



Project

**Evidencing Adaptive Sustainability
(EASY)**

Report

THAMES GATEWAY KNOWLEDGE PLATFORM

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Description of the Knowledge Platform

The Knowledge Platform is a web-based on-line data service portal which provides access to a wide range of information about Thames Gateway and its communities. It comprises a database of currently 1,600 indicators tracking a wide variety of dimensions of the Thames Gateway area. These indicators can be cross cut in a variety of ways to support a wide range of data analysis and evaluation. The particular value of the Knowledge Platform is building up a strong *evidence base* of how change is occurring in Thames Gateway, to inform appropriate responses and to develop understanding of how regeneration is succeeding.

Local Futures Group were contracted to undertake a scoping study into the Knowledge Platform concept in mid 2004. Local Futures Group had already done work in this area, so using them both built on prior knowledge and avoided the trap of creating dependence on a bespoke service which almost certainly would be excessively expensive to maintain. LFG continue to be the underpinning service provider of the portal and much data.

The report LFG produced indicated significant support for a London Thames Gateway information observatory. The majority of consultees indicated that they would value a broad range of content with the specific categories of education and qualifications, demographics and employment structure suggested as particularly valuable. The capacity to benchmark Thames Gateway performance against other regions was seen as particularly beneficial.

The preliminary version of the Knowledge Platform was delivered in January 2005 and testing immediately indicated the potential usefulness of the tool. Data (480 indicators) were available for 13 boroughs down to ward level in Thames Gateway along with four analytical tools: mapping, ranking, comparison and profiling. Subsequently, the coverage of the Knowledge Platform was expanded to the whole of the Thames Gateway (20 boroughs) with three further analytical tools: change over time, scattergram looking at the relationship between any two indicators, and table which presents data in a crosstab format. In addition, software has been developed so that other data can be added to the Knowledge Platform.

Developing Knowledge Platform at the Thames Gateway level has been significantly cheaper than 20 borough level projects, or even three sub-regional projects would have been.

The Knowledge Platform has been operational since 2005 on a password-access basis made available to staff of public agencies operating in Thames Gateway. Users include Department for Communities & Local Government (DCLG), regional development agencies, sub-regional partnerships, local authorities and universities. The design of the system is intended to facilitate a wide range of users undertaking their own data manipulation and analysis as well as a core analytical capacity providing commissioned or other reports.

The Knowledge Platform is managed by a senior analyst seconded from and paid for by the University of East London using its institutional Higher Education Innovation Fund grant. Its development costs have been grant-aided by DCLG on a project basis. The Knowledge Platform is hosted by Thames Gateway London Partnership (TGLP).

The Knowledge Platform has a steering group comprising nominees from TGLP, Universities, LSC and other Thames Gateway public sector bodies. This group acts mainly in an advisory capacity, supporting project development and user engagement.

The official launch of the Knowledge Platform took place on July 11th 2006 at the Thames Gateway Parliamentary Group Annual Reception by Yvette Cooper, Minister for Housing.

Current Uses of the Knowledge Platform

The strategic value of the Knowledge Platform has been demonstrated at both sub-regional and local levels.

Sub-regional

The data contained within the Knowledge Platform was used by TGLP as the evidence base to underpin the development of the East London Sub-Regional Economic Development Implementation Plan for London Development Agency. In selecting the appropriate key performance indicators, we developed a theme-based Tracking and Evaluation Framework (TEF) based on the Knowledge Platform which contained indicators from different policy sources and co-located them in one cross-referencing framework. The TEF is a model which could be applied other contexts and strategic priorities. Having the Knowledge Platform analytical capability available to TGLP led to a deeper understanding of the main issues affecting the sub-region and also saved considerable time and cost in data extraction and analysis. Similar work carried out on our behalf previously by consultants has tended to cost in the region of £15-25k with an additional £5-10k per year for data updates.

The Knowledge Platform has been used to inform the TGLP contribution to the London submission for the Thames Gateway Interim and Delivery Plans. In addition, data from the Knowledge Platform has been used to compile the evidence base for the Thames Gateway Economic Development Investment Plan which outlines the strategic priorities of the three Thames Gateway Regional Development Agencies. Having access to a wide range of data has enabled TGLP to respond promptly to queries and provide evidence-based commentaries and policy propositions. We estimate that if TGLP had contracted out the data analysis and interpretation, this would have cost in the region of £20-25k with a slower response time.

The Knowledge Platform was used in determining key indicators selected for London and South Essex review of UK Assisted Areas conducted by DTI. The only area in London to receive 'Assisted Area' status was a group of wards located in London Thames Gateway.

The Knowledge Platform has also been used to generate income to be ploughed back into the project. The Citigroup Corporation provided £20k for the production of a London Thames Gateway Skills Audit. This report analysed the current policy on skills, educational attainment and skill levels across London Thames Gateway and their relationship with local and sub-regional labour markets. As part of the 2007 work programme, this report will be enlarged to include all of the Thames Gateway boroughs and will be the focus of the first research event to be held in the summer of 2007.

Local

The Knowledge Platform has been used to provide the data for a number of 'State of the Borough' reports (Swale, Lewisham Thurrock and Tower Hamlets) and the key conceptual indicators underpinning the Swale Regeneration Framework (2006) and the Basildon Regeneration Framework (2006). Each 'State of the Borough' report costs £10k, half of which pays for the production of a data annex used to inform the main report. The Knowledge Platform contains all of the indicators used in the data annex and in addition, allows the user to select bespoke clusters of indicators.

In Thames Gateway South Essex, the Knowledge Platform has been used to provide the evidence base for Thames Gateway South Essex's Economic Strategy. This economic

strategy represents Thames Gateway South Essex response to the challenges set out in the DCLG Thames Gateway Interim Plan. The first draft of this economic strategy is due for consultation in late March. Similar to the approach taken in the East London SREDIP, the Knowledge Platform will be used to monitor progress against objectives linked to a wide range of economic indicators.

The Knowledge Platform provided the underpinning data for the 'Flying Start' project located in Sheppey which was awarded £250k funding from the Big Lottery Fund, the only project within the Thames Gateway to receive approval.

ONGOING DEVELOPMENT OF THE KNOWLEDGE PLATFORM

The intention behind the Knowledge Platform is that it becomes a comprehensive and widely-used means of instigating analysis, research, dialogue and debate about regeneration within the Thames Gateway.

Local Futures Group is currently adding new software and data which will develop the Knowledge Platform's capacity to be an observatory and information portal, not simply a website where users can access quantitative information:

- A new front-end content management system will enable the addition of policy documents and other non-statistical evidence. Feedback from local authority users indicates that they would like to have their own directory on the Knowledge Platform where, for example, local regeneration strategies could be co-located with monitoring data. This would enable local authorities to develop their own local evidence in a structured way, inside a richer framework of information about other boroughs.
- Clustering key indicators and electronic publishing will enable the production of templated reports including the latest available data on an easily accessible basis. This means that a report using data contained in other reports that are published annually or biannually can be continuously updated. For example, the data underpinning the Tracking and Evaluation Framework as part of the SREDIP could be published electronically with links to the latest data always available at the click of a button. This would be particularly relevant with labour market indicators which are often published quarterly. It means that the shelf life of key strategic documents can be considerably longer. In effect, with other revisions, the documents cease to be a series of snapshots and instead become a standing resource.
- The Centre for Geo-Informatics at UEL has obtained funding from the UrbanBuzz building sustainable communities programme being run by University College London (UEL is the prime partner for this programme). A part of the project will provide a tool for undertaking micro-modelling of demographic changes to understand possible need for social infrastructure. This work will make understanding of demographic changes and migration patterns available much more quickly than has been traditionally been available through the decennial census. It is intended that the results of the geo-demographic modelling could be disseminated and sit alongside the wide range of data held on the Knowledge Platform.
- Pro-Active East London (one of five London County Sports Partnerships and the third largest in the UK) will provide £20k to fund the Knowledge Platform to become an online resource for their partners. This will include adding the results of the Active People Survey for East London, sourcing a range of sporting participation data and adding that to the Knowledge Platform and linking these to data on health already held in the KP. The intention is to produce a reliable and robust evidence base that links sporting activity to health in East London.

- Integrating the DCLG State of the Gateway Baseline data into the Knowledge Platform. The advantage of integration is that the latest current data is always available at the touch of a button. In addition, the indicators used as part of the State of the Gateway baseline can be broken down at district, and where available, ward and SOA level. This enables a much finer grained analysis for monitoring progress across the Thames Gateway, particularly key locations such as Canary Wharf, Stratford City, Ebbsfleet, etc. Discussions are still ongoing at DCLG, but software enhancements already underway will mean that progress can be made relatively quickly once a decision has been made.

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