

## Case Study - Bluewater



Dartford is home to Bluewater, Europe's largest and most innovative shopping and leisure centre.

Around 27 million people a year visit Bluewater which opened in 1999 following a major development programme to turn the former chalk quarry into an international attraction.

The architecture is unusual for a shopping centre, being heavily influenced by English Culture Folklore and the Kentish environment. For instance fresh air is brought into the malls through rotating aluminium vents on the roof - a unique design based on traditional Kent oasthouse roofs.

A local training scheme was introduced for the hundreds of jobs created during the construction phase and many of the hundreds of retail jobs have been taken up by local people. The Centre has won many awards including Retail Destination of the Year 2003 and Best Venue for Groups 2003.

Around 15% of land in the Borough has traditionally been quarried, for sand, gravel or chalk. The quarries were generally within the urban area, adjacent to existing residential communities.

By the 1980s most of the redundant chalk quarries had been or were still being filled with household waste and the future of the Western Quarry, a 100 hectare site about 50 metres deep, came up for consideration.

There were a number of possible uses, including filling the quarry with household waste, but this would not only have taken decades but also meant refuse vehicles continuing to pass through urban areas as well as the risk of methane gas migration.

When an application for a regional shopping centre was submitted in 1986 it proved an ideal opportunity to change the character of the area. Dartford Borough Council supported the proposal because it could see that such a major development would:

- provide a tremendous boost to the economy of North West Kent both in terms of job creation and in harnessing spending power within the Borough
- would help uplift the whole image of the Dartford area through having a positive impact on people's perception of the area, including improving investment prospects
- provide an imaginative solution to the restoration and after-use of the quarry

Bluewater, with its high quality award winning design has proved to be a flagship for development in the Borough, enabling the Council to successfully pursue a policy of seeking

much higher quality design in new development. This can be seen in the award-winning development at Ingress Park, close to Bluewater.

Eventually Bluewater will form an integral part of the expanded Kent Thameside urban community and will be surrounded on three sides by mostly residential communities. It will be linked by the Fastrack public transport system with Dartford and Gravesend town centres and the Channel Tunnel Rail Link international and domestic passenger station at Ebbsfleet.

Bluewater was proposed and agreed in the pre Rio Earth Summit era, when sustainability was not an issue. However the Council was successful, through the development control process, in persuading the applicant to increase the size of the bus station. Such was the demand from bus companies that the bus station operated at capacity from day one. Waste generation targets were also agreed.

Situated in a unique location amid 50 metre cliffs, Bluewater is surrounded by lakes, parkland and trees and is home to a wide range of wildlife including kingfishers, swans, cygnets, moorhens, mallards and perch. More than 1 million trees and shrubs have been planted to enhance the landscape which forms an essential part of the Borough's Green Grid.

The developer established a forum with local community groups during the construction phase of which the Council was a willing participant. The forum still exists to promote dialogue between Bluewater and local people on issues of concern and to take on board suggestions from the community to enhance the environment and operation of the centre.