

## **OUTER LONDON CONSULTATION RESPONSE FROM UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON**

As an institution based largely in the London Borough of Newham, we endorse Newham Council's submission. In particular we support the view that sees Newham as an integral part of inner London.

We would also add the following remarks, addressed largely to the outer London position in the east of London:

Consideration of the fortunes of outer London should be considered against a background of long-term trends. To understand the position of the outer London area, it is important to grasp how London itself is changing over a long period. We would argue that 'economic London' as an entity is now much bigger than 'Mayoral London' – it is a super-region like similar super-regions clustered round capitals and other major cities around the world.

The corollary of that is that 'central London' is expanding from the essentially Victorian definition based on railway termini which related to a much smaller concept of London which then excluded Hillingdon, Enfield, Havering and Croydon. The new central London is being created by large scale development pushing beyond those termini – southwards past London Bridge and Waterloo, westwards past Paddington, northwards past Euston, Kings Cross and St Pancras and, most importantly, eastwards past Liverpool St and Fenchurch St. We think it is reasonable, by 2030, to see the meridian line, broadly linking Stratford, the Royals, Canary Wharf and Greenwich, as marking the eastern edges of central London.

Newham is shifting its orientation from Essex, up to the 1964 reorganisation of London, to being an integral part of what people will think of as 'London' more than 'east London'. It is not just that Newham historically shares characteristics with inner London in terms of deprivation, it is coming to share an inner London identity in terms of the density of transport and housing and in the nature of the businesses it will host – and being in the mind of what visitors to the capital think of as 'London'. The existing London Plan makes this clear: the anticipated density of jobs holds up moving eastwards to Stratford, then drops precipitately from 1000 per acre at Canary Wharf to 19 per acre in North Bexley.

The symbiotic eastwards shift of the visitor and knowledge economies over the last 30 years prospectively is now very much beginning to embrace Newham – though much gain is yet to be realised. There is a very big question as to what will push or pull it further east. And, as the Strategic Regeneration Framework agreed in principle by the Olympic Park Regeneration Steering Group acknowledges, there are some very large challenges in terms of the 'connecting strategies' required to ensure local residents and businesses benefit from that change and are a part of driving it.

What has underpinned regeneration in the inner east and is now succeeding in promoting very large scale development is a combination of factors:

- Major environmental improvements
- Transport improvements on a very large scale
- Longterm active promotion of very large development opportunities by the public sector to get the private sector to invest. City Airport, Canary Wharf, Excel, O2, Stratford City are all examples of the public sector making possible 'sector shifting' development, ie bringing in large scale new economic activity which previously did not exist in the area. The media centre at Hackney Wick may also fall into this category.

In effect, this approach has helped create what are now being referred to as 'super hubs'. In the absence of a comparable big and prolonged commitment of the public sector to the outer east, similar change cannot reasonably be expected. This is true even if very large former industrial areas became vacant – 200 acres of former Ford estate have not so far found an obvious business use and it is very unclear what would happen to the remaining Ford lands if FMC became a victim of the credit crunch as GM and Chrysler have.

It is quite possible that, just as we have had to adjust how we understand the economic role of inner east London, from docking to financial and business services, we have to make a similar adjustment in thinking to understand how the outer east areas will work. Super hubs will follow a market logic ultimately, not simply 'an availability of land' or 'desire of policy' logic.

The outer areas could quite possibly have a future as more residential areas, which would require a strong focus on them being attractive as places to live and have leisure and also on transport improvements, particularly orbital, which would make them highly accessible and thus desirable. Bexley is less than a mile from Newham as the crow flies. The return road and rail journeys are ridiculously long given that proximity; residents of Bexley are disadvantaged in terms of access to the jobs north of the river that taxation has invested billions in helping to create at existing and emerging super hubs. And this will remain the case until the Thames Gateway Bridge and Crossrail are constructed. As the outer boroughs fail to provide the number of local jobs they once did, and commuting routes are already stretched, access to the changing shape of London's economic geography and hence to jobs becomes an increasing challenge. Simply following the radial logic of past London (and UK) development may well prove to be an insufficient answer to support the polycentric economic geography that a super hub policy implies.

The outer town centres will potentially have growth opportunities from proximity to centres of much greater economic density. In effect, the 'city fringe' in the east in 2030, round the core area of Stratford, Canary Wharf, the Royals and Greenwich, plus the City itself, may well be found in centres like Ilford, Barking, Woolwich and Lewisham (much of which is more 'outer' than Newham). The geographical opposite can also be true – North London benefits from Stansted for example as the west does from Heathrow and the south from Gatwick. The equivalent in the east may well be what emerges at

Shellhaven. The OLC should therefore also look at what major development locations outside but well connected to London can provide work and business opportunity.

The skill levels of the residential population in the outer east are an important component of re-profiling the areas as attractors of business. It is doubtful whether Ford would have built the diesel engine plant in east London had it not already had a very large estate at Dagenham. As it is, the public sector invested considerably in raising skill levels of employees up to GCSE and some A Level equivalent. The requirement to do this, in effect, explains why the outer east has not worked as a magnet for advanced manufacturing as policy has previously proposed. It isn't a competitive location in terms of environment, connectivity, skills or amenities compared to the M3, M4 or M11 corridors, for example.

A strong working relationship with higher education is part of the solution to this challenge. However, following a period of major investment in HE in Thames Gateway, and entering a period of resource limitation, it is highly unlikely that the outer boroughs will directly acquire new HE presence beyond development already in the pipeline. Instead, the challenge is to connect those areas, community and business alike, with universities nearby.

In terms of part-time and adult learning, the default distribution of higher education in London tends to advantage those in the inner areas - Newham has a high take up of HE for example. Ease of movement to enable people to combine commitments to work, family and learning is essential. UEL and Birkbeck, University of London, are working jointly on expansion of provision – Stratford Island – at a location very close to Stratford regional station being a key part of the case for the quality of access particularly after Crossrail opens. By contrast, at present, our modern Docklands campus faces south, north and west, but not east. If the DLR extended to Dagenham, linking also to the C2C route, this would significantly expand the potential market for higher level adult learning in an area where it is essential to enable people to be more competitive in the evolving London labour market. Such questions have not historically been part of how policy has thought about outer London; we believe that this should change as part of the process of imagining the revitalisation of the outer east.

Finding ways to re-energise the town centres of the outer east is fundamental to their survival as attractive areas. Havering has done this with success in Romford. It will be possible to redevelop large, but in some ways marginal sites such as Barking Riverside, as and when new transport access makes this viable. They will be innately more successful developments if it feels as though they connect to thriving centres. If they are the hinterlands of failing centres, there is a potentially toxic reinforcement of unattractiveness and consequent likely poverty. Town centres are the potential 'capture points' of benefit accruing from the scale of development now occurring to the immediate west of the east London outer boroughs.

Other alternatives are to find forms of business that a/ want to be in the outer boroughs, and b/ will potentially pull people out from the surrounding counties and the inner east (also efficient in transport commuting terms) into their areas for work, ie they achieve critical mass of development as opposed to merely local activity. As things stand, they are in many ways less desirable locations (neither the inner London fish nor the country fowl) for development lacking a sense of proximity (fast effective transport) and amenity (the quality of leisure and retail).

Public sector employment won't do this in sufficient volume, neither will concepts like 'back office' which have been dying as 1960s attempts to build centres like Romford and Bexleyheath as significant office locations have finally just about expired. A number of the non-town centre locations for business are also tired if not degraded. Despite some focus on business park improvement through SRB, for example, the overall sense of relatively low quality hasn't changed in some areas. And, as the nature of the UK economy changes, quite a few more traditional business areas seem poorly-connected, poorly-served in terms of amenity value and unattractive to new or footloose business. Patterns of landholding (SME owners seeing estate as their pension and obstructing consolidation to enable environmental improvement) are an issue and require more creative solutions – the clearing of the Olympic Park area was controversial, but it was well-handled by LDA and achieved both successful relocation and the creation of a very large scale development opportunity. There is also the unresolved thorny issue of the tension between London needing logistics infrastructure, including large warehouses, and the outer boroughs understandably not wanting such land uses because they produce few jobs and they characterise an area as unsuitable for much other business. The inability of planning to resolve these kinds of issues ultimately propagates the worst outcome – stasis and decline.

It wasn't obvious in 1980 that the answer to the Docks closing was financial services, an airport or exhibition, event and entertainment industries. Eventually, though, the market was persuaded that east London, with improved transport and environment and in some cases tax breaks or other incentives, was a suitable location. Changing the nature of place and engaging the imagination of high quality developers (many international rather than UK) is ultimately what has made change take place.

One area where the roll-out of change can continue to shift eastwards is in terms of the visitor economy. Thirty years ago, the east barely had any reason for visitors of any description to go there. That has changed radically in the inner areas and that change has a long way to go. In the long run, there will be opportunities to attract visitors further eastwards. The Eden project proves that, in certain circumstances, it is possible to attract large numbers of people to an unprepossessing former industrial location very badly served by transport – if the destination is good enough.

It is also important to grasp that the geographic diversity of the outer east means that a one-size fits all approach is unlikely to work. Havering, Barking & Dagenham and Bexley have in the past been high employment, but low

qualification areas. In the London economy, the demand for work requiring low skills and/or qualifications has shrunk greatly and will continue to. The challenge in Bexley and Havering may solve itself – as an older population of low qualification residents retires and moves or dies, the fact of attractive family homes, good radial transport and generally good quality schools will pull in new families of young, better-educated people. Provided those areas make themselves congenial to London's increasingly culturally-diverse population (as inner east boroughs started to do 25-30 years ago), they can change and sustain.

Barking & Dagenham, whose base of housing tenure is different, is potentially far more challenged to evolve because of the relative absence of that housing market mechanism, poorer transport, a less attractive environment generally and strong evidence of racial tension between established communities feeling threatened and new minority ethnic populations. The BNP did not stand in Newham at the last municipal elections having, in effect, been defeated in their attempts to destabilise the UK's most diverse borough.

This is an important question, not just politically and morally, but in terms of what makes an area attractive to wealth – whether in the form of families investing in housing and spending their incomes locally or major new business activity arriving. Despite the problems of the inner east, as an area it feels like it once again has a real city energy – it is far more thriving than the point in the mid-1980s when Newham, Hackney and Tower Hamlets had a single one screen cinema between them for a population of well over half a million people, for example.

By contrast, the outer east has lost a lot of the sense of ease that London's suburbs have had in the past, not least because the lifestyles they were built for – husband working, wife at home, family shopping most days in the local high street, etc – have largely disappeared. What will bring that back, in a different form, is finding a new identity as living parts of the new greater London, ie 'economic London', not in clinging to a sense of being outside of the London of poverty and dirty industry. It is likely that far from being 'outside of London', the suburbs now have to find an identity which is much more engaged with London.

The demographic change in Newham has been part and parcel of the shift of attitudes which has itself been fundamentally important in signalling a willingness for change – as opposed to being seen as an area badged by resistance to change and wanting to hold onto what had gone. The political leadership of the borough has played a consistently important part in advocating change, linked to assertive acceptance of the demographic shift. It will be different in other boroughs, but the point about local leadership being identified with willingness to change is an important component in the cocktail of place-making which succeeds in attracting new development.

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