

K.F.A.S. Annual Conference: Rochester, 13 May 1995

"The Thames Gateway" JACK WOOLFORD

The Thames Gateway, former East Thames Corridor, is a long way from Dover, but if its proponents have their way, Dover will be as much affected as North Kent from Dartford to Faversham. The main speaker, Mike Ash, Leader of the DoE Task Force, speaking on "the Future of the Gateway", advocated a partnership of public, private and voluntary sectors to attract sustainable development from West of London into Kent and Essex, especially into areas of industrial decline, without disturbing the balance of economic and social growth with the conservation of wildlife habitats and the built heritage. At Barking Reach, he said, North Kent Success had already produced 500 houses, planned to expand to 5,500. There would be 5,000 new jobs, riverside walkways, tree-planting, underground power lines and improved transport links.

Spokesmen for Blue Circle, described and illustrated their proposals for the Blue Water Park Shopping Centre and the Ebbsfleet International Passenger Station on the Channel Tunnel Rail Link, which included tree planting, lakes and an RSPB reserve for birds, Green Tours, geological footpaths and the clearing of old gunpowder mills and clay workings. Voices from the floor were already protesting at the exclusion of amenity societies from any consultation process.

Robin Thompson, the County Planning Officer, said that Kent was in the centre of the European Union's Central Capital Region, the "Hot Banana", and with the Tunnel, the Rail Link, the Thames Gateway and the new M2/M20, was a key area which might grow more than any other in the country. Though unemployment was now high, the issue in the future might well be "How do we cope with all this growth?". A balancing act was needed between development and the constraints of

considering Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Green Belt and the Revised County Structure Plan

The answer was "sustainability", both economic and social. Growth must be focused on existing towns, and the amount of energy consumed in transport must be reduced. People and jobs, housing and industry must be matched to reduce commuting. Protection of the North Kent Marshes must be enhanced. Power stations and Refuse Transfer Stations were needed but should be placed on derelict land. Public transport, including new, rapid, light versions, must be improved. Voices from the floor again protested at the exclusion of amenity societies from consultation alongside businesses, local authorities and central government. Mr Thompson promised help!

Spokesmen for CPRE (Kent) reminded us of its history and achievements and went on to define "sustainable" development as the use of finite resources in such a way as not to deny their use to those who came after. The following points were raised. Development should be environmentally led, not an afterthought to economic priorities. It seemed that developers preferred green field sites and / mindset of road building to spur development persisted. Bearing recent drought in mind, severe restraint on water resources should be stressed. Derelict land in East London should be redeveloped before Kent. The Outer Orbital Motorway would produce pollution and devastation twenty miles out from the M25. Ebbsfleet should have been located at Stratford.

The Kent Federation and CPRE (Kent) are collaborating in pressing for adequate environmental representation on North Kent Success. The Dover Society will obviously ponder the local implications.