INTRODUCTION

An Evaluation of Year 3 of the Living Places Programme has been carried out on behalf of the Living Places Partners (Arts Council England, CABE, DCMS, DCLG, English Heritage, Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, and Sport England) by DC Research Ltd.

Living Places emphasises the use of culture and sport to support local distinctiveness and quality of place and promotes the advantage of cultural bodies working together to support local services for communities and individuals, particularly in areas that are experiencing housing led growth and regeneration. The aims of the Living Places Programme are to:

- Align investment from the sporting and cultural sector across organisational boundaries so it can be used more efficiently for people and places.
- Provide information, advice and support on the use of culture and sport in sustainable communities to people working in local government, housing, property development, planning and a host of other fields who take the day-to-day decisions that shape communities of the future.
- Build the capacity of communities themselves so people can be empowered to bring cultural and sporting activity and infrastructure to their communities.

Five Priority Places (Corby, Pennine Lancashire, Partnership for Urban South Hampshire (PUSH), Thames Gateway and The South West) were chosen as the key element of the Programme as they were all places experiencing significant change, whether through regeneration or growth, demonstrated ambition and/or good practice in terms of the role of culture and sport in this change, and were sufficiently different to allow the learning to be of broad application.

Part of the remit of the Year 3 Evaluation was to provide a summary of the achievements in each of the Priority Places, focusing on the impact and added value that the programme has achieved in each place, the conditions and factors that have helped to achieve these impacts and added value, and - building on this - to identify the lessons for other places that can be learned from these experiences.

Thames Gateway as a Priority Place

Thames Gateway is a pan-regional partnership covering the three smaller regions of; Thames Gateway North Kent, Thames Gateway London and Thames Gateway South Essex. During the Living Places programme it emerged that the three areas showed marked diversity, not only in terms of governance and partnership structure, but also in terms of topography and geography, creating barriers and challenges that transcend Living Places as a programme. The overall evaluations and consultations have suggested that regional and pan regional approaches to place-based development are not appropriate given the level of variance within these areas. Despite these challenges however, smaller areas such as Canning Town in Thames Gateway London and Southend-on-Sea in South Essex have seen a concentration of investment and activity through Living Places. As a result, this summary will be focussing on the achievements of Canning Town and Southend-on-Sea as well as the Thames Gateway as a whole.

Canning Town is an area of East London within the London Borough of Newham. Newham is an area experiencing considerable growth in population and in 2001 the population was estimated at 243,737. Despite this growth and major developments in the neighbouring Docklands, Canning Town remains in the 5% most deprived areas in the UK. Southend-on-Sea is a smaller, unitary authority area with an estimated...
population of 164,300 (in 2001), and is well known as a tourist destination. Recent declines in tourism levels have led to regeneration strategies aiming to address this.

Impact and Added Value

The key impacts and added value that the Thames Gateway has achieved as a Priority Place include:

**Influencing Policy**

**Thames Gateway London** benefitted from three years of a Cultural Coordinator post which enabled a focus on Living Places priorities and the development of a Cultural Strategy to emerge. This post also allowed Living Places to influence Thames Gateway London local planning frameworks and master planning approaches across the 10 London Boroughs. Being directly involved in the development of such planning and development policy helped to integrate cultural and sporting issues into future plans and promote the priorities of Living Places from the outset of development growth.

In Thames Gateway South Essex, Living Places found it difficult to influence region-wide policy, given the autonomous nature of the local authorities. On the local scale however, there is strong qualitative evidence to suggest that Living Places was able to influence planning and economic development policy in areas such as Southend-on-Sea. This does not mean that cultural agencies have been unsuccessful in engagement, but that some local authorities (such as Southend) have been more eager to engage in specific place shaping discussions than others. As a result, whilst there are local authorities that benefited from cultural agencies investment, advocacy and brokerage, it is not reasonable to attribute this investment and activity to Living Places partnership activity.

In addition to directly influencing policy and strategy development, the added focus on cultural developments in **Southend-on-Sea** led to an increased interest from other cultural agencies, resulting in the MLA for example, commissioning a library content strategy to support library development in the area.

In Canning Town, the **Canning Town and Customs House Cultural Framework** was produced in partnership with Living Places and outlines its overall aim as creating a place where people wish to live and work and promoting participation in local life to help achieve this goal. The work was also designed to add value to existing activity and expand the knowledge of the role that culture can play in the physical transformation of Canning Town. Producing this framework has helped to influence local development plans, taking into account the importance of including cultural and sports developments.

**Developing Evidence**

The **Newham Community Infrastructure Study: Culture and Regeneration (2010)** looks at good practice in culture-led regeneration schemes in order to identify areas of potential future growth. It highlights that the introduction of Living Places led to a coordination of effort in place-shaping and cultural schemes, creating joint policy making and helped along by the Culture and Sport Planning Toolkit.

**Attracting Additional Investment and Support**

Living Places has provided additional funding for a number of projects in the Thames Gateway region. For example, in **Canning Town**, £10,000 was given to support the master planning process, cultural Section 106 provision and to work with regeneration professionals. Living Places also provided additional support and funding for events aiming to get communities involved and used to cultural activity at the sites scheduled for development.
In South Essex, Southend-on-Sea secured additional funding and support for a range of activities from MLA and ACE through its focus on developing cultural assets, actively supported by Living Places Partners. This additional funding supported a joint approach to library and museum provision and this increased interest in the area also led to the development of a modern library, museums, arts and creative facilities. In addition to facilities, support was improved through the provision of substantial officer time (from Living Places Partners), the attraction and development of the second (after Liverpool) Metal development, and Chalkwell Hall (a significant development in terms of culture led place making).

Living Places itself has also gained additional investment and support in the Thames Gateway from the Office of the London Mayor and the Thames Gateway Partnership. The cultural strategy for Thames Gateway London was developed jointly between Living Places and the Mayor’s Office who had a budget of £10,000 to support the development of the area. Through securing this support, Living Places was ideally placed to influence any subsequent policy.

As well as attracting additional support and funding for particular projects, consultations suggested that the ‘added value’ will also lie in the increased ability to attract new inward investment, given that sport and cultural developments will now form part of the attraction and the fact that the concept of ‘Thames Gateway’ will be easier to articulate given this improved identity.

Improving Engagement between Culture & Sport and Planning & Development

The development of the Canning Town and Customs House Cultural Framework involved the networking of the London Borough of Newham’s regeneration team with cultural partnerships both locally and across London. This cross-networking increased the opportunities for ‘quick wins’ (such as the Growing Place16 at Clarkson Road) and improved engagement and discussion regarding the role of cultural facilities in being a core element in the long term regeneration of the area.

The work at Canning Town has included the engagement of a number of social enterprise and third sector groups in utilising ‘meanwhile space’ in the period between site clearance and development for a range of activities and events. This has included work on community allotments, temporary BMX tracks and providing a range of cultural offers. In the short term, the use of meanwhile space has been regarded as a positive use of development space and it has resulted in positive outcomes, not only in bringing together development and cultural partners (such as LB Newham, London Living Places Partnership, Core Arts, University of East London (UEL), Groundwork and a range of community groups), but it has also improved community engagement and participation in cultural developments within Canning Town.

On the wider scale, the involvement of Living Places in the development of the London Plan increased the level of engagement between planning and cultural partners and assisted with the integration of Living Places priorities within the Thames Gateway development.

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1 Metal is an artistic laboratory to champion the need for continual investment in artistic investigation and the development of innovative ideas that could shift the thinking in the UK cultural sector. Metal provides innovative, multi-disciplinary residency space for artists from the UK and overseas in Liverpool and Southend on Sea. www.metalculture.com

2 http://www.meanwhile.org.uk/showcase/growing-place16-canning-town-london
Conditions and Factors that Enabled Impact and Added Value

**Pre existing support and arrangements**

Policy created prior to Living Places is demonstrative of the pre-existing support for cultural and sporting developments within the Thames Gateway regions. Southend-on-Sea, for example, outlined plans for the development of a cultural hub in 2007. Additionally, it can be said that support for cultural and sporting developments in Southend-on Sea pre-dated Living Places as the profile of these sectors in the Borough Council is well established, with culture and sport being priorities in the Sustainable Community Strategy. Indeed, the Council has had Culture and Sport portfolio holder in the cabinet for a considerable period of time, and the Borough Council has a vision for Southend to be the ‘Cultural Capital’ of the east of England (a position reinforced by a recent bid to become the UK City of Culture for 2013). There is a clear ambition to build on the tourism history of the area, and to use leisure and culture to drive regeneration to support increased economic benefits and job creation.

This pre-existing support undoubtedly made it easier for Living Places priorities to be realised in some areas. Given the scale of the Thames Gateway however, this was not the case across the board. In the North Kent Thames Gateway region, the level of pre-existing work and support meant that it was difficult for the programme to demonstrate any additional benefit. As a result, consultations from this area suggested that a number of London Boroughs struggled with the concept of the programme and have engaged better with individual cultural agencies.

**Area Growth and Olympic Profile**

The Thames Gateway pan-regional area is currently experiencing major growth, increased investment and attention due to the fact that the Olympic Games are to be hosted by many of the areas involved. Such increased interest in development in the area has provided opportunity for Living Places to influence this, particularly in relation to the sporting and leisure developments that will be required to both host the Games and the resulting tourist trade.

As well as the facilities required, there is a strong desire from many local authorities to capitalise on this development growth and indeed, the Newham Sustainable Community Strategy aims to maximise the potential for tourism both during and (as a result of improved facilities) after the Games.

**Cultural Co-ordinator**

As mentioned earlier, having the role of a Cultural Coordinator in Thames Gateway London not only assisted with the development of the cultural strategy and London Plan, but it also increased the officer capacity for Living Places in the Thames Gateway, consequently helping to promote discussion and integration of the programme’s priorities into policy.

**Partnership Arrangements**

The pre-existing partnership arrangements assisted with the promotion of Living Places activity and the fact that a Cultural Coordinator was able to work in partnership with the Mayor’s Office on policy development significantly improved the chances of Living Places priorities being taken into account. Furthermore, the tendency for partnerships such as the London Partnership to support places at the masterplanning level, helped with the achievements made in areas such as Canning Town. While Living Places was unable to have an impact on pan-regional partnerships (for the reasons discussed earlier), working with specific local areas and development offices helped in its achievements.
Additionally, the fact that many of these local partnerships already contained a strong focus on culture and sport and had key individuals to help drive this was certainly a supporting factor.

Lessons from Thames Gateway, Southend-on-Sea and Canning Town (for other places)

- Pan regional and regional approaches to place-based development are not appropriate or deliverable due to the variances within such a large scale area.
- Place-based focusing can assist with achievements in development policy and can attract additional investment from other agencies through the specific focus.
- Involving Living Places activity in areas undergoing major growth and investment can ensure improvements in sport and culture are deliverable.
- Maximising on events such as the Olympics can not only help to improve the area for the event itself, but also improve the long term profile and interest in the area.
- Ensuring that key individuals and partnerships are aware of and engaged with culture and sport priorities can help to drive success.
- Involve the public in developments and activities to raise the local profile and support.

The Tables overleaf highlights the range of activity and influence that Thames Gateway has had as a Priority Place in terms of studies and research reports that have been commissioned, and those that have been influenced by Living Places and the Priority Place Partnership. Given the previous focus on culture and sport development (as evidenced by some of the work pre-dating Living Places), it would be difficult to directly attribute this focus to Living Places activity, however, it does demonstrate the extent to which the programmes priorities (i.e. integrating culture and sport) are being taken into account in policy.
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<th>Status</th>
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<th>Produced by partner/Commissioned</th>
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**Source:** DC Research 2011
# Living Places Year 3 Evaluation: Thames Gateway Priority Place Summary

## Table 2: Priority Place Strategies and Plans influenced by Thames Gateway in Canning Town and Southend as a Priority Place (x=some contribution, xx=significant contribution, xxx= critical contribution)

<table>
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**Source:** DC Research 2011