

Our agenda for the arts in  
London Thames Gateway

'The arts help communities to aspire to the best quality of life; to value creativity; to participate and include; to improve their surroundings; and to put culture alongside core public services.

We are ensuring a strong agenda for the arts in regeneration projects across London and, of these, our commitment to the Thames Gateway development is a priority. We are committed to keeping pace with the momentum and to working increasingly closely with our partners to ensure that the arts are integral to the region and the communities that will grow here.'

Sarah Weir, Executive Director  
Arts Council England, London

'Thames Gateway London Partnership recognises the value of investing in the arts and culture to help build strong communities and distinctive places, and as a part of the Gateway's growing economy. We welcome Arts Council England's long term engagement in this, along with other national, regional and local partners.'

Cllr Guy Nicholson  
Thames Gateway London Partnership

Arts Council England is the national development agency for the arts in England, distributing public money from Government and the National Lottery. Our ambition for 2006-8 is to put the arts at the heart of national life and people at the heart of the arts.

# Introduction

London Thames Gateway represents the largest regeneration and urban development project in western Europe. From Tower Bridge in the west to Rainham Marshes in the east, the sub-region forms part of a wider Thames Gateway region that includes areas of north Kent and south Essex. The plan is to build 100,000 new homes in London Thames Gateway between 2001 and 2016.

Recognising the opportunities and complexities of a project of this scale, in 2006 – with the support of the Thames Gateway London Partnership (TGLP) – we commissioned Tom Fleming Creative Consultancy and Alan Dix of 509 arts. We asked them to look at the current London Thames Gateway area and explore the strategic context for arts and cultural development, provide an overview of existing arts provision, identify a role for arts and culture and outline the opportunities for growth.

They held in depth interviews with the nine boroughs in the London Thames Gateway (Barking and Dagenham, Bexley, Greenwich, Hackney, Havering, Lewisham, Newham, Redbridge and Tower Hamlets) and with Waltham Forest. These boroughs will house development sites of strategic significance to London Thames Gateway, including parts of the Lea Valley that are near the main campus for the 2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games. Interviews were also held with key cultural agencies and organisations in the Gateway, with artform colleagues at our London office and with the TGLP Creative Industries Task Group.

*Our agenda for the arts in London Thames Gateway* was developed from this consultation and informed by substantial desk-based research.

# Thames Gateway: a destination of choice

This publication is part of a process that aims to place arts and culture at the heart of the transformation of London Thames Gateway. We plan to work with key strategic partners to develop and increase arts provision, ensuring arts and culture plays a major role in building new places, shaping new communities, and forming identities.

We believe that arts and culture can help to create high quality, cohesive, distinctive and prosperous communities and places. If this is to happen effectively, we need to work with partners to ensure that arts and culture is at the heart of planning and development processes.

Three main themes have emerged that run through the work of the Arts Council, the arts sector and local authorities as we work together to place arts in the Gateway and develop a robust tool for advocacy and engaging with potential investors.

## Arts and culture for effective regeneration:

as a catalyst for investment, a way of attracting and adding value to the creative economy and creating surroundings that attract people to live in and visit an area.

## Arts and culture for vibrant communities:

to develop the confidence of participants and raise the aspirations of existing and emerging communities, to connect across cultures and generations and as a key factor in delivering better health and education services.

## Arts and culture for high quality, distinctive places:

to support excellent design, to restore the valuable role of town centres, and to forge a positive sense of place.

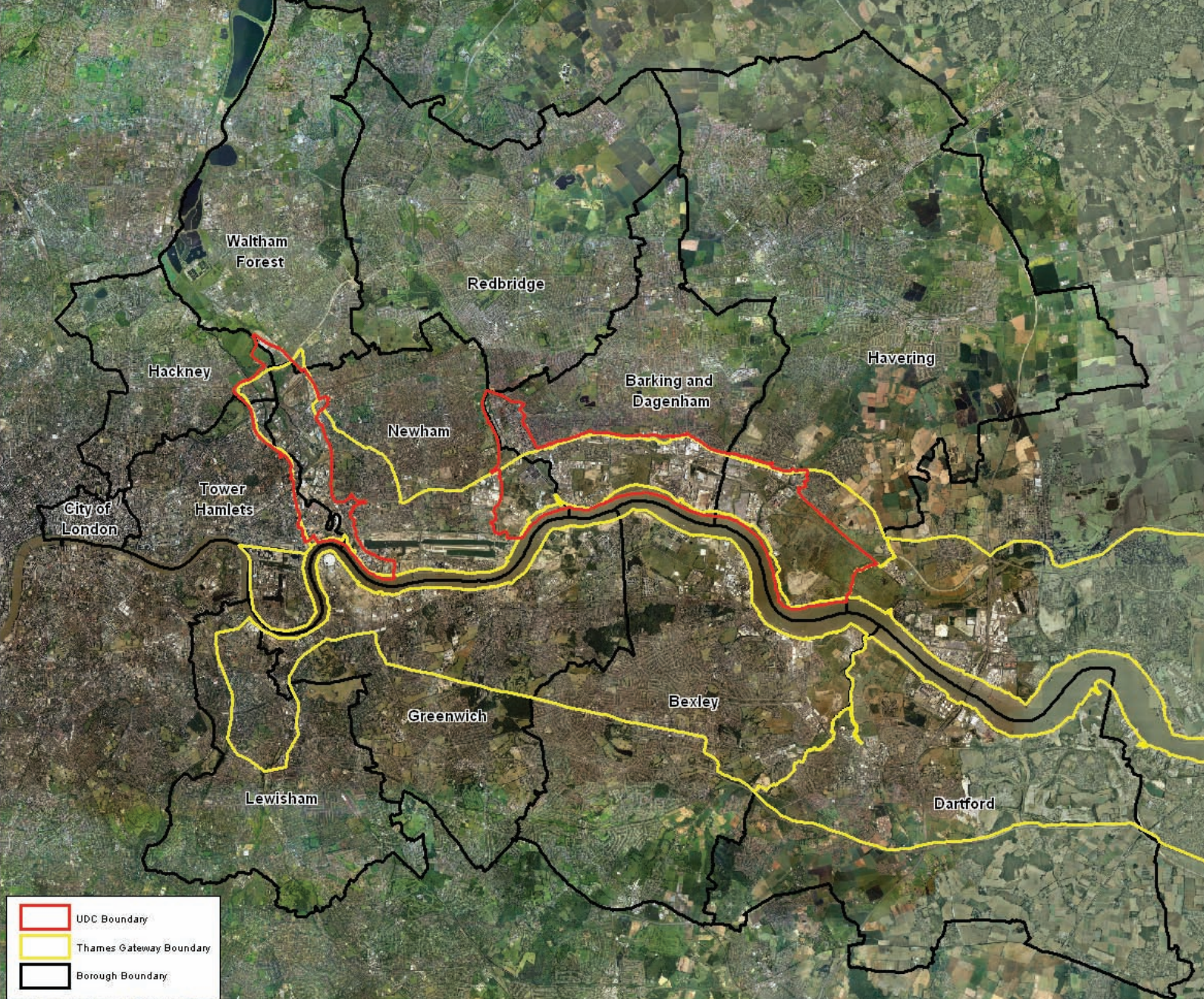


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UDC (Urban Development Corporation) Boundary is now London Thames Gateway Boundary.

Part of our task is to provide excellent examples of how the arts have already contributed to these themes in the London Thames Gateway and elsewhere. This will provide practical and effective precedents and templates for the kinds of facilities and investment needed for best commercial and community practice. We will continue to work with our partners to embed this understanding across their organisations. We will also identify current and imminent opportunities to contribute to quality development and cultural practice, and ways to invest in this.

# Working in partnership

So far we have identified five principles that will underpin how we aim to work in London Thames Gateway:

## Strengthening partnership

Multiple partners working collectively to define and position the role of arts and culture in the Gateway. This would build on the *Joint agreement on culture and sustainable communities* signed in July 2006 by partners that include the Departments for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and Communities and Local Government (DCLG), and be supported by the work of the Thames Gateway Cultural Strategy Officer – funded in partnership with Sport England, the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) and the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). We will continue to develop ways of working that will help boroughs in the Gateway identify shared priorities and bid collectively for support. We will also continue to build effective one to one relationships across the boroughs.

## Building the case for investment

This requires an ongoing assessment of regional needs, priorities and opportunities in arts and culture, and significant leverage to increase investment from partners that do not have a direct arts and culture remit (such as economic development and social investment bodies). This will include work to develop potential arts spaces in the *Building Schools for the Future* programme, the publication of joint research with the Association of Town Centre Managers, and the launch of a new public art agency to support public realm work.

## Improving capacity and expertise

Improving knowledge of opportunities, increasing the expertise to explore these, and strengthening the capacity to respond. This targets arts and culture practitioners and organisations and our own partners. Many of these organisations are not in a position to effectively pursue the multiple opportunities provided by the transformation of London Thames Gateway. This requires continued work with the creative industries, the business support sector and the higher education sector.

## Working with developers and planners

Establishing strong partnerships that reduce the current 'disconnect' between the arts and culture sector, the planning process and commercial property development. This includes a focus on specialist mixed-use developments – with arts and culture activities contributing to the success of the economic model, and residential schemes with affordable work-live spaces that help fulfil social housing requirements at the same time as increasing profitability for developers.

## Mainstreaming arts and culture

A series of projects that gradually build to position arts and culture at the heart of processes of change in London Thames Gateway. This is a long-term and incremental process. By 2016 we hope that arts and culture will hold the key strategic position that the sub-region needs to provide homes for a mix of sustainable, prosperous and distinctive communities.



# Next steps

Over the coming months we will work with our partners to implement a series of agreed actions and deadlines that will form our strategy for the arts in London Thames Gateway. They will be based on the following themes and principles and informed by the data and knowledge we have gained so far.

We will focus on strengthening the understanding of and practical role for the arts and culture in regeneration, and increasing engagement and participation among the communities in east and south east London.

## Arts and culture for effective regeneration

- **Creative industries:** the arts occupy an important part in the creative ecology of the Gateway. Pioneer arts and cultural organisations led the way in providing the Gateway with its reputation as a place for cultural exploration and innovation with the added bonus of relative affordability. The arts are often the 'research and development' for commercial creative activities, and are contributing to the creative ecology of established areas such as the City Fringe, Hackney, Deptford and Greenwich, and emerging centres like Stratford and Barking.
- **Workspace:** the Gateway already provides London with some of its most densely clustered studios and cultural production spaces. The challenge now is to place arts and cultural activity – and the work and production space it requires – close to centres of regeneration and development. This will add commercial value and a sense of excitement and distinctiveness to development areas. It will also help lessen the uncertainties faced by many arts and cultural businesses based in short lease properties, and threatened by (rather than able to enjoy the benefits of) increasing land and property values.
- **Housing:** as with business, arts and culture helps make housing development distinctive and demonstrably contributes to healthy lifestyles and communities. The scale of the planned housing development requires the engagement of social landlords and house builders, and an approach to community building that takes the expertise and commitment of artists and arts groups in east and south east London to their local communities. This will enable an imaginative approach to community cohesion, the engagement of people in planning the futures of their communities and the development of projects that celebrate distinctiveness and local identity.





Image: Acme Studios' Copperfield Road building, London E3. Photo: Hugo Glendinning

## Arts and culture for vibrant communities

- **Diversity:** the cultural diversity of the Gateway is one of its distinctive features – it is a positive indicator of the demographic and social change in the sub-region and runs parallel to the huge levels of physical change in progress. Arts and culture has an important role in helping existing and new communities respond to the opportunities and challenges presented by these changes.
- **Learning and skills:** the evolving new economies of the area – including culture, sports and leisure, and the tourist industry – offer many job opportunities and we need to work with partners to ensure that local people are well placed to make the most of those opportunities. Arts and culture can contribute to informal learning, in particular to educational programmes linked to the Olympic and Paralympic Games, to developing cross-artform and cross-curricular learning and skills opportunities and helping to deliver the emerging creative and cultural skills agenda.
- **Health:** arts related programmes contribute – together with sport – to a healthy lifestyle and community health programmes. Local examples – like Bromley by Bow Centre, the work of nationally acclaimed dance development agencies, performance companies and training institutions – provide good templates for the role of the arts in health, which we will share with partners. Growth in the area will generate a number of new health buildings and resources, and the work of artists and culture practitioners can help to make these environments more welcoming as well as engaging communities in active lifestyles.

## Arts and culture for high quality, distinctive places

- **Festivals and events:** the vibrant festival scene in the sub-region is a highly visible and accessible form of participatory arts. Many learning and training programmes have been built around these activities. The scene includes international festivals (Greenwich and Docklands), major commissions and events (for example at Canary Wharf and Victoria Park) and a wide range of local cultural and arts festivals and events. Building capacity and expertise before 2012 is essential – both for the Cultural Olympiad and for the longer term, and we will work with the five boroughs on this agenda.
- **Cultural tourism:** tourism is a key part of the sub-regional economic strategy. Arts and culture – museums, artists studios and galleries, theatre, music, dance, parks, markets and festivals – can help make London Thames Gateway into a distinctive destination. We will explore how we can support stronger connections between arts venues and producers and commercial leisure providers and hotel and conference venues.
- **Consumption and production:** through the co-location and connectedness of spaces for arts consumption and arts production – the galleries, bars, theatres, workspaces, support services, shops, arts centres, cinemas and universities – we can establish ‘creative city districts’ in London Thames Gateway. These would have the ambiance and attitude needed for genuine distinctiveness and commercial success.
- **Public realm:** some of the most successful commercial and public realm developments demonstrate the practicality and unique contribution of the role of the arts in masterplanning and urban design, and in creating pieces of work that add to the distinctiveness and reputation of the developed area. This approach needs continuing advocacy – in the Olympic developments and for housing and commercial projects across the Gateway.

These are the priorities identified by our work to date. We aim to move forward with our partners in the next few months. If you would like to contribute to this consultation, or have any questions about this publication, please email Charlotte Penny at [charlotte.penny@artscouncil.org.uk](mailto:charlotte.penny@artscouncil.org.uk)

Arts Council England, London  
2 Pear Tree Court  
London EC1R 0DS

[www.artscouncil.org.uk](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk)  
Email: [enquiries@artscouncil.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@artscouncil.org.uk)  
Phone: 0845 300 6200  
Textphone: 020 7973 6564  
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Layout by Jonaki Sarkar ([jonaki.sarkar@ntlworld.com](mailto:jonaki.sarkar@ntlworld.com))  
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Front cover: Studio Festi performing *The Dancing Sky* at the Greenwich + Docklands International Festival 2006. Photo: Alastair Muir

