

## Site visit to Barking town centre



**Members with Cllr Ashraf and Cllr Geddes in the Ice House Quarter**

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On Monday 5 September 2015 the London Assembly Regeneration Committee took part in a site visit to Barking town centre as part of its investigation into culture led regeneration in London. The visit was attended by Navin Shah AM, Chair, Shaun Bailey AM, Deputy Chairman, Unmesh Desai AM and Tom Copley AM. The visit was an opportunity to view the work of the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham on the new Artist Enterprise Zone, learn about the partnership approach to culture led by Creative Barking and Dagenham and speak to local people and artists.

## The Galleon Centre- Creative Barking and Dagenham

The visit began at the Galleon Centre, a community centre around 15 minutes' walk south of Barking train station. A former older persons' activity centre, it has been transformed to serve as the home of Studio3 Arts, a local arts outreach organisation. At the centre, Members were met by Councillor Rodwell, Leader of Barking and Dagenham Council, Helen Ball from Creative Barking and Dagenham (CBD) and around ten Cultural Connectors (see next paragraph for details). Councillor Rodwell told us about the importance of culture to the borough, describing the transformation of attitudes towards culture among local people. Members were told about how working in partnership with the local community was a major part of the boroughs' cultural strategy.

### Cultural Connectors



**Navin Shah AM speaks to Helen Ball from Creative Barking and Dagenham**  
London Assembly, 2016

After this introduction, Members heard about the importance of creative networks to tackle the problem of isolation, allowing artists to work together to generate new ideas through CBD. CBD is an Arts Council England's 21 Creative People and Places Programme funded initiative, working with communities and artists to develop engagement in the arts. This is achieved through its 137 Cultural Connectors, individuals who volunteer their time to get local people interested and involved with the arts in the borough. Cultural Connectors work with the borough and artists to identify work of importance to the local community and allocate funding. This includes Neighbourhood

Commissions, whereby artists take up residency in areas with little cultural activity, which CBD argues that this helps develop local confidence in arts and culture. CBD also told us that a legacy could be secured as Cultural Connectors would continue to operate in the community after funding

for the programme finished. However, in replicating such a programme, CBD warned us that relationship building takes a long time and that this should be well-considered.

Members also heard about the importance of CBD's Landmark Commissions, high-impact works that reflect within the local area and community, and 'make people want to come on the train to Barking and Dagenham'. Panels of Cultural Connectors, an artistic expert and an expert on the local area (typically from the borough's regeneration department) assess the works put forward as part of Landmark Commissions, interview artists and select the winning entry. CBD told us that artists appreciated the transparency of these panels and that decisions about entries were considered fair.

### Funding

The funding of CBD was a big part of the discussion. The borough has given CBD, £100,000 in funding, although this has been matched by £730,000 in funding from other sources, including Arts Council England. For example, funding from the Mayor's Office on Policing and Crime means that CBD does work with young offenders, which may not initially be about the arts and culture.

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## The Ice House Quarter- Barking Artist Enterprise Zone

From the Galleon Centre, Members were invited to see artists' studios in the Ice House Quarter next to the River Roding. The Ice House Quarter consists of a range of newly refurbished industrial buildings and new apartment blocks. We initially visited the bottom of a block managed by Bow Arts and home to several artists' studios. The studios were designed to be as 'bare bones' as possible to keep the rent levels low and affordable. At the studios, Members were able to interact with several artists, including one who had set up a gallery in the space to promote her work.

### Putting culture on the map in Barking and Dagenham



**Navin Shah AM speaks to an artist in the Ice House Quarter**

London Assembly, 2016

After the tour of the studios we were given a presentation by Councillor Saima Ashraf on planned cultural work taking place in the borough. Examples of this include the Festival of Suburbia on the Becontree Estate and linking up the Abbey Green with Barking town centre and the Ice House Quarter. In addition, the borough is looking to establish an anchor institution, the East London Heritage Museum, in a former Ford stamping plant, as well as plans to develop Barking Riverside into London's Barcelona.<sup>1</sup>

This was then followed by a talk from Michael Cubey at Bow Arts who told us about the availability of artist workspace and their reasons for investing in the borough. He told us about the low incomes of artists which means that they cannot 'upgrade' to more expensive studios. This means that artists suffer when there is a lack of affordable studio space and affordable housing. This means that artist workspaces need to be subsidised- for example the one we were visiting was at 50 per cent to 30 per cent of local market rents. We then heard from

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<sup>1</sup> Evening Standard, 2016, [Sadiq Khan approves 10,000 homes in 'Barcelona-on-Thames' plan](#)

Verity-Jane Keefe from Mobile Museum who told us about her working mapping the cultural activity taking place in Barking and Dagenham. She looked at communities living on estates undergoing regeneration in Barking and Dagenham, particularly historic estates such as the Gasgoine Estate. She has been using her Mobile Museum art project to connect people with local and London-wide culture by working with them to commission work and produce a map of Barking and Dagenham's culture.

### The Artist Enterprise Zone

After this Paul Hogan, Commissioning Director - Culture and Recreation, ran us through a presentation on the Artist Enterprise Zone and the development that would take place. He told us about how each new block built would be home to artists' studios at the bottom of the block, providing affordable space and contributing to a cluster of artistic activity. He also told us about the wider work of the borough in providing spaces for artists. He said that the borough was looking to provide new spaces for artists, although it was not very interested in meantime uses. However, it had looked to bring empty buildings is cultural use, such as the former old people's centre that is now Studio3 Arts and the White House, which will provide a base for artists and residents for five years. He told us that the end goal was to open up the river to Barking, including a new café and artists' shared live-work spaces, with 18 to be built as a first trial.



**Cllr Geddes talks to Members in the Ice House Quarter**

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Councillor Cameron Geddes, Cabinet Member for Economic & Social Development then spoke to us about the importance of building up networks and partnerships across London to develop culture in Barking. He noted the importance of the Cultural Connectors in working with communities, young people and schools. He told us that the financial security of the culture-led regeneration in Barking was important to the

council. He argued that the 35,000 new homes being built in Barking and Dagenham could be used as leverage to bring in income. These could also contribute

to culture, such as through the council's Beautiful Balconies initiative which saw ponds, flowers and vegetation installed on balconies. However he warned that the scheme was not a gentrification project and that maintaining the character and culture of the area is vital.

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