



OFFICE OF THE  
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

# Sustainable communities in the East of England

Building for the future





## Foreword

We are transforming our communities and reversing the legacy of decades of under-investment.

We have achieved a great deal, but we need to do more. In some parts of the country there are still areas of acute deprivation where demand for housing has collapsed. In others, demand for housing continues to outstrip supply, leading to rising house prices and shortages of affordable housing. We need a step change in our approach to tackle these problems. We need to work together to build sustainable communities in which people want to live. Central government must play its part, which is why we are changing our approach to housing, regeneration and planning: investing some £22bn England-wide over the next three years. But delivery depends on a change of approach at the local, regional and national levels. That is why we want to move away from the old, top-down policies of the past where decisions were taken for local communities rather than by them.

Our focus is on building partnerships for change, providing the regions with the tools and resources to make a difference, and making sure we link what we build and how we build with plans for public services, transport, and jobs.

We have already strengthened regional policy and devolved decision-making for economic development and planning. Now, for the first time, we will decentralise housing policy and give the regions a real say in how we invest in our communities.

This Regional Action Plan – together with our national document – sets out the policies, resources and partnerships we will put in place for successful, thriving communities in every part of the country.

Our aim is to carry this action plan forward with regional partners and local government to ensure that together we can build sustainable communities that we can be proud of and that will stand the test of time.



John Prescott, MP  
Deputy Prime Minister

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Prescott". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.



## Introduction

The Government is committed to changing our approach to sustainable communities: creating and maintaining places where people want to live and stay. The document *Sustainable communities: Building for the future* is a national programme of action setting out how the Government intends to achieve sustainable communities for all.

The Regions' White Paper, *Your Region, Your Choice*, set out the Government's plans to decentralise power and strengthen regional policy. It provided for directly elected assemblies to go ahead in regions where people want them, and for strengthened arrangements in all regions to improve strategic planning and delivery. The national programme of action is a further step in this direction, with a substantial shift in responsibilities for the use of housing resources. Regional people will in future have the responsibility for deciding how the available resources can best be used to meet the needs of the region, a substantial further devolution of responsibilities. We need to make the most of this opportunity in the East of England.

This regional programme of action sets out proposals for maintaining and creating sustainable communities in the East of England. We need to create sustainable communities in which people want to live and:

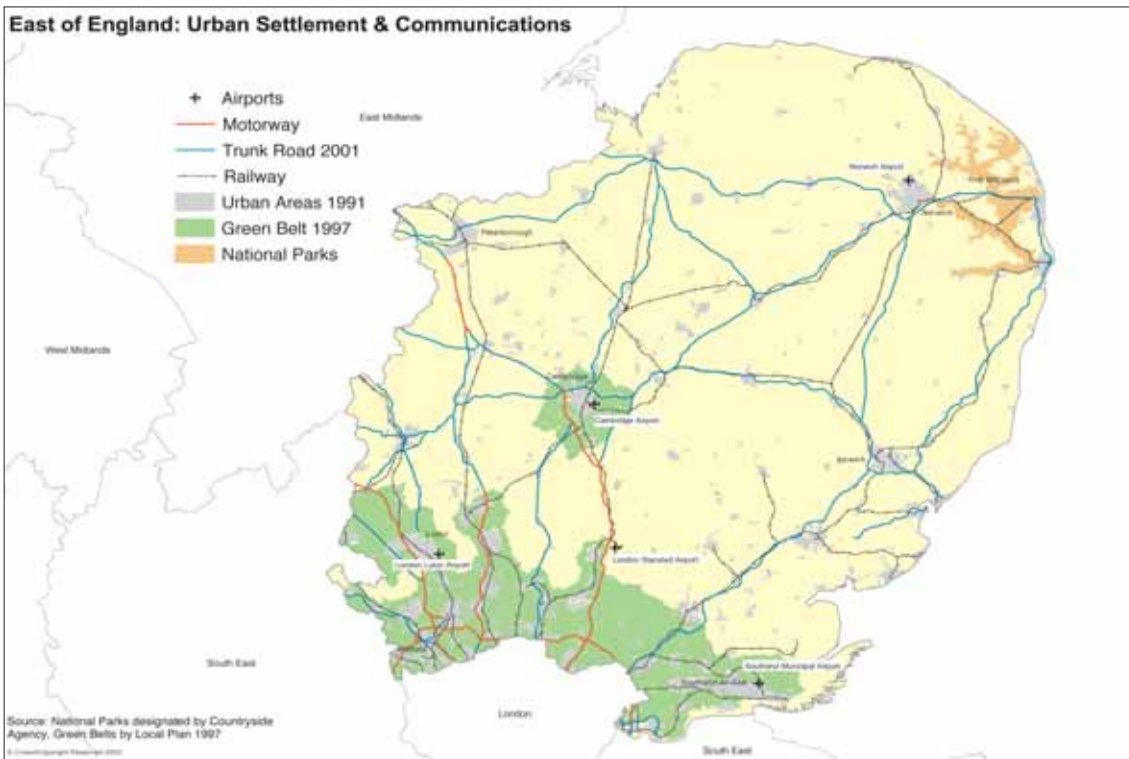
- ◆ *are economically prosperous;*
- ◆ *have decent homes at a price people can afford;*
- ◆ *safeguard the countryside;*
- ◆ *enjoy a well-designed, accessible and pleasant living and working environment;*
- ◆ *are effectively and fairly governed with a strong sense of community.*

The programme of action does not attempt to cover all the issues of importance to communities. It highlights actions to address housing, planning and neighbourhood renewal issues.

The Government Office for the East of England will be working with regional and local partners over the coming months to build on these proposals, to link them with other relevant programmes, and to turn policies into action.

## Communities in the East of England

- ◆ *The East of England is a region of diverse landscapes such as the Fens, the Brecklands and coasts of Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk. It contains many areas of high environmental value and has a rich heritage of historic towns and villages.*
- ◆ *The East of England's population of 5.4 million is distributed unevenly across the region, density being greatest in South Essex and Hertfordshire where a quarter of those in employment commute to jobs in London, and lowest in the north. In the region as a whole around one third of people live in settlements of less than 10,000.*
- ◆ *Away from London there are a number of major sub-regional centres, such as Southend, Ipswich, Cambridge, Norwich, Peterborough, Luton and Bedford, and an extensive hinterland of market towns and villages.*



## Strategic challenges for the region

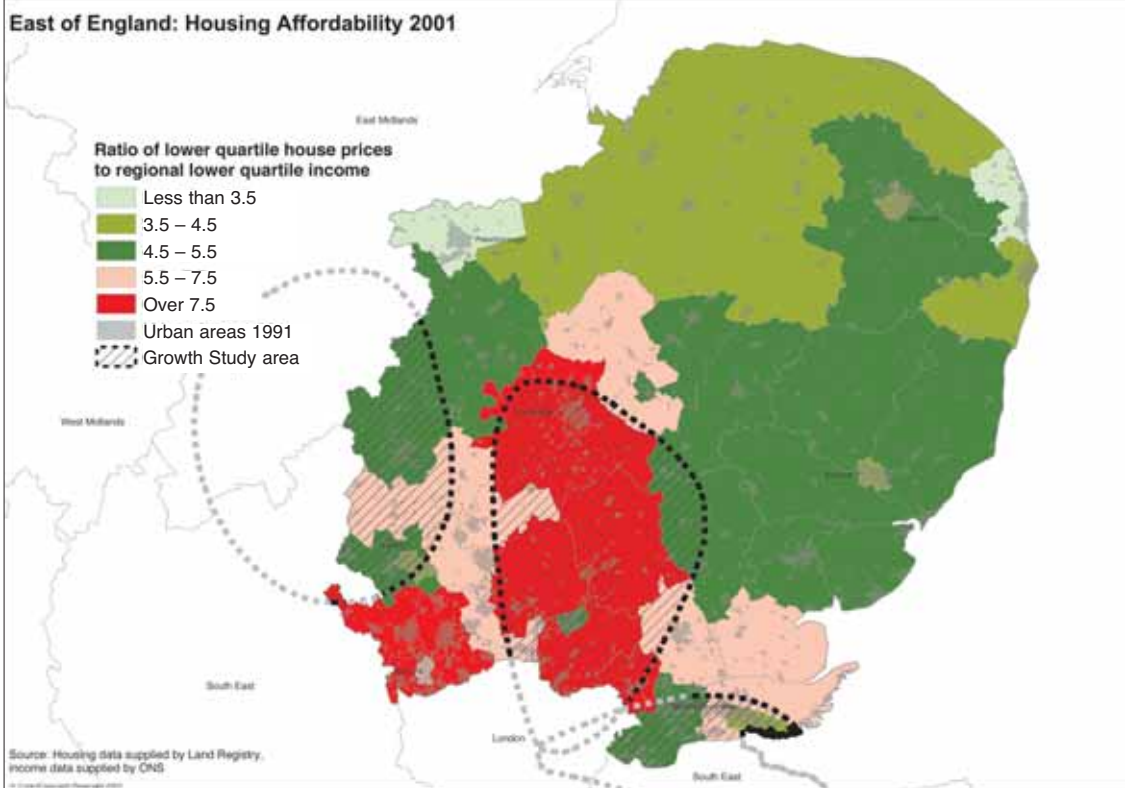
### Key issues

- ◆ *Addressing problems of high and rapidly rising house prices and their impact on the recruitment and retention of staff, particularly close to London and around Cambridge but spreading deeper into the region.*
- ◆ *Improving transport infrastructure – railways, roads, airports and ports to meet the needs of economic growth.*
- ◆ *Ensuring that the benefits of economic growth are spread across the region, particularly to those urban and rural communities facing problems of deprivation and peripherality.*
- ◆ *Addressing the development consequences of scarce water resources throughout the region and an increasing sea level for coastal and low lying areas.*

## Housing

### The challenge

- ◆ *To provide for the East of England's growing population, which increased by some 6% in the last decade and is projected to increase by over half a million over the period 1996 to 2021.*
- ◆ *To address the imbalance in the demand for and supply of housing. Household numbers increased by 5.4% over 1996-2001, whilst the stock of dwellings increased by just 4.6%. Housing completions are at record low levels with just under 16,000 permanent dwellings being built in 2001/2, whilst skill shortages are widespread throughout the house building industry.*
- ◆ *Increasing numbers of those on modest incomes, including key public sector workers and others essential to the local economy, cannot afford to purchase their own home. The map "Housing Affordability 2001" illustrates the relationship between regional lower quartile income to local authority lower quartile house prices. The higher ratios indicate parts of the region where there are more likely to be problems of affordability. Recruitment and retention problems are widespread in high growth parts of the region, in particular in Hertfordshire, Essex and Cambridgeshire.*
- ◆ *To close the gap between the need for and provision of affordable housing in rural districts.*
- ◆ *To achieve the Government's ambitious target to ensure all social housing meets the decent homes standard by 2010. Currently, the region has 35% of council homes below the Decent Homes standard.*



#### The action plan

- ◆ To ensure the delivery of the policies set out in this document an East of England Housing Board will be established. This Board will be brought together by the Government Office for the East of England's Regional Director and will include representatives from the Housing Corporation, the East of England Regional Assembly (EERA), English Partnerships, the East of England Development Agency (EEDA) and other relevant bodies in the region. The Board will take responsibility for preparing a Regional Housing Strategy. A new single housing 'pot' for capital resources will be established, taking the place of the Approved Development Programme (ADP) and the Local Authority Housing Investment Programme (HIP). The Board will advise Ministers on the allocation of the single pot to meet priorities set out in the Regional Housing Strategy.

- ◆ *To ensure a strategic approach to key worker and social housing across the wider South East of England, the Housing Corporation and English Partnerships will manage the allocation for affordable housing from the three regional pots as a single fund.*
- ◆ *The East of England will share in the £4.736bn being provided for housing investment in the three south-eastern regions over the next three years. We expect at least £1bn of this will be invested in key-worker housing.*
- ◆ *We have given English Partnerships and EEDA a new role to support development, regeneration and increased opportunity across the growth areas.*
- ◆ *English Partnership's funding will be increased to enable them to discharge their new role (in partnership with the Housing Corporation) in identifying and assembling sites for housing development.*

**The masterplan for the new Elstow Garden Village incorporates sustainability principles. It will be developed on the site of a former depot near Bedford and planned around a new railway station. A total of 4,500 new homes will be provided of which 1,125 will be affordable homes provided for those on low incomes. The scheme is jointly supported by two Bedfordshire district councils.**

- ◆ *We will consult on powers to enable local authorities to lease compulsorily properties that have been empty for more than six months so as to bring them back into use.*
- ◆ *We will legislate to allow councils to charge up to 90% of the full council tax on second homes and to end completely the discount for empty homes.*
- ◆ *We are in the process of removing the restrictions on the Cash Incentive Scheme so that councils are free to assist tenants to buy their own homes wherever this is a good value for money way to free up a council home.*
- ◆ *The Housing Corporation has a target to deliver 1600 affordable homes in villages throughout England in 2003/04. This will be increased to 3,500 over the two years 2004/05 and 2005/06.*

- ◆ *Nationally, the Government will be providing around £2.8bn over the next three years to help improve council housing. The national plan of action announces the removal of unnecessary barriers to stock transfer, the launch of a third Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) bidding round, and plans to make it easier to refurbish council houses through Private Finance Initiatives (PFI). The Government Office and the Community Housing Task Force will work with local authorities that have not already developed a strategy to upgrade their council housing to the decent homes standard, to help them decide which of these options is best for their stock.*
- ◆ *We will accelerate development in the Thames Gateway, London-Stansted-Cambridge and Milton Keynes-South Midlands growth areas, all of which lie largely or partly in the East of England. Over the next three years, we will make available up to:
  - £446m for Thames Gateway; and
  - £164m for Milton Keynes-South Midlands, Ashford, London-Stansted-Cambridge.*

London and the Growth Areas have the potential to accommodate an additional 200,000 homes above levels currently planned in regional planning guidance.

- ◆ *New cross regional partnerships will be set up in early 2003, to bring partners together for Milton Keynes-South Midlands and London-Stansted-Cambridge.*
- ◆ *We will work with Thames Gateway South Essex Partnership to bring about regeneration within the area in line with the vision in the Strategic Framework.*

### **London-Stansted-Cambridge**

The London-Stansted-Cambridge corridor has experienced substantial economic growth in the last decade, underpinned by clusters of some of the UK's most successful businesses in biotechnology, life sciences and ICT/software and a rapid increase in the use of Stansted airport. Housing pressures along the corridor are already intense with Cambridge experiencing significant shortages of affordable housing. The issue is not whether growth will continue, but at what level and how that growth is handled.

A study, commissioned by local authorities and regional partners, into the growth potential of the area has developed a range of spatial patterns and scenarios generating growth options in four broad areas: Upper Lea Valley; Harlow; Cambridge; and, in the longer-term, new settlements in north Essex or south of Cambridge.

The study suggests that the potential for growth in housing provision to 2031 could range from around a quarter to half a million, but that achieving this growth would over time require significant improvements to transport infrastructure.

Planning for this area is at an earlier state than for the other growth areas. The Government's recent consultation on airport capacity in the South East (SERAS) inevitably affects the work necessary to develop the broad options into more detailed spatial and local plans.

### **Milton Keynes – South Midlands**

The Milton Keynes-South Midlands growth area is already demonstrating dramatic capacity for economic success. The area's potential for further growth has been assessed in a study jointly commissioned by regional and local partners. The study has identified opportunities to achieve much more with the right east-west links, a cross-boundary approach, a raising of skills levels and significant regeneration.

The study's preferred option concentrates growth on five major urban areas, two of which fall in the East of England: Luton/ Dunstable/ Houghton Regis and Bedford. The other urban centres fall in the South East and East Midlands: Milton Keynes, Northampton and Wellingborough/Kettering/Corby.

The potential for growth across the entire area to 2031 is for up to 300,000 jobs and 370,000 homes.

### **Thames Gateway**

The Thames Gateway presents a huge opportunity. It offers the opportunity to regenerate existing deprived communities through access to 300,000 new jobs, has one of the largest concentrations of brownfield sites in the country, is in a strategic location on major transport links to the continent, and is close to London.

The Government is keen to realise this potential, working in partnership with local authorities, the Greater London Authority (GLA), the Regional Development Agencies, the Housing Corporation and English Partnerships.

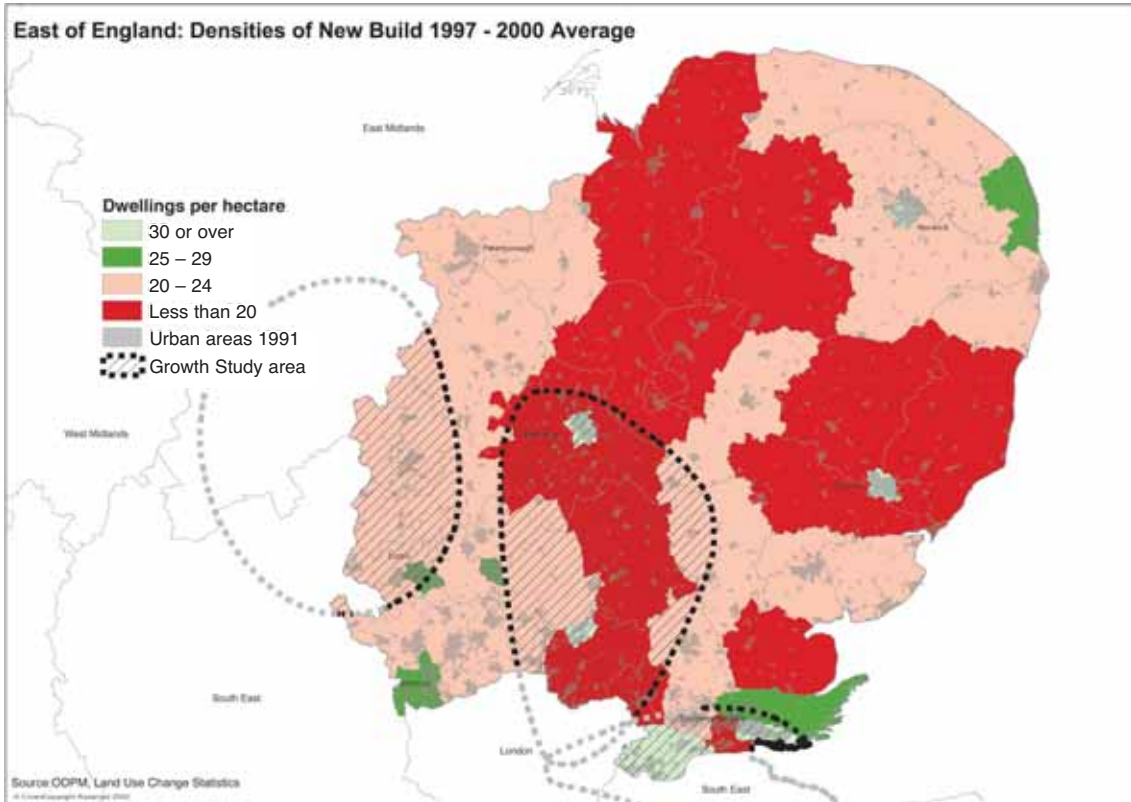
The Thames Gateway Strategic Partnership has developed a broad strategy for the Gateway. In response, the Government:

- ◆ *Has set up a Cabinet Committee, chaired by the Prime Minister, to consider how far and to what timescale we should seek to develop the Gateway. This will set out its conclusions in May 2003.*
- ◆ *Will set up delivery bodies with a clear remit and the necessary powers to drive forward development.*
- ◆ *Will consider the best approach for each area, in consultation with local partners, and ensure that vehicles for delivery are transparent and locally accountable; and*
- ◆ *Will invest £446m over the next three years across the wider Gateway in land assembly, site preparation, affordable and keyworker housing, neighbourhood renewal and urban renaissance.*

## **Planning**

### **The challenge**

- ◆ *The requirement for expansion and development of sustainable communities in the south of the region and around Cambridge has put pressure on existing Green Belt boundaries.*
- ◆ *Between 1997 and 2001 the average density of new dwellings in the region was only 22 dwellings per hectare, which along with Yorkshire and the Humber, is the lowest of any region. The map "Densities of New Build 1997-2000 Average" shows the extent of the density of new dwellings in the region.*
- ◆ *There is a need to make better use of brownfield sites in urban areas to unlock the regeneration potential of many towns in the region. In 1997-2000, only 54% of the region's new dwellings (excluding conversions) were on previously developed land.*



### The action plan

- ◆ *The planning system will be reformed, modernised and streamlined to ensure it is a positive force to secure the development needed.*
- ◆ *The East of England Local Government Conference together with the Government Office for the region are working to produce draft Regional Planning Guidance which addresses the needs of the East of England up to 2021. Draft Guidance is due to be issued for public consultation in the second half of 2003.*

**A new planning framework for Cambridge is being agreed following the November 2000 Regional Planning Guidance (RPG) for East Anglia through the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan. It will support continued growth of the research and technology based economy. It will allow more housing from 2006, so reducing the growth in long distance commuting. Proposals include a new settlement at Oakington and urban extensions to Cambridge following a review of the Green Belt.**

- ◆ *New developments should make more efficient use of land. We will expect new developments to achieve densities of 30-50 dwellings per hectare, sometimes more, which will mean that we can meet housing needs and reduce the take-up of land.*

- ◆ *We will give priority to development of brownfield sites and focus development within urban areas.*

**A 50 hectare former industrial site south of King's Lynn's historic town centre will be redeveloped for housing, retail, community and employment uses as part of the Millennium Communities programme. King's Lynn & West Norfolk District Council, Norfolk County Council, English Partnerships and the East of England Development Agency have committed £25m to the project.**

- ◆ *We will ensure protection of the green belt in the region by rigorously assessing applications for large scale greenfield development, whilst allowing local authorities to bring forward local changes where there are strong development needs, e.g. around Cambridge and Luton.*
- ◆ *We will monitor councils to ensure they achieve targets for dealing with planning applications and preparing development plans. An additional £350m in planning delivery grant is being made available nationally to help improve and accelerate the planning process.*
- ◆ *Given the amount of low lying land within the region we will require spatial strategies in Regional Planning Guidance to take account of potential flood risk. We will also encourage efficient water usage in new development.*

## Transport

### The challenge

- ◆ *There are good north-south links through the region provided by key national road and long distance rail links giving rise to large volumes of through traffic. Away from the M25 and A14, east-west links are more restricted.*
- ◆ *The road and rail networks, particularly close to London, are heavily congested at peak times.*
- ◆ *Transport improvement will be an important part of the development of the growth areas (Milton Keynes-South Midlands, London-Stansted-Cambridge and Thames Gateway).*
- ◆ *Improvements to public transport would enhance people's access to jobs and to public and private services in rural areas.*

### **The action plan**

- ◆ *We will work with the Highways Agency and railway industry stakeholders (including the Strategic Rail Authority) to deliver improvements to trunk road and rail networks and in particular address the transport needs of growth areas.*
- ◆ *We will complete the region's programme of Multi Modal Studies (MMS) and Roads Based Studies (RBS):*
  - *CHUMMS: Cambridge to Huntingdon (Ministerial decision announced);*
  - *Norwich to Great Yarmouth/A47 (Ministerial decision announced);*
  - *Orbit: M25 (Awaiting response from EERA/SEERA);*
  - *LOIS: London to Ipswich (Awaiting response from EERA);*
  - *LSM: London to South Midlands (Final report due February 2003);*
  - *Norwich to Peterborough (Final report due February 2003).*

**The Cambridge to Huntingdon Multi-Modal Study (CHUMMS) examined the problems of travel in the corridor around the A14 and produced a well-received, integrated package of measures to relieve congestion – an upgrade for the A14, a rapid transport link forming the core of a new public transport network, demand management in Cambridge and traffic management in villages close to the A14, plus recommendations about improving walking and cycling facilities.**

- ◆ *As part of the review of the Government's 10 Year Transport Plan, consideration will be given to the longer-term infrastructure needs of the growth areas.*
- ◆ *We will encourage local authorities to bring forward better quality Local Transport Plans including major schemes, which address rural and urban transport needs within county and unitary areas.*

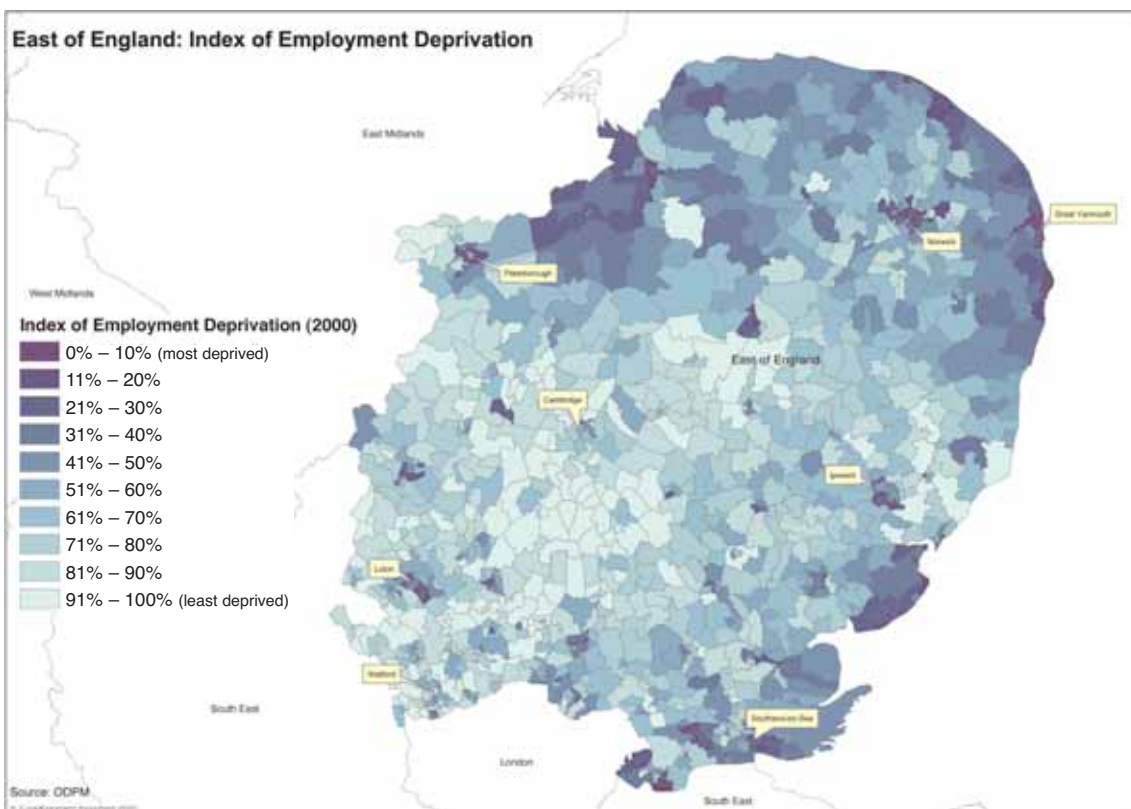
## Economic growth and skills

### The challenge

- ◆ The region enjoys a dynamic economy including major clusters of internationally important high technology companies and a strong service sector. In 1999 GDP per head in the region was 14% above the national average.
- ◆ Economic prosperity and job growth varies across the region. It is highest close to London and around Cambridge and Stansted, and lowest in peripheral towns and coastal areas. The map "Index of Employment Deprivation" illustrates the distribution of employment deprivation on a ward basis throughout the region.
- ◆ In parts of the region economic growth is held back because of lower levels of educational attainment within the adult population. In Thurrock 33% and in Norfolk 40% of adults have NVQ level 3 qualifications compared with 48.5% nationally. A similar picture emerges at higher levels where 15% of adults in Thurrock and 19% in Norfolk have NVQ level 4 compared with 27.1% nationally.
- ◆ The region has 17% of England's market towns. These need regeneration to become healthy and attractive centres serving their own population and the rural hinterland.

### The action plan

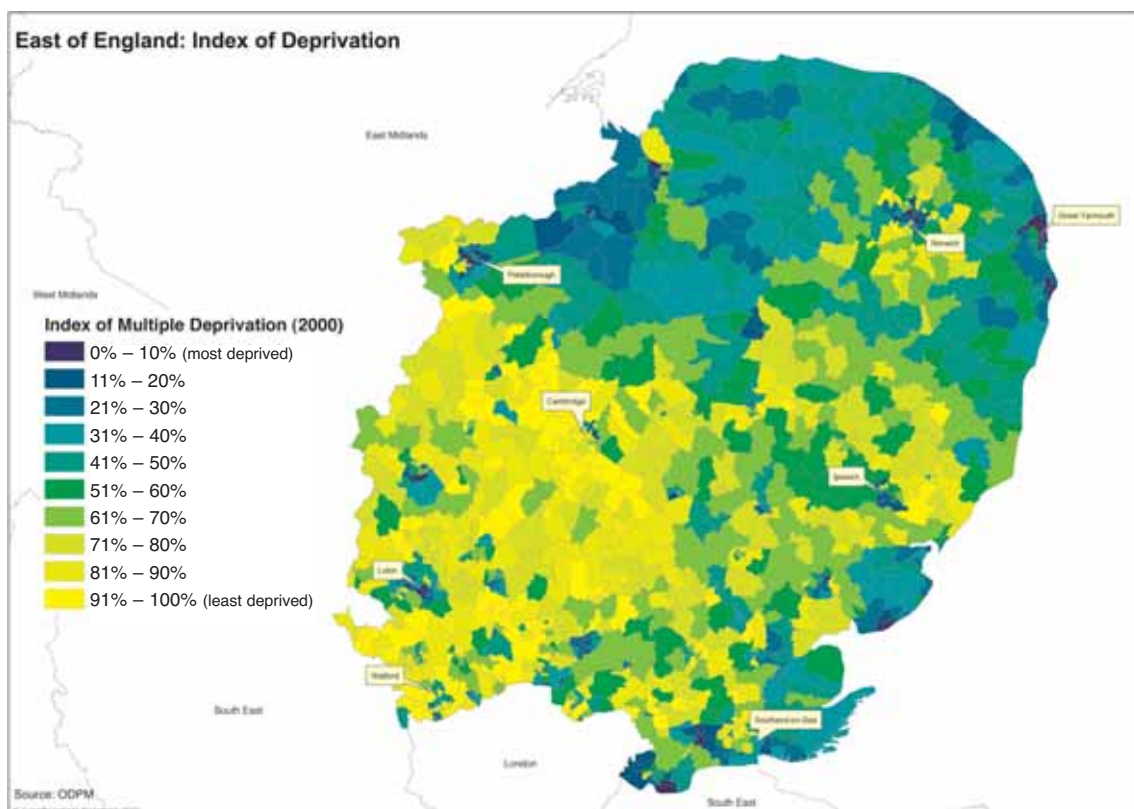
- ◆ The Government Office for the region is working with EEDA and EERA to refine targets within the Regional Economic Strategy (RES).



- ◆ The Government Office has collaborated with EEDA and EERA on research to assess the spatial implications of growth assumptions within the RES. Other research has looked at prioritisation of regional funding initiatives for sustainable economic development.
- ◆ The region's market towns have an important role to play in tackling rural exclusion, acting as employment and service centres for people in the rural hinterlands. EEDA's Market Towns Initiative helps the region's smaller rural towns to identify the key problems they face and to agree with partners the actions that will help with development and regeneration.

**The EEDA Market Towns Initiative and the Countryside Agency's market town Healthcheck have galvanised a range of activities across the region. Examples range from Sport England's project with Chatteris Basketball Club and Wisbech Acorns Football Club to development of special needs housing and a commercial childcare centre in Thaxted.**

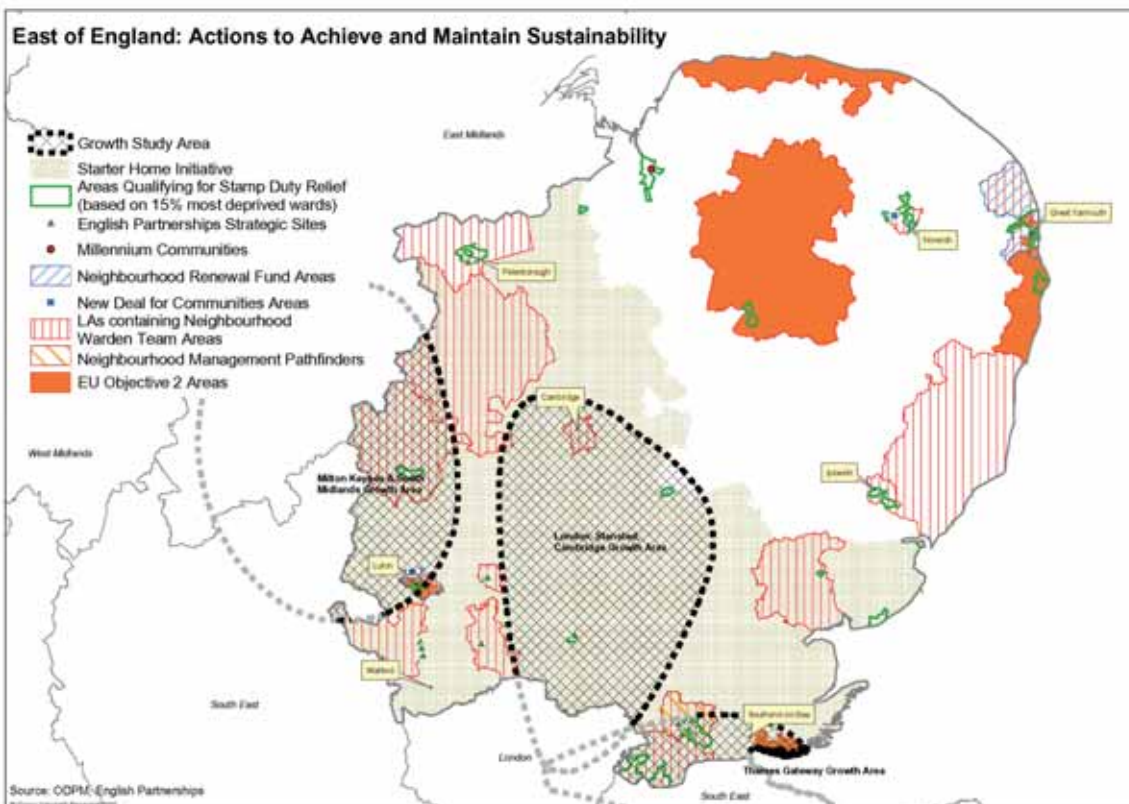
- ◆ EEDA is developing a Framework for Regional Employment and Skills and Action (FRESA) to address basic skills and workforce development.
- ◆ Support is provided by EEDA through the Small Business Service for increased business start up and survival across the region.



## Tackling deprivation and renewing communities

### The challenge

- ◆ *The East of England is, on the whole, relatively prosperous, with some districts in Essex, Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire among the least deprived in England.*
- ◆ *At the same time, other districts in the region are amongst the most deprived: Basildon, Great Yarmouth, Harlow, King's Lynn and West Norfolk, Luton, Norwich, Peterborough, Southend-on-Sea, Tendring and Waveney are included within the 100 most deprived districts in England on one or more of the Indices of Deprivation 2000. The map "Index of Deprivation" illustrates the extent of deprivation on a ward basis throughout the region.*
- ◆ *At ward level this deprivation can be intense: a cluster of wards in Great Yarmouth falls within the top 5 'hot-spots' of deprivation in England.*
- ◆ *There is a need for a comprehensive approach to tackling issues of deprivation to ensure the integration of new and existing communities.*
- ◆ *In 2001 only 7% of the working age population received income support (compared to 9% in England overall), however this increased to 12% in Great Yarmouth and 13% in Norwich.*



- ◆ *There are significant pockets of rural deprivation in the East of England which are dispersed, small scale and therefore difficult to detect. Some districts in the region rank amongst the most deprived rural districts in England.*

#### **The action plan**

- ◆ *The New Deal for Communities programme is enabling exciting redevelopment opportunities to be realised. In Luton the redevelopment of a former electronics factory site will provide a much needed community and learning centre.*
- ◆ *Neighbourhood Renewal Funding is providing skills training and supporting projects to revitalise some of the most deprived communities in the region.*
- ◆ *Under the national Pathfinder project a neighbourhood management initiative in Basildon is working with partners to improve availability of local services.*
- ◆ *In Peterborough, the Community Development programme is bringing together voluntary, community and Black, Minority and Ethnic groups to achieve greater community cohesion.*

**Norwich is rightly thought of as a fine provincial city. In parts however there are high levels of social deprivation. A New Deal for Communities project is helping to transform three large estates to the west of Norwich, through the redevelopment of a 16 hectare site at Bowthorpe, providing social housing, an enterprise zone, a training centre and a recreation area. A creative industry academy is also being set up with Arts Council/Lottery funding support to provide NVQ opportunities in the arts and media sector.**

- ◆ *We will establish regional Centres of Excellence to promote best practice in design and management of public space.*
- ◆ *The Government will be providing £201m over the next three years for schemes to improve liveability throughout the country.*

## Summary of Government programmes in the East of England

### European Structural Funds

European funding used to stimulate economic development in the EU's least prosperous regions. Amounts include the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund (ESF). £184m for ESF and £93m for ERDF for 2000 to 2006

### East of England Development Agency (EEDA)

The EEDA co-ordinates economic development and regeneration to improve the relative competitiveness of the region. £55m spent in 2001/02 and £88m projected for 2003/04

### Approved Development Programme (ADP)

Housing Corporation administered annual housing capital fund allocated to housing associations £52m for 2001/02, £64m for 2002/03 and £74m for 2003/04

### Housing Investment Programme (HIP)

Programme to provide housing capital funding for local authority housing. Amounts include Annual Capital Guidelines and Private Sector Renewal Grant. £57m for 2001/02, £61m for 2002/03 and £52m for 2003/04

### Major Repairs Allowance

Resources to meet the ongoing capital costs of maintaining the current condition of local authority housing stock. £150m for 2001/02 and for 2002/03 and £136m for 2003/04

### Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (NRU)

The NRU funds various programmes in the region to narrow the gap between deprived neighbourhoods and the rest of the country. £5.3m for 2003/04

### New Deal for Communities (NDC)

A community led partnership based around renewal in communities including pioneering approaches to neighbourhood management. £12.9m in 2003/04

### Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders

20 pathfinder initiatives set up to test new ideas and approaches to neighbourhood management. £0.8m in 2003/04

## Next steps

This summary sets out some initial ideas about what the action plan set out in *Sustainable communities: Building for the future* means for the East of England.

Partners in the region now need to develop this into action on the ground. The Government Office for the Region will play a full role in facilitating this, but if we are to achieve the aim of creating sustainable communities throughout the East of England, it must be the region's action plan, not one handed down by central government.

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