

Development Brief

North Woolwich, Albert Island,
and Southern Beckton



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PART 1

Introduction

1.1 Executive Summary

East London in general has seen mass regeneration in more recent years and the Royal and King George V docks are no exception to this trend. ExCel London; the DLR; Crossrail; the UEL campus; the Siemens building; and the Newham Council offices were all completed (or are still to be) in the last few decades. Deindustrialisation, and the closing of the docks, have left the area spatially and socially fragmented with high levels of transience and a diverse population. This report presents an alternative to the economic regeneration that the area is used to, with the aim of allowing local residents, and users of the space, to actively engage and lead in its design. Following trends elsewhere, this design strategy builds on the principle of giving spatial agency to this population and allowing those who best understand the area to design what is useful for them.

This report will briefly contextualise North Woolwich, Albert Island and the southern areas of Beckton, before presenting a synthesis of the previous analytical lenses. Five overarching categories arose from this process: a political economic perspective; socio-cultural understandings; qualitative research findings; regeneration plans; and the spatiality of the site as a whole. These points of analysis allowed the development of the potentialities and weaknesses of the site. One of the aims of this report was to use these findings to build upon the sites potentialities and to mitigate these weaknesses. Building on this, our vision statement sets out the core aims of our strategy: to allow the residents and users of space to make the decisions about its use, design and implementation. Three guiding principles further cement this vision: spatial agency; flexibility; and exchange. This report will then detail: why this strategy; where this could happen; who could be involved; what could this look like; and how could it be achieved? Exemplar cases are provided to further detail these points.



North Woolwich after World War II
(Photo: London Development Authority)

1.2 Historical and Geographic Context

- » The Royal Albert and King George V docks, were among the last group of docks built towards the end of the 19th century (The Innes Partnership, 1998).
- » Post-war rebuilding enabled a resurgence of industrial activity soon after the Blitz, though the docklands became obsolete and closed in 1981.
- » This left behind long stretches of derelict land along with high unemployment and poverty (LDA, 2010).
- » Change came with the London Docklands Development Corporation, in 1981, and its first proposal to construct London City Airport.
- » The LDDC also designated the Docklands area an enterprise zone in 1982, encouraging businesses to relocate or start in the area by exempting them from property taxes, simplifying planning regulations and capital allowances (The Innes Partnership, 1998).
- » This intervention was unpopular among local residents; their needs of affordable housing being largely neglected (Ibid.).
- » This took its toll on the local economy too; by 1991 area unemployment had risen to 25% and there was a declining population (Ibid).

PART 2

Analysis

2.1 Synthesis

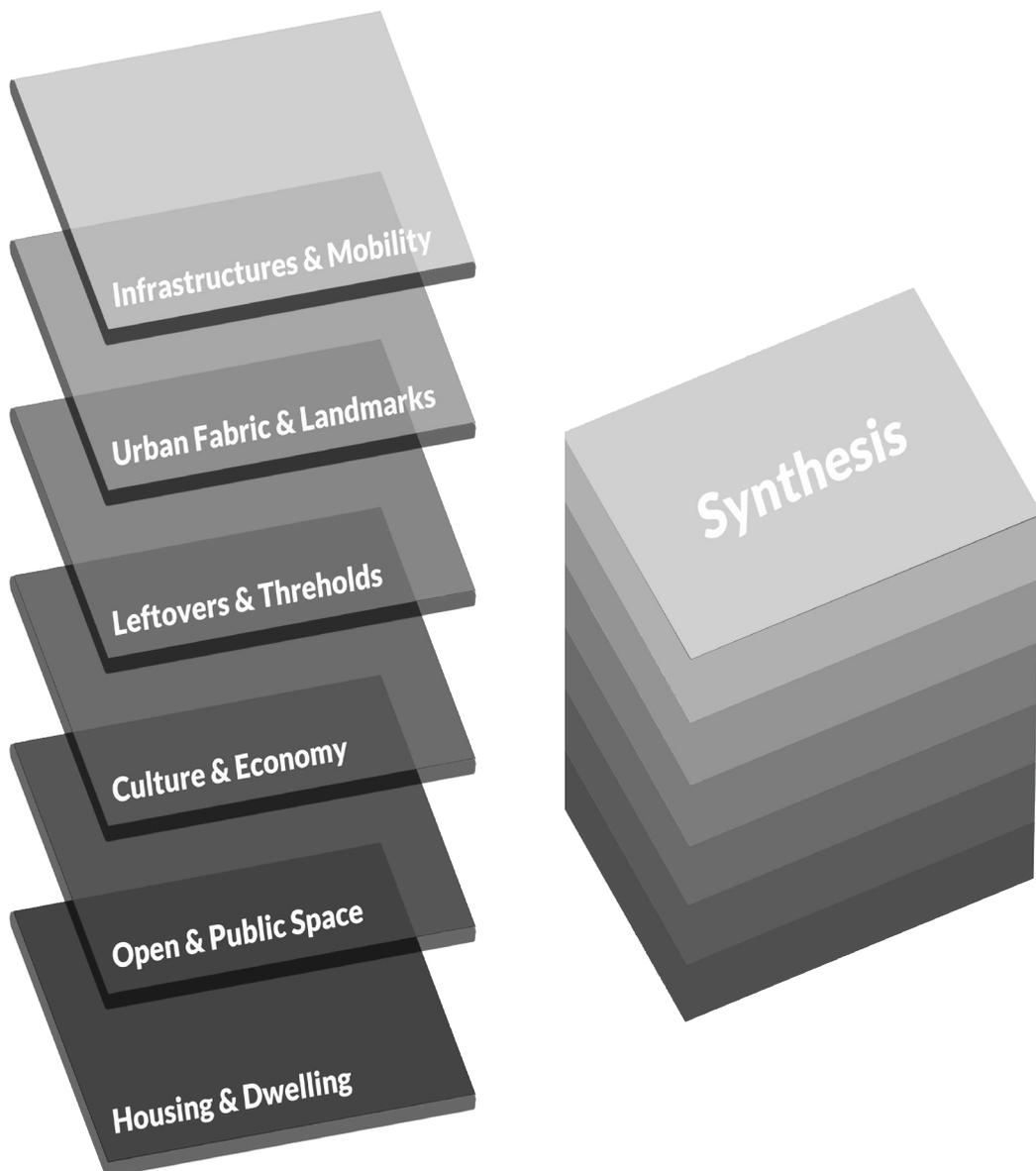
2.1.1 A Political-Economic Perspective

There is a disparity between the population's needs and desires and the development of the site as a whole. Although there are many large employers in close proximity to these residents, there is still high levels of unemployment and deprivation as a result. The site has been identified by many key actors in London as strategic for investment; exemplified by the chosen location of Newham Council's offices. North Woolwich in particular has experienced a decline in its main high street with many residents now

choosing to use monopoly services further away. This phenomenon is not unique to this area but an example of high street decline in the UK.

2.1.2 Socio-Cultural Understandings

The heterogeneity of residents in the site was frequently acknowledged within the different analytical lenses; demonstrating the multiplicity of different identities. Ethnic diversity, religious practice, employment and income, education levels



and language were just a few of the socio-cultural differences discussed; these were shown to be a point of tension as well as a positive potentiality. There has been, and is still is, high levels of transience within the area; in part due to successive waves of immigration and also due to its role as a transport hub. The perceived level of social cohesion in the site, or lack there of, was not thoroughly understood; with the responses of interviewees proving highly variable. Demographic data illustrated a social and cultural discontinuity between this site and the rest of London and England.

2.1.3 Qualitative Research Findings

A common qualitative research methodology was carried out to establish a more holistic understanding of the Royal Dock's as a whole space. This has allowed for more critical reflections on people's lived experiences and their everyday. Amongst residents, employees and visitors of the site there were commonalities in points addressed, despite different lenses of analysis. Many interviewees mentioned the green and open public spaces as an asset of the site, however, the safety of these areas was a concern at night-time. The diversity of the different users and residents was referred to commonly as a problem and a cause of tensions. The isolation and fragmentation, both social and spatial, was also highlighted with many different people identifying the space as unique in the context of London. Many younger people particularly, spoke about a lack of activity and services in the area and a need to travel to reach shops, employment and other sites of activity. The transport services were mentioned in a positive way, although concerns over their affordability were raised.

2.1.4 Regeneration Plans

One of the core themes presented was the future planned and potential development in the area. The relatively fast paced and thorough transformation of the Royal Dock's has been acknowledged historically and is identified as a certainty for the sites future. The east of London is becoming a focus for development with the Olympic Legacy plans reshaping large parts of the city. Starting with the initial development of the dock's and its associated infrastructure, successive development including: London City Airport; UEL; ExCel; and the DLR have shaped the character and spatiality of Beckton, Albert Island and North Woolwich through time. The way in which mass infrastructure has impacted these spaces is likely to continue with the Crossrail development having begun in the site and the ABP masterplan approved of.

2.1.5 The Spatiality of the Site as a Whole

The spatiality of the site has been shown to have been produced by a number of competing factors: political forces; economically led development; land ownership; policies; power relations; industrialisation; deindustrialisation; and the people who live, work and visit the site. Albert Island, Beckton and North Woolwich are all in themselves spatially diverse with different typologies of housing and open space. The housing stock is varied with a high percentage of it social housing. The site has higher levels of green and open space than many other inner city areas and has exposure to the Thames; an entity that shapes the space physically and economically. The space is shown to be both a nodal point and a fragmented leftover.

2.2 Potentialities & Weaknesses

WEAKNESSES

POTENTIALITIES

• LARGE COMMERCIAL CHAINS NEARBY

• FEW & DISCONNECTED CYCLING LANES

ROYAL VICTORIA GARDENS •

FUTURE TRANSPORT HUB WITH CROSSRAIL •

FURTHER ENGAGEMENT WITH UEL •

• THE AREA IS NOT LEGIBLE

• HIGHLY HETEROGENOUS POPULATION

• POTENTIAL EXPANSION OF LCY AIRPORT

• THE INDUSTRIAL LEGACY OF THE AREA

• SOCIAL & SPATIAL FRAGMENTATION

YOUNG & DIVERSE POPULATION •

“GREEN ENTERPRISE ZONE” CLASSIFICATION •

• HIGH LEVELS OF TRANSIENCE

UNIQUE CHARACTER WITHIN LONDON •

THE RIVER THAMES •

LARGE AREAS OF GREEN & OPEN SPACE •

• REGENERATION PLANS FOR THE AREA

• HIGH RATES OF UNEMPLOYMENT

PART 3

Strategic Development & Design Framework

3.1 Vision Statement

We envision a place where diversity isn't a barrier; but aids social cohesion. Where residents are able to directly influence the spaces in which they live and work; giving agency to the users. Fostering local partnerships and giving creative licence to local people in order to produces spaces that meet their needs and priorities.

3.1.1 The Vision Further Explained

This strategy places the local residents of North Woolwich and southern Beckton firmly at the centre of further, local, spatial initiatives. It has been identified previously that this area suffers from social fragmentation but by designing new local spaces and activities this process in turn co-produces cohesion. This strategy is not centred on a discrete process or result but is more interested in a dynamic and evolving future. The mechanism and outcome of different interventions would be developed through partnerships between local residents, major local actors and Newham

Council; creating spaces that meet the needs and desires of this population. The emphasis of this strategy is as much on the process and who is engaging, as it is on the final outcome.

“Due to the nature of design professions, an intervention or design solution is always produced, even when it is best to leave a place as it is ... in some cases designers can best function as activists when what is needed is protection and advocacy over urban design” (Moser, 2007)

3.2 Principles

3.2.1 Spatial Agency

Our reality is indeterminate, implying that the outcomes of development are not known and not foreseeable. Design, then, should not be conceived in an isolated intellectual or conceptual space, but rather be unfixed at the start and remain open-ended, allowing for incremental transformation, rather than large-scale sudden change. Designing on the ground requires the collaboration of those that will use and reuse the space, likely the inhabitants and those earning their livelihood in the area. Planning and architecture are not disciplines confined to professionals, nor should they be conceived of as a commodity for the affluent. They are rather ways in which the spatial agency of every human can be delivered. Though not expected to be innate, spatial agency can be fostered through developing spatial judgement and reflective awareness.

3.2.2 Flexibility

The fundamental assumption underlying current planning practices is that specific outcomes can be achieved through meticulously designed plans, e.g. masterplans. However, reality is so complex that even if plans are implemented correctly

and by chance the desired outcome is achieved, it is short-lived as circumstances change. A fixed design response cannot be an answer to an urban challenge, rather it requires flexibility in planning by accommodating change over time, and having the ability to respond to social, economic and environmental demands. To simplify complex reality into a document or plan is inhibitive of long-term flexibility and should be replaced with more organic transformative forms of development.

3.2.3 Exchange

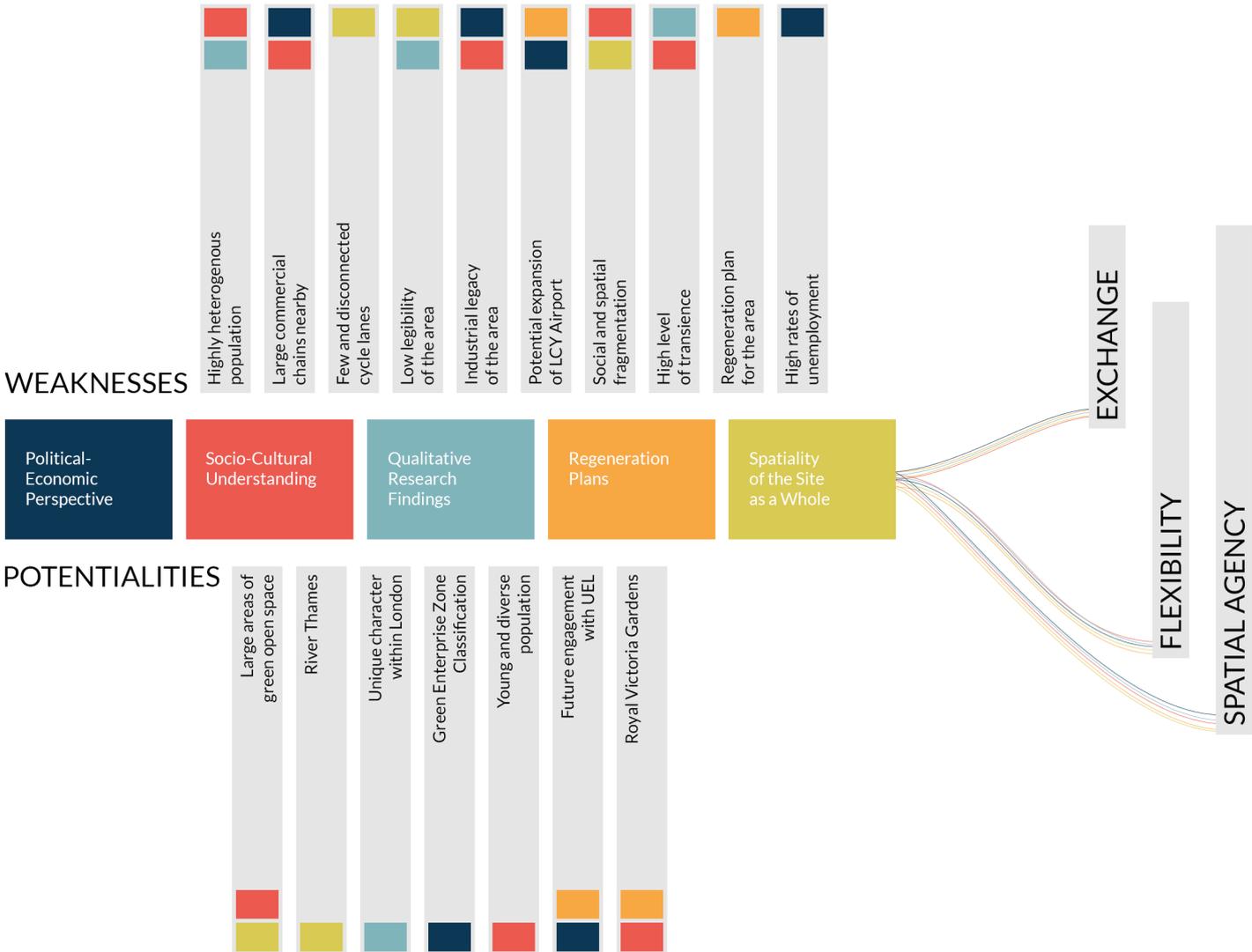
While spatial agency addresses a personal and flexibility an institutional dimension, a third dimension on the level of society is necessary. An organic urban development, driven by universal spatial agency, also requires a healthy and convivial space within which thought and practice can be advanced. Exchange at this level requires frequent social interaction, and for that interaction to grow more intimate culminating in a form of community at the local level. While respecting personal freedoms, it is understood that the communal enables the co-production of knowledge and space and is thereby fundamental for healthy built environments.

3.3 Guidelines

The diagram below depicts the overall process of development for this development brief, and in particular the specificity around the guidelines.

SYNTHESIS

PRINCIPLES



GUIDELINES

STRATEGY

SCENARIOS

- Acknowledge the importance of incremental knowledge co-production
- Prioritise resident's needs in decision-making, implementation and maintenance
- Create opportunities for transfer of knowledge, skills, and ideas
- Strengthen existing networks while creating new ones
- Enable future adaptability
- Ensure resident's resilience through their prioritisation in interventions
- Encourage diversity and integration across all interventions

OVERALL STRATEGY

SCENARIO 3 Support existing initiatives



"It doesn't feel like things are being developed, just that everything is being taken away."

SCENARIO 2 Language Centers



Social Language Exchange: relaxed and fun environments for interchange of linguistic skills

SCENARIO 1 Allotments



Mobilising local people through collective agricultural projects

PART 4

Design Strategy & Intervention Sites

4.1 Why this Strategy?

This strategy would build upon Newham Council, and the Mayors of Newham's, current aims of creating a resilient borough; through community, personal and economic resilience, and acting in the interest of local residents (Newham Council, 2013a, Newham Council, 2013b). Whilst looking for alternative forms of design: building education not schools, healthcare not hospitals and building for the majority not the minority, this strategy would help to strengthen social cohesion in the area (Parvin, 2014, Awan, 2014). Allowing residents to be heavily involved in the design and development of spaces in North Woolwich, Albert Island and southern Beckton, whilst working in partnership with the council and other local interests, the area could be used to better serve its current population. The sites long industrial history, its young and diverse population, its proximity to the Thames and the multitude of open, leftover and public spaces should be used as opportunities for strengthening local resilience. This would provide an alternative, and complimentary, strategy to the economic regeneration that is already planned for the area. This scheme would increase trust and transparency between residents and the council, as well as encouraging people to stay in the area (rather than using services elsewhere); both of which are aims of Newham Council (Newham Council, 2013a).

Examples of similar processes/strategies:



Park Fiction, Hamburg, Germany

This park area was redeveloped and redesigned by local people after protesting against other development initiatives. Although the process took many years to complete, as the space held a lot of social tensions, the principle adopted of 'any idea counts' has made for a successful outcome. The redevelopment and design of this park was completed with a highly participatory approach in partnership with the local authorities and financed by public funds from a programme called 'art in public space' (Spatial Agency, 2014a).

Sans Souci Cinema, Soweto, South Africa

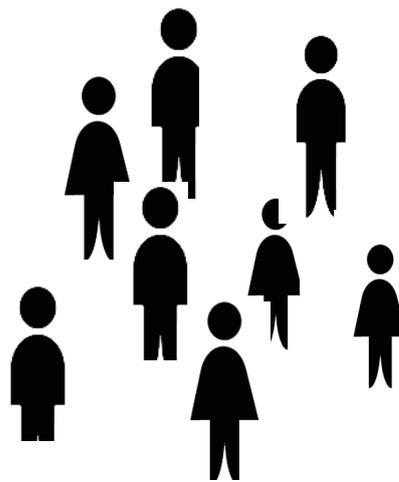
With almost no funds available, this project sought to re-utilise an abandoned space with high symbolic value in the community. By running a series of events; designers, architects and local planners hoped to get local people to participate in remembering and reproducing the history of the building; in order to bring the space back into local consciousness (Spatial Agency, 2014b).



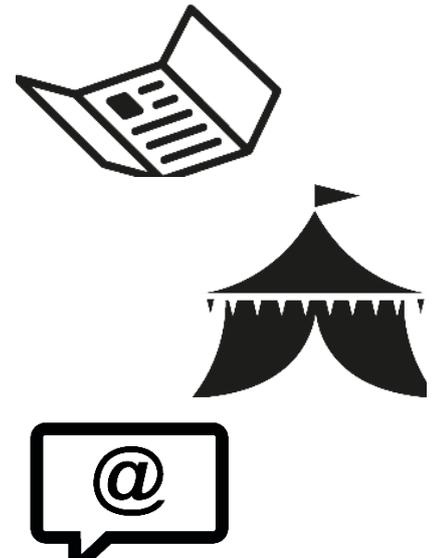
4.2 How could this be done?

This illustrates the beginning of a longer term strategy of engagement with local residents, whereby they are able to start making decisions that will directly impact their future. This provides a basis for a longer, more holistic form of regeneration.

We start by prioritising local identity and social cohesion with the hope that this will act as a catalyst for other forms of change. Building on people's livelihoods and their everyday we hope to create an environment where people want to stay in the area; concentrating on local residents' desires rather than initially aiming to attract new people to the area.



- » Engage with residents;
- » Build Trust;
- » Promote new strategy in different places to reach different groups of people; in schools, the local shops, the park, betting shops, pubs, etc.

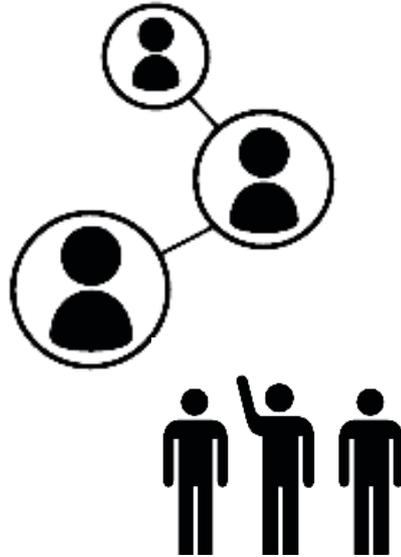


- » Make this new approach visible to local people;
- » Use social media, pamphlets and events as catalysts for action, eg. screenings of the world cup.

START ————— THESE INITIAL PROCESSES SHOULD BE C



- » Use different tactics to identify the needs and desires of local residents; their hopes for the area;
- » Adopt an approach of 'no idea too big'.



- » Create a local leadership network and plan for engagement;
- » Begin to get volunteers to lead design schemes and create plans for action in the area;
- » Engage with other local actors to get their input and support.



- » Run pilot projects schemes so that the people involved can see tangible results;
- » Use ideas that can be adapted and changed when produced;

CONTINUOUS

4.3 Where could this happen..?





- Green Areas that could host Events.
- Albert Island That could be used for Urban Agriculture activities.
- Schools, Community Centers, Bars and restaurants that could be used for the language center.
- Opened Spaces that could be used for inflatable football matches.

Beckton Park

BECKTON

The Beach Bar

ALBERT ISLAND

Woodman Community Center

Fight For Peace Academy

NORTH WOOLWICH

ROYAL VICTORIA GARDENS

RIVER THAMES

4.4 Who could be involved?

Initiating responsive interventions
Investment in existing

Investment in existing

Collaboration/
Knowledge sharing

Newham Council



Newham Council as Local Authority for this area, to act as a major catalyst in community responsive initiatives.

Private Org's & Companies



The area is surrounded by large companies such as Tate & Lyle, Tesco, Asda, City Airport and others.

University of East London



University is made up of various schools that could offer expertise or opportunities for collaboration.

Improved community welfare, having a positive effect on other sectors

Helping to fulfill CSR mandate, improving public image

Vocational learning for students

Benefits/Trad

Collaboration

Local Businesses



Within the area, there are various small local business such as convenience stores, take aways, pubs, bakeries.

Community groups/charities



There are various non-profit organisations, i.e. Fight for Peace, Woodland Community centre.

Local people, i.e. 'community'



Made up of the different individuals, families and groups that live and use the area.

Possibility for increased custom and network building

More impactful work on local community

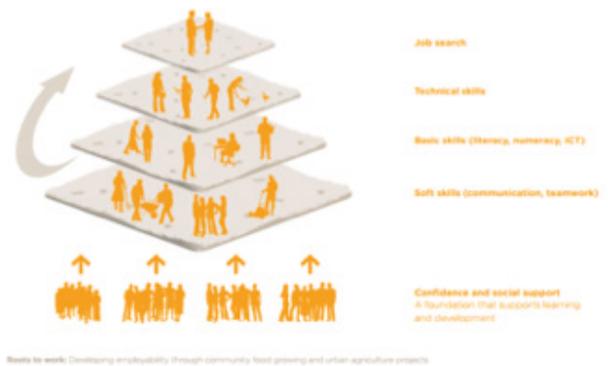

Proposed Interventions

e offs

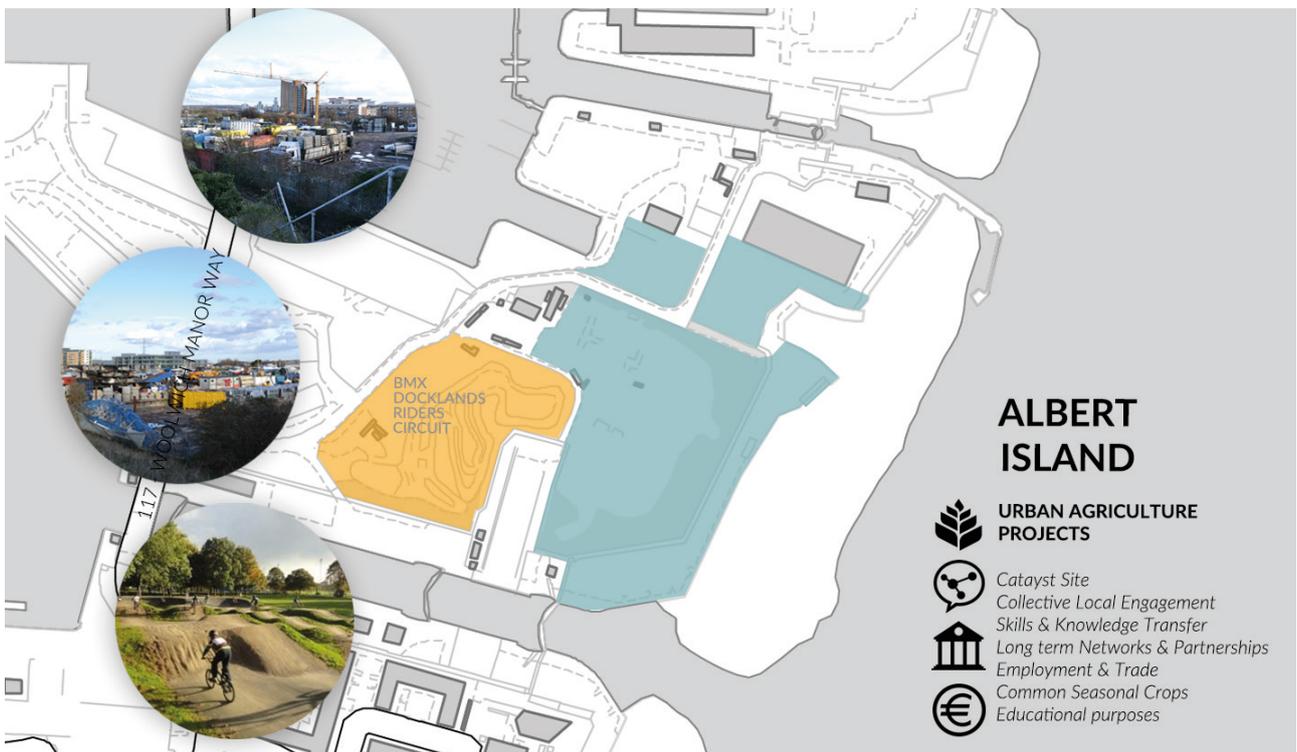
4.5 What could this look like?

4.5.1 Albert Island

Albert Island is a space that seems isolated from North Woolwich and South Beckton; a forgotten space, however, it is easily accessible from these two areas. Currently, there is some activity on the island, such as Gallions Point Marina and the Docklands Riders LTD that occupies a significant space for warehouse and off-road motorcycle riding, but there is still a great amount of vacant space. This is a location of great potential and the following proposal looks at how the use of space can be explored through testing different uses as flexible and changeable solutions.

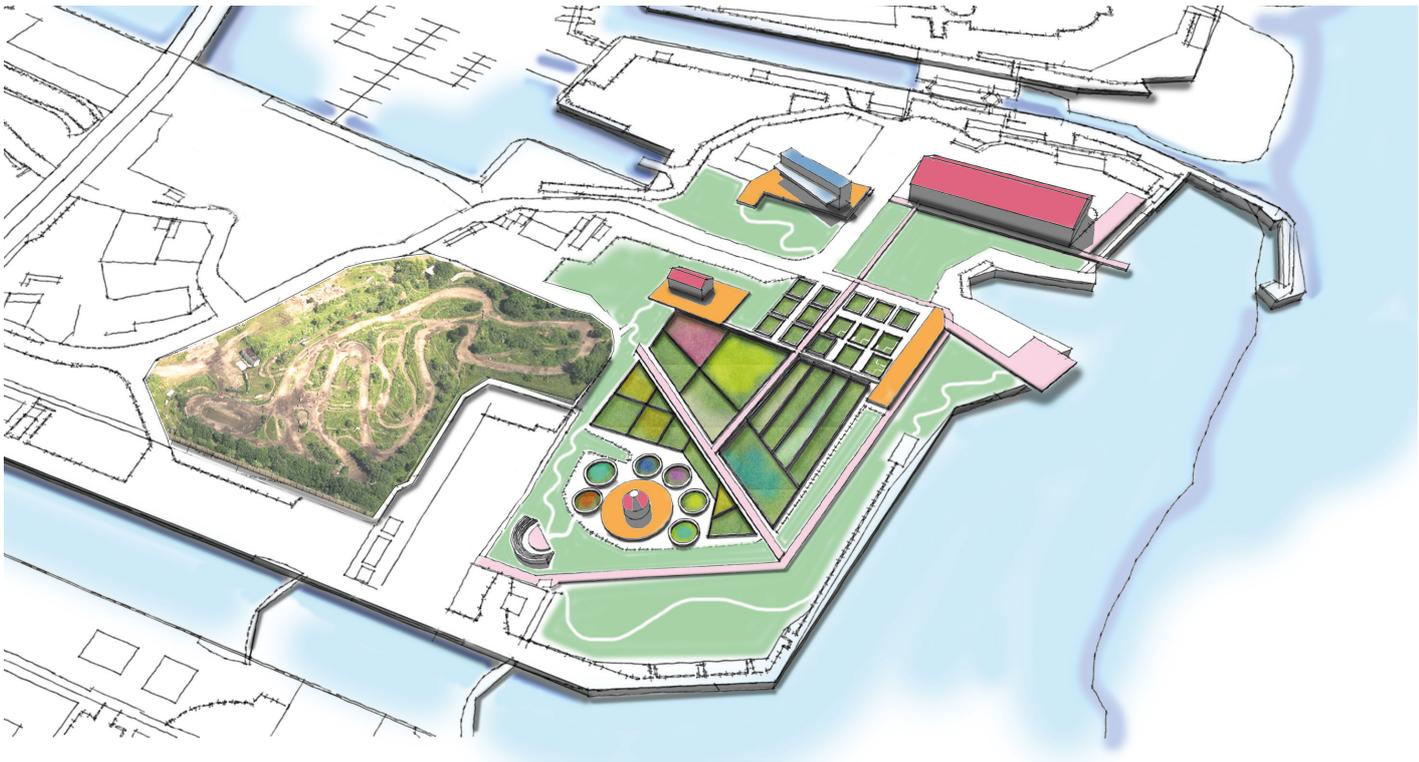


(Development of Skills for Employment, Varley-Winter, 2013)



‘Projects can link participants into networks which increase their chances of finding employment.’

(Varley-Winter, 2013, pp.9)



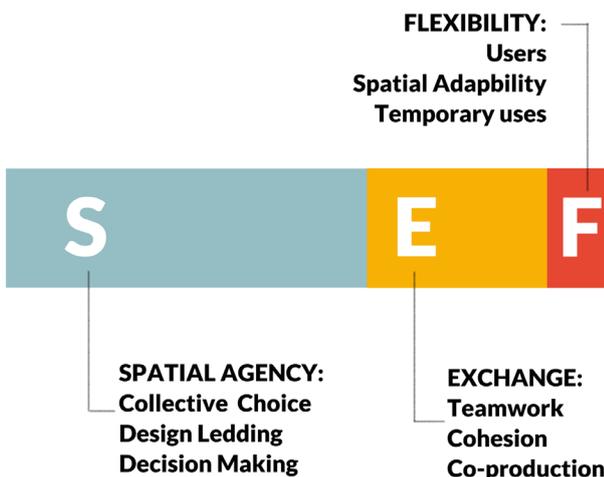
Mobilising local people through collective agricultural projects.

Suggested Intervention

The innovation of an urban agricultural plot and community owned garden to be managed by local residents. The aim would be to create activity and transform the space as a catalyst for new local relationships and networks. The 'Roots to Work' Report (Varley-Winter, 2013), carried out by Capital Growth, identifies urban agriculture projects as catalysts for improving the employability of individuals and groups; as well as strengthening community relationships.

The proposal objective is to promote the following:

- » Community engagement/relationships
- » Health education
- » Creating flows of production and consumption
- » Creating transferable skills increasing employability
- » Possibility for trade opportunities



'Participation in community food-growing groups and city farms can also develop technical skills which prepare individuals for jobs, transfer enterprise skills and encourage engagement in formal learning'

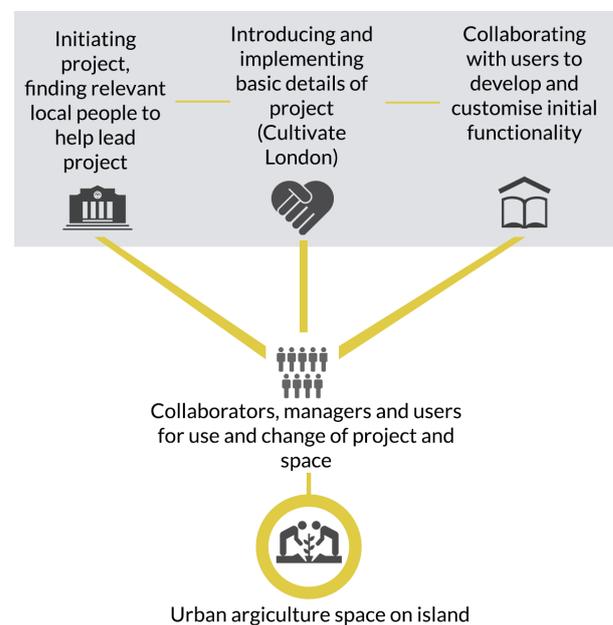
(Varley-Winter, 2013, pp.8).

Potential Actors/ Partnerships

Newham Council: At the centre of this intervention is the local people. The council's role therefore becomes essential to mobilise and encourage people to get involved with the project while also being receptive to the flexibility of the intervention as a temporary solution that will be shaped by the opinions of locals.

University of East London: Different departments may be able to help promote and educate healthy living options in the community using this space and to help transform the spatial features through design. By engaging/partnering with local communities this space could be used to test and implement knowledge, gained by students, in a practical situation (vocational learning).

Cultivate London: It may be possible, in the long term, to build a partnership with this organisation which have a few sites across London. In these sites Cultivate London work with 16-24 year olds to help provide horticulture training and job opportunities (Cultivate London, 2013).



Example Cases

(Culpepper Community Gardens, Culpepper, 2014)



Culpepper Community Garden, Islington, UK

A 'beautiful public open space in the heart of Islington, London, which serves both as a city park and as an environmental community project. Managed by and for local people, it is a unique project where people from all walks of life come together to appreciate and enhance their environment' (Culpepper, 2014).

R-URBAN

This project seeks to build urban resilience in European cities through creating networks that create flows and networks based on urban activities. It is a strategy which is being implemented in a number of sites around Colombes over a four year period (UrbanTactics, 2008, RUrban, 2012).

'Simply working physically, outdoors and in a natural environment, contributes to mental well-being for participants'

(Varley-Winter, 2013, pp.7).



Social Language Exchange: Creating relaxed and fun environments for the interchange of linguistic skills.

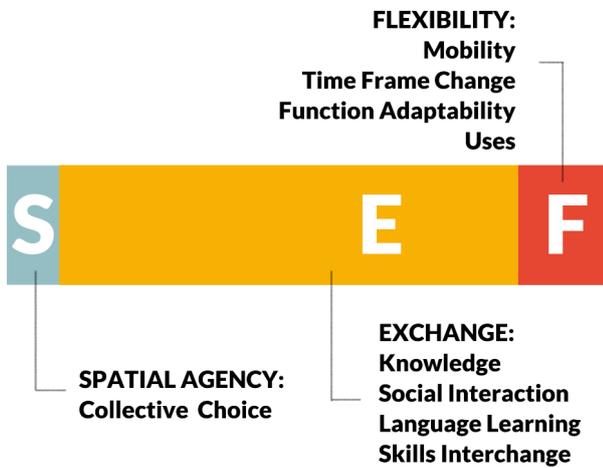
4.5.2 Language Exchange

The site is characterised by the diverse backgrounds of its inhabitants; with a large percentage of the population not having English as their first language. This becomes an identifiable barrier to many people getting employment but also creates a negative view of the diversity of

language within the area. The diversity of languages and cultural backgrounds could however be a strength of the site. Leftover space could be used to further understand people's perceptions and aspirations with regards to language and communication.



Suggested Intervention



To create social moments and interactions through events and social evenings to facilitate the sharing, practising and informal teaching of various languages. This could be from learning basic conversational levels of a language, to exercising skills being taught on a formal teaching curriculum/course through real life conversations. This works as an exchange of knowledge, and can be a way to encourage social interactions within the area and become a platform for learning and improving English for employment reasons, amongst others. These language centres could be in Local pubs, restaurants, community centres and possibly outdoors in summertime or good weather ('Exchange Centres'). This principle could be applied to the exchange of other knowledge, skills or training.



There is also the possibility of a food exchange place with similar objectives and parameters.



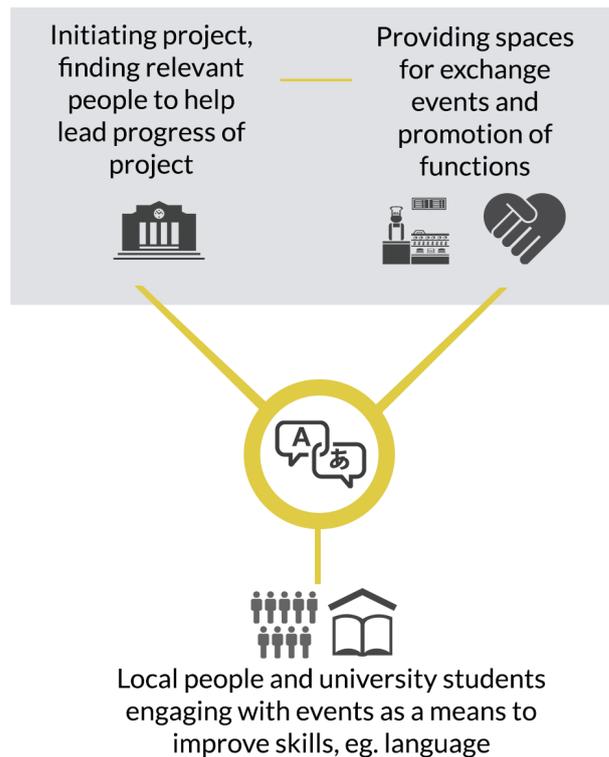
Shown here is the Language Exchange Event



Potential Actors/ Partnerships

University of East London - Linguistics Department could help to promote vocational learning amongst students and residents.

Community Centre Organisations/Local businesses - Using local businesses and spaces in the area would help provide new opportunities for local businesses as it will help to increase custom on special language nights. The use of community centres may open up the range of people that will attend, such as children or teenagers who may be restricted in local pubs.



Example Case

(Language Exchange Ireland, Real Events, 2013)



Language Exchange Dublin, Ireland

Groups of people meet once a week in a local pub to practice different languages. People are paired based on the language skills they have or want to obtain. This has created social activity and cohesion as residents have been able to help one another using skills they already had (Real Events, 2013).



(Language Exchange Ireland, Real Events, 2013)

“It doesn’t feel like things are being developed, just that everything is being taken away.”

4.5.3 Enhancing Local Initiatives

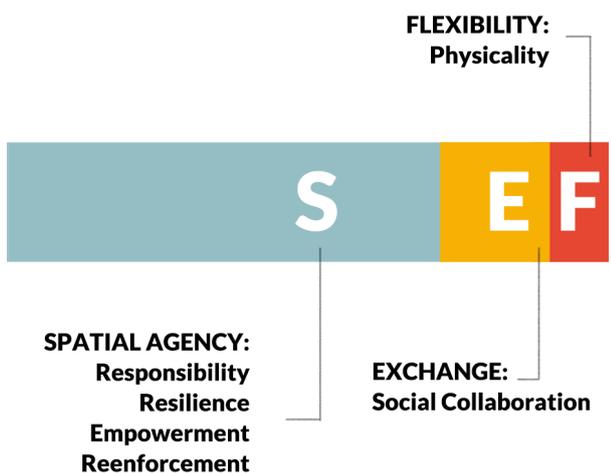


There are already many small initiatives in the area that could be further developed with the support of the council and local businesses. By supporting these initiatives and empowering them to continue and grow, it is likely that stronger community networks and social cohesion will be a product. This would help to build relations between residents and the council and develop trust and common aims.

Many of these initiatives support children or more vulnerable groups, within Newham, who may not be benefiting from other regeneration plans. Enhancing existing projects, businesses and skills that residents have will help to revive the area and stimulate action. As these projects have already been initiated, often with little funding or external support, it can be seen that there is a great potentiality and enthusiasm for local improvements.

In supporting groups of local residents, the council would enable an impetus for change that is already prevailing and, as such, help to create local resilience and communities that need less support in the future.

Potential Actors/ Partnerships



“Sometimes it feels like the Government doesn’t think we exist.”

Example Case

(Singstars Choir, TedX, 2013)



The Royal Dock's Singstars

“Being part of this has been wonderful, it has taken away some stress from me and has helped my kids confidence.”

Based in the Asta Community Hub this choir was set up by locals for children and adults in Silvertwon and North Woolwich after feeling like the regeneration in the area was not for them. Many of the people taking part explained that it is helping children build confidence and giving them dreams and ambition. This brings people together from different local areas and communities and provides activity in an area where residents often feel neglected. There are hopes within the group of expanding and making it a central part of the area with the group themselves stating that it is helping them build local resilience (TedX, 2013).

Fight for Peace

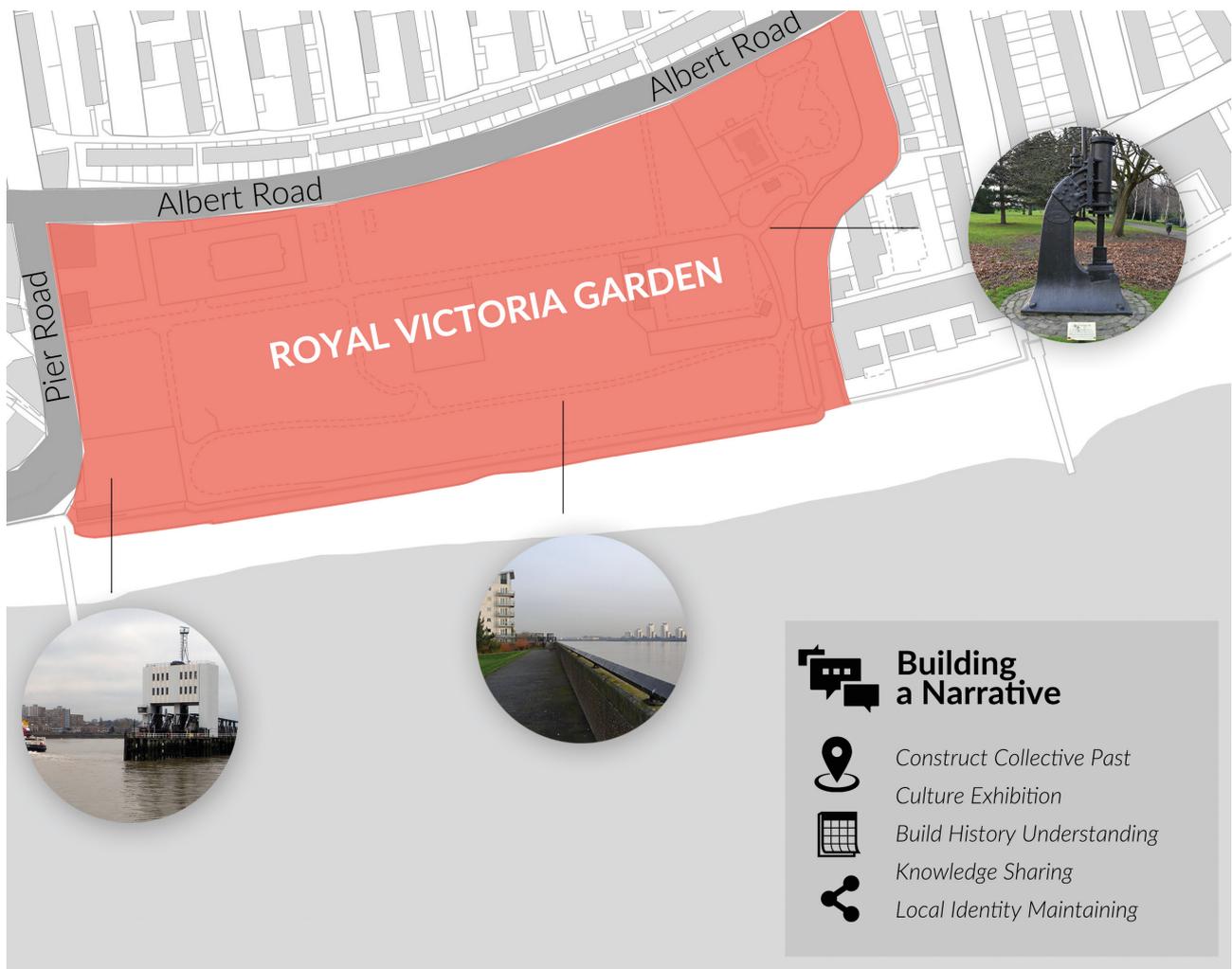


Fight for Peace is a global organisation with a centre based in North Woolwich. Using boxing, martial arts, education and training, the centre is a space for young people; particularly those in an area suffering from high levels of crime. All members are offered different forms of education and training, as well as legal and psychological support. One of the aims of the organisation is to better prepare young people for further education or the job market and this could be strengthened if it was streamlined with opportunities from the Job Centre and with support from Newham Council and UEL particularly (Fight for Peace, 2014).

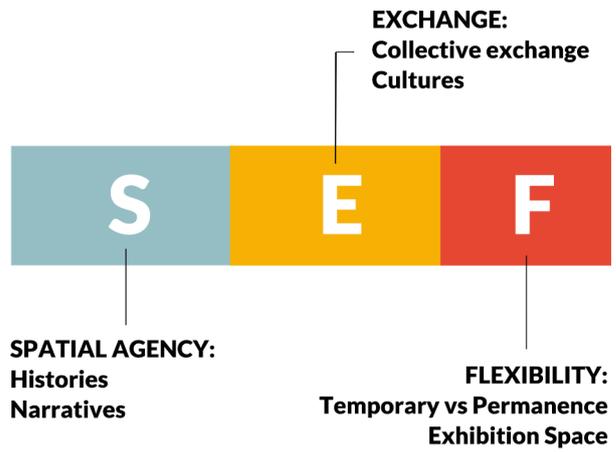
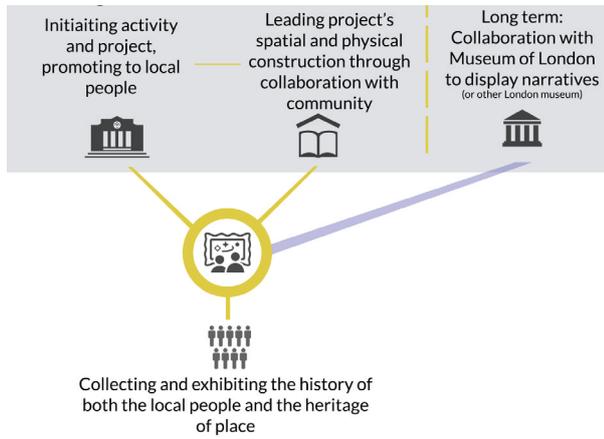
4.5.4 Building a Narrative

- » Using temporary or permanent sites of exhibition to invite residents to build a narrative of their understanding of the sites history as well as their own.
- » There is much transience in the area, huge diversity and a contentious site history but that does not mean that a collective past cannot be constructed.

- » This would create a story; the history of the docks and the history of those cultures and identities that formed the space today.
- » This could be tied to cultural events and other activities in the local area.



Potential Actors/ Partnerships



(Below and Right: Possible manifestations of the promotion and activities.)



PART 5

Conclusion

This report presents an alternative form of regeneration for the areas of North Woolwich, Albert Island and southern Beckton; placing residents firmly at the centre of the process.

The current regeneration plans do not take into account the local population and their needs, desires and aspirations. Having considered the potentialities and weaknesses within the area, we sort to consider ideas which would be suggestive but not prescriptive, leaving room for the thoughts and opinions of the local people to form the permanent use of spaces in the area and community activity. This strategy aims to build upon strengths within the community and to run inline with Newham councils own aims of creating resilience. We

feel that this strategy would not only benefit the local residents individually but as a collective, empowering them to prioritise the things they feel are of more central importance; be it healthcare, employment, education or a new cinema. There are many examples of local initiatives in the area already that could benefit from further support from the council. We feel that these initiatives indicate a desire of local people to be involved in the transformation of the area; rather than being passive recipients.

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