

Thames Estuary Path – Kent Thameside Overview

Kent Thameside is the area of Dartford and Gravesham to the north of the A2, which has been an important corridor for trade and movement between London and Dover for thousands of years. Dartford and Gravesend are historic settlements, but communication between them is limited by steep chalk hills and the industrial areas that grew up along the waterfront. Residential developments are now replacing the riverside factories and wharves where they have closed.

Historically, the river was the most important transport corridor and Gravesend was an important maritime centre. The riverside path has real potential as a sustainable transport corridor for walking, cycling and the new Fastrack bus route³⁷, linking the existing communities and planned new developments along the waterfront.

Supporting policies and strategies

Kent Thameside Green Grid sees the waterfront as an important strategic route in the green grid network¹⁴. Policy RT4 of the Dartford Local Plan supports riverside access and the provision of new footpaths, bridleways and cycleways³⁸. Kent Thameside Walking and Cycling Strategy recognises the importance of the waterfront path from Crayford Ness to Gravesend as part of the local walking and cycling network¹⁵. Green Cluster Studies for the Darent Valley and Ebbsfleet Valley & A2 Corridor both highlight the Thames waterfront as a key part of Greening the Gateway in this area¹⁸.

The Strategic Framework for Kent Thameside's Waterfront³⁹ states that "The River Thames is Kent Thameside's greatest environmental asset. The development of the waterfront presents a one off opportunity to bring about change in Kent Thameside. Even though larger development opportunities exist inland from the Thames, mixed-use development presents a unique opportunity to animate and transform its waterfront and to enhance the image and identity of the historic towns of Dartford and Gravesend. The riverfront should become Kent Thameside's showcase. To achieve this, we need positive plans to rationalise uses, bring people back to their river with the introduction of mixed-use developments, and the creation of a Thames Path as part of the Kent Thameside Green Grid."

Barriers to walking and cycling

There are currently two main routes between Dartford and Gravesend – the A2 and the A226. Both are heavily trafficked and moderately hilly. There is a shared path beside the A2, but it is not attractive for optional leisure trips. A

new path beside the river would not only be useful of utility trips, but would also attract a large number of leisure trips from local residents and visitors.

The new development at The Bridge has provided some exemplary infrastructure for walking, cycling and public transport, where none existed previously. A new bridge over the Dartford Tunnel entrance has overcome the major obstacle of the M25/A282, which splits the local community in Dartford. This carries the excellent Fastrack bus service and a shared footway for walking and cycling. The route continues through the development site and crosses the A206 with a second new bridge. As further sites are developed, Fastrack and the accompanying shared footway will be extended, offering real benefits for new and existing residents.

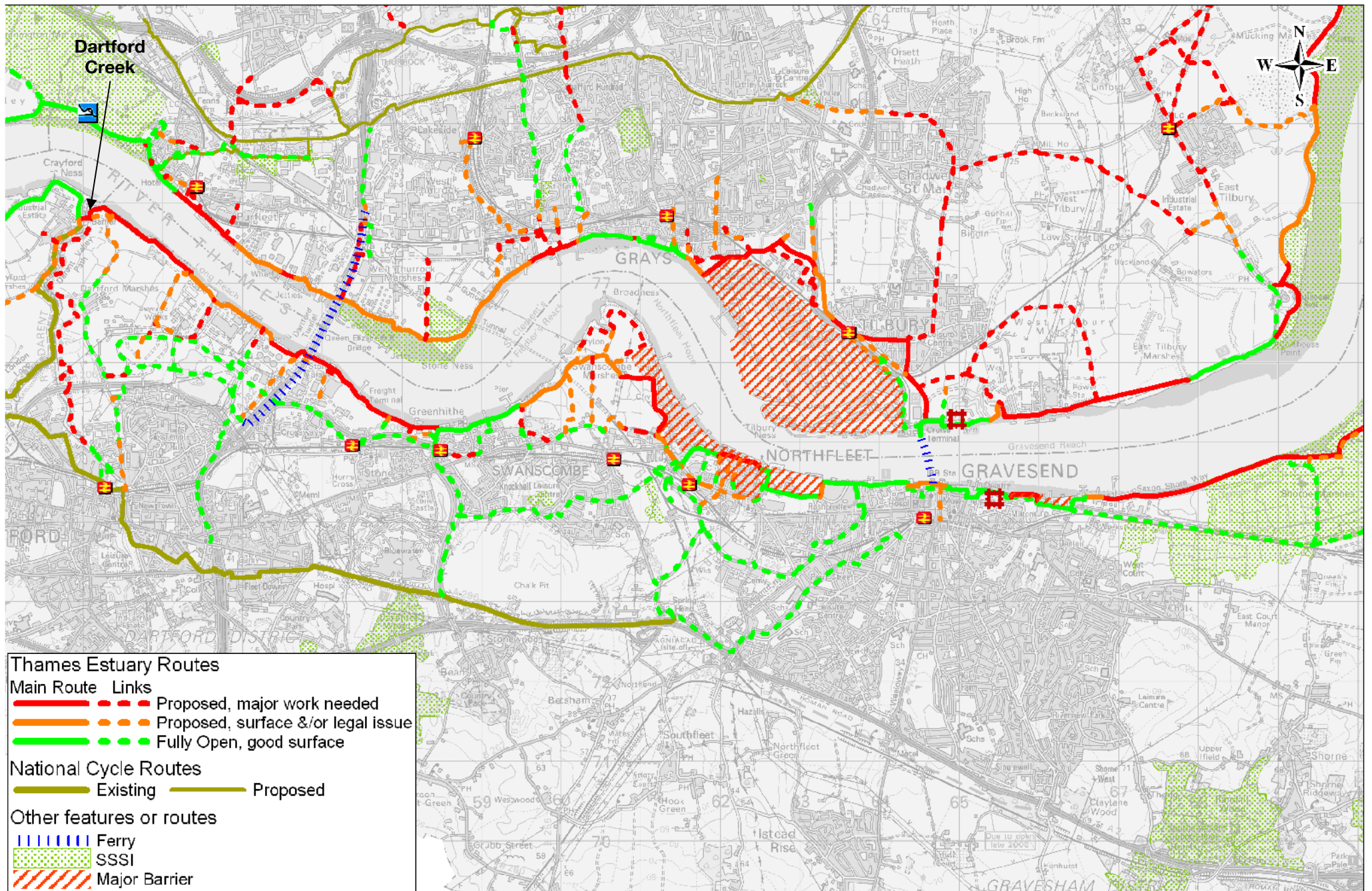
Development sites

Two of the top 10 Thames Gateway housing programmes and one of the top 10 job-generating programmes are located in Kent Thameside¹. There are a number of major developments planned or underway within walking distance of the river, including The Bridge, Ingress Park, Swanscombe Peninsula, Northfleet Embankment and North East Gravesend^{40s}. Eastern Quarry, one of the largest development sites in the whole of the Thames Gateway area, is only a mile from the river. Ebbsfleet International station is a 10 minute walk from the river and will become a major transport hub when domestic services commence in 2009.

Some of these development sites will create new waterfront access where none has existed for many years. Although developers will be expected to create high quality promenades within their sites, they are unlikely to develop existing adjacent sections of the waterfront path. It is likely that public investment will be required, but special arrangements will be needed as existing walking and cycling budgets are insufficient.

National Cycle Network

NCR1 currently runs through the area, but uses only 540 metres of the waterfront. The route passes through Dartford town centre, then alongside the A296 and A2 to Springhead. New shared footways pass Ebbsfleet International and run alongside Thames Way to join the waterfront at Landsdowne Square. The route threads its way through Gravesend tantalisingly close to the river, before leaving the industrial area beside the Thames and Medway Canal to Higham. Sustrans would be delighted to re-align NC1 along the waterfront if the existing paths can be improved.



Thames Estuary Path – Section 42 Dartford Marshes – North Kent

Condition of the waterfront

Between Dartford Creek and Longreach Sewage Works, the flood defences comprise two parallel grassed banks, with public access along the top of the embankments. It would be relatively straightforward to improve the surface for shared use. Current status is public footpath.

At the sewage works a concrete wall provides the flood defence and a rough track runs on the riverside.

This section is easily accessible from surrounding residential areas in Dartford and the new mixed development at “The Bridge”, also known as Dartford Park⁴¹. Dartford Marshes are an important green space for people and wildlife and the riverside paths have enormous potential as a ‘green lung’ for local people, as well as forming part of a long distance route for both utility and recreational trips.



Looking east to QEII Bridge

Barriers to development

Dartford Creek forms the boundary between Greater London and Kent. It is also a major barrier to the Thames Estuary Path as a significant inland diversion is needed to cross the creek. A new bridge at this location would open up many miles of the riverside path and connect the communities at Erith, Dartford and Greenhithe.

The Dartford Creek Barrier is operated by the Environment Agency and is a key structure in the flood defences for Dartford and Crayford. A new bridge could be a free-standing structure adjacent to or fixed onto the flood barrier.

LB Bexley has commissioned feasibility work and discussions are underway with the Environment Agency. Budget costs are estimated at £1.2–£1.7 million, depending on the type of structure.



Dartford Creek Barrier

Links and Access

L1 The flood defences beside Dartford Creek provide an attractive traffic-free route into Dartford Town Centre and the railway station.

L2 Joyce Green Lane provides vehicle access to the flood barrier and the shooting range. A link to The Bridge development site could be created across land owned by Dartford Borough Council.

L3 The former Joyce Green Tramway will link the proposed District Centre of The Bridge development directly with the waterfront. Although it is not currently a public right of way, we recommend that this is developed as the primary route between Dartford Town Centre, The Bridge and the waterfront. The old cobbles of the tramway have been restored in places, although much is covered with a layer of tarmac.

L4 Marsh Street is an historic riverside access track, but it is now sandwiched between the power station and sewage works. Steps over the sea wall restrict access to the waterfront. It does have public bridleway status, but it is not an attractive route.

Key Recommendations

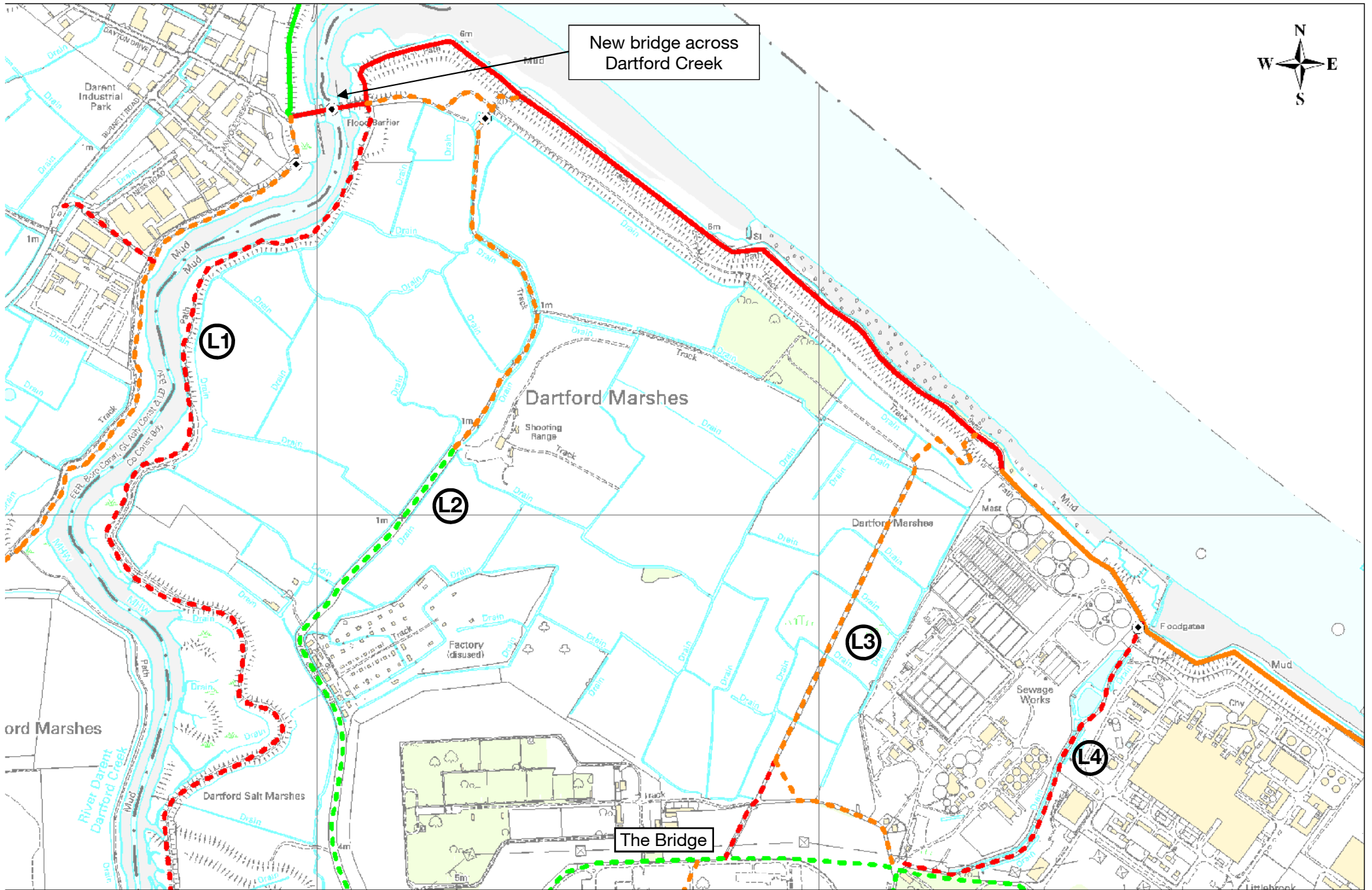
1. Provision of a new bridge at the Dartford Creek Barrier.
2. Surfacing of 2560 metres of riverside path along flood defence embankments for shared use.



Artist impression of improvements



Littlebrook Power Station



New bridge across Dartford Creek



L1

L2

L3

L4

The Bridge



Thames Estuary Path
Map 42 Dartford Marshes

Scale 1:10,000. 0 200m

Key

- Barrier
- Fully Open, Good Surface
- Proposed, Surface/Legal Issue
- Proposed, Major Work Needed
- Link or Option

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Thames Estuary Path – Section 43 Littlebrook and Crossways – North Kent

Condition of the waterfront

This section passes the industrial sites of Littlebrook Power Station and Crossways Business Park. The riverside path passes under the major landmark of the QEII Bridge. The flood defences vary from grassed banks to wide concrete tracks, with public access throughout. In some places, no improvements are needed and elsewhere it would be easy to improve the surface for shared use. Current status is public footpath.

This section is easily accessible from surrounding residential areas in Dartford and the new mixed development at “The Bridge”. If a link can be created through the Littlebrook site, this would increase the value of the path for local people.



Littlebrook Power Station



Access control above Dartford Tunnel

Barriers to development

B1 The only significant barriers are the substantial access controls and reduced path width above the Dartford Tunnel and under the QEII Bridge. The path is as little as 1.8m wide in places. There is scope to move the existing palisade fencing back over a short distance to accommodate a wider path.

Modification to the access controls will need to be discussed with the relevant authorities to allow easier access for disabled people and bicycles.

There is a minor issue at the jetty adjacent to the power station, where there are level changes that should be modified.

Links and Access

L1 The first stage of redevelopment of Littlebrook Business Park includes new shared paths, linking with the emerging network through “The Bridge” development. As the site is further developed, it is hoped that a new link to the waterfront can be created.

L2 There is a tarmac access road very close to the waterfront, but there is no current public access. If access can be negotiated, a link to the new “Fastrack” bridge over the Dartford Tunnel portal will be useful.

L3 There is an existing track linking Crossways with the waterfront. Minor surfacing works would be needed to bring this up to a reasonable standard. The access barrier at the south end could be improved.



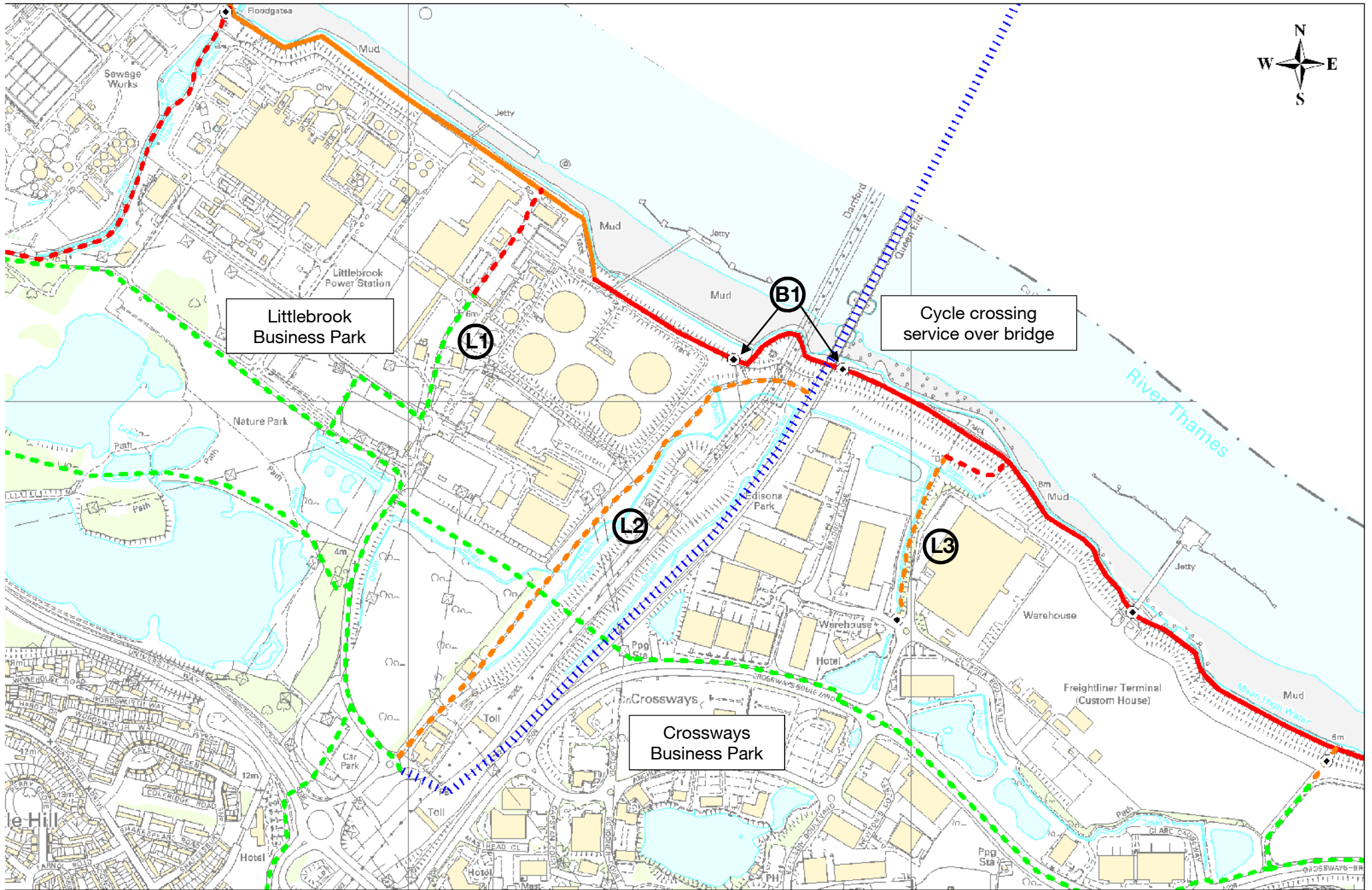
Crossways link

Key Recommendations

1. Surfacing of 1390 metres of riverside path along flood defences for shared use.
2. Modification to access controls under the QEII Bridge (B1).
3. Moving fence line back by at least 1 metre over 120 metres above Dartford Tunnel.



Jetty adjacent to power station



Littlebrook Business Park

Cycle crossing service over bridge

Crossways Business Park

Scale 1:10,000. 0 200m

Key

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Thames Estuary Path
Map 43 Littlebrook and Crossways

Thames Estuary Path – Section 44 Greenhithe – North Kent

Condition of the waterfront

Between the QEII Bridge and Johnson's Wharf, the flood defences again comprise two parallel grassed banks around 4 metres wide, with a public footpath along the top of the embankments. It would be relatively straightforward to improve the surface for shared use.

The industrial site at Johnson's Wharf is occupied by Lafarge Aggregates and there is no public access. The adjacent site is being developed for housing and new public access to the waterfront will be provided (DBC planning reference 05/00573/FUL).

Most of the Greenhithe waterfront is physically accessible, but it is in private ownership and there is no continuous access. Much of the housing here is relatively recent, but the local authorities have failed to ensure the necessary access.

Ingress Park is an exemplary development, with an excellent promenade on two levels, the upper level comprising a good quality tarmac path 3 metres wide.

This section is easily accessible from surrounding residential areas in Stone and Greenhithe and from the commercial area at Crossways Business Park. There is good potential for local utility trips as well as leisure and longer distance recreational trips.

Barriers to development

The Lafarge works are a major barrier, but there is a satisfactory diversion on an existing footpath between the superstore and this site. Greenhithe High Street is a reasonable alternative to the waterfront, particularly as it contains a number of fine historic buildings.

Waterfront access should be provided wherever possible. A case in point is the Neptune Slipway site, which is currently subject to a planning application for residential development (DBC planning reference 08/01136/FUL). The developers propose a new public riverside walk, but only 1.5 metres wide with steps. This is wholly inadequate if the ambition is to create a high quality riverside path.



Freightliner jetty access

B1 At the Freightliner terminal, the path runs underneath the jetty access road, but headroom is restricted at 1.95 metres. Excavation is needed to

improve access and the removal of an unnecessary barrier on the east side.

B2 The access to Ingress Park is very difficult for bicycles and mobility vehicles and should be modified.

Links and Access

L1 An industrial road links Crossways Boulevard (and Stone Crossing station) with the riverside, but access is by steps across the flood defences. Substantial earthworks would be needed to provide easy access.

L2 Greenhithe station is easily accessible from the river on existing shared paths.

L3 There are a number of access points to the waterfront through the Ingress Park development. Everards Link, a brand new Fastrack bus route through to the station, is under construction.



View east to Greenhithe

Key Recommendations

1. Surfacing of 960 metres of riverside path along flood defence embankments for shared use.
2. Increase headroom and remove barrier at Freightliner jetty access (B1).
3. Improvements to footpath beside Superstore as an interim route.
4. Detailed feasibility work into the options for public access to the waterfront at Greenhithe.
5. Modifications to the access barrier at Ingress Park (B2).



Waterfront west of Greenhithe