

CAPTURING POTENTIALS

**Development Brief for Silvertown, Royal Docks & North Woolwich
Submitted March 10, 2016**

**BU1 - TRANSFORMING LOCAL AREAS
Building & Urban Design in Development
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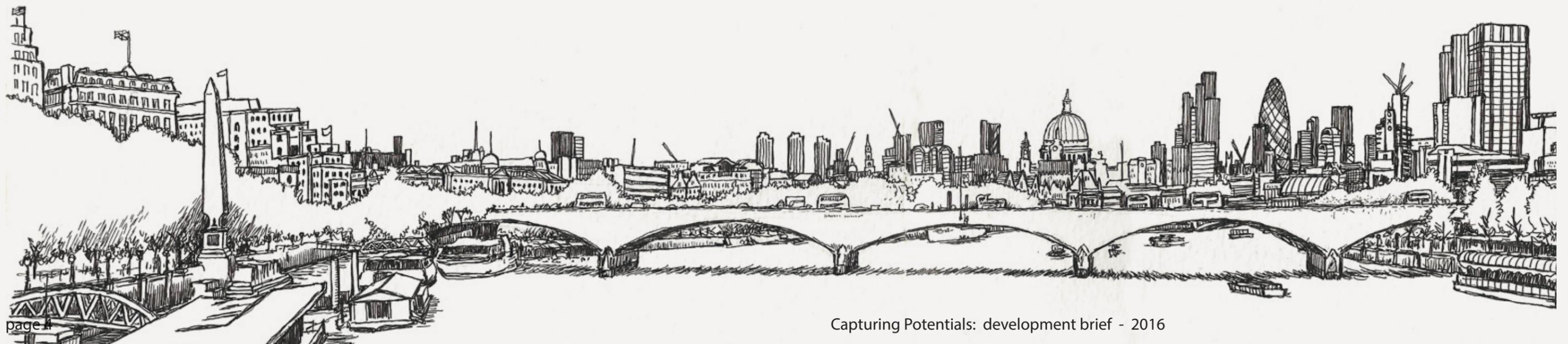
INTRODUCTION

We seek to capitalise on what North Woolwich has rather than what it might be lacking.

Urban design is an attempt to co-produce knowledge about cities in order to offer counter narratives and mobilise new sites of critical intervention. It is about asking questions rather than supplying answers. In the course of our two-month exploration of North Woolwich in the London Borough of Newham (which is variously also referred to as Silvertown and the Royal Docks), we have asked ourselves what regeneration might look like in a post-industrial place? How can large infrastructure function as a bridge rather than a barrier? How can a neighbourhood be improved while remaining affordable? What kind of environment would encourage creativity and collaboration? In its 2014 proposal for our study site, the New Economic Foundation says that North Woolwich “suffer[s] from loss of space and productive land...and from limits to easy access to surrounding neighbourhoods...[T]he geography is such that the community is hemmed in by water both north and south” (40).

It is about asking questions rather than supplying answers.

Following this bleak assessment, however, NEF adopts a more optimistic tone, noting that “access could be better bridged and the amenity of the land opened up” (ibid). We have likewise opted to focus on the affirmative--opportunities over weaknesses, aspirations over threats. To that effect, we have devised strategies that contrast with the approach of government agencies, which tend to see post-industrial cities as blank slates, with market-oriented and property-led development the only ways to reverse supposedly inevitable decline (Imrie and Thomas, 1999). We seek to capitalise on what North Woolwich has rather than what it might be lacking: river access, space, and a diversity of people and skills. We echo the sentiment of Sir Robin Wales, the mayor of Newham since 2002: Newham, and the Royal Docks in particular, should be “a place where people choose to live, work and stay” (Newham London Partnership, 2010: 3). We strive for a neighbourhood that is lively and friendly, where a multitude of people produce a multiplicity of spaces, all with an eye towards building a unique, inclusive, and self-sustaining community.



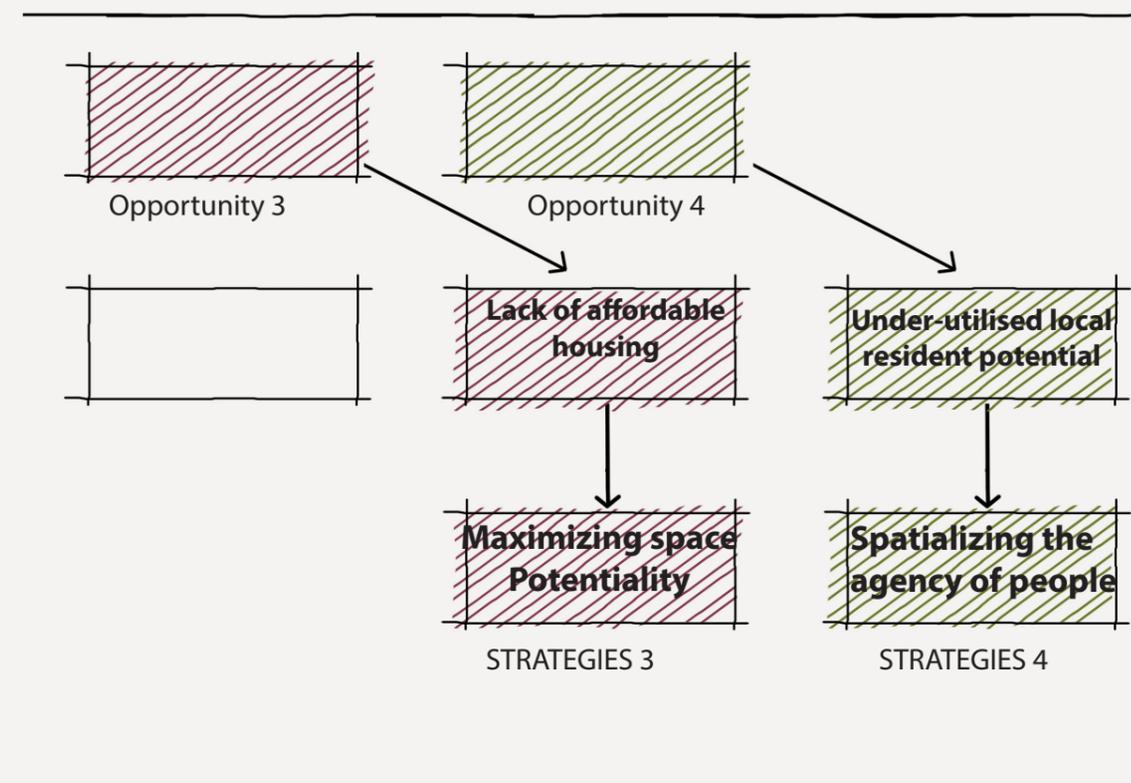
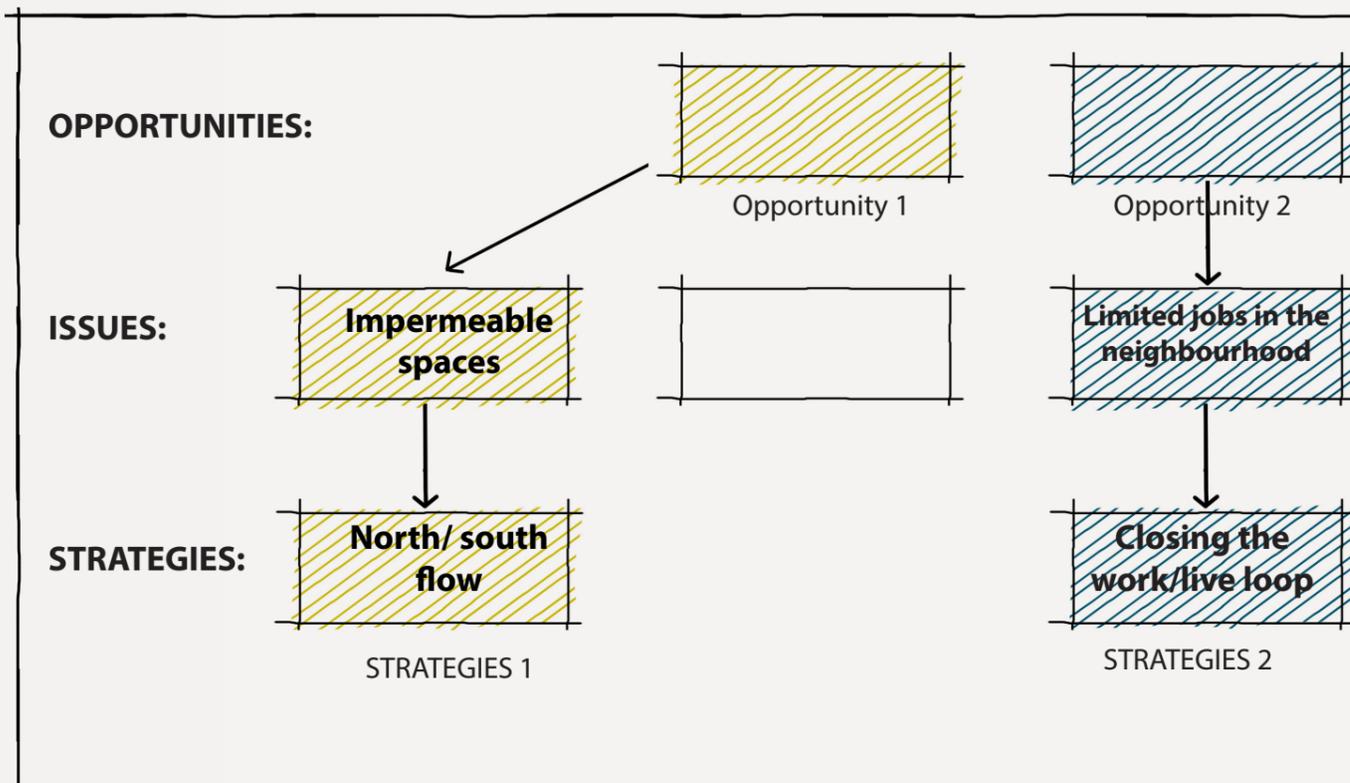
S	O	A	R
STRENGTHS		OPPORTUNITIES	
Well-connected to the city		Internally not well connected	
Good variety of housing types		Not enough affordable housing	
Diversity of people		Diversity of people	
Only city airport		Airport doesn't provide jobs locally	
un-used space		re-use of empty industrial area	
main roadway is well used		the wall along this road that separates	
ASPIRATIONS		RESULTS	
improve movement		new foot paths	
densify?		new houses	
make visible this culture		public art, landmarks	
generating a local economy		local training, local business	
opening it up to public use		new bridge, new waterfront promenade	
activate this as a promenade		public art and wayfinding signage	

We began formulating our design response by looking back on our own urban analysis of the site and those of our classmates, evaluating each of the six lenses of analysis. From there, we extracted a number of issues, prioritised them, and matched them with opportunities. Instead of a SWOT analysis--which we find negative and confrontational--we SOARed, focussing on Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results. We complemented our assessment with another site visit, building on the spatial and experiential knowledge we gained during previous visits and adding to our collection of photographs and videos. We also continued to review relevant literature, including government planning documents, counter proposals, a local newsletter that examines social justice in neighbourhood development, and more.

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To construct a theoretical framework, we drew upon the writings of Foucault and Agamben on resistance. "Existing potentiality contains therefore the power of negation, the freedom to resist; 'potentiality is always also constitutively an impotentiality, [...] the ability to do is also always the ability not to do...' [P]otentiality is a power that simultaneously delivers and withholds" (Boano and Talocci, 2014: 110). We contest the dominant view of the Royal Docks as an "in-between space" that is neglected, disconnected, and lacking things to do. We have instead chosen to embrace an alternative paradigm and see the area as a space of negotiation and possibility.

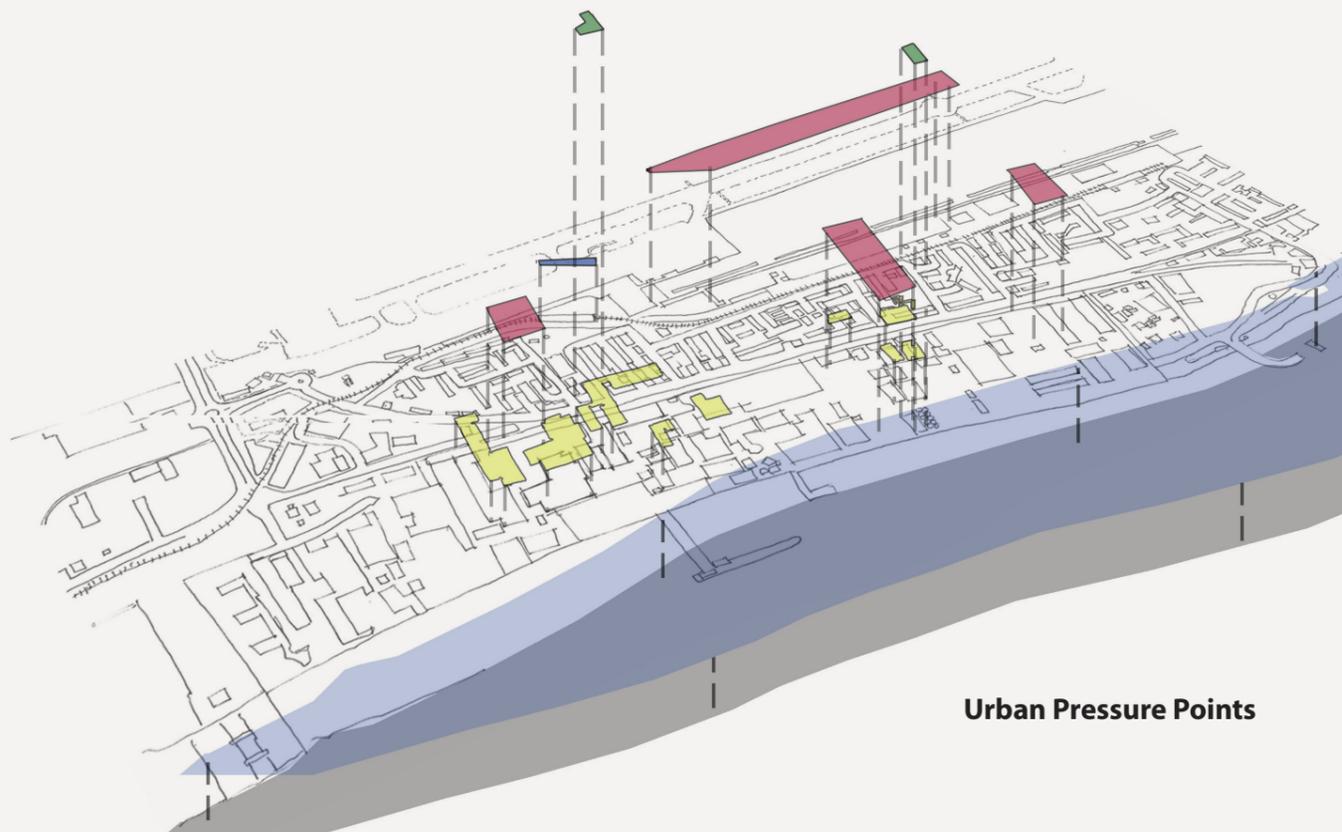
METHODOLOGY



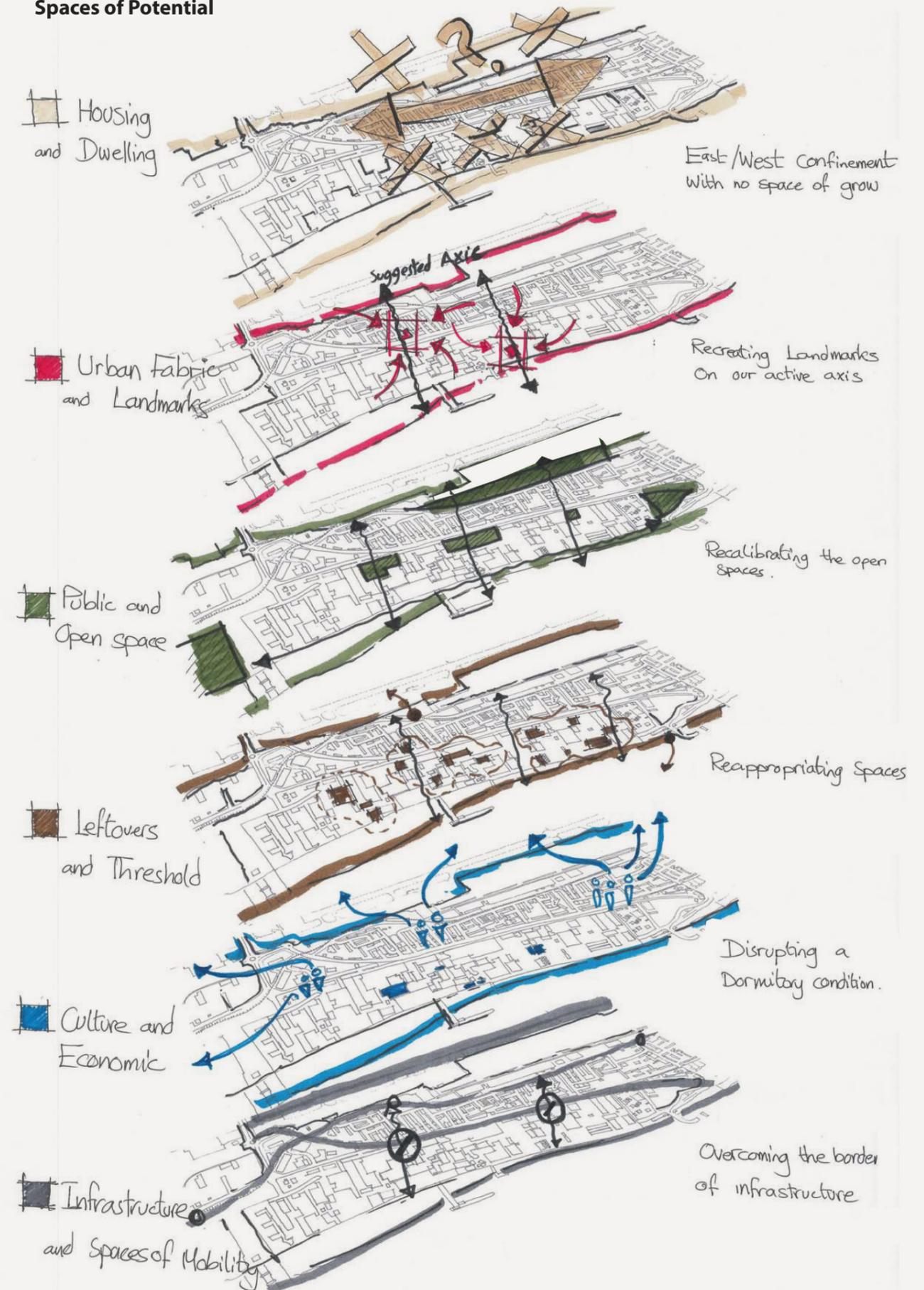
OVERVIEW OF ANALYSIS AND STRATEGIES

Through our analysis we identified several complex issues that residents of the Royal Docks and the surrounding areas within the Council of Newham face. We categorised these issues, which impact the social, economic, and cultural conditions of residents on a daily basis, into four opportunity segments: **potential for permeability, growth in local employment, new spaces for affordable housing, and local resident potential.** Under these categories, we aim our development brief at their root causes in an effort to redirect current development plans and transform them into opportunities. Our four strategies are:

- North/South flow**
- Self-contained living, dwelling, and working ecosystem**
- Maximising the potentiality of space**
- Spatialising the agency of people**



Spaces of Potential



1. Bold ideas, but little application on the ground

Newham's Sustainable Community Strategy 2010 – 2030 sets out objectives for community development, specifically identifying the following:

“Building personal and economic capacity, offering effective support for people to gain employment or training and to support people with specific needs at different times in their lives. Fostering trust and fairness, including building neighbourhood pride and creating a heightened sense of community engagement. Connecting people, building communities where there are strong bonds of friendship and trust between people and with service providers, tackling social exclusion and encouraging people to stay in Newham”

(Newham London Partnership, 2010: 4).

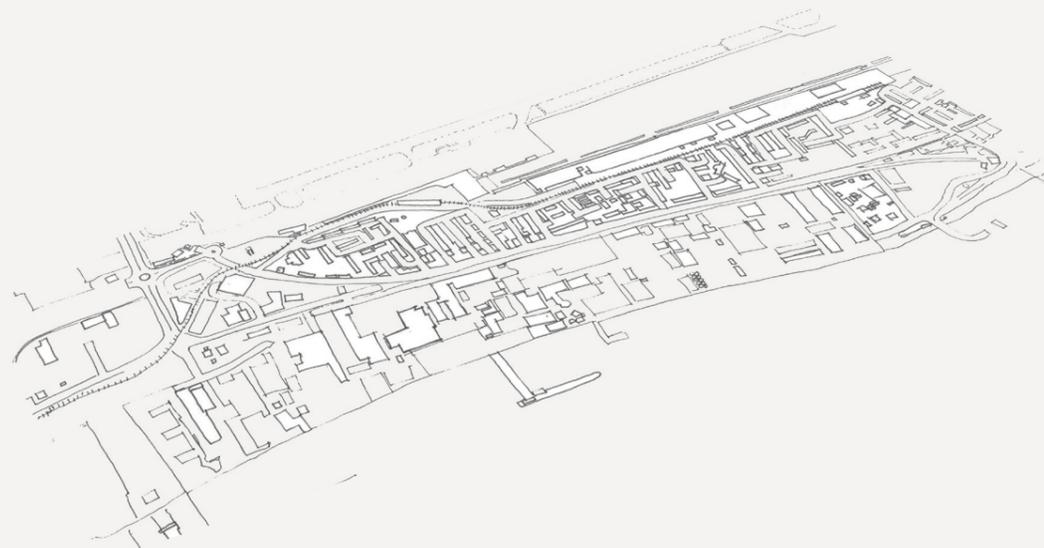
This statement, while admirably positive, overlooks the specific challenges of the Royal Docks area. Although there is significant urban development—led by public and private interests, which are still under consideration or already in progress—none directly addresses the issues we discussed above. The 2011 brief, *Royal Docks: Parameters for Development*, cites examples of infrastructural elements and some social spaces, noting that, “North Woolwich has a range of community facilities, including Drew Primary School, St John’s Church, a community hall as well as other neighbourhood focused facilities...” (LDA: 140). The brief neglects to mention, however, that the secondary school that serves the area is actually outside of it and that community spaces, particularly in open and public areas, are few and far between.

Geographically, the new ABP will sit in a long and narrow area between Victoria Dock Road (A1020) to the north and the Thames Water Basin to the south. The high profile of the project is incongruous with the urban fabric of the surrounding area. As we learned from interviewing local residents, the DLR is not the primary form of transport for people living in the Royal Docks. More than half of the residents own their own cars and most of the rest use the two busses, down from three previously. This puts the ABP even further out of their reach in terms of its accessibility.

2.

Asian Business Park

“Recent urban transformations in the West and emerging economies have come to represent a ‘privatopia’... These projects are often designed by star architects and financed mainly by global capital” (Banerjee, 2011: 208). Directly to the north of the docks is a mega development project, the Asian Business Park (ABP). This is a £1.7 billion project funded primarily by Chinese investors to create an office complex situated on 1.4 million square metres of land between Royal Albert and Beckton DLR stations. Ferrells Architecture is the lead on the design. Sir Terry Ferrell of Ferrells Architecture, the lead firm on the design, claimed that, “this development will re-instate the Royal Docks as a commercial and trading centre for the 21st century. The masterplan creates a state-of-the-art business district for financial, high-tech and knowledge driven industries which will act as a catalyst for the transformation of the wider Royal Docks and East London” (Myall, 2016).



Continued on next page

3.

Tackling affordable housing

One of the most prominent challenges in North Woolwich and throughout London is overcrowding and lack of affordable living. Though the Borough of Newham ranks first in London for overcrowding, the residential developments surrounding the Royal Docks are market-rate properties that will price renters out of the area. There is no public land held by not-for-profit owners and which could be leased to a Community Land Trust (CLT), and no policy in place to halt the rapidly appreciating property values in the area. Indeed, Newham has seen property costs increase significantly since 2014.

According to the NEF's explanation of the potential benefits of a CLT:

A Community Land Trust (CLT) underpins the ownership structure of the neighbourhood. The CLT controls the land and buildings which have been transferred from the GLA and holds these in trust to ensure permanently affordable housing and business workspace in the neighbourhood (see 'Affordability through community ownership' box below). A community energy share issue funds the renewable energy infrastructure within the neighbourhood, giving people an opportunity to invest in their area in affordable amounts. Not all space is designed; flexible infrastructure leaves space for the imagination to adapt the space to needs (NEF, 2014: 28).

1.

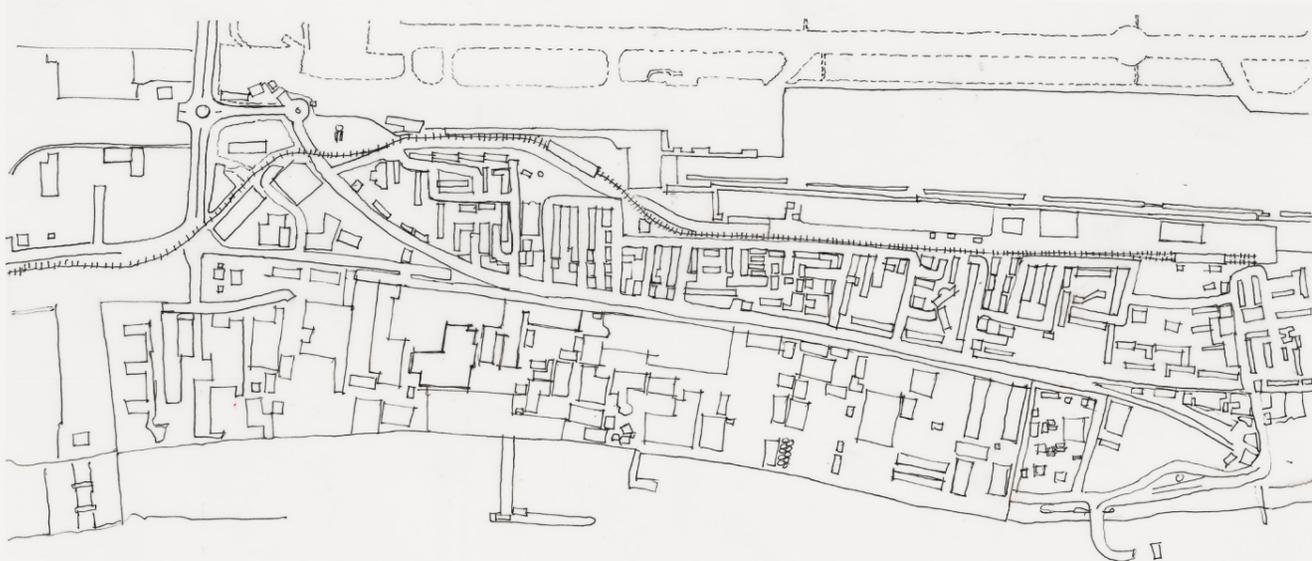
Potential for permeability

Large portions of the study site are privately owned by industry. Residents consider one of the largest of these sites, the London City Airport, to be both an advantage and disadvantage. The airport is a highly secure zone that demands significant regulations of space and building codes, for example in buffer areas near the runway and in terms of the heights of surrounding buildings.

Equally significant is that the 1980s LDDC planning for the area was primarily concerned with creating space for cars and parking rather than public transit or pedestrian areas (Brownhill, 1990). This is evident in the wide roads and limited or nonexistent pedestrian pathways along these roads, especially in roundabouts and on the Connaught Bridge.

Because of the road system, the DLR, Crossrail, and the natural direction of the Thames, mobility flows mainly from east to west, making the area a narrow rectangular corridor. This function has contributed to impermeable spaces to the north and south and restricted freedom of movement. As a result, there are significant opportunities to ease north to south mobility and increase connectivity in the area.

OPPORTUNITIES



2. Growth in local employment

The area is predominately residential with few commercial spaces. Most residents rely on the shopping centre in Beckton for their groceries and drive cars to get in and out. The pull of jobs outside the neighbourhood creates a “dormitory community” where the home is used primarily for evening activities and sleeping. This kind of lifestyle weakens social connectivity by limiting the opportunities for interaction between neighbours. Just as decreasing the distance that schoolchildren have to travel to school increases the time they can spend on other activities, decreasing the time adults spend commuting frees up time that they could spend with friends or family and pursuing other types of leisure and learning activities.

3. New spaces for affordable housing

Despite the ambitious aims that the Greater London Authority (GLA) articulates in its housing strategy, Newham is nonetheless succumbing to city-wide trends that are making housing increasingly unaffordable. Despite the launch of the largest council housing programme in 25 years in 2013 (Newham London, 2013), council housing is unable to keep pace with demand. Moreover, even council housing has become less accessible to low-income people with the recent advent of “affordable housing,” which is often priced at 80% of the market rate (Wiles, 2014), while upgrades to existing housing stock and the application of a rental standard policy are slow to take effect (GLA, 2014). As developers build around North Woolwich, the area becomes more distinctive for attracting less investment. A local housing association would enable residents to advocate for themselves and their neighbourhood with a unified voice. They would also be less vulnerable to buy-outs and less likely to default on loans should interest rates increase.

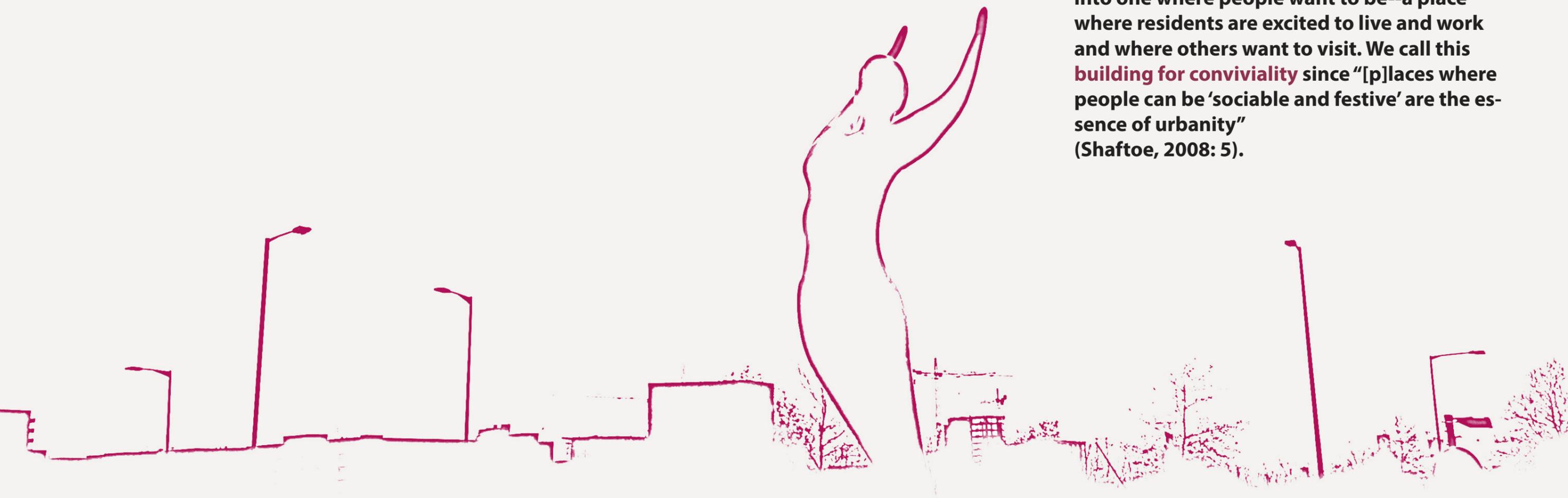
4. Local resident potential

Demographic data show a large young population and a wide ethnic diversity among residents. There are few spaces for young people to play or engage in activities outside of school, however, and interviews with local residents revealed that there is little for young people to do apart from leave the area. The small amount of public art in North Woolwich reflects only the history of the area, leaving space to represent and celebrate the ethnic and generational richness that the area now enjoys.

There are also a broad range of skills and professions within the community that could be brought forward in spaces of exchange. The creation of community centres to share resources and provide training could enable people to develop and build new and existing skills and attract residents from surrounding areas. These places also create space for partnerships that could result in the formation of new local businesses.

THE VISION

We aim to build upon existing physical, geographical, and personal assets in North Woolwich in order to transform the neighbourhood into one where people want to be--a place where residents are excited to live and work and where others want to visit. We call this **building for conviviality** since “[p]laces where people can be ‘sociable and festive’ are the essence of urbanity” (Shaftoe, 2008: 5).





STRATEGIES

1 North/South flow

2 Self-contained living, dwelling and working ecosystem

3 Maximizing space potentiality

4 Spatializing the agency of people



STRATEGY 1

North/South flow

ACTORS

Newham Council
Network Rail
Business owners
GLA

Disrupting the existing morphology in the Royal Docks requires new pathways that provide residents access from north to south. This strategy involves the establishment of north/south high streets where retailers can attract residents and visitors to areas that currently have little foot traffic. This can occur through a network of local businesses situated side by side at ground level and with residential areas above.

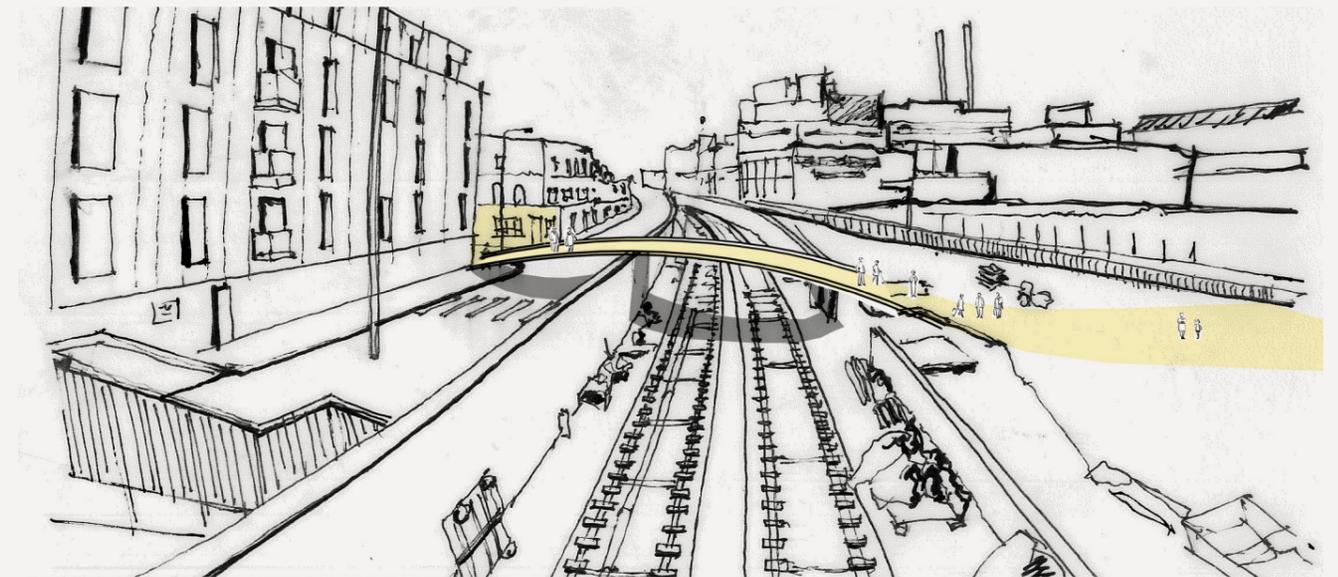
The second aspect of this strategy requires pathways to bridge Crossrail, enabling people to access the waterfront. Here we envision more than the single bridge that presently exists to allow people to cross from one side of Crossrail to the other, new forms of public art from local artists, and the creation of green spaces along the River Thames. These bridges, which would be pedestrianised and well lit, would permit people to bypass the Tate & Lyle factory.



Proposed Pedestrian Bridges



'high street' - encouraging south north flow of pedestrian



Connecting bridges - crossing over the cross rails



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STRATEGY 2

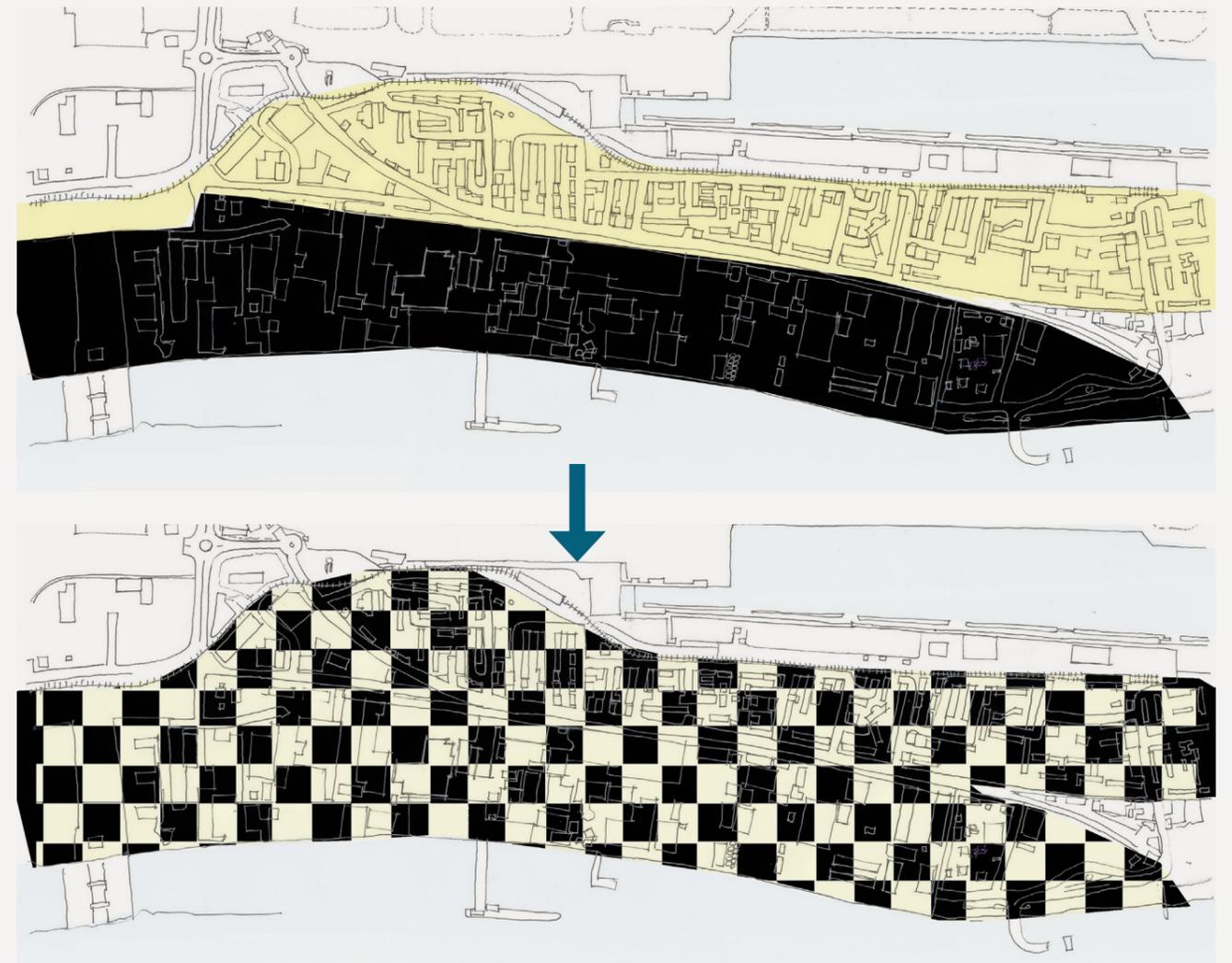
Self-contained living, dwelling and working ecosystem

ACTORS

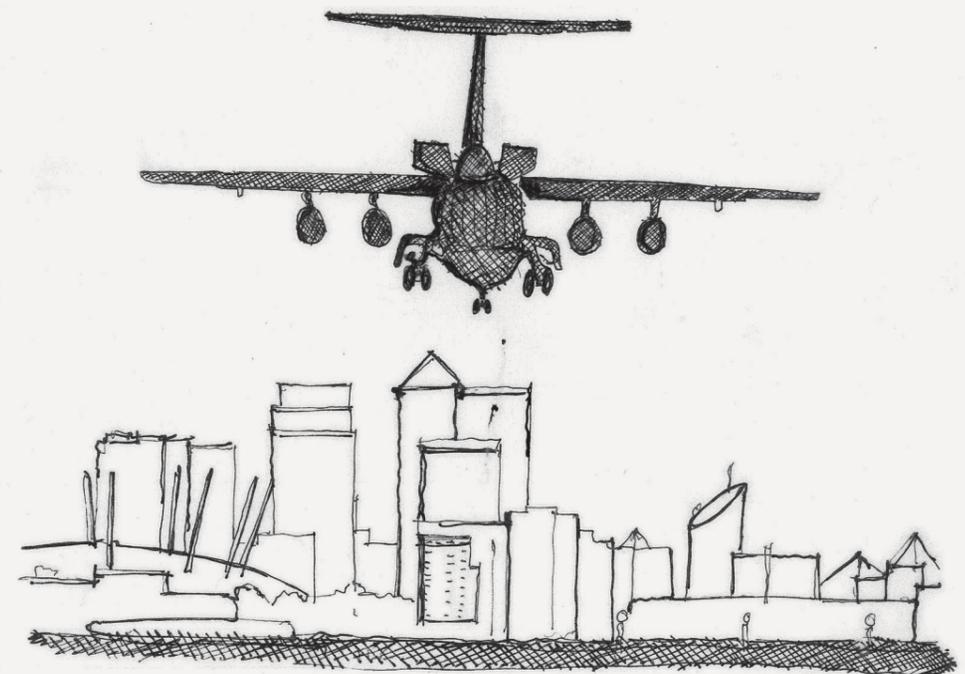
Residents
Business owners
Landlords
Newham Council
Community Links

This strategy focusses on the dynamism of an ecosystem, defined as a community of interacting organisms and their physical environment. Through providing a greater and more diverse mix of commercial, residential, and community/public space, the network of activities in the area will grow. Just like an ecosystem in nature, this ecosystem must be self-sustaining through local business and local spending. For example, free public event space brings community-led activities which draw residents out of their homes and increases what they spend on local services.

This ecosystem extends to the spaces of daytime activity, including workplaces and schools. Creating more jobs within the neighbourhood contributes to a more balanced lifestyle and lower levels of stress through shorter commute times. It also improves the safety in the area through ensuring that there are always people around. Constructing a secondary school would save students a trip to nearby areas, increasing the time they have available outside of class to play and study.



Integration through cross-rail to bring mixed use



STRATEGY 3

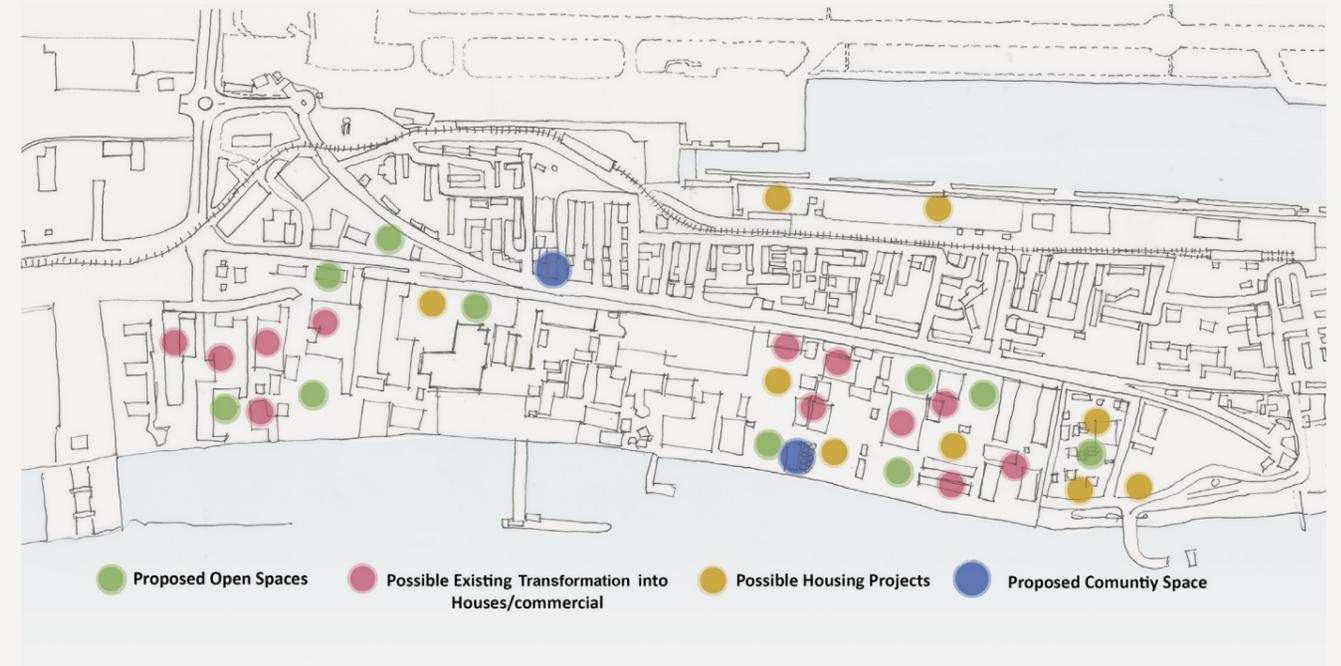
Maximizing the potentiality of space

ACTORS

Newham Council
Network Rail
Tate & Lyle
GLA
London City Airport

We see significant potential to reclaim derelict industrial space, car parks, and green spaces to transform them into active hubs for local residents. Working with landlords, tenants, and the Newham Council to obtain space that can be re-purposed for public good is essential to the health and dynamism of the neighbourhood. There are currently several sites that are under-utilized or vacant, including the expansive above-ground, single-level car park for City Airport. Converting this car park into a stacked parking garage would free up land that could be reappropriated for the greater community benefit, extending the neighbourhood northward and creating a new and dynamic town centre. Other spaces that could undergo similar transformation are vacant buildings within the industrial zone along the Thames and the former social club for the Tate & Lyle, a richly decorated building on Connaught Road at the corner of Wythes Road. Collaboration between landowners and residents could lead to new mixed-use spaces.

To address the shortage of truly affordable housing in the area--and provide an alternative to the high-end developments going up nearby--Newham could take a cue from nearby Lewisham and explore the feasibility of self-built housing schemes. The Lewisham Council has recently turned over land to a CLT to build 33 homes that "will remain affordable in perpetuity," with prices linked to local incomes (Wainwright, 2016).



STRATEGY 4

Spatialising the agency of people

ACTORS

Community leaders inside and outside of Newham
Community Land Trust
other NGOs

Recognising the agency within people living in the area is our final and most crucial strategy. We propose activating new spaces to provide places where people can self-organise and express their identities as individuals and as a collective, thus creating a new social infrastructure for the Royal Docks. This could involve combined working and learning spaces to store tools and provide space for workshops and training. Shared knowledge opens up doors to better job opportunities and higher income. The walls on both sides of Crossrail provide unique canvases spanning the length of the neighbourhood which could be appropriated for art installations, community message boards or calendars, and more. These spaces become collective assets or “community capitals” because they are collectively owned and managed and of high community value.

An important aspect of these collective capitals is so-called maker spaces. “Maker spaces add to the diversity of the local economy by disrupting the cycle of ‘buy, use and bin’ by providing access to shared tools, resources, training and know-how to up-cycle materials and encourage collaborative consumption” (NEF, 2014: 28).

The last element of this strategy is the establishment of a Community Land Trust. As outlined earlier in this brief, the CLT underpins the ownership structure of the neighbourhood and creates a platform for negotiation. A CLT can help protect residents from future development encroachments or threats and it can easily incorporate community capitals that are collectively owned (Just Space, 2016).



CONCLUSION

It is not what the the Royal Docks and North Woolwich neighbourhoods lack, but rather the opportunities and potentials that exist and can spark change. The strategies we propose in this brief are designed to form a “layer cake of activities” (NEF, 2014: 7) spearheaded by local people. This layer cake is the social infrastructure needed to counter the hard infrastructure that confines spaces and resources. Strong social networks are the building blocks for the conviviality essential to forming healthy communities. Valuing people over land runs counter to the dominant paradigm that prioritises market prices above all else. Through collective actions, residents can make the area more vibrant and dynamic while also maintaining the affordability of housing and discouraging gentrification. Through collective ownership, shared resources, and local dwelling these neighbourhoods can root themselves more strongly in the terrain in order to resist the inevitable tides of real estate speculation. Our four strategies are points of departure to spur creative ideas that take advantage of the four opportunities we outlined. This brief is a tool to carry forward in spaces of negotiation that seek equitable outcomes for the people who live, work, and dwell here.

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