

# **OUTER LONDON COMMISSION CONSULTATION**

## **Response by London Borough of Greenwich**

### **1.0 General Comments**

- 1.1 As a London Borough which has provided, and continues to provide, significant and major growth opportunities contributing to London's economic vitality and well-being we welcome the opportunity to comment on the work of the commission.
- 1.2 As you know the borough has experienced unprecedented development and regeneration over the last decade. This has addressed some of the adverse impact on this borough of the economic decline of the 1980's and 1990's and the decline of the old manufacturing and industrial processes related to the historical use of the riverfront and the borough's military past. This regeneration activity has included significant developments along the waterfront but especially at the Peninsula, Woolwich and Greenwich town centres.
- 1.3 This 'inner London' regeneration has been boosted and maintained by significant transport investment with the Jubilee line at north Greenwich, the DLR at both Greenwich and Woolwich. The Crossrail station at Woolwich which is programmed to open in 2017 will provide further impetus to the regeneration opportunities in the area.
- 1.4 The 'outer' area of Greenwich, from Woolwich eastwards to Bexley continues to suffer a chronic shortage of cross river transport. This includes the area of Thamesmead which, straddling both Greenwich and Bexley boroughs, is rather confusingly for the purposes of this study in both outer and inner London at the same time. It is this type of anomaly in relation to boundaries which we hope the Commission will clarify.

### **2.0 The Definition of Outer London**

- 2.1 One of the key issues for the Council is the scope and definition of outer London used by the Commission. It is important that the Commission is not constrained by strict definitions of outer and inner London. While Greenwich is not classified as an outer London borough it has outer London characteristics. Any definitions of outer and inner London should recognise the fluidity between the two. In this context, it might be useful to see the South London Circular as a broad boundary between inner and outer London. As such the commission needs to adequately address and consider the issues for this borough especially in relation to Woolwich and Eltham.

### **3.0 The Concept of Super hubs**

- 3.1.1 The consultation introduces the concept of Super- Hubs and suggests the potential for such hubs at Stratford and Croydon. We do not support the super hub concept. Both Stratford and Croydon will continue to succeed and grow. It is difficult to envisage why further state support is required for areas enjoying the benefits of substantial private sector investment.

3.1.2 In acknowledging this growth we believe the Commission's work would be better and more strategically beneficial if focused on those town centres which may struggle as a result of the success of areas like Croydon and Stratford. We would suggest that given the social and economic geography of the area, and issues with connectivity, that an approach be developed that recognises the potential of Croydon and Stratford but is also based on the wider regeneration of our town centres and other business and residential locations, emphasising their particular strengths

#### **4.0 Woolwich and Eltham Town Centres.**

4.1 For this borough Woolwich Town centre is a key area of opportunity. It perfectly straddles the community sense of inner and outer London. This is especially so given its extensive transport links across various modes and the proposed and potential redevelopment in and around the Town Centre. In fact Woolwich serves a considerable hinterland including large parts of Bexley. The area between Woolwich and Erith is probably the largest growth/opportunity area in the South East of London.

4.2 Woolwich is a key historic town centre within the heart of South East London which has experienced significant development and has the potential for considerable growth (residential, commercial and retail) over the next decade. It has a growing importance as a key transport hub, especially with regenerative potential of Crossrail with the station due to open in 2017.

4.3 With the growth of Woolwich, there is a particular need to consider the position of Eltham. Eltham has been designated a Major Centre in the London Plan and is a significant employment and retail centre. However, it was badly damaged by 1980s planning policies and the creation of Bluewater. Its ability to recover is hampered by the continued success of that development and larger and more successful town centres such as Bromley.

4.4 The town is a key residential area and a number of new housing developments are planned close by which will further boost its catchment area. The town has a number of tourist attractions, including the historic Eltham Palace, and is also home to a large university campus. The local Primary Care Trust also has plans to build a new Community hospital in the heart of the town centre. There is potential to re-position Eltham in the context of developments elsewhere and building on its existing strengths. This could mean for example, amongst other things, repositioning the town centre to enable it to build on a retail base but also expand to provide additional opportunities which enhance its economic vitality.

4.5 The town does not currently benefit from opportunities for regeneration funding but requires investment to address the physical, social and economic challenges that the area faces. Proposals for developing and modernising the town have been identified and a delivery vehicle put in place with the establishment of an Eltham Regeneration Agency. The Agency will require external funding to support its work and the financial investment already committed by the Council.

## 5.0 Economic Issues

- 5.1 As stated above we are concerned about the definition of Outer London and the impact this may have moving forward. The boundaries between inner and outer London or more fluid than a strict definition between the two implies. This would need to be reflected in any future policy proposals.
- 5.2 *Causes of underperformance* - The causes of the relative underperformance of the outer London economy include the agglomeration effects identified in the GLA's Office Policy Review of 2007. This identified a 20-year trend for major employers either to cluster together in the West End or City/ Canary Wharf, or to seek new build premises in OMA locations, made more accessible by new road infrastructure, principally the M25. In Thames Gateway this has manifested in the loss of major employers such as Citibank and the Woolwich to our town centres, in addition to the loss of traditional manufacturing and river based industries over many years.
- 5.4 In South East London, evidence suggests that Bluewater and Lakeside shopping centres and out of town retail parks have had a damaging effect on town centre retail. The development of super hubs could further damage some sub-urban town centres still struggling to survive the laissez-faire planning policies of the 1980s.
- 5.5 *Barriers to revival and growth* - In the Thames Gateway area skills deficits remain one of the major barriers to growth. These include both lack of literacy, numeracy and customer service skills for entry level roles, and a relatively low proportion of residents qualified to Level 3 or 4, limiting their ability to access better paid employment.
- 5.6 In relation to employment there is a clear need to provide an environment that fosters local and appropriate employment and ensures that people easily travel to centres of employment, as well as being able to take advantage of skills training and education to ensure jobs available can be accessed. An examination of the potential of such areas to provide employment is welcomed as well as the measures that might be required to ensure that local people can actually take up the opportunities available.
- 5.7 Huge growth is already assured at our notional super hub of Stratford. However, this remains largely inaccessible to many in the eastern part of Greenwich where the lack of cross river transport for areas such as Thamesmead continue to stifle its economic potential. In this respect one of the main contributors to growth and connectivity for this borough remains the provision of additional river crossings and improved north-south transport links.
- 5.8 We are a number of sectors with the potential to develop over the next twenty years. Creative and cultural industries are key areas of potential growth.
- 5.9 In Greenwich, the confluence of The O2 and Ravensbourne College of Design and Technology will drive a creative and digital media cluster on the Peninsula within the immediate reach of Greenwich residents and of designated Outer London boroughs such as Newham, Bexley and Bromley.
- 5.10 Similarly, Woolwich with its exceptional and growing transport links is well placed to emerge as a major hub to serve south east London in a way that neither of the proposed super hubs at Croydon or Stratford could do.

- 5.11 Green industries of course offer great potential, and since many of these are likely to involve product manufacture then development is unlikely to be in town centres. In this respect the White Hart Triangle Business Park development serves as a good example of what can be provided.

## **6.0 Quality of Life Issues**

- 6.1 A number of the local and major town centres have suffered due to out of town developments such as Blue water and Lakeside and a proliferation of smaller retail parks. It will be important to ensure we do not exacerbate these problems.
- 6.2 The role of local social and community infrastructure, especially health and education, can not be over estimated in ensuring sustainability and vitality for local areas and has a direct bearing on the quality of life for local residents. Whilst the funding of such provision is not directly in the gift of the GLQA family there is a need to present a consistent picture to Government when lobbying for investment to meet the needs of 'Outer' London. Furthermore, areas such as the South of Greenwich have increasingly elderly populations which will have implications for resources in the future.
- 6.3 In addition Commission's consideration of public realm aspects of local areas is to be welcomed. Attractive town centre squares are very important in enhancing the neighbourhood environment and retail centres. These focal points should be created and maintained as quality, safe, public places for all ages with attractive street furniture and landscaping etc. They should be designed to encourage increased footfall into adjacent retail areas to revitalise vulnerable town centres. Work to embed healthy living into the environment, for example attractive, safe, walking and cycling routes should be a priority. In addition well designed targeted youth provision would bring disproportionate benefits in terms of impacting on community safety and the safety of the public realm.

## **7.0 Transport Issues**

- 7.1 The role of public transport and connectivity is absolutely key in promoting the growth and prosperity of Outer London and the Inner London Fringes. Road congestion and the lack of north south public transport linkages are particular issues impacting on many parts of South East London.
- 7.2 It is also clear that the Oyster card system should be made fully available across the whole of London to include areas served by over ground rail and the river Clipper services. Ideally, in the longer term there needs to be a consideration of the clear benefits of the extension of light rail and Tube services into outer London with improved connectivity with existing services. As stated above the notable lack of north-south river crossings in east London, compared to those available in West and Central London, poses a real barrier to business and regeneration.
- 7.3 It is clear that to increase the proportion of Outer London Residents employed locally requires greater connectivity between Town Centres and centres of economic activity. For Greenwich and the South-East of London this requires more river crossings. It is hoped therefore that there will be a speedy and positive conclusion to the Mayoral review of river crossings. We continue to believe that the original package of three

crossings, at Silvertown, Woolwich and Thamesmead remains critical to successful economic development. We believe that the focus of the previous Mayor on just one additional road crossing raised the fears of opponents that too much traffic would divert from either Dartford or Blackwall or both. However, only the full development of the package of three crossings will provide sufficient cross river capacity to enable new crossings to prove themselves as genuinely local.

**London Borough of Greenwich**  
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