Recent contributions by geographers on the relationships between states and citizens have documented the rise of rolled-out neoliberalism. Development agendas are, it is argued, increasingly dominated by the principles of market-driven reforms, social inequality, and a drive towards enhancing the economic competitiveness of the supply side of the economy. However, at the same time, a parallel set of discourses has emerged in the development literature which argues that it is principles of sustainable development that have, in practice, become dominant. The emphasis is, instead, on democratic empowerment, environmental conservation, and social justice. This paper examines the relationships between these ostensibly very different interpretations of contemporary development with an assessment of one of the Labour government’s most ambitious planning agendas—the publication in February 2003 of the document Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future. The proposals are promoted as a “step change” in the planning system with a new emphasis on tackling shortages of housing in the South East and reviving the economy of the Thames Gateway area. The paper assesses the different ways in which such programmes can be interpreted and argues that contemporary development practices in countries such as Britain are constituted by a hybridity of approaches and rationalities and cannot be reduced to simple characterisations of rolled-out neoliberalism or sustainable development.

Introduction
It seems an anomaly that in recent decades critical conceptions of the principles and practices of development should have taken such diverse and parallel paths. One the one hand, a range of development programmes and development agencies draw explicitly upon a set of principles that are enshrined in notions of sustainable development (SD). For Meadowcroft (1999), SD has become an all-embracing “meta-narrative” that has spread across both developed and less developed countries in recent decades. Normative notions of SD advocate equity, empowerment, and environmentally sensitive economic development. On the other hand, a range of theorists, particularly those writing from regulationist perspectives, argue that state agendas and modes of regulation have become increasingly neoliberalised over the same time period and have been driven by new forms of market-based entrepreneurialism, social inequality, and resource exploitation. Development has become
anything but sustainable as the demands of enhanced capital accumulation override the broader needs of social reproduction. In essence, many of the premises and underlying rationalities of the approaches seem diametrically opposed in both conceptual and empirical terms, yet both are variously characterised as the dominant principles underpinning planning and development strategies and agendas.

It is within this broader intellectual and political context that in February 2003 the New Labour government triumphantly announced its latest initiative to create a “step change” in the British planning system that would both enhance economic development and promote new forms of sustainability. New Sustainable Communities would be established “to tackle the problems of a rapidly changing population, the needs of the economy, serious housing shortages in London and the South East and the impact of housing abandonment in places in the North and Midlands” (Prescott 2003:3). This series of initiatives involves the physical regeneration of urban infrastructure, the demolition of empty properties, and the creation of new towns, all of which is designed to enhance the quality of life and employment prospects of a broad range of social groups, whilst boosting urban economies and property development markets (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) 2003a). Such development, it is argued, will be more holistic and self-sustaining with local people, groups and businesses playing a key role in “the planning, design, and long term stewardship of their community” (2003a:2). In line with New Labour, Third Way thinking, this stewardship role is promoted as a mechanism for local communities to nurture and guide the development process in ways that are mutually beneficial both for them and for investors so that the development process becomes balanced between the needs of the economy and civil society.

This paper examines the emergence of this significant new development initiative and assesses it in relation to broader debates over SD. It examines the extent to which it reflects and reproduces a wider neoliberalisation of policy agendas or, conversely, is indicative of the new principles and practices of economic, social and political sustainability. The paper begins by outlining the critical elements of SD and regulationist explanations of policy change before assessing the relationships between them in theoretical and concrete terms. It then documents and assesses the form and character of the government’s policy agendas through two interrelated themes: the establishment of the institutional architecture of policy delivery and new forms of sustainable citizenship. Collectively, the paper argues that the co-evolution of different development discourses raises important questions over the assumptions that characterise their deployment. In assessing actually existing development practices, it concludes that there is a greater hybridity of approaches and rationalities than is often
acknowledged, taking analysis beyond simple characterisations of rolled-out neoliberalism or naïve forms of sustainable development.

**Sustainable Development, New Labour and Neoliberal Governance**

**The Rise and Rise of Sustainable Development**

The discourse of sustainable development has become one the central orthodoxies of planning, not only in Britain but also in Europe and North America (de Roo and Miller 2000). Planners in a variety of contexts now ostensibly strive to create SD programmes that can be supported by social, economic, and environmental resources in the long term for the benefit of individuals, communities, and society as a whole. The discourse arose in the 1970s and 1980s with the publication of critical academic work on the limits of growth (see McRobie 1990; Schumacher 1973) and environmentally focused reports by global institutions such as the World Bank (1989), the United Nations (World Commission for Environment and Development 1988), and the World Conservation Union (1991). Collectively, these called for new forms of economic development which put greater value on environmental resources, extended the time horizons in which actors think and operate, and promoted greater equity between different social groups and communities, primarily through new forms of democratic economic governance (see Chatterton 2002; Gibbs 2002; Pearce, Markandya and Barbier 1991; Whitehead 2003).

Much of the early writing on SD focused on environmental resource use and management and sought of establish new frameworks in which economic development could be linked to the conservation of resources and species diversity on the planet. However, as Willers (1994) argues, the term has been defined in a variety of ways. It was, for example, taken up with great zeal by big businesses intent on promoting agendas of “sustained” economic growth. In other contexts the term has taken on meaning in relation to broader environmentalism. Thus, on the one hand, there are those who call for a shallow greening of development policy in which the environment is visualised as a “bundle of processes, all of which have natural functions that serve the interests of human survival and contentment” (O’Riordan 1992:308). This type of approach, that dominates development agendas in developed countries, tends to produce discourses of sustainable development that are highly utilitarian in that they advocate, not “limits to growth [but] the growth of limits” (Willers 1994:1146). More radical, deep green, environmental thinking that views human beings as alienated from the environmental disruption that they create and calls for reductions in economic growth has remained outside the mainstream (O’Riordan 1992:318).
The politicisation of the concept of SD raises a series of questions over its deployment in the technologies, strategies and philosophies of state action. What forms, for example, does SD take as a discourse and as an actually existing set of policy practices and programmes? In and through what political processes are these agendas shaped and with what outcomes? If SD has become what Meadowcroft (1999) terms a new meta-narrative, what does this tell us about emerging forms of state regulation and the (spatial) institutional fixes that are developed to implement reforms? For at the same time as the principles of SD have come to “dominate” policy agendas, others argue that it is neoliberalism, with its principles of market efficiencies, entrepreneurial communities, and resource exploitation which have, paradoxically, taken centre stage (Neumayer 1999). The next section examines some recent perspectives on neoliberalism drawn from regulationist writings and draws out the links and connections with SD discourses and ideals.

**Neoliberalism, Development Agendas, and New Modes of Regulation**

Within the geographical literature there has been a growing body of work which has sought to address state–society relations through regulationist interpretations of institutional change. For regulationists, the period since the mid-1970s has represented a new era of institutional regulatory fixes at different spatial scales characterised by evolving forms of neoliberal governance. Neoliberalism is underpinned by the belief that “open, competitive, and unregulated markets, liberated from all forms of state interference, represent the optimal mechanism for economic development” (Brenner and Theodore 2002:2). For Jessop (2002) the Keynesian welfare structures of the post-war period have been converted into new modes of Schumpeterian, workfarist regulation that promote international competitiveness and socio-technical innovation, the subordination of social policy to economic policy, the limitations of national scale policymaking, and new forms of partnerships and networks of reflexive self-organisation (Jessop 2002:112–113; see also Peck and Theodore 2002). These reforms have been underpinned by the expansion of new modes of entrepreneurial active citizenship; the extension of market principles; the implementation of “voluntary” codes of (de)regulation on private sector actors; a reduced role for organised labour in decision-making processes; and a new authoritarianism of social control, morality, and behaviour (see Brenner and Theodore 2002; Rose 2000).

For Peck and Tickell (2002), neoliberal regulation has evolved over different periods. During the late 1970s and 1980s in the USA and
UK, neoliberalism took the form of a “rolling back” of the frontiers of the welfare state and savage critiques of the capacities and practices of post-war state management. However, by the 1990s, as the negative externalities of such measures began to impinge upon the prospects for economic development, so the character of neoliberalism changed to focus “on the purposeful construction and consolidation of neoliberal state forms, modes of governance and regulatory relations” (Peck and Tickell 2002:37). This “rolling out” of neoliberalism, the authors contend, is a less visible, more surreptitious mode of “pervasive meta-regulation” which has been obfuscated by the “centre-left” politics of the Third Way and the New Deal. Neoliberal principles, it is argued, have been woven into the fabric of a broad range of policy programmes at the same time as they have subordinated non-market political and cultural forces to the broader requirements of capital accumulation.

The actually occurring forms of neoliberal regulation do, however, differ significantly from place to place so that for Brenner and Theodore these “contemporary neo-liberal tendencies … have been unfolding at a range of geographical scales and in a variety of institutional sites” (2002:19–20). The specific form and character of neoliberal regulation are dependent upon existing social relations and state practices and, therefore, its effects “cannot be reduced to the internal characteristics of certain institutions, or politics; it also exists as an extra-local regime of rules and routines, pressures and penalties” (Peck and Tickell 2002:45). As such, neoliberalism “refers to the politics and processes whereby a relative handful of private interests are permitted to control as much as possible of social life in order to maximise their personal profit” (McChesney 1999:7). The interests of the powerful, in particular contexts, become the norms that guide political debate and practice to the exclusion of others.

The ascendancy of regulationist perspectives in critical geographical writing does not come without its difficulties. Neoliberalism, by definition, invokes the re-emergence of early modern principals of liberalism which Jessop (2002:108) defines as the primacy of private property, “free choice” in consumption, a night-watchman role for the state, and conceptions of state action as an intrusion into the formally free choices of members of society. However, such a characterisation of liberalism is relatively partial and selective as liberalism as a philosophy has always been underpinned by a wide variety of perspectives. Feminist writers, such as Nussbaum, for example, argue that “many critiques of liberalism are really critiques of economic utilitarianism” (1999:57). Rather than calling for state (de)regulation that punishes and disciplines whole sections of society, the liberal writings of authors such as Mill, Kant, and Rawls posit that all human beings “are of equal dignity and worth, no matter where they are situated in society and that
the primary source of this worth is a power of moral choice within them, a power that consists of the ability to plan a life in accordance with one’s own evaluations of ends” (2000:57). For Nussbaum, liberalism advocates strong state action where prejudice and injustice can be challenged through intervention, it is not a blueprint for a jungle law of individual self-gratification and market-based principals. Such an interpretation of what liberalism’s principles consist of seem to be at odds with some of the characterisations of regulationist writers, indeed, many strands of liberalism call for the empowerment of the public realm at the expense of the private (see Holmes 1993).

In addition, regulationist writing primarily focuses on the supply side of the economy and the use of regulation to engender new modes of Schumpeterian entrepreneurialism to overcome falling rates of profitability. Yet, this raises a series of theoretical and empirical questions over the demands on states made by a range of interests which may or may not be linked to wider neoliberal objectives. States are constantly faced with the autonomous claims of actors and groups at different spatial scales shaped by wide-ranging historically mediated state–civil society relationships. These differences may be flagged up as significant by regulationist thinkers, but the implications of proposing a position in which a pervasive neoliberal meta-governance dominates state regulation, but may be altered so radically by competing demands on the state that they barely constitute “neoliberal” policies at all, are not followed through sufficiently. As While, Jonas and Gibbs’ (2004) study of growth agendas in Cambridge demonstrates, there is a “necessary relationship between the politics of economic development and that of collective consumption” (2004:301) so that development agendas have to be understood in the context of a variety of competing development rationales articulated at a variety of scales and through different institutional structures of state regulation.

Moreover, how does the discourse of SD fit in with neoliberal conceptions of state change and what can its emergence and widespread deployment tell us about the form and character of neoliberalism and state regulation? As discussed above, SD is a chameleon-like discourse which has been (re)interpreted and deployed by a range of interests to legitimate and justify a range of often contradictory and divergent agendas. In the context of the purported shift to neoliberalism, we might expect that policy programmes and agendas which draw on SD discourses have themselves become neoliberal in the broader sense of the term. However, many of the philosophical and practical elements of SD contain within them the seeds of very different agendas—of democratic reform, economic equity, and new time frames of less exploitative economic development. For authors such as Meadowcroft, these elements have the potential to enable the

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formation of alternative, non-materialist and progressive agendas and act as a “normative standard which requires the balancing of environmental economic activity and social equity in current decision-making” (1999:37). At the very least, the widespread emergence of a discourse which has the potential to challenge the central tenets of neoliberal philosophies calls into question the hegemony of a “rolled out” neoliberalism.

The extent to which SD agendas and frameworks take on neoliberal forms becomes an empirical question to be interrogated in and through specific case studies which can then be used to inform theoretical inquiry. For instance, if neoliberalism does shape and dominate the policy activities of Western governments, we might expect that SD will be deployed and reinterpreted in ways that challenge the legitimacy of state regulation and control, and promote market-driven development agendas. In many ways, SD in its broadest sense lends itself to such an interpretation. It is, after all, concerned with the efficient use of resources, something that neoliberals argue results from the implementation of market principles. In addition, neoliberals would have little difficulty in accepting the notion that the degradation of environmental resources could hamper economic development and that policies which sought to increase the sustainability of investment could expand the growth of limits, rather than highlighting the limits to growth. Moreover, if markets are the most efficient mechanism for using resources, then the promotion of private sector actors and their expertise into decision-making frameworks, it could be argued, would further the cause of SD. Given the speed with which SD has been adopted by big businesses and governments intent on supporting (and sustaining) economic growth, there appears to be much justification for characterising SD as another discourse which has been subsumed a wider neoliberal, regulatory logic.

Yet, at the same time the emergence of SD, at a variety of different scales, provides policymakers and a range of communities with alternative ways of thinking about economic development, social justice, and resource use. The enhanced focus on the impacts and externalities generated by economic development can challenge neoliberal inspired growth agendas and modes of regulation. The greater attention given to social justice and inclusion which characterised the original foundations of the sustainability movement sit uneasily with neoliberal, trickle-down economics in which development capacities are to be maximised with scant regard for redistribution or social justice. Whilst discourses of SD also call on the breaking open of (state-dominated) economic systems, their aim is to encourage a variety of actors to engage directly in the politics of
development, not just those in powerful positions from the private sector.

Similar debates characterise the significant shift towards the related concept of sustainable communities (SCs). In many countries, communities and citizens have been given enhanced responsibilities to develop their own agendas in a context where the supporting structures of welfare systems have been gradually eroded (Raco 2003). For regulationists the shift towards communities could be construed as an attempt to institutionalise the decline of state support for vulnerable sections of society and to instil new entrepreneurial governmentalities into dependent groups. Community empowerment represents a central element in the rolling out of neoliberal relations and subjectivities and acts as a mechanism for instilling the illusion of self-sufficiency and societal detachment. At the same time, community plays a central role in discourses of SD. Again, there are associations with neoliberal interpretations of community in encouraging the activation of citizens and the reduction of dependent state–citizen relations. However, there are also important differences. Within SD discourses a SC is one whose collective resources, such as employment and forms of collective consumption, are maintained in the longer term to enable community change to proceed in less rapid, more equitable ways. A SC does not equate with growing polarisation and marginalisation but encourages enhanced social cohesion. Again, the approaches do have overlaps, but their contrasting interpretations of the processes and practices of development planning necessitate further empirical analysis of actually existing programmes, their rationales, and the extent to which they reflect neoliberal modes of governance or those of SD of a hybrid of the two.

The remainder of the paper examines these trends and processes by analysing and deconstructing the New Labour government’s latest and most ambitious strategy for the formation of sustainable communities, development and planning in the UK—the Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future framework (ODPM 2003a). According to regulationists, New Labour has been at the forefront of rolled-out neoliberalism in Western Europe. The paper examines what the government is trying to achieve in its proposals, how legitimate and useful its intentions are, what development philosophies underpin its actions, and what the benefits and dis-benefits of such an approach might be. It argues that there exists a hybridity of approaches embedded in the Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future document and outlines the ways in which policy agendas might be better understood and improved. The paper focuses on the proposals in the South East and the Thames Gateway as it is here that the plans and proposals are the most well-developed and have been
the critical driving force behind the emergence (and in judging the overall success) of the wider project.

Building Sustainable Communities: Planning Policy and Sustainable Development in the Thames Gateway

New Labour’s New Agenda

One of New Labour’s key ambitions when it took office in 1997 was to promote the regeneration of Britain’s urban areas and deprived regions in new ways that were informed by the key tenets of SD. The publication in February 2003 of the document Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future (SCBF) represents a significant milestone in the administration’s policies towards this end. The programme seeks to tackle housing shortages in the South and East of England, rejuvenate land and housing markets in low-demand areas of northern industrial cities, and protect rural areas from growing development pressures. It calls for the expansion of housing development in three areas of the South East: Milton Keynes, Cambridge-Stansted and Ashford, with the construction of 260,000 houses; and the regeneration of the Thames Gateway in East London and along the Thames Estuary, where 120,000 houses are proposed. A total of £610 million has been allocated for these developments, which are to be spearheaded by development partnerships and Urban Regeneration Companies in the former, and two newly established Urban Development Corporations in the latter (see ODPM 2003a, 2003b). These measures are supplemented by the establishment of nine Market Renewal Areas in northern cities in which there will be “sustained action to replace obsolete housing with modern sustainable accommodation, through demolition and new building or refurbishment” (ODPM 2003a:24).

For the Blair government, SD is achieved when programmes: provide new sources of urban employment for local people by creating new investment spaces; transform the aesthetic quality of derelict and depressed urban environments thereby encouraging people and businesses to stay in urban locations, and attract new investors; open up new opportunities for housing and commercial development; enable higher levels of population density to be achieved, thereby reducing the need to use up additional land to meet growing demands; enhance the liveability of towns and cities; and protect rural environments from urban sprawl and environmental destruction (see ODPM 2003b). The government argues that this form of SD will enable land and housing markets to be re-balanced, with development pressures alleviated in ways that will encourage economic growth and enable the formation of sustainable, environmentally friendly forms of urban planning. In many fast-growing urban areas in the South and
East of England, costs of living have risen so quickly over the last 10–15 years that public and welfare organisations, which pay moderate and low wage rates, are increasingly struggling to attract core workers to maintain or enhance their services. In addition, companies that rely on semi-skilled manufacturing or service workers have found their profit margins increasingly squeezed and many industries face chronic labour shortages and growing property costs. What makes the SCBF initiative different, it is argued, is that it will not only tackle existing market difficulties but will do so in a way that encourages the establishment of SCs and SD in which people will be able to live and work and have access to social facilities.

The government, therefore, explicitly draws on normative interpretations of SD in advocating its new proposals. Development is portrayed as a mechanism for encouraging economic growth whilst simultaneously supporting the broader requirements of social reproduction and, in a shallow green way, the environmental limits of growth (see Massey 1994). This is reflected in the government’s definition of what constitutes a SC (see Table 1).

The definition echoes broader shifts in policy thinking that emerged during the 1990s that promoted the concept of “holistic”, sustainable regeneration in which local economic, social, political, and environmental problems are tackled simultaneously. This is indicated by the stress on investment in quantitative infrastructure, such as housing and transport, and the simultaneous references to qualitative

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Key requirements of a sustainable community</th>
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<tr>
<td>• A flourishing local economy to provide jobs and wealth</td>
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<td>• Strong leaderships to respond positively to change</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Effective engagement and participation by local people, groups and businesses in the planning, design and long-term stewardship of their community</td>
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<tr>
<td>• An active voluntary and community sector</td>
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<tr>
<td>• A safe and healthy local environment with well-designed public and green space</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Sufficient size, scale and density and the right layout to support basic amenities in the neighbourhood and minimise use of resources</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Good public transport and other transport infrastructure both within the community and linking it to urban, rural and regional centres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Buildings—both individually and collectively—that meet different needs over time and minimise the use of resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A well integrated mix of decent homes of different types and tenures to support a range of household sizes, ages and incomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Good quality local public services, including education and training opportunities, health care and community facilities, especially for leisure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A diverse, vibrant and creative local culture, encouraging pride in the community and cohesion within it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A sense of “place”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The right links with the wider regional, national and international community</td>
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Source: Adapted from ODPM (2003a:5)
notions of sustainability, such as the creation of a sense of “place” and the benefits of community diversity and vibrancy. In addition, the framework calls for “effective engagement and participation by local people, groups and businesses, especially in the planning, design, and long-term stewardship of their community, and an active voluntary and community sector” (ODPM 2003a:5). It argues for “strong community leadership” and an activation of political consciousness within local community groups.

The SCBF programme is also explicitly geared up to what it perceives to be the functional needs of the UK’s most successful economic region as its first priority is “to accommodate the economic success of London and the wider South East and ensure that the international competitiveness of the region is sustained, for the benefit of the region and the whole country” (ODPM 2003a:46). The focus is on ensuring that the most successful places maintain their competitive advantages in a global and international context. This is explicitly stated in the government’s progress report on the SCBF in which it argues that:

we cannot simply try to halt growth in the South East in order to divert it to other regions. The government’s regional policy is focused on enabling every region of England to perform to its full economic and employment opportunities. (ODPM 2003b:5).

Imposing what it terms “artificial constraints” (5) on development in more successful regions would not necessarily benefit less successful regions as investment “may well go abroad, or simply not happen”.

The SCBF proposals, therefore, contain many of the core discursive elements of the broader SD literature. However, if rolled-out neoliberalism now dominates state policies, then we might expect them to be imbued with the principles and disciplines examined earlier in the paper. In what ways is this the case? In the following section the paper examines the SCBF through two interrelated elements—new governance arrangements, and new philosophies of citizenship. It argues that neoliberal elements are inherent across the proposals, but also that they cannot simply be characterised as an expression of rolled-out neoliberalism. Instead, they can be interpreted as something of a hybrid, containing the possibilities for the emergence of very different agendas and philosophies.

**Delivering Sustainable Communities, New Forms of Governance and the Role of the Private Sector**

One of the key elements of rolled-out neoliberalism is the discursive privileging of the expertise and capacities of private sector actors and a sustained critique of the state. In many ways the SCBF framework does exactly that through its clarion call for a selective “break from
the past” (ODPM 2003a:3). There is the now familiar New Labour critique, not only of the Conservative administrations that preceded it but also of earlier Labour administrations for whom state planning was seen as a vehicle for the delivery of greater equality and social needs. John Prescott, for example, states that:

for more than 30 years this country has lost its way. All governments failed to meet housing need. We built housing in a way that failed to put the needs of communities first. We did not invest for the long term. (Prescott 2003:3)

The government’s intention in relation to SCs is to “remove barriers to delivering the housing needed in our communities and ensure the planning system was not a break on the supply of sites for housing in sustainable locations” (Hill 2003:1).

Local authorities, as regulatory agencies, are chided for their alleged failures to provide the right homes in the right places at the right times and their failure to respond to market signals and processes.

Again and again within the SCBF document, problems are identified (for example, the tendency of house builders to construct houses that use up large areas of greenfield land, in flat contradiction of SD agendas) with little acknowledgement of the house-building industry’s key role in creating the problems in the first place. The practice of “land-banking”, for example, in which plots of land are deliberately not released by developers in order to raise values, is not discussed or acknowledged.

Criticism is, instead, made of the planning system and the inefficiencies of local planning authorities with “unsustainability” elided with state efforts to artificially interfere with market processes.

In this sense, the SCBF represents a clear example of Hutton’s criticism of New Labour’s Panglossian view that “only the state does not keep its promises; the private sector always does and it is morally better for individuals to act for themselves than collectively” (2002b:296). It reflects neoliberal conceptions of SD that assume that the market knows best and that sustainable urban and regional development will take place if market principles are embedded in development agendas. Given that private sector practices are not construed as a “problem”, then regulatory or financially punitive solutions, such as taxes on specific types of development, are not considered as necessary.

In governance terms, the establishment of two Urban Development Corporations (UDCs), one covering the London stretch of the Thames Gateway, the other covering the area around Thurrock, east of London, to deliver the SCBF, in many ways institutionalises the role of private sector actors in the new development frameworks. As in the 1980s, the UDCs are justified by their ability to enable “site assembly and the remediation of brownfield land” (ODPM 2003a:47)
and these will be spearheaded by “bodies with a clear remit and the necessary powers to drive forward development … to secure comprehensive regeneration” (50). The rationale for establishing UDCs is that these areas have “a wide range of complex land-use and assembly problems, which currently constrain housing and economic growth” (ODPM 2003c:2). In echoes of earlier UDC initiatives the proposals highlight the ways in which areas of the Thames Gateway have “the potential to become an important centre for international trade and enterprise—building upon its rich maritime heritage, maximising the value of the river and empowering its diverse communities to provide an exciting, vibrant and sustainable place to live, work and visit” (7).

The UDCs will be given the normal planning powers and responsibilities under The Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980, with the local authorities maintaining responsibility for minor planning decisions to ensure that the UDC does not become overburdened with planning functions. They will be time limited to 7 years, with a major performance review after 5 years, and in Thurrock their boundaries have been drawn to co-incide with those of the local authority (Thurrock Borough Council) so that “the UDC will operate, as far as possible, in co-operation with the Borough” (ODPM 2003a:5). The selection of the Executive Board will be “in the best spirit of partnership” with no one interest having “a majority of seats on the Board” (11). Similar structures are being put together for the more complex administrative area of the inner London Thames Gateway (ODPM 2003b).

The establishment of UDCs betrays a lack of originality, rather than a step change, in development thinking. The role and impacts of UDCs in Britain’s cities during the 1980s and 1990s were highly controversial. The government’s own evaluations criticised UDCs for their inability and/or unwillingness to encourage development that benefited local people and communities—one of the principals of SD (see Imrie and Thomas 1999). UDCs are underpinned by the logic of market-driven development and the belief that markets can and will deliver to meet social ends. They embody many of the characteristics of “rolled-out” neoliberalism. They are unelected, yet possess strong planning powers. They represent market freedoms at the same time as they wield relatively large amounts of state power and resources. They institutionalise private sector involvement in decision-making processes without taking into account the limited capacities or the (il)legitimacy of private sector actors to play such a role and their time-limited and target-driven frameworks may force them to promote development projects whether they are “sustainable” or not. They will almost certainly promote a shallow green development

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agenda in which economic growth will be the central objective of policy.

And yet, to characterise the government’s proposals in the Thames Gateway as a manifestation of rolled-out neoliberalism would be premature and partial. The SCBF agenda is underpinned by a rationality of massive, direct, and wide-ranging state intervention in the spatial economy, not all of which is aimed at supporting property companies to take advantage of local development opportunities. The pursuit of economic growth *per se*, as the SD discourse demonstrates, does not make an agenda “neoliberal” or *necessarily* undermine the capacities and well-being of local communities; indeed a diverse, healthy, and accessible employment base is often critical to meeting their needs. The problems faced by communities in and around the Thames Gateway relate to broader concerns with issues of social reproduction, such as the quality of local public services, the lack of accessible housing and employment, and demographic change. In some ways the SCBF proposals seek to address these to try to ensure that a broader range of communities and individuals benefit from development.

Moreover, at the same time as the government has sought to enhance business representation, its response has also been shaped by existing socio-political relations in the Thames Gateway and attempts to satisfy a diverse range of competing and autonomous demands on its capacities. The recent history of the London Docklands Development Corporation and its widely acknowledged failure to tackle the problems faced by deprived local communities has acted as a focus for local political activism. This explains why the SCBF framework is insistent that the new UDCs will “operate with the full involvement of local actors and partners” (ODPM 2003a:48). They will act as “benign UDCs”, drawing on the successes of UDCs of the past, in terms of land assembly and property-led regeneration, whilst ensuring community involvement and a less economically focused set of agendas. The government is adamant that the new UDCs will, therefore, unlock “the potential for growth and regeneration … and would have the effect of improving the quality of life for those in the area now, and in the future, with particular benefits for those currently living in areas of high deprivation”.

Local authorities in the Thames Gateway have, in fact, been calling for enhanced investment in the area and *for* the establishment of UDCs. Through a partnership organisation, named Thames Gateway London Partnership (TGLP), local authorities have been pressurising the government to concentrate development efforts in the Thames Gateway area (TGLP 2003a, 2003b). Some of the pressure for development has, therefore, been coming from the bottom up rather than the top down. In addition, the Thames Gateway is located within
Greater London and responsibility for its development also falls, in large part, to the machinery of London government—the elected Mayor, the Great London Assembly, and the London Development Agency (LDA). The UDC is being implemented in this existing institutional landscape and its additional role is not as clear cut as with earlier UDCs. The LDA, in particular, is empowered to carry out similar functions to the UDC, but brings with it a set of different mechanisms of accountability and local responsiveness.

Under concerted pressure from the LDA and the London Mayor, the proposals for the London UDC have run into problems. After a delay of six months they were finally published in October 2003 and were significantly scaled down to cover a much smaller area than originally planned (see ODPM 2003c). Instead of focusing on eleven development areas, the UDC will now be restricted to six. Far from providing a mechanism for private sector empowerment, the board of the new UDC will be drawn from a variety of interests, with significant representation from local authorities and the local community, so that overall one group will not dominate. In addition, the government’s intention of appointing a Chair from the property industry has not been met as the private sector has so far shunned the UDC as an ineffective and weak institution. The TGLP and other local public sector bodies, ironically, continue to lobby for a stronger UDC on the grounds that it may help them to achieve their broader socio-economic development objectives. In particular, their focus has been on the need to expand the local housing base and to tackle the complex local problems of fragmented land ownership and governance responsibilities.

Whilst the rhetoric of government has focused on the inadequacies of the planning system and public sector bodies, its actions and proposals thus far do not advocate a dismantling of the planning system. Local authorities and local communities will continue to act as local gatekeepers of the planning process. Challenging brownfield targets for new development have been imposed and the requirement that local community and voluntary projects are directly supported as spin-offs of development projects (through Section 106 agreements) do not constitute a blind, ideological shift towards aggressive neoliberalism. In many ways the SCBF proposal recognises that markets have failed to meet broader needs and that state agencies do have a critical role in ensuring that development takes place, which is more equitable and more economically and socially sustainable. The belated recognition in the SCBF proposals that the problems facing planners and communities are complex and inter-connected is something that geographers and planners have been advocating for a number of years. The outcomes of the policy-making process are, therefore, relatively complex and whilst they do embody, both
implicitly and explicitly, elements of rolled-out neoliberal principles, they are also constituted through a range of competing demands, some specific, some more generic, that push development agendas in alternative directions more akin to broader discourses of SD. Similar processes have been evident in the SCBF characterisation of sustainable communities and it is to these that the paper now turns.

Creating Sustainable Communities: New Subjectivities and Sustainable Citizenship

One of the key elements of the regulationist characterisation of neoliberalism is that it uses the notion of “community” to re-draw subjectivities and to create new entrepreneurial, active modes of citizenship. Citizenship becomes linked to the ability to reduce “dependency” on the state and to create new modes of self-help. In many ways the SCBF’s explicit and implicit characterisations of community do promote such rationalities. In terms that echo Thatcherite conceptions of citizenship, the SCBF document openly declares that “owning a home gives people a bigger stake in their community, as well as promoting self-reliance” (ODPM 2003a:37). Community is characterised as a mechanism of self-reliance, with a reduced role for the (welfare) state to manage the risks of everyday life. Involvement in circuits of consumption creates new forms of subjectivity, with individuals becoming direct stakeholders in the fortunes of housing markets. In so doing, they become, it is argued, new types of citizen who can break free from a dependent or reliant relationship with the state. Conversely, those without access to housing are seen to have less of a stake in their areas and become, by default, less responsible citizens, unable to fulfil the Blairite vision of a society of self-governing, self-regulating and responsible individuals in sustainable local communities.

In these terms, a sustainable citizen is one who actively contributes to the (economic) well-being of a community. Passive, dependent citizens at the same time undermine community sustainability. It is assumed that by conforming to market principles such agents are fulfilling their social responsibilities and that it is incumbent on policymakers, planning agencies and local communities to find ways of maximising choice. The terminology of sustainability is used to cover an extension of existing Blairite agendas into new areas of policy. Consequently, the SCBF programme has not promoted conceptions of universal entitlement and rights. Instead, it has reiterated one of the key principles of neoliberal governance that assistance should be given to those who have demonstrated a capacity to be responsible whilst marginalizing the needs of those who have failed to take responsibility for themselves. It is this shift in the rights,
responsibilities and treatment of citizens in the SCBF proposals that reflects New Labour’s modernisation agendas for the welfare state.

In addition, the SCBF can be criticised for its promotion of community “norms”. The presence of middle-class households is seen as the key to area regeneration and community salvation, as places without such households are characterised, through the SCBF document, as ill-balanced and failing. Exclusive gated communities or privileged neighbourhoods are not criticised for their failure to attract lower-income populations but are portrayed as the justifiable exercise of market power and choices on the part of the affluent. SC agendas in some ways, therefore, justify and promote forms of gentrification as a vehicle for transforming the fortunes of people and places through the re-invigoration of local property and land markets (see Lees 2003).

For New Labour, community “sustainability” has only become a “problem” now that economic and social pressures are beginning to impact upon the economic competitiveness of the South East region and the quality of life of middle-income groups. The SCBF’s focus on so-called “key” or “essential” middle-income workers who are no longer able to purchase their own homes and enjoy market freedoms is a case in point. The SC document states that “in parts of the country there is a shortage of housing. Homes are unaffordable for people on moderate incomes, including many of the key workers on whom our public services depend” (ODPM 2003a:6). The SC plan claims that up to 10,000 key workers will, therefore, be helped into home ownership between 2001 and 2004, with expenditure of over £1 billion (35). And yet, lower-income groups have long suffered from such trends but this was not (and is still not) considered to be a significant “problem” requiring sustained government investment in housing or regeneration projects. The housing needs of low-income workers are not viewed as a break on economic development, indeed, much of the urban renaissance literature and the government’s broader economic development agendas are premised upon the exploitation of those sectors of the labour market that are required to service the new economy (see Amin, Massey and Thrift 2000). Thus a specific set of problems brought to a head by uneven spatial development are to be tackled by a particular manifestation of rolled-out neoliberal development agendas.

And yet, there are conflicting messages in the SCBF’s definitions of SCs. On the one hand, community is conceptualised as a source of dynamic change, with planning policy becoming a process of giving “choice to customers” so that cities become “places where people want to live and will continue to want to live” (ODPM 2003a:5). The emphasis of such agendas is to try to make cities attractive to those with enhanced market power, rather than seeking to restrict
choice through stronger regulatory, legal and policy measures such as changes to the taxation system. On the other hand, the proposals give community ontological status as a source of “fixity” in an increasingly unstable and changing social and economic environment. Creating place-based communities that “will stand the test of time and [be places] in which people want to live” becomes the means and the ends of policy—community as both subject and object of action (Prescott 2003:3). The creation of lasting, rather than temporary, communities becomes a key element in “creating communities that can stand on their own feet and adapt to the changing demands of modern life” (ODPM 2003a:5). Meeting the needs of social reproduction is given a new priority in development agendas.

Whilst the concern with activating communities can be characterised as a part of broader rolled-out neoliberal re-regulation of subjectivities, the recognition that decision-making processes need to be broken open and made more directly accountable to local communities is also inherent in the proposals. Notions of community “stewardship”, although ill-defined, do provide a recognition that agendas need to be shaped from the bottom up as well as the top down. Community subjectivities are not simply being reworked around competitiveness agendas, but are being re-shaped through a series of institutional mechanisms that will have an impact on the delivery and outcomes of the SCBF. Thus, at the same time as new organisations, such as UDCs, are being established in the Thames Gateway, a whole range of parallel initiatives, such as Community Strategies, Local Strategic Partnerships, and the New Deal for Communities Programmes, have been launched in and through which community representation (albeit with limitations) is being channelled and mobilised. Providing new platforms for community action does not necessarily result in a shift towards new neoliberal subjectivities. Instead, it may work in a variety of ways by, for example, instigating new, alternative development discourses and practices. As Gough (2002) argues, activating individuals does not constitute a one-way process of socialisation from one mode of regulation to another but, instead, provides new opportunities to reshape and mould emerging agendas. Indeed, early evidence suggests that new forms of community activism are emerging in the Thames Gateway in the wake of the development proposals (The Guardian 2004).

The SCBF also provides a policy framework in and through which governments are able to directly tackle existing inequalities between communities. Whilst its conceptions of SCs contain contradictory rationalities, there is, at least, a clear recognition that links can be made between the needs of communities and the broader re-capitalisation of derelict and contaminated brownfield sites. One of the enduring problems faced by Britain’s cities has been the flight of
affluent populations to areas beyond urban boundaries. The SCBF represents one of the first government initiatives to recognise the environmental and socio-economic costs of urban–rural spatial divisions and makes explicit links between planning, economic development, community change, and environmental sustainability. Whilst it embodies notions of citizenship that establish new boundaries between different types of citizen, it also seeks to tackle some of the demand-side pressures faced by communities which have found their capacities of social reproduction eroded by economic change and failing welfare support systems.

Conclusions
The Labour government’s proposals for the Thames Gateway represent one of the most ambitious spatial development programmes of its kind in Western Europe. The recognition that there are structural imbalances within the UK economy is to be strongly welcomed as for the first time in two decades a UK government has accepted that unchecked spatial imbalances not only impact on economic competitiveness but also have significant implications for people and places. Under the banner of SD, massive injections of public money are to be made in house construction and infrastructure provision. There is also a new focus on development agendas concentrating on the reclamation of brownfield sites and the formation of SCs. Undoubtedly, the SCBF agenda represents a “light green” manifestation of SD. Economic growth is characterised as the means and ends of policy. It does not reject the principle that development is *sui generis* environmentally unsustainable and socially divisive. Instead it embraces the prospect of enhanced, locally managed growth, the benefits of which can be devolved to a range of SCs.

This paper has assessed the ways in which significant development projects, such as this, can be characterised and understood in relation to broader shifts in state regulation and development discourses and practices. It has examined the extent to which it constitutes a form of actually existing development practice and what this has meant on the ground. It has argued that, in many ways, the principles of a rolled-out neoliberalism are inherent in the SCBF—from the focus on the development of the South East of England as a core global region, to the drive to establish and mobilise active, independent community subjectivities. Moreover, the government’s deployment of the term “sustainability” has been interrogated and it too has been used to denote a variety of meanings, many of which differ from the principles that underpin broader sustainability discourses. In practical terms the government’s reluctance to place strong regulatory measurers on private sector developers and its over-reliance upon spatial planning...
as a blunt instrument of policy control will, in all likelihood, limit the SCBF’s impact over the medium to long term.

However, the paper has also shown that a number of rationalities are evident and that actually existing development programmes contain within them a variety of competing and conflicting agendas. At the same time as the SCBF is concerned with promoting market-driven solutions to planning problems, it also establishes broad-ranging agendas which focus on the demands made by a variety of social groups. Its emphasis on ensuring the (albeit inequitable) provision of the means of social reproduction are as strong as its emphasis on meeting the supply side requirements of potential investors. In addition, “embedding” policy proposals in specific places provides opportunities for a range of existing actors, from community groups to local authorities, to influence the implementation and evolution of actually existing policy agendas.

The implications of this are two-fold. First, the paper raises a number of questions over the theoretical characterisations of development that currently exist in critical geography. Is what is emerging in major development projects like the Thames Gateway a form of rolled-out neoliberalism, a new manifestation of SD practices or a hybrid of the two? As Jessop (2002:113) notes, ideal types “are constructs formed by the one-sided accentuation of empirically-observable features of social reality to produce logically coherent and objectively feasible configurations of social relations”. In this sense the form of “empirically observable” features highlights a hybridity of development discourses, to the extent that characterising changes to the regulation and governance of Western societies as constituting rolled-out neoliberalism is highly questionable. This is not to say that such approaches do not provide useful heuristic vehicles for interrogating empirical study. But it highlights the dangers of adopting top-down discourses and ideologies to explain diverse development practices. The SCBF document is not simply a neoliberal agenda that has been played out in a particular way. It is constituted from a number of rationalities, some of which can be defined as neoliberal, some of which are drawn from other intellectual, political, and ethical traditions. If what is actually occurring is at odds with what regulationists assert should be taking place (ie the transition from one mode to regulation to another), then is it not time to revisit theoretical constructs? For example, the parallel discourse of SD is given far less emphasis in regulationist accounts than is warranted. It is tempting to dismiss SD as conforming to wider “neoliberal” logics, given that the latter is presented as the new reality of meta-governance. Yet, as this paper has shown at a variety of levels, the picture is more complex and development agendas need to be embedded in broader processes of socialisation and the meeting of autonomous and
contrasting political demands (see While, Jonas and Gibbs 2004). The implementation of any progressive or alternative agenda needs to be grounded in and though detailed critical empirical research that teases out the rationalities and philosophies of state practices and their impacts on a variety of social groups.

Secondly, an approach that emphasises the hybridities that characterise actually existing policies provides the discursive and intellectual space to develop alternative and broader ranging conceptions of development processes and practices. There are a variety of elements of SD discourses that are shaping the form and character of policy programmes such as SCBF, and these could be expanded. An alternative agenda might call, for example, for a reduced emphasis on regional economic competitiveness and more focus on developing the indigenous capacities of businesses and communities in areas such as Thames Gateway. It may promote the establishment of strong regional policy frameworks that encourage more equitable and socially, environmentally, and economically sustainable development in both donor and recipient regions (see Amin et al 2003). In addition, the establishment of new regulatory frameworks could provide significant state regulation and direction to the development process. For instance, a time limit could be placed on planning proposals to prevent the damaging practice of land-banking or regulatory controls could be imposed on greenfield site development to prevent and encourage new development in urban areas.

A new vision for urban development that does not simply privilege any development on the grounds that it is “brownfield” (the socially divisive property-led regeneration programmes of the 1980s, for example, were almost always “brownfield” developments) and a more pluralist conception of the notion of a sustainable community in which the rights to both the benefits of economic development and access to forms of collective consumption are enshrined in development agendas, would also lead to more rounded and successful development projects. In some ways the SCBF represents the beginning of a shift towards such approaches. It is, perhaps, its failure to redefine sustainable citizenship in broader, less choice-focused terms and the lack of intellectual and policy connection between the South East region and other regions in the UK and beyond that represent its biggest failings. It is for critical academic work to assess the capacities and possibilities of future directions in such “sustainable” regional planning frameworks.

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Endnotes

1 Keith Hill is currently a Minister responsible for planning and housing policy at the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

2 As Hutton (2002a) notes, it is estimated that over 85,000 plots of land remain unused in England as developers deliberately create blockages in urban land markets to generate additional profits from rising values. According to the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors, the low level of housing supply currently being experienced in Britain is a consequence of house builders “controlling supply and releasing new homes at the level that suits them best in line with obligations to shareholders” (quoted in Planning Online 2003). In addition, the RICS’ figures show that in London alone, from 1997 to 2003, the permissions granted by planners for development increased from 17,000 to 30,000, yet new start developments over the same period only increased from 6000 to 6500 (Planning Online 2003).

3 Moreover, these “pressures” on housing and land supply are then used to underpin political campaigns which call for the relaxation of planning controls on profitable greenfield sites that developers would prefer to develop. This practice is particularly common in the United States where it has had a major impact on urban landscapes and environments in places such as Los Angeles and Las Vegas where socially divisive and environmentally damaging urban development has taken place for decades (see Davis 2003).

4 Section 136 of the 1980 Local Government, Planning and Land Act sets out the powers of UDCs: “to secure the regeneration of its area by bringing land and buildings into effective use, encouraging the development of existing and new industry and commerce, creating an attractive environment and ensuring that housing and social facilities are available to encourage people to live and work in the area”.

5 The London Docklands Development Corporation was in existence from 1981 to 2000. It was responsible for the massive-scale property-led regeneration of the Docklands area. It was amongst the most explicit UDC proponents of property driven regeneration during the 1980s and its programmes were renowned for their failure to tackle the needs of local communities, indeed its programmes undermined many of them (see Brownill 1999).

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