





# Top commuter hotspots from Hertfordshire to Kent: where to find good-value family homes and train journeys of less than 35 minutes to London

A new study reveals where to buy if you want to quit London, get more house for your money and not spend all day commuting...

## 2. EBBSFLEET, KENT

Homes close to Ebbsfleet International station offer top value for money, at an average of £218,741, with an average detached home costing just over £300,000. An annual season ticket for the 18-minute journey to central London costs £4,428.

The thought of living by a major station might not immediately appeal – but within a mile of Ebbsfleet your other options include Gravesend, Northfleet, and Swanscombe.

## 3. SWANSCOMBE, KENT

Chris Ralph, negotiator with Robinson Jackson estate agents in Swanscombe, says buyers like the town because of its period housing, good schools and great transport links. Swanscombe is roughly between Dartford and Gravesend, with Bluewater Shopping Centre on the doorstep, and one of its two-up two-down Victorian cottages would cost about £250,000. A three-bedroom semi would cost up to £275,000.

# Sustainable drainage systems and parks shaping garden city

Green infrastructure pivotal in masterplan for Ebbsfleet



EBBSFLEET DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

**Ebbsfleet: first new garden city in a century is still at the masterplanning stage with many details to be ironed out**

**By Sarah Cosgrove**

still a lot of flexibility in terms of how well it will be

planning authorities and developers. “The main thing is delivering infrastructure, so it’s about asking how you could use this as a way of gluing it together via landscape. It’s important to get the right balance of city and open space. We need strong edges — clear edges — but when you’re in the green spaces they can be incredibly wild.”

New green spaces in the masterplan include a former landfill site next to Ebbsfleet station that will provide views down to the river. Smith called it the Primrose Hill of Ebbsfleet. Having a statement park right next to the station “sends a big message”, he added. “In each park we’d have slightly different character, some more urban and others more focused on ecology and wetlands.”

There is “a huge emphasis on play and on sport”, said Smith, with cycle and walking routes among the ideas. Some will be more familiar to those used to existing urban parks but there could also be 20km cycling loops for those keen to get some serious exercise. Smith is also keen to promote the temporary use of existing areas, as has proved so successful in King’s Cross.

Another way for Ebbsfleet to be a proper garden city rather than a sprawling suburb is an emphasis on a particular style of urban planning. Rather than give the illusion of countryside by creating lots of sprawling curvaceous drives and cul-de-sacs lined with low-density but ultimately fairly isolated housing, the Ebbsfleet dream is to offer high-density housing but with more green space closer to more people than is the case in London.



By Sarah Cosgrove

The nature of the landscape where the Ebbsfleet garden city is taking shape is supporting the ambition for it to be threaded with green infrastructure and based on a network of sophisticated sustainable drainage systems (SuDS), with a park within five minutes' walk of every home.

The first new garden city in a century, Ebbsfleet is still at the masterplanning stage with many of the details to be ironed out. Several rounds of negotiations with landowners, developers and planning authorities still remain, but the design outlined in the recently revealed masterplan is knitted around seven new major city parks, including a "Primrose Hill for Ebbsfleet" next to the Ebbsfleet International rail station and based on the "green grid" already planned by Kent County Council that aims to link green spaces across northern parts of Dartford and Gravesham.

Some 15,000 homes will be built and there will be a major upgrade to the Fastrack bus system, enabling 90 per cent of garden city residents to live within five minutes of a bus stop. A series of public realm spaces will be opened up along the River Ebbsfleet, allowing public access along the Thames, while the masterplan shows new pedestrian bridges, walkways and cycle paths connecting Swanscombe, Northfleet and Greenhithe with the rest of the garden city.

The land cannot hope to have the required sewerage capacity relying on traditional methods, said the landscape architect who is part of the AECOM-led consortium of experts that collaborated on the masterplan, Spacehub director and landscape architect Tom Smith. "SuDS are an incredibly important part of delivering that," he said. "There's

still a lot of flexibility in terms of how well it will be delivered. A lot of work that had been done was very good." This includes a water drainage system and the identification of areas of ecological value.

Ebbsfleet Development Corporation lead designer Simon Harrison added: "We're part of the Achieving Urban Flood Resilience in an Uncertain Future research project being led by the universities of Cambridge, Nottingham and Newcastle, and are currently investigating opportunities for maximising SuDS.

"We have a huge lack of capacity in the sewage network so it really does matter. It's really going to pay for itself and it's a really important aspect. The aspiration is to have SuDS everywhere." Green roofs and green walls are also goals, he added.

Among the ideas on the table is funnelling surface water down to the site's man-made lakes to recharge them, and diverting water from the sewerage system. "It's ambitious but this is what we should have in the future," said Smith. "This is one of the ideas that are possible."

He said the site has a particularly unusual landscape, with gorges cut to create the quarries and cement works and two large lakes created. When the Blue Lake quarry was dug workers hit a spring and it filled up with water. Elsewhere, the human landscaping has been overlaid with years of natural growth. "It's important to try and keep some of the qualities of that landscape. Wouldn't it be fantastic if you could have a woodland, cliffs, gorges, lakes — there's even a tunnel."

His job was to work with that now naturalised landscape, the infrastructure and housing ambitions and to tie together existing plans and ambitions to produce a vision that could be sold to

closer to more people than is the case in London.

"It's a case of how can landscape deliver real connectivity and lure people out of their homes," said Smith. "We want to have a green grid, pushing cycle infrastructure from the mews street to the main road. The grid will be integrated with buildings. It's looking at the bigger picture."

Harrison is now working on the delicate job of incorporating feedback into the final designs, which are likely to be put before the development corporation in the new year after the masterplan went out to consultation with the community at five open days in October attended by 500 people.

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## Limits of funding models spelt out at parks inquiry

There is "no silver bullet" to the parks funding crisis, despite optimism in the work going on to develop trusts and other innovative funding models, MPs heard at the parks inquiry's third evidence session on 21 November.

Representing the Core Cities Group, Nottingham City Council head of parks and open spaces Eddie Curry and Nesta senior programme manager Lynda Ragoonanan, who led the Rethinking Parks project, both told MPs that alternatives have their part to play but could not be relied on to completely replace public funding.

Curry, whose own service is due to become self-funding by 2020, said there are many examples of innovation prompted by parks cuts but the

Paul Spooner and EDC staff held their monthly developers meeting and were given updates on starts on site and completions. Developers were also given an update on the new Information Centre and signage project

Paul Spooner attended a meeting of Northfleet Rotary Club after it changed its name to Northfleet with Ebbsfleet Garden City Rotary Club.

EDC were invited on a tour of Gravesend Sikh Temple and met community leaders

Paul Boughen attended a meeting of the Swanscombe and Greenhithe Residents Association AGM and updated them on our progress to date.

Paul Boughen attended a meeting of the Thames Estuary Partnership conference on the topic of sustainable development on the Thames.

Simon Harrison gave a tour the Garden City to academics from the University of Cambridge who are studying sustainable urban drainage systems and discussed the possibility of EDC joining a learning and action alliance on the issue.