



Office of the
Deputy Prime Minister

Creating sustainable communities

Creating Sustainable Communities

In the East of England



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2. Backbone Garden Project – *Groundwork*
3. Val Mitchell, Decent Homes Scheme, West Midlands – *ODPM*
4. Oakgrove Millennium Village School, Oakgrove, Milton Keynes – *English Partnerships*
5. The Chase Local Nature Reserve, Dagenham – *Thames Chase*
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ODPM Strategic Plan: The East of England

Foreword by Caroline Bowdler, Regional Director, Government Office for the East of England

I'm delighted to introduce this new publication which outlines much of the work being done to create sustainable communities in the East of England.

Growth is a strong theme for this Region, which includes large parts of three of the four growth areas set out in the 2003 *Sustainable Communities Plan*. We want to respond to the housing pressures and exploit our economic opportunities, but we need to learn the lessons from the new towns and expanded villages of the last century. Housing alone does not make a sustainable community. Places where people want to live also provide for work, education, culture, sport, health services, and transport to and between them – in a safe local environment which people can enjoy and take pride in.

Growth must help to drive regeneration. We must not let older neighbourhoods in our urban centres – in Harlow or Peterborough for example – miss out on regeneration while new developments cluster round the edge.

In the East of England, with 250 market towns and no metropolitan areas, regeneration may look a little different from other regions. Our pathfinders to improve rural service delivery are very important to us. So is our work to encourage improved levels of education and skills, to enable all our communities to access high-quality jobs.

This document explains what is happening to deliver more sustainable communities in the East of England:

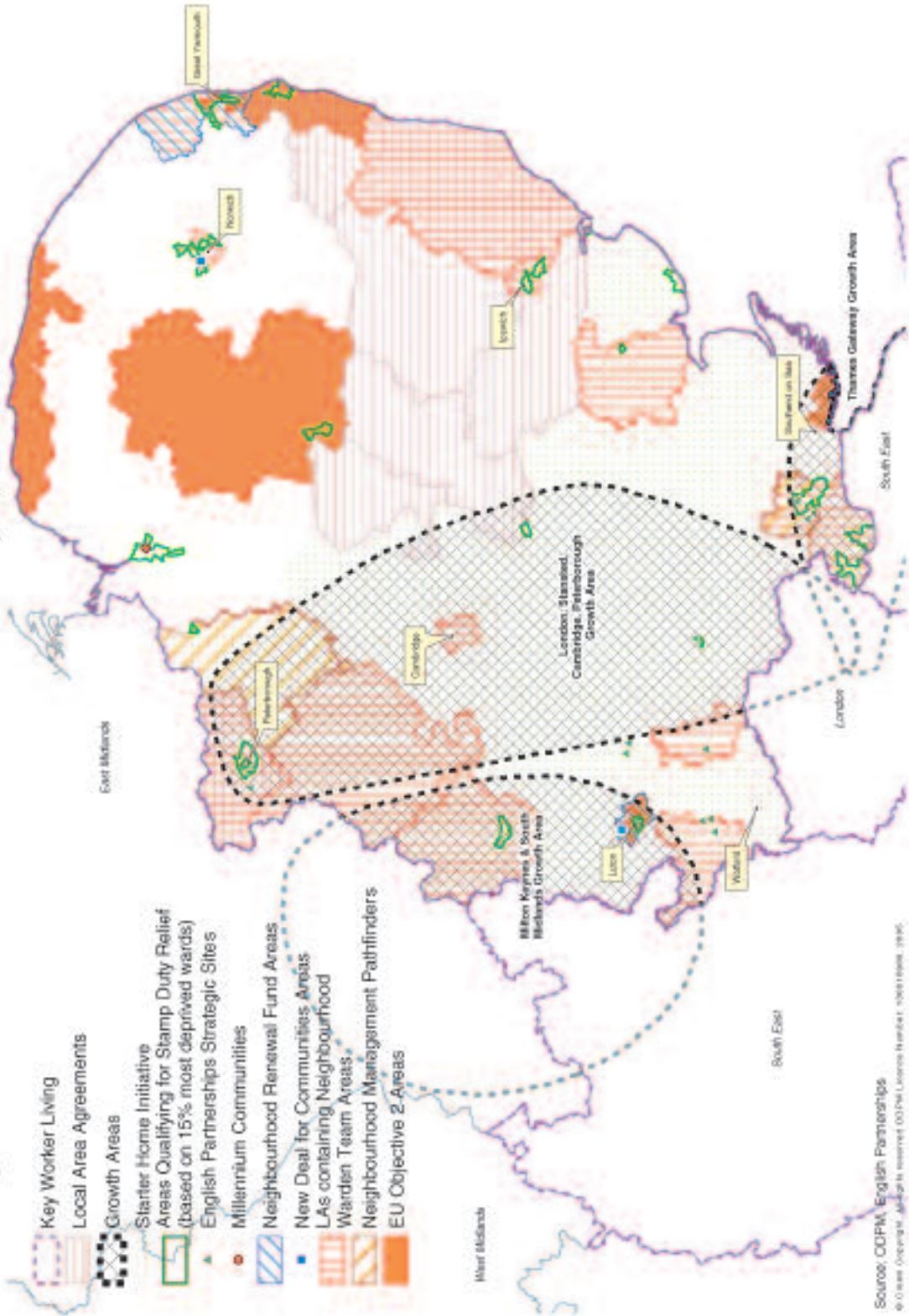
- ◆ Delivering a better balance between housing supply and demand.
- ◆ Ensuring people have decent places to live.

- ◆ Tackling disadvantage.
- ◆ Delivering better services through strong effective local government.
- ◆ Promoting the development of the region.

It is being published alongside the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's five-year strategies *Sustainable Communities: Homes for All* and *Sustainable Communities: People, Places and Prosperity*.

Together these publications mark a major step forward in our commitment to create safer, stronger, more successful places to live and work – here in the East of England, and right across the country.

East of England: Actions to Achieve and Maintain Sustainability, updated 2005



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Our approach

In February 2003, the Government published the £38 billion *Sustainable Communities Plan*, the most comprehensive programme of investment in homes, neighbourhoods and the quality of life for decades.

One of the key principles behind the *Sustainable Communities Plan* is that different parts of the country face different problems.

We need new ways of working at the neighbourhood, local, sub-regional and regional levels in order to overcome decades of disinvestment and allow everyone, in all regions, to share in the nation's prosperity.

We can only do this if we allow for the circumstances for each region when we make decisions and spend money. It is clear from the lessons of the past that the old way of doing things – decisions imposed from Whitehall without full consideration of the regional or local context – no longer works.

The Government Office, the voluntary Regional Assemblies, the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs), the Learning and Skills Council and other regionally-based organisations are working together to create sustainable communities, reflecting regional priorities in the East of England.

Investing in housing is an important part of the sustainable communities programme:

- ◆ Building new homes where they are needed most.
- ◆ Renewing social housing where it has fallen into disrepair.
- ◆ Reviving housing markets in places where people no longer want to live.

But creating sustainable communities is about more than housing. It is about:

- ◆ Increasing jobs and economic growth, promoting social justice and improving the quality of life.
- ◆ Encouraging people to get involved in the decisions which affect their community.
- ◆ Delivering better public services.
- ◆ Building schools, hospitals and transport as an integral part of development, not an afterthought.
- ◆ Improving the environment, for example by making streets, parks and squares cleaner, safer and greener, and building more environmentally friendly buildings.

Making a difference

We have seen a lot of welcome progress in the two years since the *Sustainable Communities Plan* was published, building on the achievements since 1997. However, there is still a lot to do.

Over the next five years, we will continue to make a substantial impact on delivering sustainable communities and a more prosperous future for all the people of the East of England. This report explains what we're doing to take our agenda forward over the next five years.

Approval was granted recently for £2.95m growth areas funding for the SmartLIFE scheme. This funding will help to establish a SmartLIFE centre to act as a hub for innovations and dissemination of best practice, as well as a training provider for modern methods of construction.

This scheme will help in developing an innovative approach to sustainable development to ensure that new developments can not only achieve a high standard of design, make efficient use of resources, and minimise greenhouse gas emissions, but also be delivered in a faster more efficient manner. The Business Planning phase has now been completed and designs for the new centre are currently being drawn up, which will be developed at Cambridge Regional College's Cambridge Science Park Campus.

The home you want, in the place you want it

To offer everyone, whether they are owner-occupiers, first time buyers, social tenants, key workers or people who rent privately the opportunity of a decent home at a price they can afford, there will be:

- ◆ £1.1 billion investment by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in new homes, jobs and infrastructure in four Growth Areas, with £40m to support other areas which want to pursue growth.
- ◆ Completion of reforms of the planning system to strengthen the delivery of new homes and infrastructure nationwide.
- ◆ Action to deliver new homes in a responsible way while protecting and enhancing the environment: extending the Density Direction to cover areas of high housing demand in the south west and east, including all the Growth Areas; and a new Green Belt Direction requiring certain proposals for development in the green belt to be referred to the Secretary of State.
- ◆ Help for over 80,000 first time buyers and key workers to get a foot on the property ladder, in part by using public land for new homes.
- ◆ An extension to Homebuy, to offer up to around 300,000 more social tenants the opportunity of home ownership.
- ◆ More choice for those who rent, including launching moveUK – a new scheme bringing together nationwide information about jobs and housing opportunities in one place, giving people a better quality of life in a new area.
- ◆ Extension of choice-based lettings to all local authorities by 2010, so that tenants can choose where they live instead of having a home allocated to them.
- ◆ More than doubling investment in social homes from 1997 levels, to £2 billion per year, delivering an extra 10,000 new social homes per year by 2008.

Building more homes in the right places, at the right cost, to the right standards of quality and design

Affordable housing is in short supply in parts of the region, and the number of households is forecast to rise by half a million by 2021. Increasing numbers of people on modest incomes, including key public sector workers and others essential to the regional economy, cannot afford to purchase their own home.

- ◆ We are working with partners on a step-change in housing delivery in the growth areas and across the region as a whole, securing supporting infrastructure and tackling delivery blockages.
- ◆ By 2008 the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) will invest some £850m in the Thames Gateway.
- ◆ By 2008 ODPM plans to have spent £425m across the other Growth Areas. The London-Stansted-Cambridge-Peterborough & Milton Keynes-South Midlands Growth Areas will share in these increased resources.
- ◆ In addition, a new Community Infrastructure Fund of £200m will support transport infrastructure development in the four Growth Areas.
- ◆ Regional Housing, Economic and Spatial Strategies will be implemented to deliver better economic performance and more balanced housing markets.
- ◆ We will work with the East of England Regional Assembly to put in place an up-to-date Regional Spatial Strategy by the end of 2006.

Harlow Gateway

The relocation of sports and leisure facilities will facilitate the redevelopment of this brownfield land for a residential scheme comprising an estimated 530 dwellings, including 30% affordable homes and a new leisure centre, football stadium, athletics track, one-stop health facility, a science and technology centre and a children's nursery.

The project, which has received nearly £11m of Growth Areas Funding, has involved acquisition of the college site for the development of the new sports centre, outline planning consent for the scheme and preparatory work to enable the release of the first piece of land for housing. The next stage will involve submission of detailed planning applications for the development of the football stadium and new sports centre.



How Harlow is taking shape under the Gateway Scheme.

Investing to improve the existing social housing stock

While most people in the region are well housed, there are still too many people living in cold, damp homes.

In 2004 there were some 64,000 non-decent council homes and some 76,000 non-decent private homes in the East of England.

A disproportionate number of low income and vulnerable households live in poor housing, affecting health and social well-being – often in the most deprived neighbourhoods.

New investment solutions, working alongside major programmes of regeneration and renewal, are however helping to deliver decent homes in places where people want to live.

- ◆ Non-decent social homes reduced by over 38,000 between 1997 and 2001; a further 24,000 reduction is expected to be achieved between 2001 and 2004 in the Local Authority sector.
- ◆ Long-term investment solutions for 99,000 non-decent homes.

- ◆ £5m Regional Housing Board investment promoting new approaches to private sector renewal, including Private Sector Loans Fund.
- ◆ The East of England will share in over £2.5 billion for Arms-Length Management Organisations and £1.2 billion for Housing Private Finance Initiative schemes available nationally over the three Spending Review years, for its contribution to the national aim of bringing all social housing into a decent condition by 2010.
- ◆ We will work with partners to develop new region-wide affordable warmth programmes by April 2006 to help deliver decent private sector homes and tackle fuel poverty.



Colchester Borough Homes aims to improve the quality of service that it provides to its tenants.

Case Study:

Colchester Borough Homes, set up by Colchester Borough Council to manage its 6,640 rented homes, is one of the new-style ALMOs. It is 100% owned by the council but managed by a board comprising tenants, leaseholders, council nominees and independents. The service was inspected by the independent Audit Commission Housing Inspectorate and was given a two star rating for effective repairs, improvements and information services. This means the council will receive an additional £13.5m capital funding over the next 12 months to improve the quality of its housing in the district.

New jobs and economic growth

To strengthen regions to support skills, jobs, the economy and housing there will be:

- ◆ A strategic long-term approach to key issues such as skills, transport, planning and infrastructure, with greater alignment of priorities and spending, helping to increase the employment rate to 80%, including 900,000 more people in work in areas outside the Greater South East.
- ◆ An enhanced role for RDAs, including the delivery of Business Link Services and R&D grants, and links with Regional Skills Partnerships.
- ◆ The development of RDA inter-regional growth strategies, including the Northern Way, the Midlands Way and the South West Integrated Growth Strategy.
- ◆ The Core Cities group working to develop policies for 'city-regions'.
- ◆ Development planning which meets the needs of businesses and householders, while protecting the environment.

The East of England's economy is diverse with no single predominant industry and includes a strong service sector and significant biotechnology and ICT clusters. However, the region faces challenges on transport infrastructure and low skills.

- ◆ A new Regional Economic Strategy (RES) setting out the long-term direction for the region was published in December 2004. Government Office for the East of England and the East of England Regional Assembly have been working to ensure that the *Regional Spatial Strategy* complements and supports delivery of the RES.
- ◆ The claimant count rate in the East of England (1.7%) was considerably below the average rate for the UK (2.3%) in August 2004 – economic activity in the East of England in May-July 2004 was high, at 82.55% of those of working age.

- ◆ Over the next five years, we will build on the region's strengths in many sectors (including research and development) to foster innovation and growth.
- ◆ We will continue to help make communities sustainable by encouraging and supporting the integration and innovation of transport improvements in rural and urban areas.
- ◆ We will develop the skills base, promoting learning opportunities for individuals and raising aspirations for business to help overcome low skills.



Great Yarmouth

Case Study: *Inte*GREAT

The *inte*GREAT project is a major regeneration package building on the cultural and historical strengths of Great Yarmouth, aimed at re-establishing it as a thriving seaside resort. The project will create a stimulus for change, providing greater confidence for both public and private sectors and for the local community, resulting in greater investment, improved quality standards and increased attractiveness of the resort as a place to live in, work in and visit.

The key to the project is the use of European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) money amounting to over £4.5m that has attracted additional funding from the East of England Development Agency (EEDA), local authorities and the private sector.

Tackling deprivation and disadvantage

To tackle disadvantage so that people are not condemned to lives of poverty, poor services and disempowerment by accidents of birth or geography, there will be:

- ◆ Over £2.5 billion invested each year in practical work to transform many of the worst-off areas, better targeted on those that need it most.
- ◆ Faster progress in education, health, work and cutting crime in the most deprived areas and for the worst off people – narrowing the gap.
- ◆ Over £5 billion housing-related support for over 1.2 million vulnerable people to help them live independently and successfully.
- ◆ Action to tackle homelessness – with the aim of halving numbers in temporary accommodation by 2010.
- ◆ Better personalised public services which can meet individual needs better.
- ◆ Greater efforts to attract private sector investment to deprived areas.
- ◆ Effective provision for Gypsies and Travellers, while tackling unauthorised development.

To balance economic success with social justice we must bring hope back to neighbourhoods suffering from lower life expectancy, lower skills, lower education attainment and lower aspirations.

In the East of England the gap between the most deprived neighbourhoods and the rest is narrowing. For example:

- ◆ The number of 15-year-old pupils in maintained schools in the East of England achieving 5 or more GCSEs at grades A* to C (or equivalent) has risen from 48% to 54% since 1997/8.

- ◆ Worry about burglary and car crime, as measured by the British Crime Survey 2003/04, was significantly lower in the region than across the rest of England and Wales.
- ◆ The “No Cold Calling Zone” is being piloted in the Saints Area of Luton (690 houses), an identified hotspot area for burglary, distraction burglary and cold calling. These incidents have been eradicated, with no cases reported between May and November 2004.
- ◆ The number of people sleeping rough in the region has fallen by 82% between 1998 and 2004.
- ◆ Connexions Partnerships remain on schedule to reach their targets to reduce by 10%, the numbers of 16-18 young people who are not in education, employment or training.



Young people at Lea Manor High School, Luton developing skills in the building trade.

Case Study:

Lea Manor High School, Luton, is offering NVQs in hairdressing, building and construction and hospitality and catering, with the aim of improving the educational standard of pupils de-motivated by the academic curriculum.

New facilities within the school, including a fully fitted hairdressing salon, provide a realistic commercial environment where pupils can develop skills associated with specific trades.

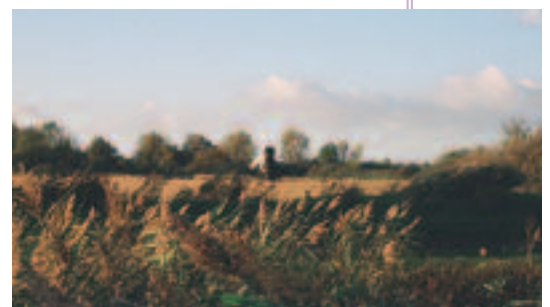
The courses have improved pupils’ attendance, motivation and achievements, decreased exclusions and increased parental involvement. The atmosphere in the school as a whole is more positive.

Hiring out of facilities after school hours is helping create additional income, ensuring the project’s sustainability.

But there is still a lot to do – low skills and qualifications is an important issue, with 23% of 16 year olds in the region obtaining poor or no grades at GCSE.

Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) are playing a key role as part of local neighbourhood renewal strategies. Close partnership working between local authorities, residents and other stakeholders has also been helping to prevent homelessness and make communities safer.

- ◆ The recent Spending Review has continued funding of the two New Deal for Communities schemes in the region. NDC funding for East of England this year is £10m, contributing to a total of £84m over a ten year period.
- ◆ In the NELM area of Norwich, NDC funding has helped establish a creative industries academy and an innovative community transport scheme.
- ◆ The East of England will receive Neighbourhood Renewal funding (NRF) of £3.5m this year and another £3.5m next year. To date, two local authority districts – Luton and Great Yarmouth in the East of England have benefited from the NRF.
- ◆ There will also be continued funding for the two neighbourhood management Pathfinders in the region.
- ◆ The Wisbech Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder, worth £2.5m over five years, is one of only three rural pilots in the country and has just commenced. It is aimed at engaging local people in the development of community assets and services, and helping to close gaps in health and education provision.
- ◆ Basildon Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder has successfully effected changes to mainstream service provision such as the Parks Department and the Police.
- ◆ We will also deliver significant regeneration of the Marsh Farm area in Luton over the next six years, mindful of the longer term opportunities presented by the sub-regional plan for Luton, Bedford and Milton Keynes. This is being assisted by NDC funding and should positively impact on health, education, employment, crime, housing and the physical environment.
- ◆ We will develop a model for tackling rural disadvantage more widely through a separate Rural Pathfinder in the Fenlands that will explore ways to simplify and target funding and service delivery.



The Fenlands of the East of England. Through strategic initiatives, including the Rural Pathfinder, GO-East aims to tackle the rural disadvantage that lies behind the postcard image through the simplification of funding streams and improved service delivery.

Improving the quality of life – cleaner, safer, greener neighbourhoods

To make neighbourhoods cleaner, safer, and greener, creating communities all over the country that people are proud to be part of, there will be:

- ◆ Sustained investment to make all social homes decent by 2010, and to ensure that at least 70% of vulnerable households in the private sector have a decent home, with environmental improvements in local neighbourhoods.
- ◆ A cross-Government programme for improving local liveability in every community across the country, measured through a new liveability Public Service Agreement target, which says that there must be measurable improvements by 2008.
- ◆ Around £7 billion for local authorities to fund local environmental services over the next three years, with around £3 billion for highway maintenance and street lighting.
- ◆ Extra powers to deal with anti-social behaviour – litter, fly-tipping, graffiti, fly-posting, noise and nuisance vehicles – through the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Bill.
- ◆ Action to incentivise councils to take effective action to improve their environment, by giving this the weight it deserves in the measurement and assessment of council performance, and by providing reward grants for councils who exceed targets agreed with central Government in Local Public Service Agreements.
- ◆ The introduction of model bye-laws which can be used by communities to address problems of anti-social behaviour.
- ◆ A new Code for Sustainable Buildings, to promote excellence in new buildings for energy and water efficiency.
- ◆ A target to raise the average energy efficiency of the residential housing stock by 20% by 2010, compared with 2000.

Growth and regeneration in the East of England must drive one another. New developments will be integrated with existing communities, enabling everyone to benefit from improved facilities for education, health, culture and sport. Our rich environment and heritage will be respected and enhanced, from the Thames Gateway Green Grid to the Great Yarmouth seafront.

- ◆ 19 parks and green spaces in the East of England have been selected for Green Flag Awards in 2004/05.
- ◆ 13 Neighbourhood Warden Schemes are increasing resident satisfaction, reducing fear of crime and improving environment.
- ◆ Over the next five years, we will use the new Safer and Stronger Communities Fund to roll out further wardens schemes in the region.
- ◆ We will improve the management of parks and public spaces to make them more attractive and accessible. Ipswich, Luton and Maldon have been chosen to take part in the £89m liveability scheme.
- ◆ Three Community Forests in the region are contributing to the opening up of public space for recreation and developing biodiversity opportunities.
- ◆ The development of a Cultural Vision for Thames Gateway embracing culture, leisure, tourism and sport will support regeneration and social inclusion in the area.

Better local government

To ensure that local government delivers excellent services and leads and enables community empowerment, there will be:

- ◆ Local Area Agreements to deliver better services based on shared priorities: 21 pilots under way and a further 40 agreements to follow.
- ◆ Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), engaging the private sector in projects to improve town centres.
- ◆ Clearer roles for councillors – with a strong, visible executive and roles for councillors as advocates of their local community.
- ◆ More opportunities for mayors for those that want them, particularly in our major cities, with greater power to make a real difference.
- ◆ A fair, transparent and sustainable local tax and finance system.
- ◆ A new housing role for local authorities, based on investing in new social homes; managing housing better; taking a more strategic approach to planning for homes, growth and infrastructure; and providing land for low cost homes.

We are working with partners and stakeholders in the region to improve the delivery of services and bring about positive outcomes for both the citizen and the community.

- ◆ Pilot Local Area Agreements (LAAs) in Suffolk and Peterborough represent a radical new approach to help join up public services more effectively and provide greater flexibility for local solutions to local circumstances.
- ◆ Over the next five years, we will promote and advance the emerging local government strategy and strengthen the way that local and central government work together.

- ◆ This year, East of England's 54 local councils and the region's police and fire authorities are receiving over £4 billion from the Government through the Local Authority Formula Grant.
- ◆ Comprehensive Performance Assessments (CPAs) of local authorities within the region rate the majority as good or excellent. Only six are weak or poor and ODPM/GO-East are working with them to improve their performance.
- ◆ We will analyse the outcomes of CPA results across the region and work with partners to assist in the improvement of local authority performance.
- ◆ Beacon Council awards have been made to 16 authorities.
- ◆ Over the next five years, we will continue to tackle multiple challenges around growth and regeneration in key places across the region – for 2004-05 we have identified Peterborough, Luton, Harlow and Thames Gateway for targeted work. There are plans to extend to other areas later.
- ◆ We will also pull together existing funding streams, with a focus on shared priorities at national and local level.
- ◆ We will continue to exploit all opportunities to develop and spread best practice, challenging local authorities on best value (e.g. in planning, housing, local transport, waste services), learning lessons from pathfinders and pilots, helping to develop centres of excellence and learning networks.

More say for communities

To give people more of a say in the way places (both urban and rural) are run and help improve local services, there will be:

- ◆ Opportunities for all communities to have more control over their own neighbourhoods through a proposed Neighbourhoods Charter forming part of a national framework agreed with local government and others, which could include the ability for communities to own their own assets (for example, playgrounds or community centres), and to trigger action when things aren't right.
- ◆ More responsive local services, with better links to local people, including schools, health services and the police.
- ◆ Local councillors, who are drawn from a wider section of the community, as leaders and advocates for local communities, at the heart of arrangements for improving their neighbourhood.
- ◆ More devolution of budgets and control to communities – which could involve small community funds held by councillors to make a difference in their neighbourhoods.

Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) offer a way for close partnership working between local authorities, residents and other stakeholders in order to improve the quality of life and local service delivery. LSPs have integral roles in the Suffolk and Peterborough LAAs, ensuring full engagement of key local partners, including voluntary and community sectors.

- ◆ Community Empowerment Networks have been established in the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF) areas of Luton and Great Yarmouth.

The New Deal for Communities (NDC) schemes in the region are actively engaging local communities to ensure they have a voice in shaping the future of their neighbourhoods.

- ◆ NDC in Norwich has begun a major project to redevelop the old Bowthorpe School site. This scheme will involve new housing, an employment zone, and new community and sports facilities.

Working across the region

To ensure that decisions are taken at the right level to join together action for the benefit of all, there will be:

- ◆ New roles for Government Offices in delivering Government policy and bringing it together.
- ◆ Strengthened Government Offices in the lead on negotiating targets and priorities with local authorities through Local Area Agreements.
- ◆ Proposals to merge regional housing and planning bodies, bringing together responsibility for housing and planning strategies.
- ◆ Regional Emphasis Documents and regional funding allocations which give more regional influence over budgets.
- ◆ Regional Resilience Forum with agreed delivery plans to improve planning for emergencies.
- ◆ Regional co-ordination for those fire and rescue activities which need to be handled at a regional level.

The Government Office Role

The Government Office for the East of England brings together the activities and interests of ten Government Departments within a single organisation. It uses its policies, programmes and influence to enable communities to become better places in which to live, through the effective alignment and delivery of national, regional and local priorities. It also provides a regional perspective to inform the development and evaluation of Government policy.

The Government Office manages European funds as well as significant spending programmes on behalf of these Departments. It oversees budgets and contracts delegated to regional organisations, as well as carrying out regulatory functions and sponsoring the East of England Development Agency.



The East of England is well positioned to take the lead in driving forward the UK innovation agenda. The region is in the EU top 10 on proportion of GVA spent on Research and Development. The telecoms industry is especially strong around Suffolk, and the pharmaceutical industry is well established in Herts and Beds. Plant and environmental biosciences have a significant presence around Norwich, and of course Cambridge is a world-leader in scientific and technological research.

To achieve the greatest progress, we need to make the most of our assets and advantages. That means working at the right level – for example, bringing together services, funding and programmes which can be best co-ordinated across the whole region.

In recent years, strong partnerships and new ways of working have been created to maximise the effectiveness of initiatives at the regional level.

The region's contribution to the development of the Regional Emphasis Document, Regional Skills and Competitiveness Partnership and the Integrated Regional Strategy, have all shown partnership working at its best and demonstrated how well the region can contribute to policy development.

- ◆ The Regional Resilience Forum and sub-groups are bringing together key players from local authorities, local police forces, health and emergency services, the military, and the media. We are helping the Forum engage with stakeholders in the successful implementation of the Civil Contingencies Act.
- ◆ The Government Office has established the Public Agencies Group East (PAGE) forum to encourage better joined-up working among public bodies, helping to develop a transparent, integrated and sustainable approach to regional policy.
- ◆ The East of England Public Health Group is working with partners to implement the Public Health White Paper and Regional Health Strategy to improve health and well-being and reduce health inequalities.
- ◆ The Regional Skills and Competitiveness Partnership is tackling the challenge of low skills, and helping to drive innovation and growth across the region.

CONCLUSION

We are working with a range of stakeholders to make our vision of sustainable communities a reality – from local government to the private sector, from local community groups to regional agencies.

We believe that the East of England has huge potential as well as a proud heritage – and we are making a long term commitment to improving the quality of life for people in the region.

Our vision is to create sustainable communities in which people thrive and prosper – the homes they require, the security they want, the environment they deserve and the jobs they need.

