2.1 Planning Background

2.1.1 The area covered by this Local Plan Review consists of the whole Borough of Gravesham. This comprises the urban area of Gravesend/Northfleet, Istead ward and the parishes of Cobham, Higham, Luddesdown, Meopham, Shorne and Vigo. The extent of the Plan area is shown on the Proposals Map.

2.1.2 Gravesham is situated on the south bank of the River Thames, some 32km (20 miles) east of London and astride the A2, one of two main road routes between the capital, the Channel Ports and the Channel Tunnel. The M25 motorway lies some 8km (5 miles) to the west. Part of the line of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link will run through the Borough with a new International and Domestic Station being located at Ebbsfleet on the western edge of the Borough. This will link Gravesham directly with continental Europe.

2.1.3 That part of Gravesham to the north of the A2 is included within the Thames Gateway, an area extending from Docklands in London to Tilbury in Essex and the Isle of Sheppey in Kent. The Thames Gateway is recognised as being a major growth area with the ability to accommodate significant levels of housing and employment development, alongside improvements in environmental quality. Within the Thames Gateway, those parts of Dartford and Gravesham to the north of the A2 form Kent Thames-side, one of two growth areas of regional significance.

2.1.4 Gravesham is both urban and rural in character. Gravesend/Northfleet comprises the main urban area, which includes extensive industrial, commercial and residential areas and Gravesend Town Centre, an important shopping and service centre. The extensive rural area lies to the south of the A2 and to the east of Gravesend. This mainly forms part of the dip slope of the North Downs, rising from the riverside marshes in the north to the crest of the Downs in the south. Much of this rural area is of high agricultural, landscape and/or nature conservation value, and it is within the Metropolitan Green Belt. Within the rural area, there are a number of villages, some of which are of considerable historic and conservation interest.

2.2 Context

2.2.1 The Local Plan Review is prepared in the wider context of policies set at national, regional and county level.

National Policies

2.2.2 The Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions is responsible for setting planning policies at a national level. This is done through the publication of Circulars, Planning Policy Guidance Notes (PPGs) and White Papers, all of which have to be taken into account when preparing this Local Plan Review.
2.2.3 Sustainable development is a key theme of national policy and a revised UK Strategy was issued in 1999. Sustainable development is often defined as “development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” The UK Sustainable Development Strategy identifies the need to meet the following objectives:-
• social progress which recognises the needs of everyone;
• effective protection of the environment;
• prudent use of natural resources; and
• maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment.

Regional Guidance

2.2.4 The following Regional and Sub-Regional Planning Guidance is of relevance to the Local Plan:-
• RPG9 “Regional Planning Guidance for the South East” (1994)
• RPG9a “The Thames Gateway Planning Framework” (1995)
• RPG9b “Strategic Planning Guidance for the River Thames” (1997)

2.2.5 RPG9 “Regional Planning Guidance for the South East” contains the following principles which will govern the development of the South East Region. All development should:-
• work towards sustainable development objectives;
• provide for market-driven development to accelerate economic recovery;
• provide sufficient housing;
• make the fullest possible use of opportunities for redevelopment and recycling of urban land;
• respect the Region’s valuable environmental features and avoid the wasteful use of land and other natural resources; and
• co-ordinate planning and transport policies.

2.2.6 RPG9 is in the process of being revised. SERPLAN, the South East Regional Planning Conference on which all local authorities are represented, prepared the Draft RPG9 in 1998 and this was subject to a public examination by a Panel in 1999. The Panel Report was issued and the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions produced its proposed changes to the draft Regional Planning Guidance for the South East for public consultation in March 2000. This seeks to encourage economic success throughout the Region, ensuring a higher quality of environment with management of natural resources, opportunity and equity for the Region’s population, and a more sustainable pattern of development. The focus is on enabling urban renaissance, promoting regeneration and renewal, concentrating development in urban areas, promoting a prosperous and multi-purpose countryside and promoting wider choice in travel options, thereby reducing the reliance on the private car.

2.2.7 RPG9a “The Thames Gateway Planning Framework” is a particularly important document for Gravesham since the Borough is situated in the heart of the Thames Gateway. The document identifies Kent Thames-side (Dartford
and Gravesham north of the A2) as one of the two main centres of development in the strategy for the area. This sub-regional guidance sets out the following Framework Principles for informing land use guidance and decisions on development:-

- making the most of the Thames Gateway opportunity;
- creating a vibrant and sustainable pattern of communities;
- closely relating transport opportunity and land use opportunity;
- bringing life to the river and river-front; and
- a New Environmental Standard.

2.2.8 RPG9b “Strategic Planning Guidance for the River Thames” contains the following objectives:-

- For the built environment:
  - to secure a special quality for new development and improve the existing townscape;
  - to protect and enhance historic buildings, sites, structures, landscapes, skylines and views of importance;
  - to enhance the vitality of the river front by making best use of its potential attraction for a range of uses; and
  - to protect important archaeological remains.

- For the natural environment:
  - to improve the quality and provision of open space along the river;
  - to conserve and enhance the ecology of the river; and
  - to respect Green Belt and other designations denoting areas of ecological, conservation or landscape importance.

- For use of the river and riverside:
  - to encourage and harness the transport potential of the river;
  - to promote and increase the use of the river for recreational purposes;
  - to safeguard land uses related to these functions; and
  - to maintain and improve public access to, along and across the river.

**Kent Structure Plan 1996**

2.2.9 The current Structure Plan provides for development and change in Kent to 2011. It seeks to achieve a balance between the development of the economy and the conservation and enhancement of the rural and urban environment.

2.2.10 A fundamental objective has been to move towards a strategy of “sustainable development” but it is recognised that this is likely to be a slow process. The broad pattern of development over the next 5 to 10 years is largely already set by current development plans and planning permissions. Nevertheless, by adopting a policy approach which better integrates environmental concerns with land use and transport policies, the current Structure Plan has laid the foundations for a pattern of development, urban form and transport which embodies the principles of environmental protection and enhancement, and energy efficiency.
The strategic policy in the current Structure Plan for Dartford, Gravesend and Northfleet is Policy NK1 which states the following:

“At Dartford, Gravesend and Northfleet major economic development and housing opportunities will be comprehensively planned through the local plan process and phased in association with new transport infrastructure (including completion of the South Thames-side Development Route and provision of new and improved public transport networks), leisure, recreation and community uses. Opportunities for enhancing the economic, leisure, amenity and transport potential of the River Thames should be exploited. The need to uplift the quality of the built and open environment should be addressed. This should include the adoption of high environmental standards and restraint upon, or careful location of, uses which would adversely affect the appearance and potential of the area. The strategic areas for new development are:-

(a) Land to the north of Dartford, to the west of the Dartford Tunnel intended for mixed use comprehensive development, involving high quality business and science parks, university campus, housing, leisure and recreation uses.

(b) Land at Crossways Business Park (including the Dartford International Ferry Terminal) to the east of the Dartford Tunnel for continued mixed use development including office, industrial and distribution uses, as well as support services.

(c) Western Quarry, for a regional shopping centre (Bluewater). Appropriate uses additional to retail development would, in strategic terms, be acceptable.

(d) Eastern Quarry for comprehensive mixed use development with emphasis on housing provision, together with open space, schools, community facilities, and employment land, to be developed in accordance with a Master Plan and integrated with an enhanced public transport and road network.

(e) Swanscombe Peninsula for major mixed use development, predominantly housing, taking full account of the area’s relationship with the River Thames and the proposed Channel Tunnel Rail Link, and integrated with an enhanced public transport and road network.

(f) Ebbsfleet Valley for the construction of combined domestic and international passenger station on the Channel Tunnel Rail Link, in association with a new business centre. Development should reflect a high standard of civic design and landscaping and be integrated with new and improved transport networks including links to other parts of Thames Gateway.

(g) At Gravesend and Northfleet, the emphasis for new development will be on the re-use of redundant and derelict sites and premises, including high quality development at the riverside for uses appropriate to a waterfront location.

In addition, the suitability for development of land primarily for housing to the north east of Gravesend, and road accessibility to this sector of the town, will be examined through the local plan process. Long term protection will be afforded to areas of national, international or other strategic importance for nature conservation.”
The Strategy for Gravesham

2.3.1 The strategy for the Borough during the Local Plan Review period 2001-2011 will be shaped by its key role within Thames Gateway. The challenge will be to achieve the level of development envisaged whilst providing adequate protection for the environment.

2.3.2 The formulation of strategic principles for the planning of the Borough must be soundly based on national and regional guidance. They must also comply with strategic policy set out in the Structure Plan (the other part of the Development Plan for Gravesham) and take into account more local influences, namely various strategy documents prepared by the Borough Council itself. These are as follows:

Community Plan 1996
This aims to give a broad outline of what the Borough Council is seeking to achieve and sets out objectives which seek to:
• maintain its drive to make itself and its services accessible;
• secure an economic regeneration of the area which is both sustained and, in terms of the environment, sustainable; and
• take action which will improve the quality of life for residents.

The Community Plan is currently subject to review and has recently been subject to public consultation. It is due to be finalised later this year.

The Regeneration of Gravesham 1998
This states that the Borough Council’s long-term objective for economic development is to:
• develop, encourage and promote employment generation of both quality and diversity that will enhance the opportunities, prosperity and quality of life for the residents and businesses of Gravesham.

The Strategy contains the following relevant objectives which aim to:
• ensure that the prospects for economic and social regeneration are not frustrated by the lack of homes;
• provide a catalyst for good quality redevelopment and exploitable potential to allow derelict, vacant or underused sites to provide additional homes of all tenures;
• facilitate the provision of affordable and safe private rented accommodation;
• actively pursue partnerships with land owners and potential developers for comprehensive redevelopment of both market and affordable housing in the Canal Basin area and land North East of Gravesend, Ebbsfleet and the town centre; and
• seek improvements in the supply of affordable housing for all household needs by using enabling powers to stimulate investment by Housing Associations.

In this Strategy, the Borough Council aims to:-

• achieve equal opportunity in the provision of leisure facilities;

• take the lead in seeking to increase the opportunities for participation and performance in leisure;

• increase access to, and awareness of, leisure provision in Gravesham; and

• balance the provision of publicly accessible leisure opportunities of high quality with the need to protect and enhance the environment, particularly the countryside.

Action Plan 2000 Local Agenda 21 Strategy

The Strategy seeks to improve the local environment by encouraging action which:-

• cuts down waste;

• saves energy and natural resources;

• promotes sensible methods of travel;

• prevents pollution; and

• looks after the local environment.

Gravesend Town Centre A Strategy for Action 1998

The Strategy sets out the following objectives for the long term role of Gravesend Town Centre:-

• a vibrant and lively shopping and service centre for Gravesham and the surrounding area;

• a place to visit for a good day or evening out;

• a place for people to stay when visiting London, the south-east and Kent;

• a place where people do business and find employment; and

• a place where people want to live.

Riverside Regeneration in Gravesham 1997

This document seeks to outline the Borough Council’s approach to the regeneration of Gravesham’s riverside. It provides the framework for the Thames Riverside Chapter of this Local Plan Review.

Strategic Principles

2.3.3 Taking into account the national, regional and county-wide guidance and the various strategies being prepared by the Borough Council itself, the Strategic Principles will have sustainability objectives at their core.

2.3.4 The key Strategic Principle which will underpin and influence all aspects of this Local Plan Review is as follows:

• to balance the need for sustainable new development to meet the employment, housing, social, education, health and leisure requirements of those living and working in Gravesham, with the need to protect and enhance the urban and rural environments.
2.3.5 The following Strategic Principles link to this:-

- to meet the Kent Structure Plan housing requirements by adopting a sequential approach to identifying sites for residential development, thereby giving priority to previously developed land before the release of fresh land;
- to encourage the regeneration of urban land and buildings and the restoration to use for development or open space of derelict and contaminated land;
- to promote the themes of sustainability, mixed use and good design on new development sites within the Borough;
- to achieve an efficient, integrated, balanced and sustainable transport system which facilitates public transport and meets the economic, environmental and social needs of the communities in Gravesham;
- to seek a better relationship between new development, employment centres, shopping, community/leisure facilities and transport;
- to increase the range, quality and accessibility of social, education, health and leisure facilities;
- to seek equality of opportunity by addressing social exclusion and taking into account the varying needs of local people and communities, including affordable accommodation, employment choice, training and accessibility;
- to enhance the quality of the built environment and open land in the urban areas of Gravesham/Northfleet and the villages;
- to integrate the development which is necessary to sustain the rural economy with the protection of the countryside for its landscape, wildlife, agricultural, forestry, recreational and nature resource value; and
- to develop the potential of the River Thames and to enhance the quality of the riverside environment.

**Strategic Aims**

2.3.6 Each of the following topic chapters in this Local Plan Review commences with a strategic aim which, together with the objectives and policies, refers back to the strategic principles in paragraph 2.3.5. The strategic aims are as follows:-

- to encourage and facilitate high quality, sustainable, mixed use development, in order to achieve the economic and environmental regeneration of Gravesham and meet the objectives for Thames Gateway;
- to build on existing achievements in order to maintain and enhance the vitality and viability of the Town Centre, to enable it to perform its role as place to work, shop, live, spend leisure time and invest;
- to achieve an efficient, integrated and balanced transport system which makes best use of the existing transport network, seeks to enhance it, improve safety and benefits the environment, whilst facilitating sustainable development opportunities in the Borough and across Kent Thames-side;
to facilitate a range of housing provision suited to the needs of the Borough in a sustainable way, consistent with economic, environmental, social and design considerations;

- to foster a healthy and competitive economy, which offers a wide choice of employment opportunities locally and builds on the concept of the “learning region;”

- to enhance and support the existing retail and service centres within the Borough, ensure that they provide focal points for a wide range of facilities for the local community and to ensure the proper provision of such facilities for Gravesham residents wherever they live. A particular priority is to support and enhance the role of Gravesend Town Centre;

- to conserve, protect and enhance the Borough’s natural environmental features and to promote the principles of sustainability in all decisions concerning the Borough’s natural resources;

- to conserve, protect and enhance the character, appearance and historic integrity of the built environment in both the urban and rural areas;

- to improve the appearance and functioning of the built environment generally in order to create an attractive environment for residents and visitors and to encourage investment in the local economy;

- to conserve, protect and enhance the character and appearance of the Green Belt and the rural area in general, to identify those locations in the rural area where development is appropriate, and to promote a healthy rural economy;

- to maximise the potential of the River Thames and to facilitate its role as the focus for the regeneration of Thames Gateway, subject to sustainability, environmental enhancement and nature conservation considerations;

- to increase the opportunities for leisure and tourism in the Borough and to meet identified needs, without harming the environment and having regard to the competing demands of other land uses; and

- to ensure that existing and future residents of the Borough have easy access to the full range of social and community infrastructure (including utility services).

**Development Strategy**

2.3.7 These principles and aims lead to the strategy for guiding development in Gravesham over the Local Plan Review period up to 2011. This section highlights the most important elements of this strategy. An Urban Structure Diagram indicating the major development sites and other proposed housing and employment sites, together with the existing and future transport network and existing community facilities and local centres, is shown overleaf.

**Major Development Sites**

2.3.8 The identification of Kent Thames-side as a key growth point for the South East will significantly change the strategic role of the Borough over the next 20 to 30 years. This process will commence during the Local Plan Review period as a number of major development opportunities come forward.
2.3.9 In particular, the Borough Council will promote the development of key sites at Ebbsfleet, the Former Northfleet Power Station, Northfleet Cement Works, the Canal Basin Area, North East Gravesend and the Former Southfields School. Land will be safeguarded for possible development at Swanscombe Peninsula in the longer term.

2.3.10 It is important to ensure that new development is fully integrated with existing communities and the Borough Council will ensure that new development provides for the social and community facilities required by the additional population.

Gravesend Town Centre

2.3.11 The Borough Council will continue to attach great importance to the health and vitality of Gravesend Town Centre, which is a focus for social and economic activity in Gravesham. Emphasis will be placed on consolidating the retail area, encouraging a mix of employment and residential uses, improving social and community facilities, establishing the Town Centre as a major transport node by the creation of a Public Transport Interchange, promoting an evening economy through the encouragement of leisure uses and taking full advantage of Gravesend’s heritage and riverside setting.

Transport

2.3.12 Transport is a key issue given the Government’s commitment to an integrated land use and transport policy approach. The Borough Council will encourage alternative modes of transport to the private car, implement parking policies which restrain car usage, manage existing highway space and make provision for a new Public Transport Interchange in Gravesend and the development of the Fast rack public transport system.

2.3.13 Of crucial importance is the construction of Phase 2 of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link and the International and Domestic Passenger Station at Ebbsfleet. The station is due to open in 2007 and will reduce journey times to Paris, Brussels and London and will form the hub of a new public transport network running through Kent Thames-side.

Green Grid

2.3.14 The Green Grid concept was introduced in RPG9a and this has been developed within Kent Thames-side. This Local Plan Review will identify the existing open spaces forming part of the Green Grid network and will seek to enhance the network. The Green Grid will be established to protect and enhance open spaces, the landscape framework and the ecological resource and to provide linkages from existing and new communities to open space, the River Thames, the countryside and community facilities. A Strategic Green Grid Diagram is included overleaf and shows the existing and proposed open space resource within the urban area and the development areas which will be required to contribute to the Green Grid. In addition, the Diagram indicates the strategic links and gateways which form part of the Green Grid, in the context of the transport network, community facilities and local centres.
2.3.15 The River Thames forms the northern boundary of the Borough and is a major asset which needs to be more fully utilised. Mention has already been made of the Town Centre Riverside but there is also the commercial riverside at Northfleet Embankment and to the east of the Canal Basin and the rural riverside comprising Eastcourt, Shorne and Higham Marshes.

2.3.16 The Borough Council’s strategy for the Thames Riverside will be to achieve a balance between housing, employment and recreation uses which contribute to or benefit from a riverside location, whilst safeguarding the ecological resource.

Rural Area

2.3.17 Gravesham has an extensive rural area to the east of Gravesend and to the south of the A2/M2 and Channel Tunnel Rail Link. The rural area, with the exception of the villages identified on the Proposals Map, is wholly within the Green Belt, where there is a general presumption against inappropriate development. The Borough Council is committed to maintaining Green Belt boundaries and preserving the openness of the Green Belt.

2.3.18 The continued strong protection of the Green Belt will ensure that development pressures are resisted and directed instead to the identified development sites in the Gravesend/Northfleet urban area. Other than minor infilling and minor redevelopment, the villages in the rural area are likely to remain much the same. However, the Borough Council will facilitate the diversification of the rural economy where opportunities arise and will promote the improvement of existing and provision of new local rural services.