

8. NEED FOR A STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ENHANCEMENT INITIATIVE

- 8.1. As outlined in section 7, there are a number of local initiatives that seek to address environmental issues within the Green Belt – particularly within the Study Area. Although often very effective, the initiatives are disjointed and do not form part of a cohesive whole. There is a tendency for local authorities to focus on their own ‘patch’ of Green Belt, rather than see it as a contiguous landscape, habitat or recreation area. This fragmented approach at the local level is exacerbated regionally by the fact that the Study Area falls within three planning regions: London; the South East; and the East of England. Paris, in contrast, falls within a single region and has developed a strategic approach to the planning and management of the city’s hinterland (Plan Vert Regional D’ile-de-France).

ADVANTAGES OF A STRATEGIC APPROACH

- 8.2. A strategic approach could bring a number of important benefits. These include:
- Environmental enhancement of the Green Belt could be achieved across administrative boundaries
 - Consolidation and integration of existing initiatives into a more cohesive framework
 - Development pressures of a strategic nature, such as the Growth Areas defined in the Sustainable Communities Plan, require a strategic response
 - The opportunities and aspirations for the Green Belt, as set out in section 5, would be realised more effectively in the context of a strategic initiative.
- 8.3. Ideally, a single strategic initiative should cover the entire Green Belt and urban fringe, as with the Paris model. However, a sub-regional, cross-boundary approach is a positive step, particularly if links are made between initiatives. For example, it may be appropriate to develop initiatives in quadrants around London in the northeast (Green Arc area), northwest, southeast and southwest. In the southeast a partnership led by Kent County Council is at the early stages of developing a ‘regional park’ initiative, which extends from the edge of London along the Thames Gateway to the sea, which could represent an example of such a cross-boundary sub-regional initiative.
- 8.4. Part B of this report develops the concept further for the Green Arc area around the northeast of London, and the final section of the report presents a framework model that could be used for extending the concept around London.

REGIONAL POLICY SUPPORT

- 8.5. Current draft RPG14 (East of England) emphasises that there are significant advantages to be gained through a strategic vision for urban fringe management of an extended area, such as the Green Grid in Thames Gateway South Essex and the

- Green Arc around north-east London. It states that the potential for co-ordinated management of the countryside throughout the Green Belts in the Region should be investigated and consideration given to preparing joint strategies that cross administrative boundaries (Para 4.41)
- 8.6. RPG 9a for the Thames Gateway sets out policies for environmental improvement in the Thames Gateway area. It highlights that the vision for the Gateway is concerned with enhancing the environment, which can mean making better use of assets or creating new features of benefit. The range of existing initiatives, including the Thames Chase Community Forest in East London, are discussed, and the scope for further flagship projects noted.
 - 8.7. The London Plan includes as a key objective (Objective 6): To make London a more attractive, well-designed and green city. A key policy direction for achieving this objective is to provide the spatial framework to achieve better use of resources and improvements to the environment in support of the Mayor's environmental strategies.
 - 8.8. The Plan also indicates that the Mayor will work with partners to improve access to the countryside and the quality of the landscape in the urban fringe. It also notes that the Mayor and boroughs will support sub-regional and cross-borough boundary urban fringe management and in particular will explore the potential for taking forward the concept of Community Forests within London (Policy 3D.13 Rural London).
 - 8.9. Specifically with regard to the Green Belt, the Plan states that *where Green Belt is of poor quality, steps should be taken to improve it. This may include undertaking a review of a wider area and identifying actions to promote improvements* (Paragraph 3D.46)