noted:

- The young people had a generally good awareness of the River and the Borough’s riparian offering. There was a consensus that many young people in the town would not use places such as the Fort Gardens, The Prom or St Andrews’ Gardens as they worried about safety and “the type of people” that congregated in these spaces. This was particularly prominent in the winter months where it was expressed that a lack of lighting around the river front makes it feel “unsafe” and not the type of place that a young person would want to go.
- The group were unaware of assets in Northfleet such as Northfleet Harbour, the Northfleet Beach and the industrial heritage in Northfleet connected to the River.
- The group was aware that recreational activities took place on the Thames, but they were generally unaware of how they could participate in the activity of the clubs. They felt that the clubs were not doing enough to make themselves attractive to young people.
- The group felt that the Council should do more to promote these recreational opportunities within schools as an alternative to the traditional fun runs and sports like tennis.
- Many in the group felt that “we were missing a trick” in not providing more recreational activities connected to the enjoyment of the River.
- There was a consensus in the group that not enough was done locally to educate young people about the importance of the River Thames and there was equally little done to promote safety. It was suggested that the Council and Schools should develop a local curriculum around this.

- The group did not have a clear understanding of “Thames Gateway”, “The Estuary” and they additionally did not know about the “Port of London Authority”.
- On being presented with a map of the River the group found it challenging to demonstrate direction and to identify local places/landmarks.
- The Group did not know about the Saxon Shoreway and on being told about it stated that the Council should do more to promote this as a key feature of our borough.
- The group did not know that the PLA was based in Gravesend and further still they had no idea about the career opportunities available. It was discussed that the Council should work with the PLA to better present these opportunities and further still it would be useful to identify future skills gaps in careers on the river, so that Gravesham students could adapt their studies to make the most of these opportunities.
- It was agreed that the historical and cultural importance of the River Thames at Gravesend is often forgotten or ignored.
- There was consensus that a Ferry to London would be seen as a uniquely ‘cool’ alternative to travelling on the train and that such a facility would be used by young people especially when going to concerts in Greenwich and other hard to reach by train locations.
- The young people suggested that the promenade area was outdated and lacked anything interesting.
- The young people further suggested that the club facilities along the promenade looked tired and that the area could do with an uplift.
- There was concern over the Lower Thames Crossing and it was unanimously agreed that Highways England had failed to engage with young people throughout the process thus far.

RECOMMENDATION 3 – IMMEDIATE CONSIDERATION

The Council should improve its engagement with Young People in matters relating to the river.

The Council should work with the Port of London Authority and RNLI, acting as a facilitator to better communicate messages around River Safety to schools and local organisations.

The Executive Member for Young People should ask the Youth Council to appoint a “youth representative for the River” who will act as a stakeholder for the Cabinet to engage and consult with on matters concerning the recreational use of the Thames.

Councillors and Youth Councillors be provided with a tour (when conditions allow) of Northfleet Harbour and the Northfleet River frontage so that they can be better aware of the issues and opportunities.

The Executive engages and consults with the Youth Council on the Lower Thames Crossing giving young people a chance to feed into the mitigation process.

RECOMMENDATION 4 - IMMEDIATE CONSIDERATION

The Cabinet Member for Community & Leisure ensures that greater consideration is given to recreational/sport activities on the Thames and that these opportunities are communicated to young people across the Borough as part of the annual sports programme and listed on the Visit Gravesend website.

RECOMMENDATION 10 - TO BE CONSIDERED FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT APPLICATIONS OR FUTURE BID APPLICATIONS TO APPROPRIATE FUNDING SOURCES

The Council urgently look at ways to promote and improve the accessibility of the Saxon Shoreline.

Planning policy should reflect a desire for developers to contribute towards the upkeep and ongoing maintenance of this path.

The Executive may want to consider using the Community Payback scheme or the new Kickstart initiative to start clearing the pathway.

The Executive should explore the possibility of registering and administering the Promenade, Gordon Gardens and the Saxon Shoreway as a "Country Park" (Like Riverside Country Park in Gillingham).

Evidence Gathering: Gravesham Borough Council (GBC) Planning Policy Overview

2.10 On 19 November 2020; the sub-group met with Wendy Lane, Assistant Director (Planning) at Gravesham Borough Council for a Planning Policy Overview.

2.11 The following areas were discussed and noted:

- In April 2018, the Council consulted on the draft Development Management (DM) policies including Proposed Policy DM 41: Designing for a High Quality and Accessible Riverside and we are back out to consultation again on the draft DM policies including Proposed Policy DES 4: Designing for a High Quality and Accessible Riverside
- The PLA wants to work closer with the council to facilitate the safe use of the river for recreational activities
- The Council could work with the PLA to communicate messages around river safety.
- The inclusion of the policy was felt to go a long way in pulling together all GBC policies on the river that have in past been sporadic.
- Gravesend is a riverside heritage town and proud of it.
- Gravesham has come a long way with riverside regeneration; Clifton Slipways is coming forward, Thames Clipper discussions, Tilbury Ferry, London Resort, Tilbury 2, Swanscombe Peninsula.

- Climate Change / Flood Defence: the Council's approach is policy compliant – flood levels are always estimates, GBC work with the Environment Agency
- Thames Estuary 2100 issue. If on the wrong side of a new barrier GBC would need to look at our flood defences.
- It would be good to go back and query when they will make bigger plan decisions on where that barrier might be so developments can give relevant offsets.
- Saxon Shoreline / riverside pathways – need to be considered as part of developments or ongoing maintenance repair.
- Thames & Medway Canal – the Council feels it is pushing the right direction of a visual link, if not navigational link.
- Pier - general maintenance; like for like repair would generally be fine. There are very detailed plans on how maintenance is done but can't replace old bits.
- The Marine Management Organisation have helped relations with the PLA and working together.
- Communicating political will to protect the river and its assets couldn't be attached as an annex to the Planning Policy but it could be referenced as evidence.

RECOMMENDATION 5 – IMMEDIATE CONSIDERATION

The Council consider passing a motion (in the name of the Leader and seconded by the Leader of the Opposition) which communicates the unanimous desire of Members to protect and enhance the river.

Whilst this could not be attached as an annex to the Council's Planning Policies it could be referenced as evidence to help inform planning decisions in the future

RECOMMENDATION 6 - IMMEDIATE CONSIDERATION

The Council start to consider the real and immediate threat posed by global warming and the rise in water levels.

The Executive should make sure that the Environment Agency is reporting back to the Council on this subject and that Planning Policy is considerate of the fact that greater flood defences will be needed in the near future. Disabled access should also be considered in relation to this matter.

Evidence Gathering: Ebbsfleet Development Corporation

2.12 On 3 December 2020; the sub-group met with Ian Piper – CEO, Ebbsfleet Development Corporation (EDC)

2.13 The following areas were discussed / noted:

- Flood barriers: challenging area. Environment Agency want much higher flood defences. EDC have had meetings to work out what can be done & not create a major barrier between housing and the river.
- A Cruise terminal has been mentioned but not sure if its serious. A Clipper Terminal would be fantastic.
- Maritime features: very strong heritage assets in the area; the foundry around Robins Creek; want to enhance that. If Councillors know of assets down there, EDC would be happy to hear about them.
- Harbour facilities: lock gates - EDC are not planning to invest in these and this has been made clear to the Harbour Trust.
- Memorial on Tarmac site – EDC are happy to talk about where the best site is to put it
- The Tarmac site is tricky with fragmented ownership and its hard to get access to the waterfront
- Moorings at Robin’s Creek would be great but might have to be on the Thames side.
- Board appointments at EDC - might be something to reflect upon when writing the review recommendations – write to government explaining that it is the desire of the Council to have appointments confirmed ASAP.
- EDC is working with the Environment Agency on water levels etc and will create a detailed plan that can be shared with the Council.
- Blue Lake could potentially be a good site for recreational activities (Scouts, Sea Cadets etc)
- EDC have done a lot of work on what a succession arrangement would look like – stewardship trust; looking to put that in place and other governance arrangements.
- Flood defences: Environment Agency have a plan for impact looking at the long term. EDC have been looking at options and discussing them with the Environment Agency.
- EDC have learnt from what others have done in this field and want to benchmark with the best and produce something people can be proud of.

RECOMMENDATION 14 – WORK ALREADY HAPPENING OR BEING DEVELOPED

The Council should enhance their work with the EDC and the Northfleet Harbour Restoration Trust to preserve Rosherville assets and support the interim use of Northfleet Harbour for biodiversity and community use.

The Council currently have good partnership working with the EDC and we are aware that EDC have already funded some work for the Northfleet Harbour Restoration Trust. If this trust is to be successful in its aspirations the work needs a project plan, with key stages, so that successful bids can be submitted for the various stages or when such funding becomes available. The Executive should consider if they could assist the Northfleet Harbour Restoration Trust with some in-kind help, so that they are in a better position to submit bids for funding.

Evidence Gathering: Thames Estuary Envoy

2.14 On 8 December 2020; the sub-group met with Kate Willard, OBE, the Thames Estuary Envoy and Chair of the Thames Estuary Growth Board (the Board)

2.15 The following areas were discussed / noted:

- Members' attention was drawn to the Thames Estuary Growth Board Plan, "The Green Blue", which was a plan to transform the Thames Estuary area of North Kent, South Essex and East London and concentrated on non-duplication and sustainable growth which included leading the hydrogen investment strategy.
- Whilst the river tended to be considered as a serious barrier, the Board would very much like to see infrastructure being built under the river. However, it was recognised that this would be very expensive. The Green agenda was therefore being considered and, for example, the Board had been liaising with Thames Clipper in an effort to increase river traffic and the number of clients accessing the service. Community energy schemes and community minibuses were also being investigated.
- The maritime heritage of the estuary was considered to be very important and the Borough Council had been working with Estuary 21 who the Board also supported. Estuary-wide work was also being undertaken on the cultural heritage agenda which included a festival and also linked events into the development of local economies.
- In relation to Good Green Growth, it was considered that growth should be quantified or it might have a negative effect on an area and work towards sustainable growth must be undertaken such as the transportation and storage of hydrogen which was likely to be in high demand. Therefore, the factoring in of all these considerations should result in a sustainable, financial economy in terms of the climate.
- It was noted that the Board considered there to be too much housing on the river frontage which did not leave enough room for freight. A balance between housing, freight and recreational requirements needed to be sought.
- It was recognised that an estuary path would be a good way of accessing the river frontage and the Board encouraged the linking up of green spaces including the Estuary Park.
- It was noted that the Borough Council had participated in the Estuary Festival and had considered that there was too much about Essex. However, it was recognised that this was changing. It was noted that the Board did not have a grant scheme for the festival. The Council was encouraged to keep an eye on the Arts Council who would be delivering a new Strategy that would be published in early 2021 which might provide opportunities for the Council.
- Following a question on the river historically being a hub for employment, Members were advised that a meeting of the Board had taken place on a boat as not many Board members had seen their areas from the water. The Strategy had since been launched and the Board was taking a multi-faceted approach including encouraging

the use of the river for transport and was speaking with operators who were experiencing some skills shortages.

- It was noted that mobility across the river was very important because new development such as the London Resort, Tilbury etc would need skilled workers. The Board was currently considering this matter, looking at the available means of crossing the river, what was available on the other side and whether this would only attract a niche market or would appeal to a wider range of potential users.
- Following a question on how the Borough Council could make its voice heard with regard to big projects, the Sub-Committee was advised that the Borough Council was already doing a good job and had a good relationship with the Board. The Envoy also promoted a clarity of voice which meant working out the three things the Council most wanted from a particular opportunity and to hone the ability to present these requirements in less than 30 seconds. She added that if the Council supported the Board then the Board would support the Council.
- The City of London Corporation had close links with MPs, civil servants and All Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs) for example the Hydrogen APPG. The Board was working out how to work with the APPGs.
- The Board also worked with a wide range of other stakeholders such as Natural England. Whilst it was important to have a defined list of stakeholders it was also important not to have a closed list. The Envoy confirmed that she was not a fan of bureaucracy and invited stakeholders to phone or email her directly.
- It was reported that it was normal for support for Development Consent Orders (DCOs) such as the Lower Thames Crossing to falter and the Board intended to work with colleagues to resolve the issues on this challenging project. The Board's support of this project also acknowledged the issues in Thurrock but also recognised that benefits such as to highways, to the economy and employment opportunities made the project sustainable. The Envoy invited the Council to copy her in when submitting their concerns and comments to the Lower Thames Crossing and Kent Highways etc.
- It was recognised that global warming would change the face of the Thames, that a new Thames Barrier might be needed and new flood defence regulations had been approved. This meant that developers needed to understand flood defence issues otherwise developments might become stalled.
- The protection of heritage and natural sites were part of a larger conversation with relevant partners such as the RSPB.
- It was noted that the achieving National Park status for the estuary and its riverside was unlikely as it would be very complex to balance the industrial, housing and employment needs of the area with the need to protect its heritage and green spaces. However, more specific forms of protection were more likely and a strategy would be coherent but would not offer blanket protection because of the need for the area to grow economically.

RECOMMENDATION 7 – IMMEDIATE CONSIDERATION

The Leader of the Executive appoint a representative from the Council to attend meetings of the All-Party Parliamentary Groups on Maritime and Ports, and the APPG on the River Thames

This will ensure that Gravesham has a voice amongst parliamentarians at these meetings.

RECOMMENDATION 8 - IMMEDIATE CONSIDERATION

Members of the Executive and Members of the Planning Committee be taken on a tour of the borough’s river boundary (by boat)

This will provide a greater appreciation and understanding of the borough’s uniqueness from the river can be developed and help to inform future decision making. This should be done in collaboration with the Estuary Envoy, following her offer to facilitate such a trip.

RECOMMENDATION 15 - WORK ALREADY HAPPENING OR BEING DEVELOPED

The Executive begin to work with the Thames Estuary Growth Board (Thames Estuary Envoy) and local education providers to understand how opportunities such as the London Resort will require the upskilling/retraining of the local workforce.

Under the Council’s commitment to Social Mobility an assessment should be carried out on the future skills gaps that we may have in the near future

RECOMMENDATION 16 - WORK ALREADY HAPPENING OR BEING DEVELOPED

The Council take a much more active part in participating in partnership-programmes such as the Estuary Festival, using such events as a catalyst to promote tourism locally and in the wider area.

The Council is very involved with this years Estuary Festival and has led on some art installations and also obtained funding from Arts Council for a Fringe Festival, we hope that this relationship will grow as the Festival becomes bigger.

Evidence Gathering: Local Historian and Assistant Director (Communities) GBC.

2.16 On 3 February 2021; the sub-group met with Christoph Bull, Local Historian and Simon Hookway, Assistant Director (Communities) at Gravesham Borough Council to discuss events designed to promote, preserve and protect the riverside.

2.17 Christoph Bull addressed the meeting and raised the following points;

- Rochester, Gravesend's main rival with regard to river related events, had claimed Charles Dickens. However, Charles Dickens also had strong links with Gravesham. In addition, Dartford had a steam festival which had been designed around a local man named Richard Trevithick.
- Gravesham's huge advantage was that there was access to the riverside in Gravesend, Northfleet and further into the marshes. This access had bought the way to the world and the world to Gravesham.
- In addition, there were links with Essex which Medway and Dartford did not have with attractions which could be taken advantage of such as the World's End pub and Tilbury Fort.
- It was noted that Gravesham had lots of interest such as its ethnic diversity, shops, museums, gardens etc.
- Any events should be Kentish but tunnel vision should be avoided and the visitors from outside the Borough were key to the future success of riverside events.
- The need to make the offer more interesting was mentioned including the possibility of a Black Country living museum on the undershore on Northfleet creek and harbour which might include a boat repair workshop. There was also Gravesend Promenade and the Fort Gardens where a visitor might also take in the Milton Chantry and the tunnels.
- Gravesend also had the Regatta, which could be improved, the oldest cast iron pier in the world, the Clarendon Hotel, the Three Daws pub, Charles Dickens, Pocahontas, General Gordon and Gunther Plüschow (1886-1931) the only German POW to have escaped from the UK (Gravesend in 1915) in both WWI and WWII. There was also the Saxon Shore Way along which many interesting places to visit were located and where guided walks were held.
- It was suggested that branding and a recognisable logo for riverside events be considered to allow people to relate events to good times they had already had in Gravesham and to link the events together. It was suggested that historical figures with links to the area could be used.
- Previously held events which could be re-instated such as the Edwardian Fair, the Frost fair and other attractions could be signposted at events such as these.
- Food was highlighted as a trendy attraction such as ethnic street food. The possibility of bringing back shrimps and watercress as a local delicacy was suggested.
- The Gurdwara which is the largest Gurdwara complex in the UK, has links to the river and was within walking distance.
- Visitors to the area came from nearby towns such as Basildon in Essex who enjoyed the historic buildings.

2.18 The Assistant Director (Communities) advised that the creation of experiences in the area was in the Council's Tourism & Heritage Strategy and included walking tours, meals in unusual settings, talks at places not normally open to the public and the details were on the Visit Kent website under a project names "Experience" that the Council was involved in. These were normally small scale, bookable and would enhance a bigger product. The

foundations were in pace and were designed to start small with manageable hours so there was a base to grow from. Trying out sailing on the river was also being considered. The officer felt that visitors to the Borough combined visits to places of interest and meeting up with friends for a meal rather than visiting one specific place and he considered that the branding idea could be incorporated in this approach.

2.19 The following areas were discussed / noted:

- Encouraging boats to be moored in the vicinity of events as an added attraction.
- It was advised that Northfleet Creek and the Fountain building were being cleaned and renovated.
- The need to ensure the S106 money from developers to be put towards riverside heritage projects.
- Public notice boards giving information on local attractions and the need for these to be interesting but succinct. Once a visitor pays to see an attraction, then more information would be made available.
- The existing information board walks were highlighted.
- The existence of maritime places of interest was highlighted including Fort Gardens which needed improvement as did the promenade. However, the promenade would need planning permission and funding.
- The need with links to other places was recognised as it would be difficult for Gravesham to stand alone. Most of the riverside was either marshland, housing development or flood defences. Housing developments sometimes allowed for a riverside path but the flood defences (Environment Agency) tended to obstruct the view of the river.
- In relation to sailing it was noted that this would have to be carefully considered as the river was tidal with dangerous currents.
- Applying for country park status for the area was mentioned as had been achieved in Gillingham. The status needed public toilets, a café and possibly a visitor centre all of which Gravesend had if the promenade was included. Country park status might serve as a catalyst for rebranding.
- It was noted that the Three Daws to Halfords walk was difficult to negotiate from a disability point of view and this should be borne in mind when developments along the riverside are being planned.
- In relation to the possible expansion of the Regatta, a boat race was suggested.
- Havant and Portsmouth had a best of the Borough photographic competition via Instagram asking for abstract photos of maritime features which engaged younger people.
- A feasibility study into the possible creation of a museum had been carried out approximately 10 years ago. It was felt that the Council should still have the study which might prove to be of some use.
- It was agreed that access to the shoreline should be made compulsory for any type of riverside development and it was confirmed that this requirement was included in the Local Plan. The meeting was told that the Assistant Director (Planning) had advised that a declaration to this effect needed to be agreed at Full Council to be used as supplementary evidence. It was also suggested that the Environment Agency should contribute to the conversation in relation to flood defences and accessibility.
- The Assistant Director (Communities) drew attention to the Riverside Festival held in the summer which he felt should be promoted further afield.
- It was noted that the scale of the Estuary Festival had been a surprise which had also taken place in Tilbury as well as Kent and a 2021 Festival had been announced and an update on the programme would be submitted to the Community & Leisure Cabinet

Committee. The Festival attracted partnership working for example, the Estuary Envoy which was a good model to use.

- Reference was made to the Dartford Festival which was made up of floats created by local groups such as the brownies. Dartford Borough Council allegedly broke even on the festival, which was very popular, so there may be lessons to be learned. A parade to a festival was suggested and it was noted that there was space at Riverside Park.
- The need to “grow” an event was recognised together with working with local businesses.

2.20 In relation to a possible festival/parade event, the following suggestions were made:

- A May Day festival as parades did well in Gravesham.
- A parade with floats and prizes, stall etc.
- A nautical themed weekend possibly expanding on the Regatta. It was noted that the inclusion of a fairground had taken the emphasis off the Regatta.
- Boat races with commentary with no other events taking place at the same time.
- A range of musical offerings to suit all tastes.
- Shrimping and crabbing competitions – award to be presented by the Mayor.
- It was noted that access to the town pier would be a good draw for a riverside event.
- The Port of London Authority had mentioned that all mud larking licenses had been allocated in London but none had been allocated in the upper reaches of the river. If it could be made safe, it could be built into an event and be a good example of partnership working.
- Partnership working was cited as being essential and a way of ensuring that the Borough Council did not have to organise everything. A facilitator role would also be essential.

RECOMMENDATION 11 – TO BE CONSIDERED FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT APPLICATIONS OR FUTURE BID APPLICATIONS TO APPROPRIATE FUNDING SOURCES

When applying for grants it would be good to conduct a public consultation on how the river can play a much more important part in the life of the borough and the type of events or facilities that local people would wish to see if the council were successful in the bid funding.

RECOMMENDATION 17 – WORK ALREADY HAPPENING OR BEING DEVELOPED

The Council consider sponsoring and/or facilitating a Maritime Festival weekend in which people from all backgrounds could have taster sessions in rowing, mud larking, sailing etc.

A small festival has already started which celebrates the river and is currently being organised for this year at St. Andrews Gardens. The organisers have been spoken to and are considering how they might better involve others from the river community into the event and make residents and visitors aware of the many clubs that exist within the borough that make use of the river.



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