

BU1 Transforming Local Areas : 27 february 2014

creating a critical design response

**North woolwich_Albert island_Becton
London Borough of Newham**

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executive summary

This report proposes a “Human-Scale Network” intervention for the North Woolich/ Albert Island/ Beckton Study Area in the London Borough of Newham.

Through our analysis, we have seen that the everyday human scale considerations have been neglected in the midst of many exciting developments in the Area, including the new Siemens centre, transport improvements, and residential developments.

Our interventions will hopefully encourage people out into the streets with their neighbours, to create a more communal feeling and promote quality of living. Importantly, it fills in a short-medium term vision to help activate the area in the process of Newham’s major development plans underway.

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fig. 0.1 - Historical view of Royal Docks from the top. Industrial and residential areas.

introduction

In the previous reports, we have acknowledged that there are considerable **physical discontinuities, limitations, and thresholds** in the Study Area. We believe that this has been a result of both the material limits of the Area and in part by the GLA's incremental development projects, that have perhaps not incorporated sufficient local community participation. There has been a trend of development focusing on a macro, or regional-scale vision for the area, which has emphasised business intensification, and transportation expansion and upgrading.

Because of the convenient transportation links with the centre of London, there is a great opportunity to develop the Study Area for the entire city to enjoy by building on its strengths.

However, we noticed that many of the Study Area's strengths are linked directly with negative aspects. For instance, the area's wealth of natural resources in the Parks with the green space are unfortunately also sites of crime.

In order to overcome these paradoxes, we have created a new vision for the area that focuses on creating a new **"Human-Scale Network"**, aimed at connecting people with their surroundings and with each other, improving the sense of place in the Area.

Analysis Structure

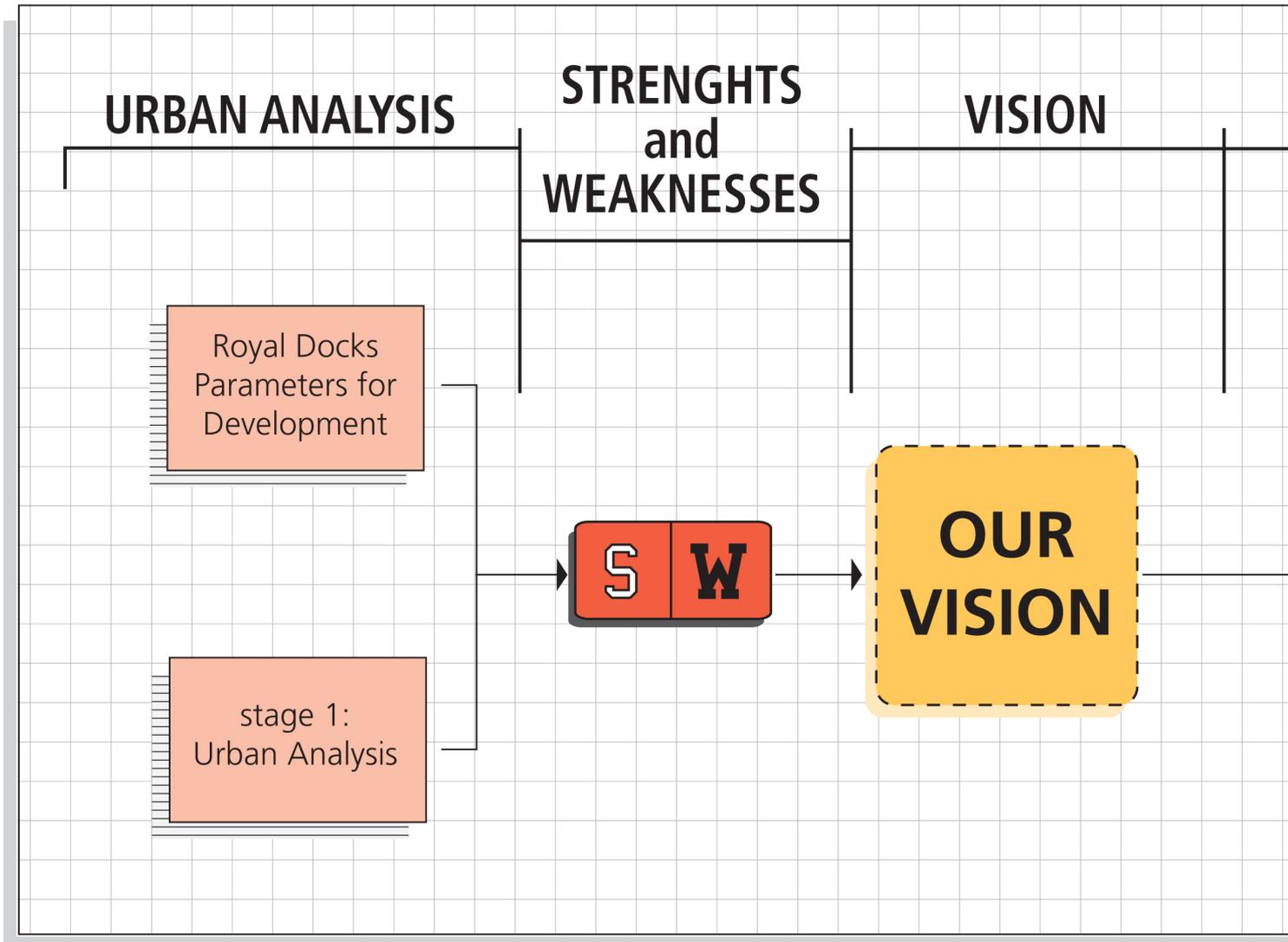
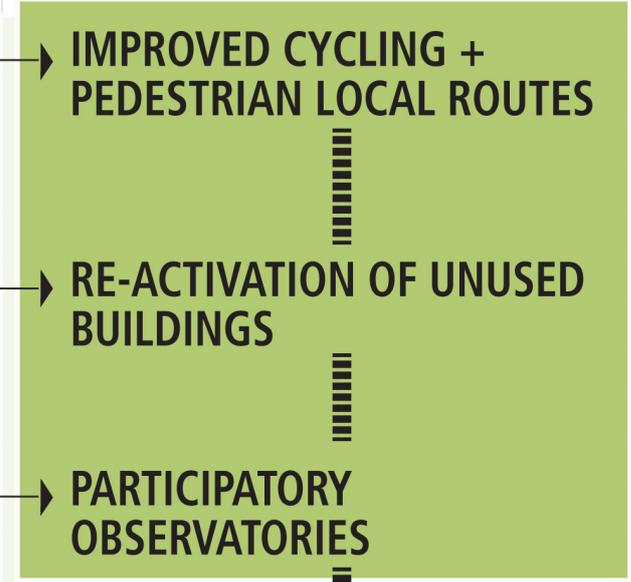
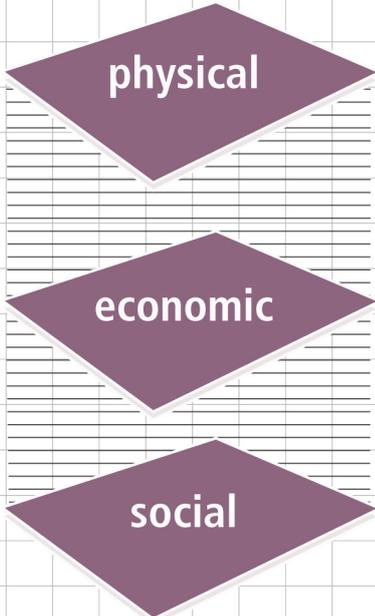


fig. 0.2 - Analysis Structure

PRINCIPLE: CONNECTIVITY

DESIGN RESPONSES

**CON
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related with their nature of short/medium term interventions for (re)activation and participation

01. Urban Analysis: Conclusion from the previous report

Critical review of Newham's Local Development Framework

In our intervention, we want to make sure to complement the current plans for the Area. We have identified excellent long-term plans, that did not necessarily offer alleviations for the present-day weaknesses of the Study Area. Therefore, we hope to keep our interventions in the short-medium term.

Sir Robin Wales, the Mayor of Newham, introduced **Newham's Local Plan for 2027** by saying that LBN has invested decades in the development of monumental infrastructure and transport hubs represented by London City Airport that places every major European city within two hours reach. He claims that "Newham is a place of unprecedented connectivity and opportunity" (Council of Newham, 2011). It will be the place where people choose to work, live and stay. Most importantly, local people are at the heart of the strategy, and LBN will always be guided by what matters most to hard working residents (ibid).

The Royal Docks

The Royal Docks are planned to represent a business destination following the line of UEL and the Excel Centre. Today's fragmented residential development will be linked and connected into a number of distinct neighbourhoods. The industrial spectre of area will be replaced by a new urban living with open access to Thames and dock water spaces. Nearly 9,000 new dwellings will be developed in the Royal Docks area.

Beckton District Park

Beckton District Park will be made safer with an increase in "natural surveillance" provided by new development and improvements to local paths and alleyways that would increase usage. New public open space will be provided at Beckton Riverside and within the Albert Basin development.

Beckton is a large Community Forum Area, but currently has a relatively low population density due to large extents of land being in retail, warehousing, utilities and industrial use, and a deliberate 1980's London Docklands Development Corporation policy of developing newly-drained land for low-rise, family-oriented housing. North-south pedestrian routes link residential areas with the Triangle Retail Park, but crucial east-west connections between residential areas and the major amenities of Gallions Retail Park and Showcase Cinema, and future access to the Roding and Thames riverfronts are lacking.

theme 1 © **creating successful places and communities**

theme 2 © **delivering high quality jobs**

theme 3 © **creating a high standard for homes**

theme 4 © **ensuring that new development is sustainable and responds to the challenge of climate change**

theme 5 © **providing the necessary infrastructure and services**

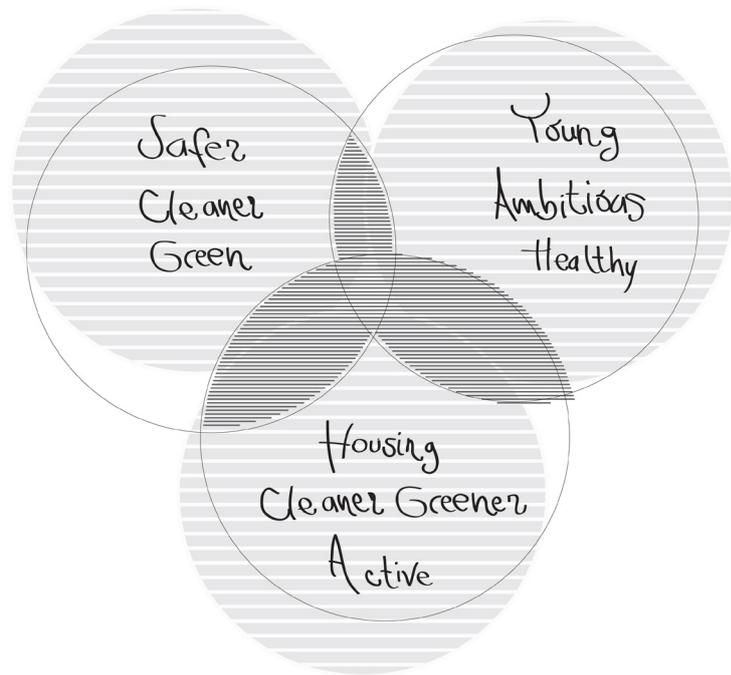
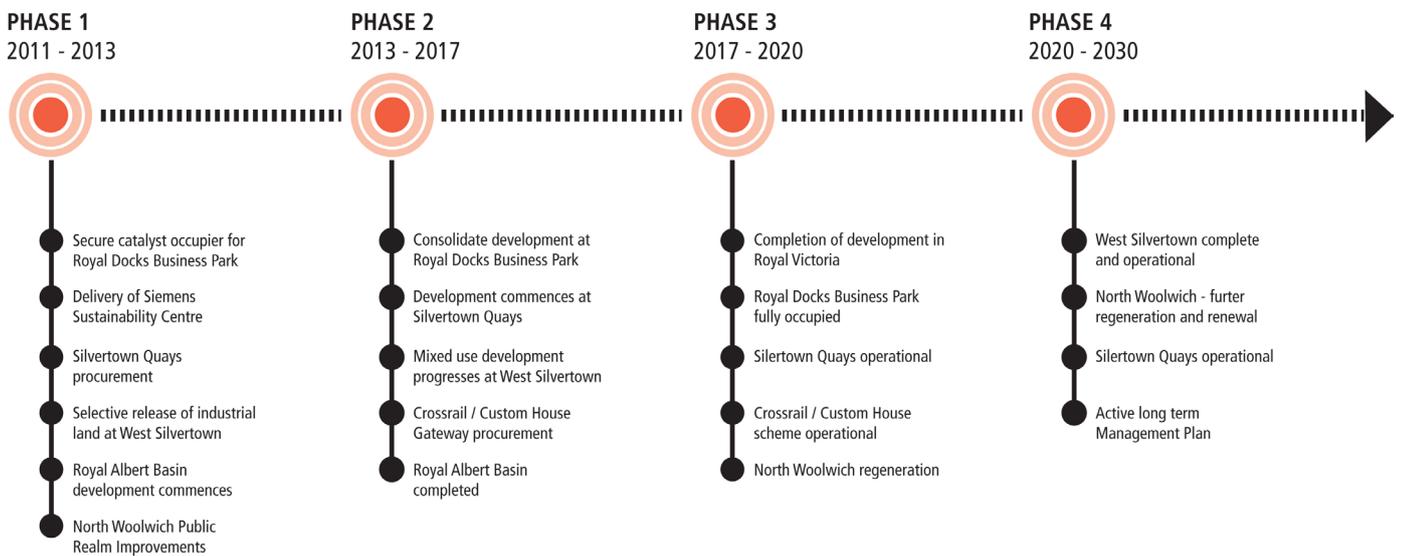


fig. 1.1 - (previous pag.)
Five themes for policy
choises
fig. 1.2 - Newham
sustainable community
strategy
fig. 1.3 - View of the
Royal Docks from the





Critique of the LBN 2027 Plan

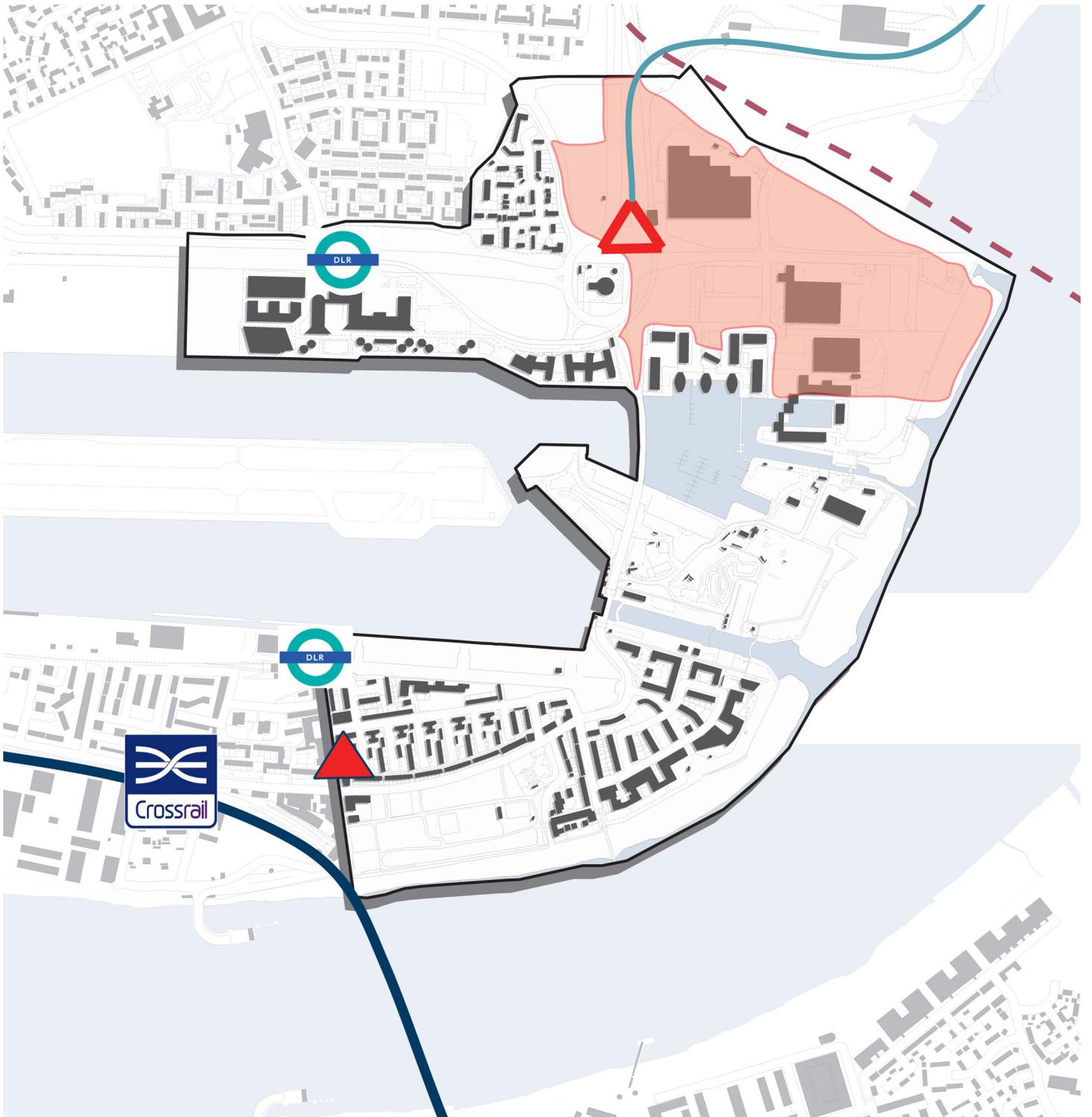
The LBN 2027 plan seems to mainly focus on solutions that do not help link the fragmented area, but rather tries to strategically link the area to the rest of London. There is a simplistic assumption that underused and vacant spaces in Beckton and North Woolwich could be solved by providing distinct and defined housing projects. We believe that the social involvement from local communities in the planned projects is overlooked in the report. The report also mentions how 70% of the Newham population comes from migrant groups, but falls short of targeting them in a social project. (Newham, 2012)

Besides planned infrastructural upgrades for the DLR and Crossrail, several links through cycling and walking paths (possibly) should be addressed and improved to provide connectivity and involve local communities.

Our project could trigger a community-led action to fill in the social gap, by allowing them to incorporate their vision into the LBN.



fig. 1.4 - Main phases of Newham's planning regeneration
fig. 1.5 - Map of LBN 2027 infrastructure



Critical review of the Urban Analysis reports

“The realistic housing situation is for people of different socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds. This involved looking at housing typologies but also how people dwell both within, and outside of, their physical home boundaries.”
(Group A – Housing and Dwelling)

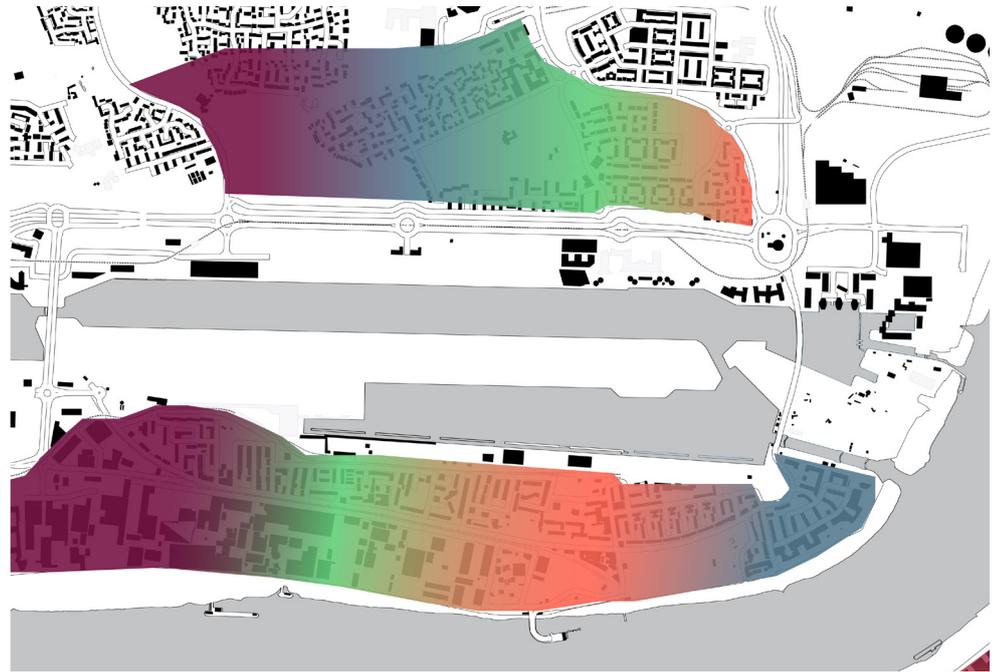


fig. 1.6 - Group A – Housing and Dwelling)

“In order to approach an intervention, we should ensure a manageable continuity to overcome the physical and social boundaries.”
(Group B – Urban Fabric and Landmarks)



fig. 1.6 - Group B – Urban Fabric and Landmarks)

“Moreover, our main observation from the three different areas of Woolwich, Albert Island and Beckton is that they are fragmented and disconnected. The clear difference in urban fabric and architecture and disconnection between different areas had a great impact on how the area is perceived for the first time.”
(Group C – Open and Public Space)



fig. 1.6 - Group C – Open and Public Space)

“In the study area we see signs of negotiation and experimentation: some maybe less “desirable” such as the drinking on Albert Island, but others are small but significant appropriations.”
(c)

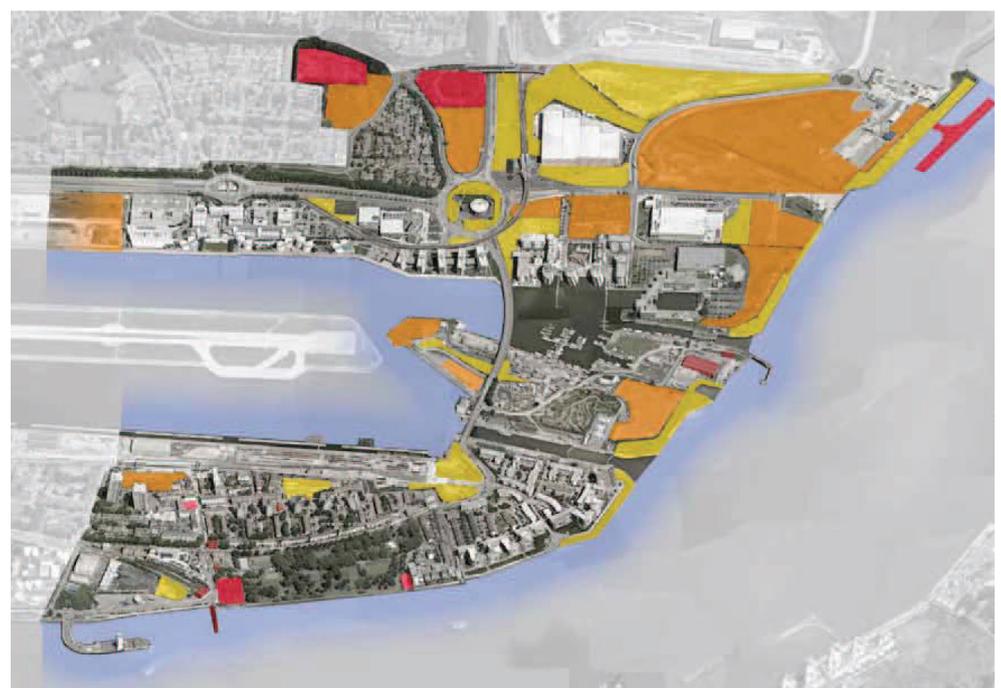


fig. 1.6 - Group D – Leftovers and Thresholds)

“There appears to be a disconnect between future economic plans for the area and the needs and desires of the residents that currently live there.”
 (Group E – Culture and Economic)

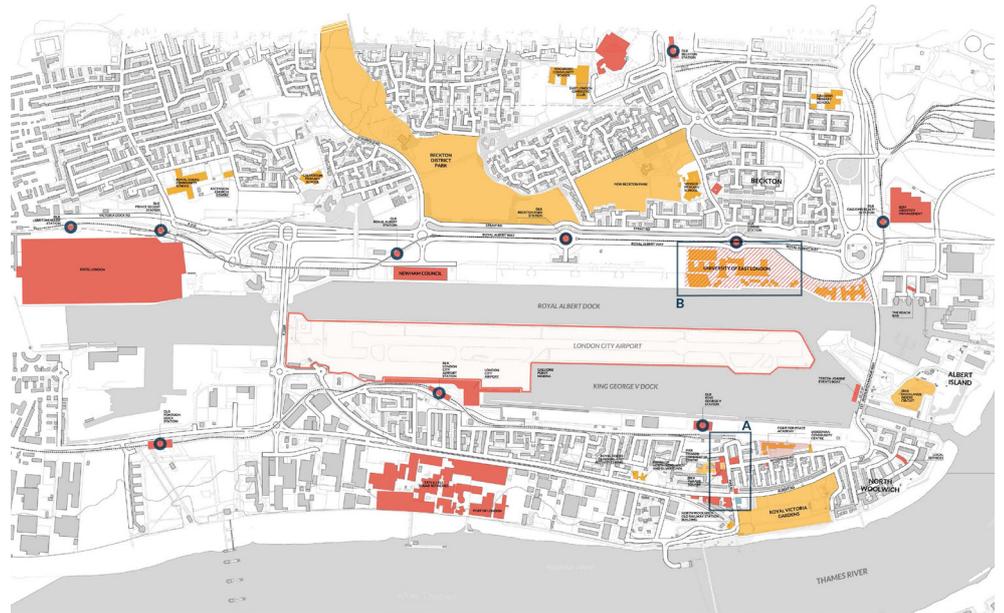


fig. 1.6 - Group E – Culture and Economic)

“There is also a problem of not proper use of the existing connections due to unclear signs or abandoned/not maintained infrastructures.”
 (Group F – Infrastructure and Mobility)

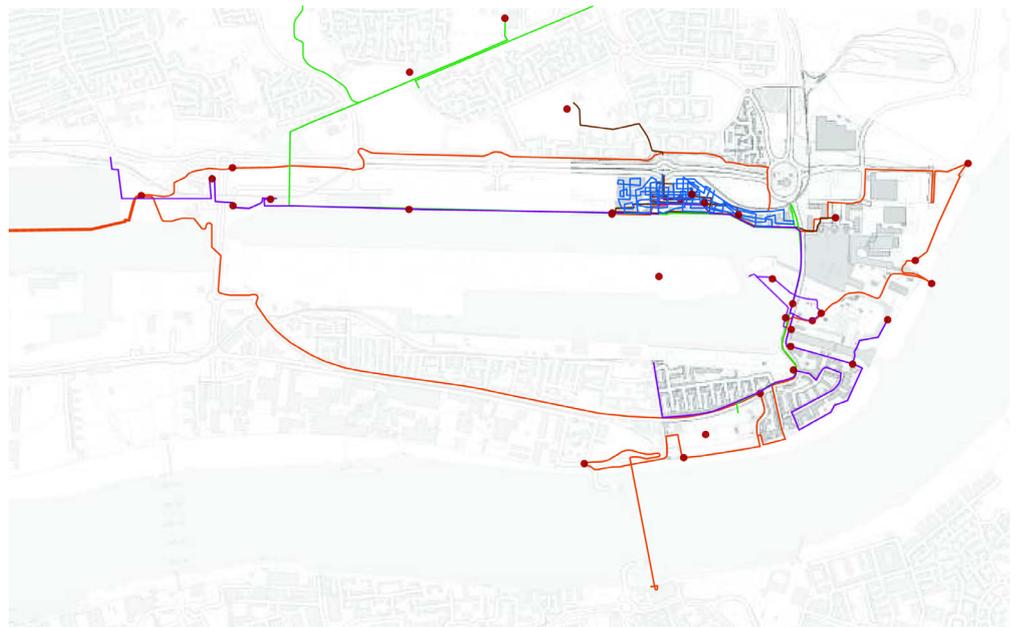


fig. 1.6 - Group F – Infrastructure and Mobility)

02. Critical Identification of Strengths and Weaknesses: Regional / Local

Strengths and weakness at the regional and local scale

Regional Scale

Our Study Area's strengths on a regional scale lie primarily in the investments and developments of the last 20 years, and the proximity to natural resources.

The City Airport, strong transportation links, UEL, and Crossrail expected in just a few years time makes the Area exciting and accessible.

Newham has targeted this area for green economic growth, which positions it uniquely within the wider Docklands area of business development and capital investment as a **more eco-friendly area**. We want to underline this strategic niche in relation to the area's green spaces.

Local Scale

Locally, there are more problematic issues.

The parks, which are seen as positive generally, are also sites of crime, and this weighs negatively on the human scale experience in the area.

The DLR provides great access for residents to the city Centre, but pedestrian zones and bike paths are not up to their potential. Local commercial outlets/ amenities are also lacking.

The infrastructure problems at the local scale amplify social problems, not readily visible. There is a general sense of **alienation** from residents with the plans, perceived to serve the Regional area

over the local interests. With new waves of

developments coming into the area, the social cohesion weakens as people **lack the human scale experiences** to be out and meet their new neighbors.

In this regard, we recognize the lack of information and participatory instances where local communities have been unable to deliver their vision face of changes that occurred in the last 20 years and will continue happening for a while.

We realized that there were many paradoxes in the area, created by conflicting conceptions of certain aspects of the Study Area. Our analysis on the Strengths and Weaknesses reveal more Regional Strengths in compromise for Local Weaknesses. It is for this reason why the intervention will focus on Local, short-term solutions.

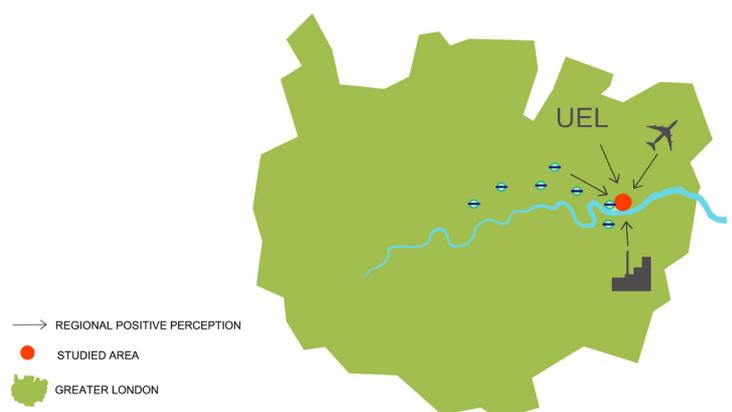
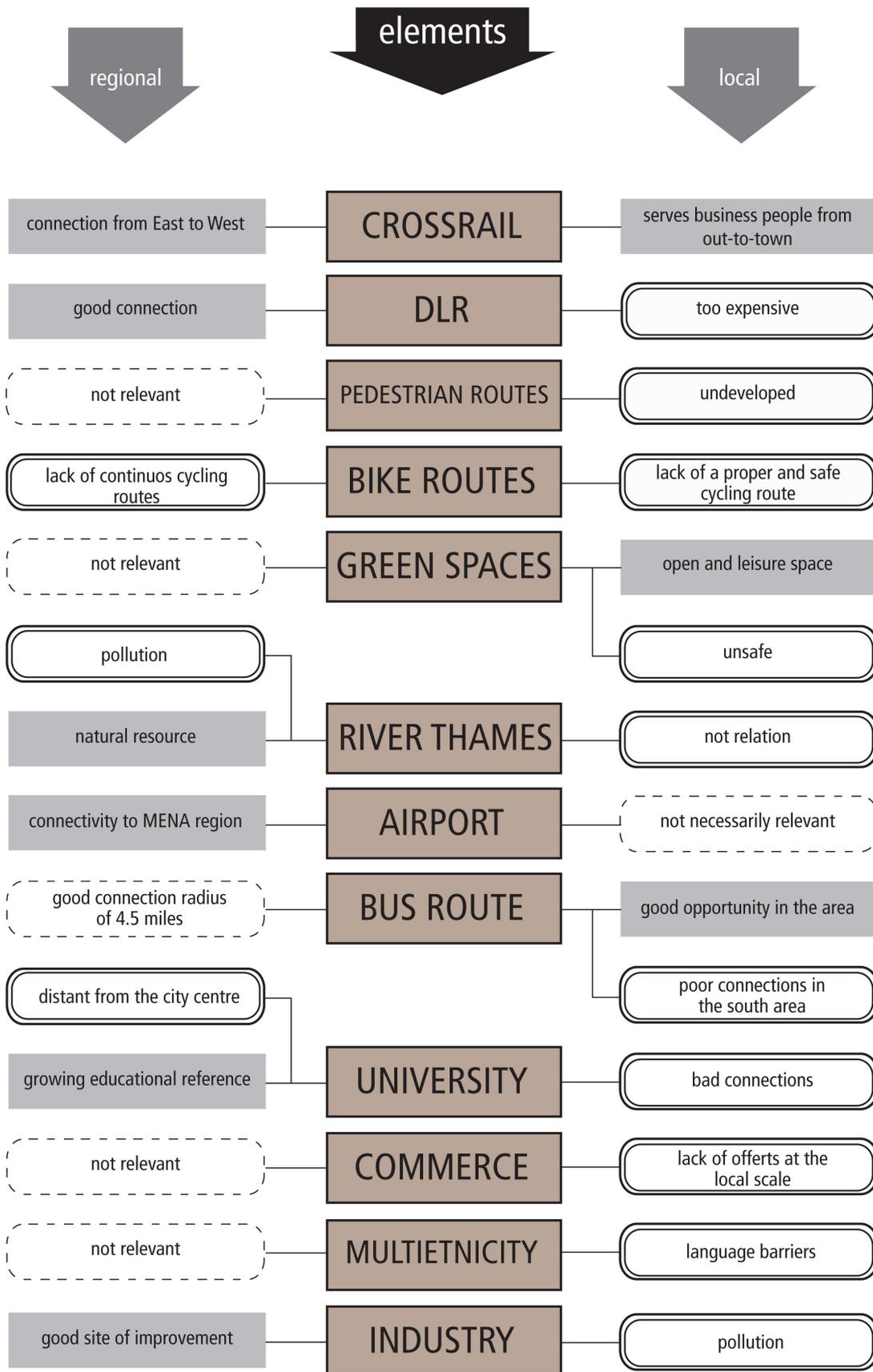


fig. 2.1 - Regional perceptions
fig. 2.2 - S/W at regional and local scale



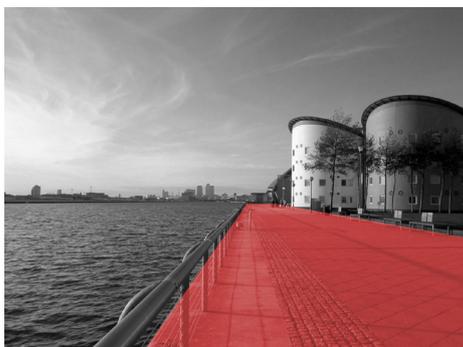
- element of analysis
- positive perception
- mixed perception
- negative perception

Physical Disconnections in the Area



fig. 2.3 - Physical disconnections in the study area.





03. Our Vision:

Human - scale Network

Our Vision

Recognizing the aforementioned weaknesses in the local planning of the area, we are focusing the vision of our intervention on creating a **“Human-Scale Network.”**

This idea is to bring people on the street, induce interaction, activate public spaces and buildings, and to encourage a conversation about the Area.

This is in line with the Jan Gehl Human Scale school of thought, where “physical planning can greatly influence the pattern of use in individual regions and city areas. Whether people are enticed to walk around and stay in city space is very much a question of walking carefully with the human dimension and issuing a tempting invitation” (Gehl, 2010. pg 17).

Today, we consider the Study Area to be lacking a personality, wherein “if a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place” (Auge, 1995. pg 63).

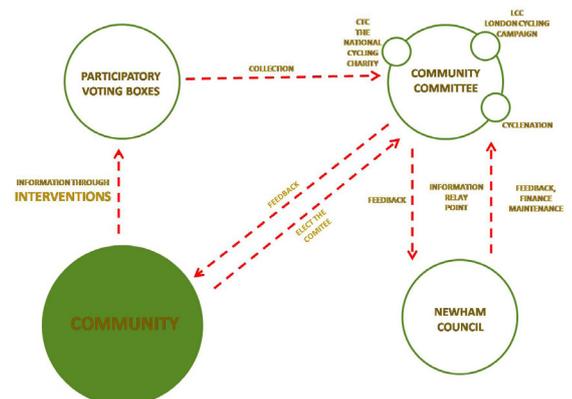
Throughout this, we want to promote overall **connectivity**. The New Oxford American Dictionary defines connect as **“bring together or into contact so that a real or notional link is established...join together so as to provide access and communication.”**

This is the foundation of our vision. We hope to improve the “Human-Scale Network” by promoting connectivity, not only physically, but also in terms of social issues and the local economy. We hope to connect people with a “Human-Scale Network” to each other, residents with the council,

and residents with local businesses. The term ‘connectivity’ is appropriately wide-reaching, and allows us to apply the “Human-Scale Network” to more than just physical interventions, as explained below.

We will do this, first, by creating **design interventions** to invite people into the public spaces. As Gehl writes, “invitations largely determine whether city spaces have the life that gives people the opportunity to meet. The issue is important because these passive see and hear contacts provide the background and springboard for the other forms of contact. By watching, listening, and experiencing others, we gather information about people and the society around us. It’s a start” (Gehl, 2010. pg 23).

HUMAN-SCALE PARTICIPATORY STRATEGY



COMMUNITY: participates in voting to improve the process, elect community committee members and suggest new observatories

COMMUNITY COMMITTEE: they are the link community with Newham Council

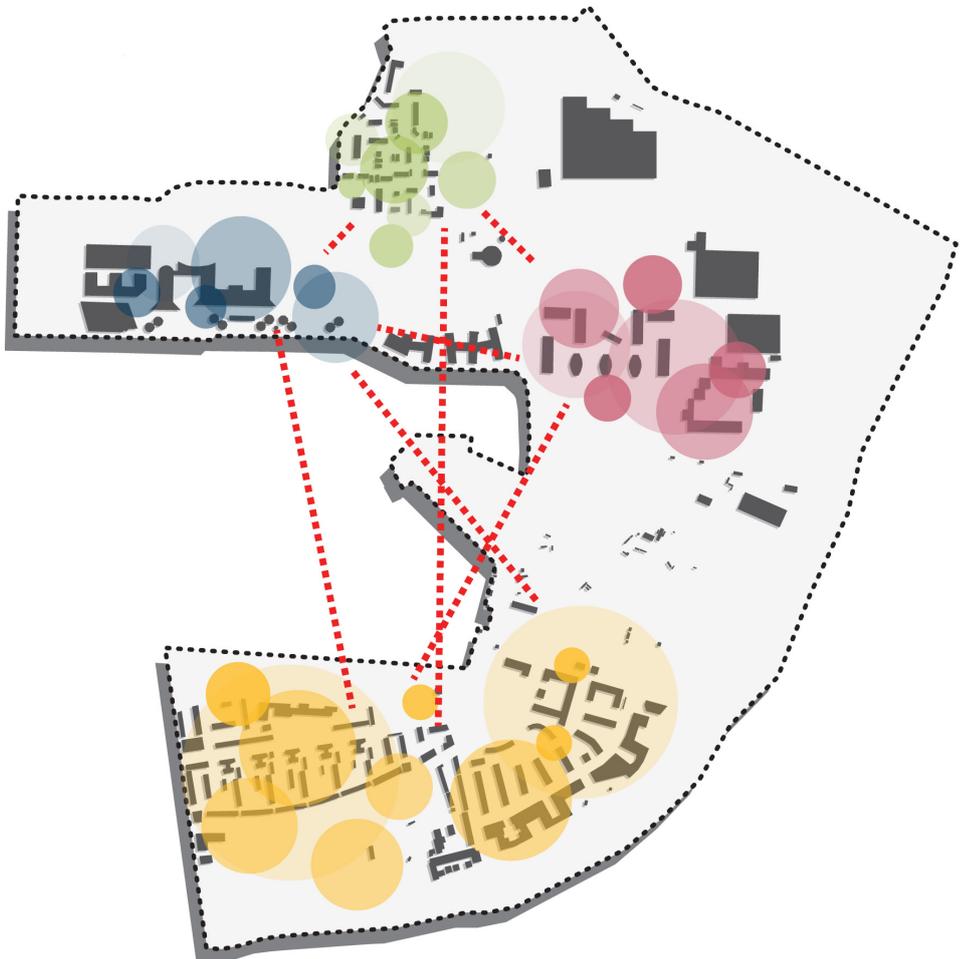
NEWHAM COUNCIL: receives feedback and set up point of contact with community committee



fig. 3.1 - participatory process in our vision

fig. 3.2 - Participatory Vision

fig. 3.3 - scheme of connectivities in the study area



04. Principles and Guidelines:

Physical

Social / Cultural

Economic

Design Principles

The strategy will attempt to change the perception of the area from a segmented, industrial zone to a more networked/ connected Area through activities and interventions on focused towards a human-scale.

The principles of our intervention will be:

- 1) **Promote connectivity (physical, social, and economic)**
- 2) **Incorporate local residents into the planning conversation**
- 3) **Focus on practicality of implementation**
 - a. **Short to medium-term interventions**
 - b. **Consider actors and funding**



fig. 4.1 - Urbanist Degree, satyricon illustration

Design Guidelines

We created the following guidelines in order to have clear ideas about the focus that the interventions should have.

Although they are classified in one of the three different levels of connectivity, the guidelines are overlapped since the interventions aims to create a network to connect the different places of the area. (See diagram _).

- 1. Improve accessibility of DLR and public parks with neighboring area for pedestrians and cyclist**
- 2. Promote the perception of safeness of public spaces, especially the public parks and waterfront area**
- 3. Provide a proper, continuous and safe cycling route throughout the whole area**
- 4. Create a human-scale network that makes this area pedestrian and bike friendly**
- 5. Promote conversations among local people based on their common concerns about local developments**
- 6. Strengthen the sense of identity and ownership by enhancing strategic focal points**
- 7. Encourage local people to increase citizen input over local development and increase the participation over interventions**
- 8. Create spaces where the community can inform and give feedback on potential projects in the area**
- 9. Promote the creation of a community committee who should manage and coordinate actors and funds in order to create different interventions around the area**
- 10. Provide a platform for local people to engage them in the economic development in short/medium term**
- 11. Activate uncared-for spaces for new economic use to promote their connectivity with local economic development**
- 12. Provide opportunities for local people to decide how to participate in current situation that many great new businesses come into the area**
- 13. Promote economic development in local scale through the use of abandon building**

Physical / Social and Cultural / Economic scale

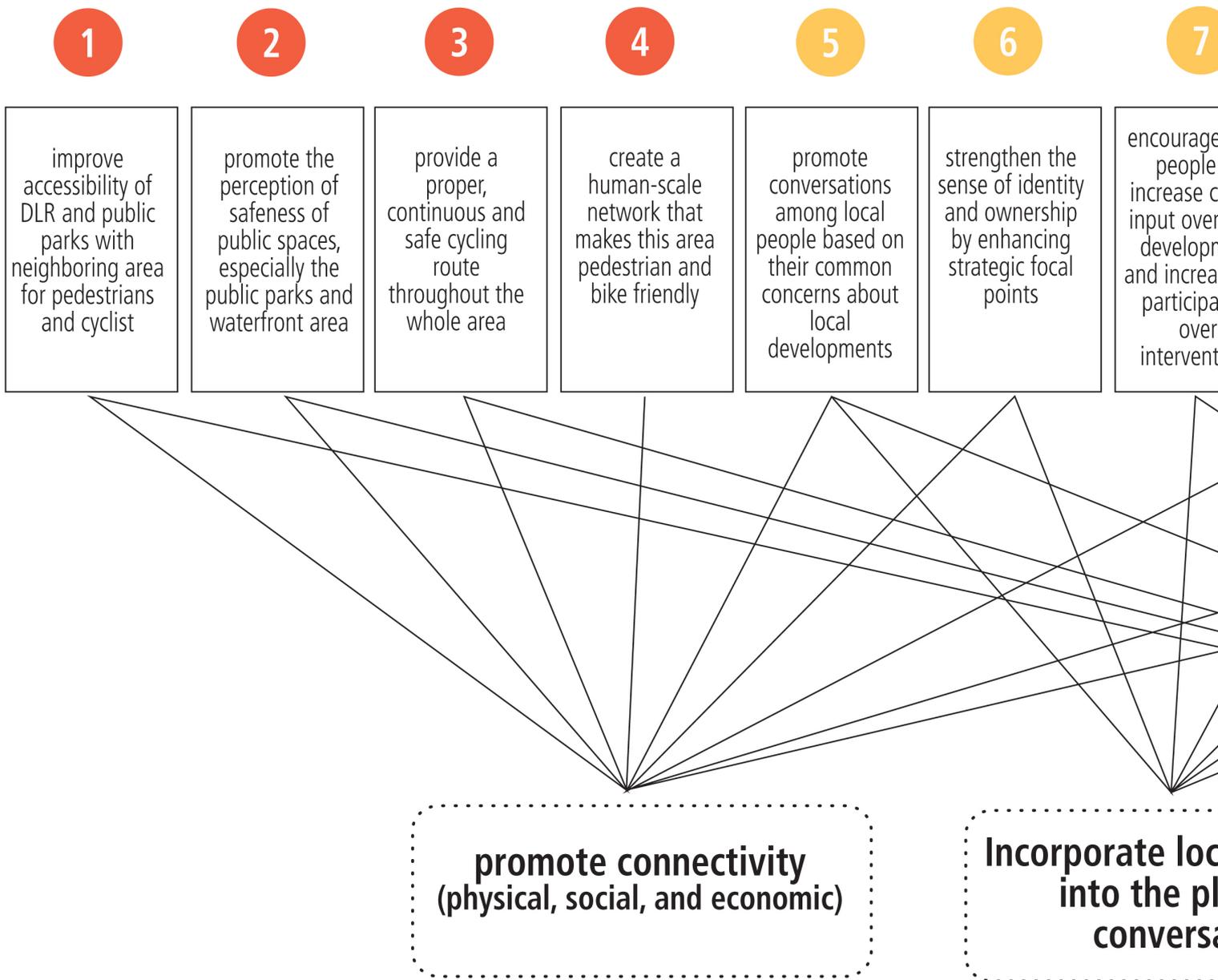
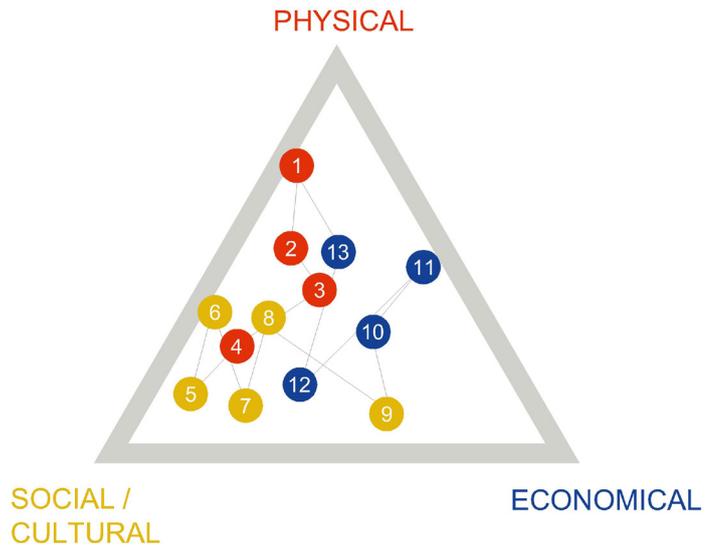


fig. 4.2 - principle and guidelines
 fig. 4.3 - guidelines relations at the physical/social/
 economic scale



- 8 create spaces where the community can inform and give feedback on potential projects in the area
- 9 promote the creation of a community committee who should manage and coordinate actors and funds
- 10 provide a platform for local people to engage them in the economic development in short/medium term
- 11 activate uncared-for spaces for new economic use to promote their connectivity with local economic development
- 12 provide opportunities for local people to decide how to participate in current situation
- 13 promote economic development in local scale through the use of abandon building

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Focus on practicality of implementation:
 a. short to medium-term interventions
 b. consider actors and funding

04. Design Response: Interventions

Maps of interventions

In our “Human- Scale Network” vision, we will develop the following:

Improved cycling and pedestrian routes

to upgrade the safety and accessibility of the area.

A set of participatory observatories

to allow people to envision new developments (especially the places with restricted access), bring excitement to future projects, and engage in the community.

Reactivation of unused buildings

easily accessible via physical networks.



interventions

- human-scale network
- observatories points
- open space
- water

fig. 5.1 - Map of the interventions



Improved Cycling and Pedestrian Routes



One element of our intervention will include better provisions for biking and pedestrian access. We want to propose ways to make it easy for people to access parts of the Study Area by bike, connecting the different segments physically, and bringing people out socially. We want to encourage people to explore the area. Improving ways for people to be on the streets can also promote traffic towards neglected economic areas. We hope to incorporate the unused buildings in the later part of our intervention into these routes.

This proposal builds off of the strengths of the Study Area. The great open spaces in the parks also provide an opportunity to connect the north and south regions of the Study Area and enhance the social areas of the parks.

This is in line with the 'Mayor's Vision for Cycling in London' wherein he proposed to strengthen the city's 'Quietways' of parks, back alleys, and greenways- all of which the Study Area has much of (Mayor of London, 2013. pg 14).

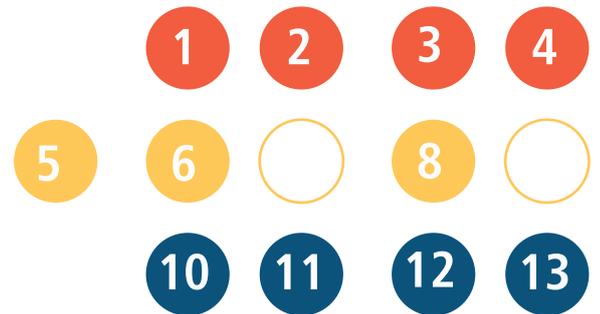


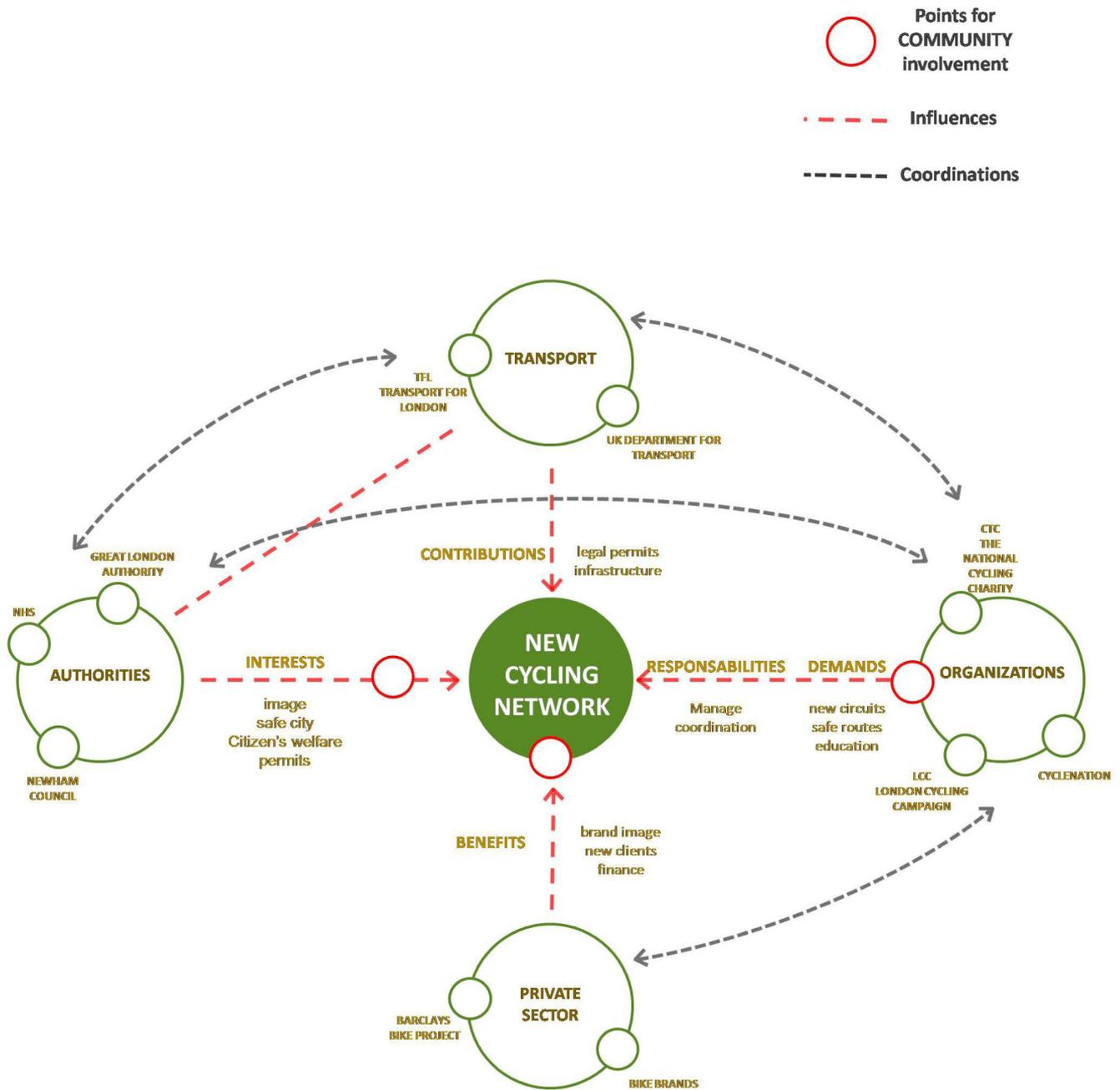
fig. 5.2 - analytical map

fig. 5.3 - actor diagram for the intervention

In what the report states will be the "most transformative of all of our policies," the mayor hopes to increase bike usage in outer London to the extent that they can be called 'mini-Hollands'- bike friendly areas where short car rides can be replaced with bike trips (Mayor of London, 2013. pg 14) .

Lighting

A central element to our bike provisions framework for the Study Area will focus on creating better **lighting infrastructure**. We have identified in our previous urban analysis that the lighting infrastructure in most of our Study Area is sufficient, but also it is very obvious that there is no lighting at all in the public parks (including Royal Victoria Garden, New Beckton Park and Beckton District Parks), which will make them lose accessibility at night to a large extent and thereby decreasing the connectivity between them and other parts within our study area.



Improving the lighting will have more than a physical repercussion, but also help to solve the social problems of crime at night.

In interviews with locals, many people talked about the **safety** and **crime** in the Beckton district parks. The anti-social behaviour includes public drinking and drug use, crime, and sexual harassment towards women who venture into

parks alone. Many of them stressed the need for better lighting in these areas that are perceived to be great assets during the day. Then we come up with the idea for **“lighting against crime.”** Although there is no strong evidence demonstrating the lighting can reduce the rate of crime, “there is a strong indication that increased lighting—perhaps lighting uniformity—decreases the fear of crime” (Tien, O’Donnell, Bamett and Mirchandani, 1979)

Examples

The original pavement can be transformed by adding a spray-on coating on the road surface, thus providing a eco-fridently lighting to the parks. The coating is a liquid-based product that can capature solar energy during the day and optical energy at night. This teconolgy is very easy to operate and it will save a lot of time compared with setting up street lamp. So it can be a short-term or medium-term interventions in ore project.

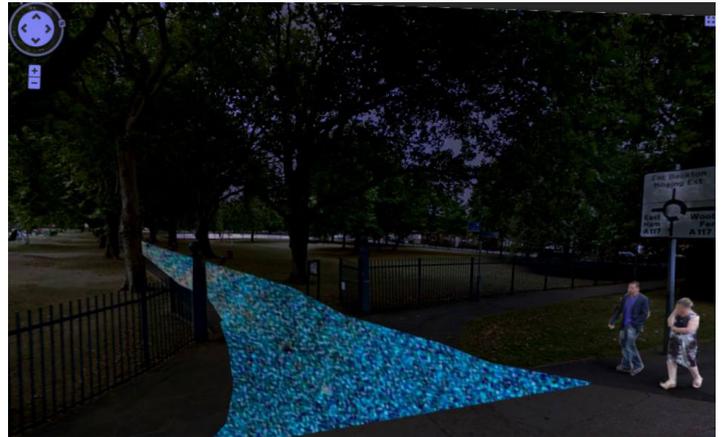


fig. 5.4, 5.5, 5.6, 5.7 - visions for the intervention



Participatory Observatories

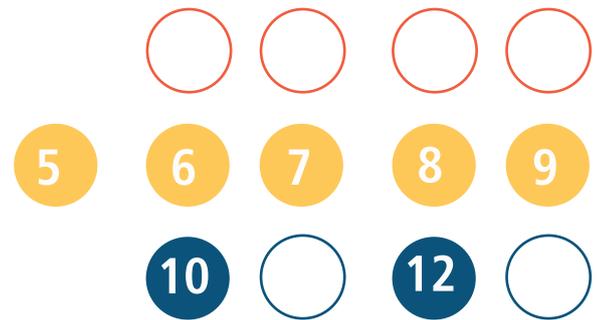
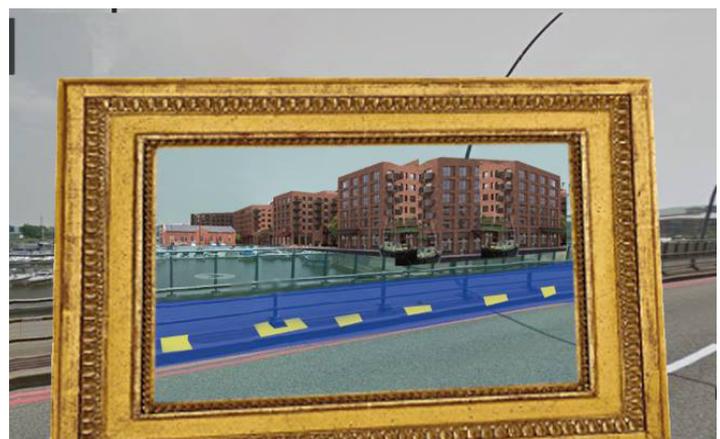
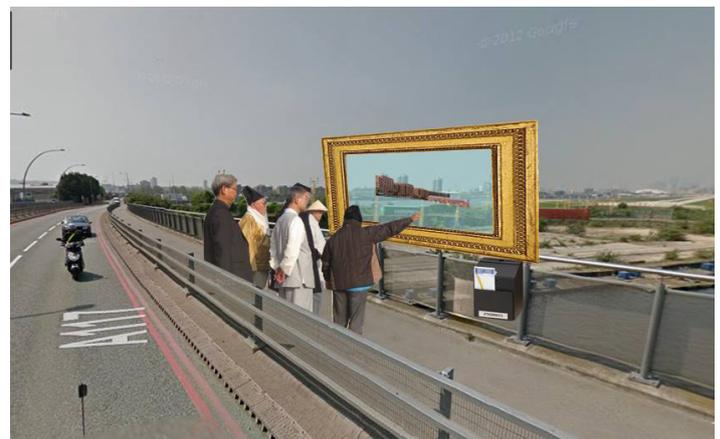


fig. 5.8 - analytical map
fig. 5.9, 6.0 - visions for the intervention

The implementation of observatories could increase awareness amongst the community about the developments and leftovers spaces within North Woolwich.

The identified problems of physical segregation and abandoned spaces can be view from vantage points throughout the Study Area that make people question the future developments. Ceating **awareness of the public and open spaces**, this encourages the community to get involved in the planning process.

This would not necessarily solve the problem of abandoned spaces by making something new, but by making people more aware of the area. It will improve the human-scale connectivit by using strategic points where one can view the developments and there impact socially and economically i.e increased land values, less social interaction.



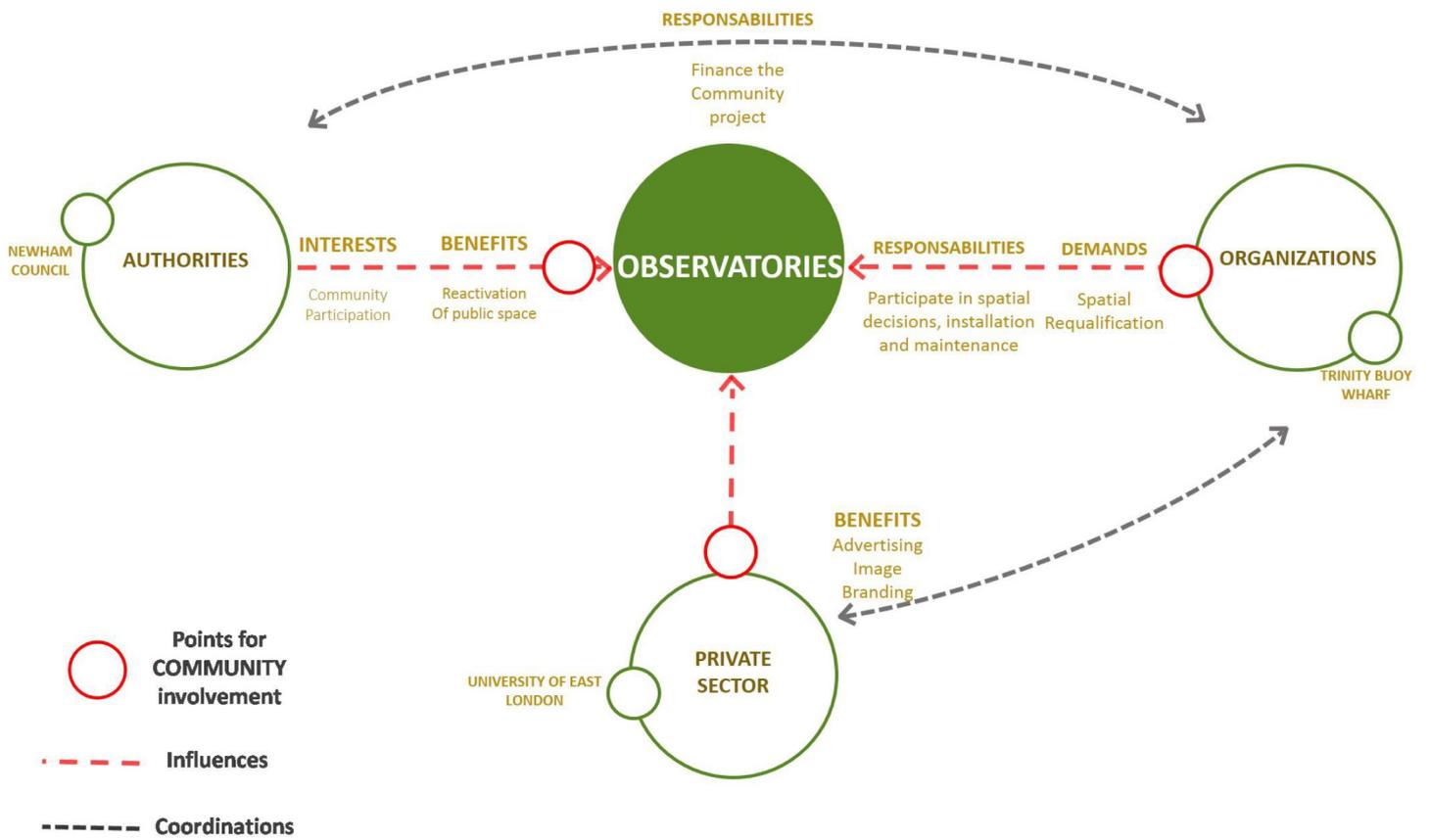
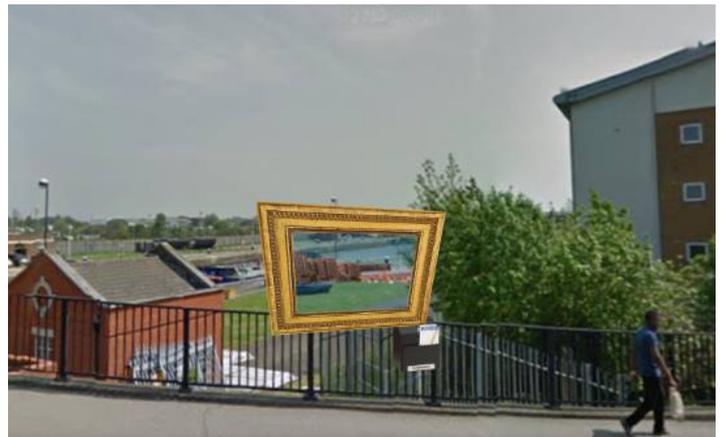


fig. 6.1 - actor diagram for the intervention

fig. 6.2, 6.3 - visions for the intervention



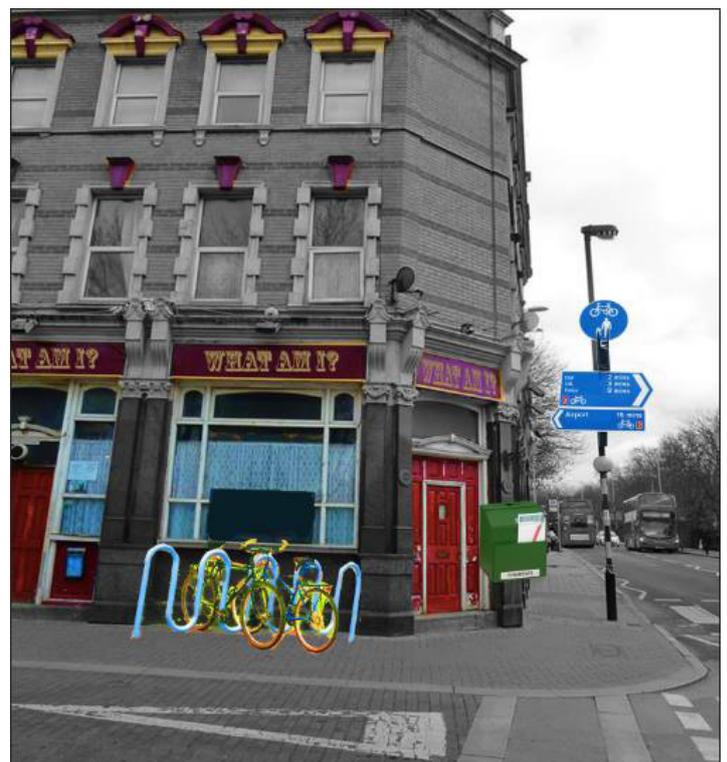
Reactivation of Unused Buildings



fig. 6.4 - analytical map
fig. 6.5 - visions for the intervention

We have identified in the previous analysis that there are many abandoned buildings in the Study Area, not designated for future new developments. We want to bring people into the old buildings by reactivating them for social use, and incorporating easy access with bike and pedestrian routes. This aim is not to necessarily changing the building, but by connecting them with the “Human-Scale Network” to improve the social and economic position of the Study Area. It will work within the general framework for improving connectivity, as it will help connect people with the history of the Area. In the meantime, it will connect neighbours with each other, as they incorporate these histories into their own meaning for living in the Area.

Our short-term plan to connect these spaces with the Area is to include them as part of the bike and pedestrian network. Clearly, there is sufficient lighting, and the proximity to the DLR station is a built-in advantage to the future use of these spaces. However, there could be improved facilities for bikes, such as bike locks in the vicinity.



Some medium-term ideas for re-activating the buildings for different uses have been inspired by other projects we have studied. An example is the Cottrell House in Wembly, where the community came together to decide on the new use for an old retail building. Free workspace was given to individuals who lent their time for repairing the structure. This would be an ideal model for the space, as it would allow for community participation to improve meaning of these structures.

fig. 6.6 - actor diagram for the intervention

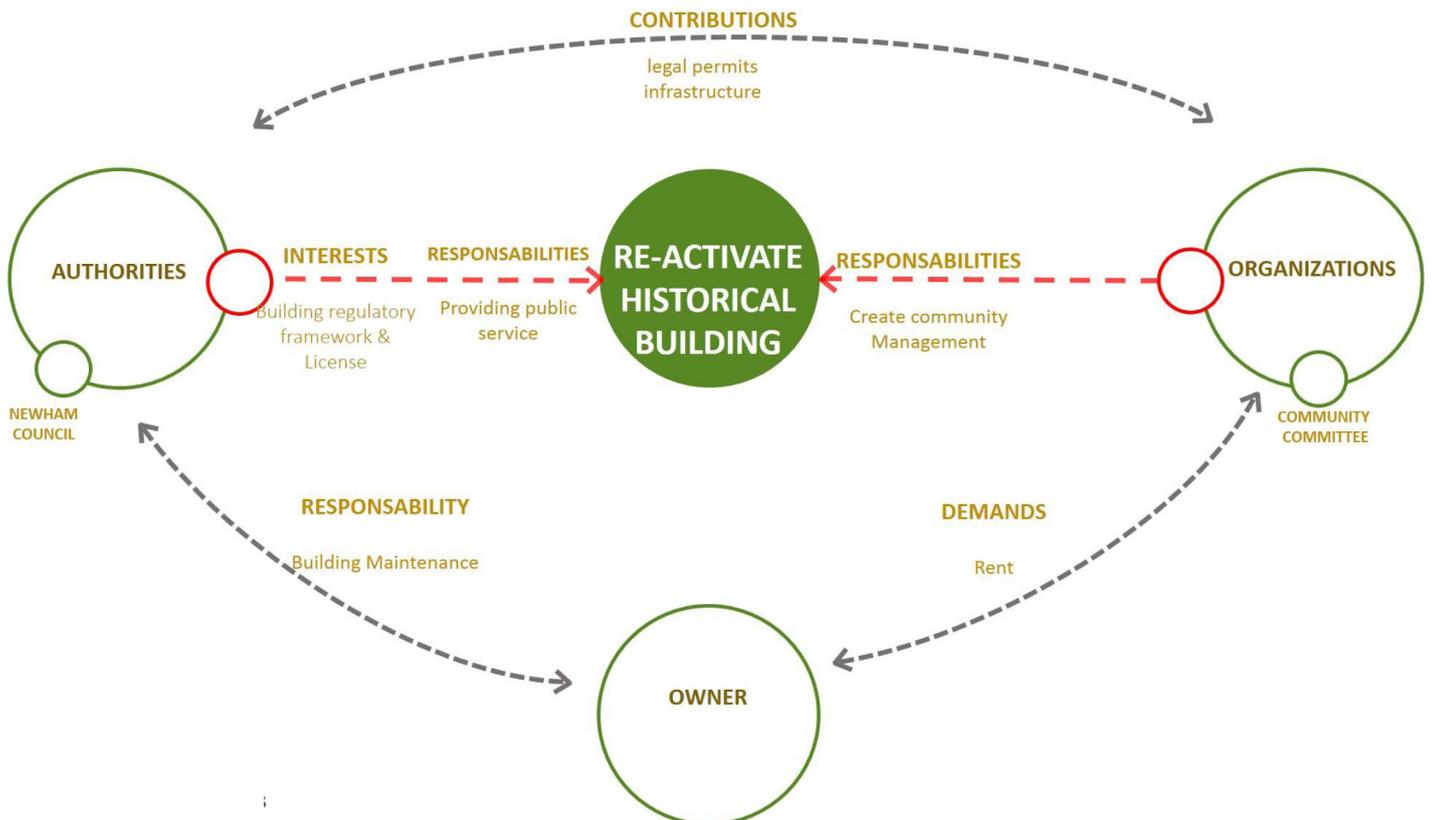




fig. 6.7, 6.8, 6.9 - examples for the intervention

○ Points for
COMMUNITY
involvement

- - - Influences

- - - - - Coordinations

conclusion

After the urban analysis in the previous phase, and the critical view of the Newham Council plan to the area, we identified weaknesses of spatial segregation that had social ramifications that our interventions are aiming to improve. The main concept of our interventions fit with the Council's idea of connects North Woolwich, Beckton and Albert Island physically with the surrounding areas. When we realized that there's a lack of community inclusion in the decisions, and having been recounted stories from the area about crime and alienation from neighbours, we sought to improve the situation with a "Human-Scale" Network.

In this, we aim to create a holistic integration creating spaces of information, opinion and decision, where the local community can have effective communication canals with the authorities. We believe this is a key element to empower the community and reach a local identity.

We recognized a complex scenario to intervene, especially because of the interaction between the scales of uses (Industrial / Infrastructure and residential) which needs different physical spaces. But since there exist human communities involved, we believe they should have an active role in the development of the area. This is what we search through the "Human-scale Network" that we proposed and we think the Newham Council should consider in their plan to develop this historical area of London.

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