

Locally Significant Views within the London Borough of Bexley technical paper

Purpose of the Locally Significant Views document

This document establishes Locally Significant Views within the London Borough of Bexley. Locally Significant Views are those which are identified as being of local importance, and their designation through the emerging Local Plan enables the Council to manage development within these locations through planning policy. The Locally Significant Views which have been identified are based on people's sensory experience of the built and/or natural environment within the borough, when taken from a particular point, or a series of points towards a focal point. The focal point may be a particular building e.g. Hall Place, an open space, or a celebrated local vista.

The Locally Significant Views document will be used to inform decisions on development proposals within the borough and has informed related policies in the emerging Local Plan.

Introduction

The London Borough of Bexley is home to hundreds of spectacular buildings, urban spaces, and natural landscapes - all of which can serve as the focal points of a view. As a borough which is of high ecological and heritage value, views from both within and surrounding the borough play an important role in the appreciation and experience of our landscape, and its character.

In terms of the planning system and forthcoming development, it is important to consider views as part of the design process where these are established to possess either architectural, townscape, landscape, or environmental quality (or a combination of these). The quality of a view may arise from the interrelationship between component buildings of a cluster when viewed from a certain angle, or the contrast between different geometries and appearances at the junction of a number of streets. The unexpected glimpse of a river valley which may reveal itself as one moves over the crest of a hill, or an oblique view towards the River Thames all contribute to the special character of the landscape within the London Borough of Bexley.

Views themselves are not simply points which are drawn on a map, or that of the spaces measured between them. Rather, views are the visual representations which form part of our sensory experience of our environment and place. Views are the culmination of the interrelationship between the various components of a view, such as the way that the foreground and background can frame a focal point. Views can be complex, allowing the viewer to focus on individual areas whilst remaining aware of a wider overall context.

Planning Context

Policy HC3 (Strategic and Local Views) of the London Plan places the requirement on the London Boroughs to clearly identify local views within their Local Plans and Strategies. Boroughs are advised - as part of policy HC3 - to use the principles of the following Policy HC4 (London View

Management Framework) when designating and managing local views. The London Plan advises that by clearly identifying local views in this manner, boroughs are able to effectively manage development both in and surrounding these views.

This document has therefore been prepared to form part of the Council's evidence base for the development management policies which are to be included within the Council's emerging Local Plan.

What is a View?

Views specifically are the level of visibility from any given point to another, as the most basic description. However, views account for far more than that and relate to our experience and sense of place. Views can often describe the familiar, the comforting or the nostalgic. Views may also be static or dynamic. Where views possess architectural, townscape, landscape, or environmental quality, they are one of the most important ways in which design is consumed.

A view itself is comprised of the viewpoint, the foreground, the focal point, and the background. The components of the viewpoint exist only in relation to one another and as part of the 'view'.

The viewpoint is the location from which the view is taken. Every location in space is a viewpoint, because views exist all around. For the purposes of this document (in the context of Locally Significant Views) however, viewpoints are often selected because they offer a vantage not found by other locations. In this sense, viewpoints are often outputs of the other elements of a view; they represent the location from which the other elements are best seen. A viewpoint could be identified because it is the spot from which a focal point is most visible, or from which the foreground best synchronises with the background.

The foreground is the area which exists between the viewpoint and the focal point which is visible from the viewpoint.

Although some views are so breath-taking that people stop specially to take them in, the vast majority of all the views are dynamic. Views are usually not taken in from a viewing platform, but rather they are experienced as one moves through the built space, such as a curving street which continually unfolds as the viewer walks down it or a skyline in which building forms weave and flow in and out of one another as the viewer rides past on a train.

What are Locally Significant Views?

Like many local authorities, the London Borough of Bexley contains a vast number of noteworthy buildings and spaces (and each of these in turn could be viewed from any number of viewing points). However, it is only a limited number of these views which are considered to be of the most significant and are therefore designated under local policy as Locally Significant Views.

Locally Significant Views are those which highlight some of the most important aspects of the borough's built and natural environment. The identified Locally Significant Views offer a solid view of a landmark (and the area from which a landmark is framed) by an appropriate background and foreground/middle ground. The views identified are considered to possess sufficient architectural, townscape, landscape, or environmental quality which is of local importance.

As discussed, the London Plan requires that Council's, through their development plans, identify locally significant views and to set out what it is about these views that are significant.

This document identifies ten views which represent the best experience of viewing landmarks both within and outside the borough (in terms of the framing of the landmarks by the foreground, middle ground, and background and the overall composition of the view). These views are designated as Locally Significant Views in the Draft Local Plan and are protected by both local and strategic planning policies which prevents inappropriate development within their locations.

Development proposals which are located within the identified Locally Significant Views will be resisted where it is considered that a development would have an adverse impact upon either the aesthetic or character of a view. Where a viewpoint is located within the site of a proposed development, inclusive public access must be maintained to the viewing location and the user experience of the view enhanced.

The identified Locally Significant Views are classified in three types. There are shorter-range views of the urban townscape which are known as 'Townscape Views'. Longer-range views and panoramas which are located across substantial parts of the borough, or those which are focussed on a landmark located outside the borough boundary, are classified as 'Regional Views'. Finally, long sweeping views which take in a variety of landscapes are identified as 'Landscape and Panoramic Views'. Each type of view has a set of characteristics which are considered to contribute to the appreciation and experience of the borough at strategic level.

The long-range views are not intended as tightly defined sightlines, but rather broad panoramas which take in sweeping visibility over large swathes of land or buildings from the viewpoint. The focal point is significant but might be highly distant and serves to attract the eye in the general direction thereby encouraging viewers to take in the broader scene across the panorama. The scene itself is also unlikely to be highly detailed, but rather the foreground, middle ground, and background is formed by the basic shapes of buildings and the landscape and how those ebb and flow across various topographies. In this sense the long-range views provide for a regional context and help to position Bexley within the wider locality. There are two types of long-range views: the Bexley Views which refer to those where the landmark is located within the borough,

and the Regional Views are those where a landmark is located outside of the borough. By contrast, the townscape views are of shorter-range, and appear more tightly defined and intimate. Instead of the sweeping panoramas of long-range views, the townscape views follow a relatively narrow viewing corridor such as along a street where buildings on either side create a sense of urban enclosure that steers the view. These views include the sort of compositions found in welcoming street scenes or attractive cluster of buildings, and at a range where elements such as architectural detailing are likely to be visible. Townscape views take in the borough's urban landscape, usually some sort of local landmark like a church or a public house as framed by the local streetscape. Finally, landscape views can be short or mid-range, where the focus is on the natural landscape or an important feature within that landscape.

The ten identified Locally Significant Views within the London Borough of Bexley are:

Townscape Views

Crossness Pumping Station, Belvedere from Binsey Walk, Abbey Wood
Carrack House/Bosworth House, Erith from Bexley Road, Erith
Hall Place, Bexley from North Park
Spire of St John the Evangelist, Bexley from Bexley High Street
St Paulinus Church, Crayford from Crayford High Street

Regional Views

Canary Wharf, London from Lesnes Abbey (viewing platform in Lesnes Abbey Woods), Abbey Wood
Canary Wharf, London from Ruskin Road, Belvedere
Shooters Hill Water Tower, Shooters Hill from The Broadway, Bexleyheath

Landscape and Panoramic Views

Thames River Valley Panorama from Ruskin Road, Belvedere
Crayford Marshes towards Queen Elizabeth II Bridge from London Loop Path, Crayford Ness

This document describes each of these views including the features that contribute to their significance.

Identification of Locally Significant Views: Methodology

The Locally Significant Views were identified through a robust process which established the best view of a series of key landmarks and vistas in terms of visibility of the focal point, the context presented by the foreground/middle ground and middle ground, and the framing created by the background. Landmarks were selected to represent locations from across the borough and a variety of types. Landmarks include heritage assets, buildings or landscape features widely recognised by local people, or buildings or structures of other significance.

VU.CITY modelling were appointed by the London Borough of Bexley to thoroughly map every location from which the identified landmarks were visible, using a method termed as 'Identifying zones of theoretical visibility'. The mapping relied upon a proprietary accurate 3D model of the area of analysis as required, including building volumes, terrain topography, and trees (the model used for analysis by VU.CITY has a 15cm accuracy tolerance).

Within the 3D model, the landmarks were selected and then used as emitters to throw "light" (raycasts) over the surrounding scene. When this "light" (raycasts) reaches a viewing plane 1.6m off the ground (which represents the average human standing viewing plane) it was assumed the target building would be visible from that location. The mapping exercise also differentiated the degree of the landmark visible from any given location, which allowed for the elimination of locations where there may have been poor visibility or locations where key features of the landmark were not visible.

The process of identifying the zones of theoretical visibility produced maps for each landmark. The maps identified the locations from which different elements of the landmarks are assumed visible. The locations were interrogated further with advanced mapping systems and site visits.

Various combinations of angles and distances created unique views of the focal point. As a result, the built and natural features which happened to emerge from within each of these views was assessed with regard to their own historical, architectural, or natural significance in addition to their spatial relationship with one another and to the focal point. The particular view which happened to include the most significant features, and that which presented them in an aesthetically pleasing way in terms of the composition of the view, was selected as the Locally Significant View (the protected view).

Assessing the impact of a development on a Locally Significant View

Locally Significant Views are protected by both the London Plan and Draft Local Plan policies.

In determining a planning application which may impact upon an identified Locally Significant View, the primary consideration in the assessment of the impact of a development proposal will be whether a proposal would either enhance or harm the established features of an identified view which contribute to its significance, or to the composition of the view as a whole.

The initial test will be whether a development proposal is visible within the view. If so, then consideration needs to be given to the impact of the proposal on the focalpoint, the foreground and middle ground, the background of the view, and lastly, to the composition of the view as a whole.

Proposals for development proposals would be considered to enhance a landmark if they would increase the visibility of the landmark. However, where this involves the redevelopment of a site in the foreground which helps to frame the landmark, the increased visibility must be assessed in

terms of balance against the loss to the overall composition of a view.

Where development proposals relate to the replacement of a building/s, these should result in a form of development which would frame a landmark in a similar or improved way. Development proposals which enhance a view and are sensitively designed to positively respond to the established character of the foreground will be viewed more favourably.

It may also be the case that development proposals may enhance views either by opening up new views or increasing the visibility of established landmarks. Such proposals would be viewed favourably.

Development proposals would be considered to harm a Locally Significant View where they are considered to substantially reduce the visibility of a landmark. Similarly, a development proposal would be considered to harm a view if the development would block views of significant features within the landmark itself. For example, if a landmark is a listed building which derives its significance in part from its chimney, a proposal which blocks views of that chimney would be considered to harm that view.

A proposal may also result in harm to a view if it is located within the foreground of a view and the development would appear overly intrusive, unsightly, or prominent. An assessment of impact should have regard to the character that makes up the foreground, particularly with regards to the overall context of the view.

Development proposals which are located in the background of a protected Locally Significant View should give context to any landmarks and not harm the composition of a view as a whole. The introduction of a new feature into the background would not necessarily cause harm, depending on the existing context. This balance should be addressed as part of a submission.

Detailed guidance on development directly located within or affecting Locally Significant Views (including submission requirements) will be set out within the Council's forthcoming Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).

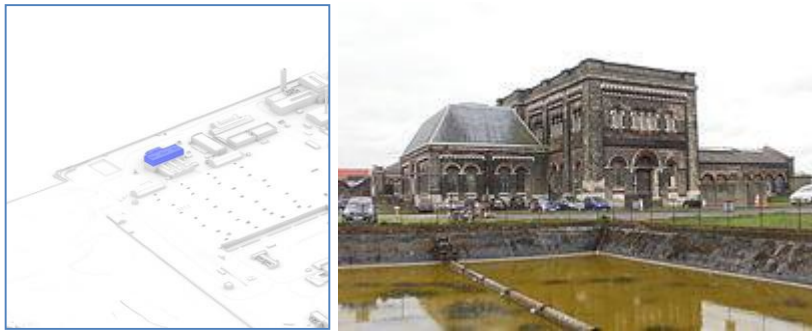
Townscape views

This section describes the following views:

Crossness Pumping Station, Belvedere from Binsey Walk, Abbey Wood
Carrack House/Bosworth House, Erith from Bexley Road, Erith
Hall Place, Bexley from North Park
St John the Evangelist, Bexley from Bexley High St, Bexley
St Paulinus Church, Crayford from Crayford High Street

The townscape, regional and landscape views are included on the Council's Submission Policies Map - these can be selected under the tab for 'Local Strategic Views'. The views are mapped from each identified the Viewing Point to the Focal Point, with the foreground and background of each view established. The Submission Policies Map can be accessed on the Council's Regulation 22 webpage.

Crossness Pumping Station, Belvedere



Focal Point	Viewing Point
Beam Engine House, Crossness Pumping Station	Binsey Walk, Abbey Wood

This view takes in the Grade I listed Beam Engine House - which is considered one of the most important pieces of industrial heritage within London - rising in the distance beyond Southmere Lake. The individually Grade II listed workshop ranges flank the Beam Engine House to the south-east and south-west respectively.

The foreground takes in a sweeping view across Southmere Lake, one of the primary water features in Thamesmead which is set within open parkland and lined with mature and young trees. The iconic tower blocks of Thamesmead stand along the waterfront to the right, and to the immediate left is a development site which is slated for new tower blocks which are proposed as part of Peabody's comprehensive regeneration programme. Straight ahead, the eye is drawn to the Lakeside Centre arts facility. The foreground offers a microcosm of South Thamesmead, one of the many water features that dominate this former marshland. The concrete tower blocks of Thamesmead have become synonymous with this part of the borough, and the new residential development that is taking place across the area.

Poking up behind the Lakeside Centre stands the Beam Engine House. The Grade I listed building is the centrepiece of the Crossness facility, which is also located within a designated Conservation Area.

Positive features that contribute to the view's significance:

- The iconic Southmere lake
- The Grade I listed Crossness Pumping Station (Beam Engine House) and adjacent Grade II listed workshop ranges to the south-east and south-west

Carrack House and Bosworth House, Erith



Focal Point	Viewing Point
Upper third of Carrack and Bosworth Houses, Erith	Bexley Road from near Lesney Park Road, Erith

This view focusses on Carrack House and Bosworth House - two tower blocks that have become landmark buildings within Erith town centre. Both completed in 1971 as part of the regeneration scheme that saw the largely Victorian town partly replaced with modernist structures, the 14-storey Bosworth House stands one floor taller than Carrack House.

The foreground consists of Bexley Road as it winds its way on the descent from the residential hinterland into Erith town centre. The steep drop in topography to the north creates a sense of openness which is visually unbroken across the River Thames. The two tower blocks stand starkly against the expansive sky, highlighting both their wayfinding role and their significance as iconic buildings within Erith. The background consists of the open sky beyond.

Positive features that contribute to the views significance:

- The winding descent of Bexley Road
- The cluster of buildings which comprise Erith town centre
- The open sky to the north/north-east

Hall Place, Bexley



Focal Point	Viewing Point
Hall Place House	The top of the hill at North Park

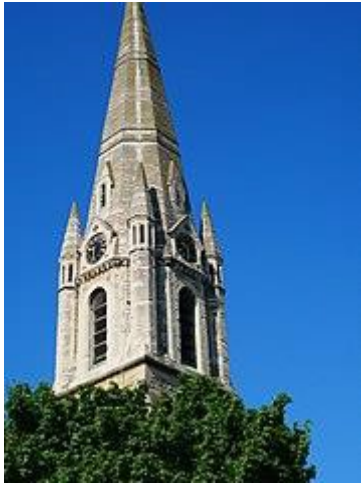
This view focuses on Hall Place House, which is both Grade I listed and a Scheduled Ancient Monument situated within a Grade II listed Registered Historic Park and Garden. The house was built in two parts: firstly in 1537 for the former Lord Mayor of London Sir John Champneys, and later extended in 1649 by merchant Sir Robert Austen, lending it a distinct appearance in two styles.

This view takes in the northern elevation of the house as seen from the steep hill that rises to its north. The foreground consists of the open green space of North Park, originally part of the grounds. The view then follows the avenue of trees that once marked the entrance to the Hall Place. The background consists of the lush green landscape of the Cray River Valley.

Positive features that contribute to the view's significance:

- The steep hilltop viewpoint that provides sweeping viewpoints over the river valley
- The avenue of Trees that draw the eye towards the House
- The Grade I listed and Scheduled Ancient Monument of Hall Place
- The background landscape of the Cray River Valley

St John the Evangelist Church, Bexley



Focal Point	Viewing Point
Spire of St John the Evangelist Church	Bexley High Street (taken from the northern pavement outside no. 43 High Street)

The view takes in the mild winding of the historic Bexley High Street before culminating in the striking spire of the Grade II listed St John the Evangelist Church. The tall and slender spire - made of Bath Stone and standing 47m in height (49m including the weathervane) - has been a prominent feature within the local skyline since 1882 and can be viewed from miles around.

The foreground consists of the urban enclosure provided by the strong building line that defines Bexley High Street. The view is tightly guided by the historic buildings that line Bexley High Street, until it opens up to make way for a number of mature trees and the church spire.

Positive features that contribute to the view's significance:

- The Old Bexley Conservation Area
- The sense of urban enclosure created by the historic buildings and built form of Bexley High Street
- The mature trees within Golden Acre Park, which echo the nearby Metropolitan Green Belt
- The Grade II listed St John the Evangelist Church

St Paulinus Church, Crayford



Focal Point	Viewing Point
Stone tower of St Paulinus Church, Crayford	Crayford High Street near the junction with London Road

The views takes in the curvilinear high street as it gently rises and curves away from the River Cray, culminating in the historic church that sits at the pinnacle of the hill over the town.

St Paulinus is a Grade II* listed church originating from 1100AD. The tower itself was built in 1406 with angle buttresses, perpendicular tracery in openings and embattled parapet.

The foreground consists of the rising Crayford High Street, which here has a compact urban appearance framed on both sides by two-storey parades of shops from a variety of periods. Although the quality of appearance varies, the built form is pleasing and has a strong sense of rhythm. The street takes a gentle ascent up the hill and winds slightly to the east and then back to the west, disappearing from view behind a terrace of early Victorian worker's houses.

Positive features that contribute to the view's significance:

- The visual interest created where buildings in the foreground depart from the pattern with slightly different orientations, such as the mock-Tudor style Dukes Head public house and the locally listed residential terrace
- The sense of urban enclosure created by the building line along Crayford High Street
- The Grade II* listed St Paulinus Church

Regional views

This section describes the following views:

Canary Wharf, London from Lesnes Abbey (viewing platform located in Lesnes Abbey Woods), Abbey Wood

Canary Wharf, London from Ruskin Road, Belvedere

Shooters Hill Water Tower, Shooters Hill from The Broadway, Bexleyheath

Canary Wharf Cluster 1



Focal Point	Viewing Point
City Bank and HSBC, Canary Wharf	Viewing platform within Lesnes Abbey Woods

This view takes in the iconic skyscrapers of Canary Wharf from the established viewing platform within Lesnes Abbey Woods.

Purposely built from 1987 on the docklands that once hummed with fervent shipping activity, Canary Wharf takes its name from the quay where traders unloaded cargo of fruit and vegetables imported from the Canaries and other Mediterranean Islands. Although ships no longer unload goods, the area retains a key role in international trade, now serving as one of the most important financial centres not only in Europe, but also the world. As the location of some of the tallest buildings within the United Kingdom and standing on side of the River Thames, Canary Wharf is visible from across London and beyond, lending it an almost exclusive wayfinding role at the sub-regional level.

This viewpoint is taken from the viewing platform. The platform includes a bronze plaque highlighting significant buildings within the cluster. Within the immediate foreground lie the ruins of Lesnes Abbey (which are Grade II listed above ground level and a Scheduled Ancient Monument below ground) which represents one of the most significant archaeological and historical sites within the borough. Lesnes Abbey had been founded in 1178 by Richard de Luci (Chief Justiciar of England) possibly as penance for his involvement in the assassination of the Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Beckett. Beyond the ruins emerges Abbey Wood with its fast growing skyline.

Canary Wharf is visible in the distance, with the buildings discernible on clearer days. Given the prominence of the height of the buildings within the cluster, they are set against a background of open sky.

Positive features that contribute to the view's significance:

- the cluster of Canary Wharf as viewed from south-east London
- the Grade II listed ruins and Scheduled Ancient Monument of Lesnes Abbey
- the modern and growing skyline of Abbey Wood

Canary Wharf Cluster 2



Focal Point	Viewing Point
City Bank and HSBC, Canary Wharf	Tyron Way, Sidcup near no. 49

This view of London's Canary Wharf is significant in part because it is so unexpected: deep within outer London, at the boundary with Kent, a suburban street offers an uninterrupted view of one of the world's most important and recognisable business clusters. The cluster emerges in the distance as one moves around a bend and disappears behind the next. This view of the iconic skyscrapers helps to place Sidcup and the borough within the sub-region, in terms of its physical location as well as in terms of economic and social relationships.

The foreground consists of a mildly sloping suburban street lined with latter-20th Century semi-detached houses set back from the street by front gardens and paved drives. The foreground ends at the point where Tyron Way splits into Northcote Drive and Sydney Road. The pair of houses at nos. 115-117 Northcote Drive are orientated to face back towards the viewpoint, providing a distinct conclusion to the foreground.

The iconic skyscrapers of Canary Wharf stand in the distance behind this pair of houses. Canary Wharf is visible from this location because of the peculiarity of topographies created by the undulating river valleys formed by the Rivers Cray and the River Thames. This location on Tyron Way sits on slightly elevated ground before the topography drops off and does not rise again until far out of view. As a result, the sky is interrupted only by the very tallest of buildings, which are those at Canary Wharf. Given the prominence of their height, they are set against a background of open sky.

Positive features that contribute to the view's significance:

- uninterrupted views of the Canary Wharf skyscrapers
- the mild slope along Tyron Way
- the building line on both sides of Tyron Way tighten the view
- the pair of semi-detached houses at nos. 115-117 Northcote Drive, which provide a neat end to the foreground

Shooters Hill Water Tower



Focal Point	Viewing Point
Shooters Hill Water Tower	The Broadway at the pedestrianised area, Bexleyheath

This view takes in the Grade II listed Shooters Hill Water Tower along the ancient Watling Street, showcasing its linearity and offering insight into the borough's history and geography.

The water tower was built in 1910 in the Gothic revival style and has since become a sub-regional landmark, in part due to its location at one of the highest points surrounding central London.

The view follows the linear Watling Street from Bexleyheath. Watling Street is an ancient route that has crossed the local area for millennia, used by the ancient Britons and later paved as one of the main Roman roads in Britannia. The long, linear route, which connects St Albans to the historic Kentish ports via London, was instrumental in shaping the built environment of both Welling and Bexleyheath, which developed their commercial cores on the route with residential dwellings being constructed primarily on side streets. Watling Street remains an important route to this day.

The foreground consists of the Broadway, lined by shops and other public buildings, including notably Christchurch. The route continues to comprise the middle ground, including as it moves up Shooters Hill, marking a transition into inner London, before culminating in the Water Tower.

Positive features that contribute to the view's significance

- the linear historic Watling Street
- the Grade II listed Christchurch in the foreground
- the rising nature of Shooters Hill
- the Grade II listed landmark Water Tower

Panoramic and Landscape views

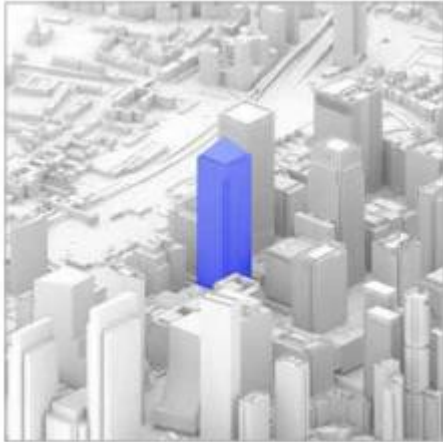
This section describes the following views:

Canary Wharf, London from Ruskin Road, Belvedere

Crayford Marshes towards Queen Elizabeth II Bridge from London Loop Path, Crayford Ness

These views are identified on the Submission Policies Map.

Thames River Valley panorama



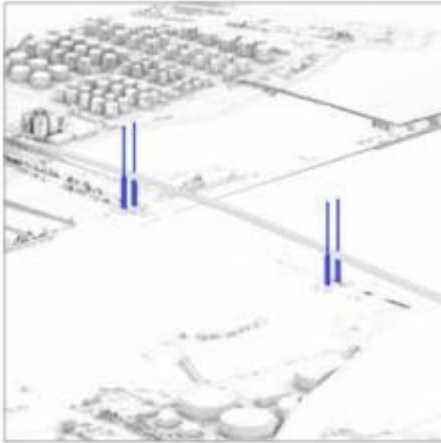
Focal Point	Viewing Point
Canary Wharf, south-east London, east London	Ruskin Road (looking over Clive Road), Belvedere

This expansive panorama takes in views across the Thames River Valley.

The expansive view is afforded by the elevated viewpoint within Belvedere. Although named after a grand house of that name, the town's name means 'beautiful view' in Italian.

The panorama begins to the northeast with miles of sheds and wind turbines and plant towers that constitutes the industrial heartland of east London. Moving westward the view takes in swathes of outer London suburbia. The iconic towers of Thamesmead stand to the fore, whilst behind them emerge the more recent 'skyscraper apartments' of modern Stratford. The panorama then takes in the expanse of inner east London with its periodic skyscrapers in places like Canning Town. The panorama ends with views towards Canary Wharf, which itself seems to peek up from the ancient woodland of Lesnes Abbey in the near foreground.

Crayford Marshes landscape



Focal Point	Viewing Point
Crayford Marshes towards Queen Elizabeth II Bridge	London Loop path within Crayford Ness

This panorama takes in the natural landscape and human built features that constitute the Crayford Marshes.

This panorama looks out from the edge of the borough across the Crayford Marshes Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The lush marshland which is subdivided by water-filled ditches with stands of reeds, and occasional hedgerows of native species, stretches to the point where the River Thames meets the River Darent. The overall character is one of expansive openness, which is unbroken only by two vital pieces of regional infrastructure: the Dartford Creek Tidal Flood Barrier which stands imposing nearby, and the much larger Queen Elizabeth Bridge which appears small and thin in the distance.