

## London Borough of Newham\_The Royal Docks \_ rethinking boundaries



MSc Building and Urban Design in Development  
Transforming Local Areas: Term 2, Development Brief Stage 2  
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## \_Executive Summary

This report aims to construct a new vision for Newham's Royal Docks which is based upon the deconstruction of boundaries in the area. It is based on our initial analysis of boundaries in the area, which was conducted through site visits, interviews and review of historical documents and urban agendas for the area.

The report is divided into three parts. The first is the framework which covers the methodology and strategies we used to analyse and understand the Royal Docks, while also contextualising our intervention within the area's history. Secondly, we look at the dynamics of transformation, and identify the presence of boundaries in the area and how they are formed. Finally, we illustrate our vision for the area through four pivotal intervention points. While we propose acupuncture interventions, the effect ripples throughout the neighborhoods. This vision is based upon our guiding principles on how to soften boundaries in the area, with the overall goal of building bridges. This vision aims to **stitch** together the neighbourhoods and help fight future fragmentation.



# Content

1_Framework.....	4
Context .....	4
Methodology.....	5
2_ Critical Identification of Opportunities and Weaknesses .....	6
Dynamics of Transformation.....	9
Identifying Patterns of the Programmatic Boundaries.....	10
Identifying Disconnections.....	11
Transport and Mobility Overview.....	12
Scale Mapping Overview.....	13
3_ Vision .....	14
SWOT Analysis.....	15
Principles and Guidelines.....	16
4_Strategic Response.....	17
Conceptual Representation.....	18
Spatial Manifestation.....	19
Specification of Site Interventions.....	20
Intervention Proposal 1.....	21
Intervention Proposal 2.....	22
Intervention Proposal 3.....	23
5_ Conclusion.....	24
6_ Bibliography .....	25
7_ Appendix.....	26
Interview data	
List of Tables and Figures	

## Context

The London Borough of Newham was formed in 1965, and is located in East London. In the last 53 years, Newham has experienced an incredible development. One of the hardest times for Newham was the high levels of unemployment in the 1980s after the closure of the docks. The borough has also experienced large changes in demographics and a high level of population growth from newcomers. Recently, the borough has seen the opening of the London City Airport, and the DLR and has also hosted the Olympics and Paralympics. The Royal Docks in Newham has been designated as an enterprise zone, focusing on sustainable regeneration and private investment, aiming to make it a new centre for East London.

Newham's development is a result of the rapid expansion and urbanisation of London's suburbs. The Local Plan Core Strategy plans to use regeneration projects as a means to bring Newham back as a centre of attention. Other regeneration projects in Newham such as Westfield Stratford, Canning Town and Custom House have aimed to provide employment and housing for current residents and newcomers. However, these large regeneration projects have rapidly transformed the landscape of Newham. The new infrastructure and housing developments are promising, but they have also played a role in creating new boundaries and feelings of isolation in the area.

**As such, our proposal for the area aims to break down the boundaries in the Royal Docks through four key intervention points.**

### 1800-1939 DEVELOPMENT

Increases in sea trade during this time led to the creation of the Docklands area in East London. Our study area, the Royal Docks, was constructed during this time alongside various other docks along the River Thames. A thriving hub for trade, the Docklands developed fast along with the expansion of housing and other facilities. The final dock to be constructed was opened by King George V in 1921, located in North Woolwich. In our study context, this can be regarded as the "golden age" of the Royal Docks.

### 1939-1945 SUFFERING

The Royal Docks suffered severe damage during World War II. Despite the damage, the Royal Docks enjoyed a brief boom in trade post war and it looked as though the docks would continue to thrive through to the end of the twentieth century, but that wasn't the case.

### 1960-1981 DECLINE

After the Royal Docks reached its peak in activity in 1962-3, it began a sharp decline afterwards due to a combination of the increase of road transport, containerisation and Britain's overall poor economy (Marriott 2011, p. 344). Unable to keep up with the rise of containerisation, the Royal Docks saw major losses in employment and the subsequent destruction of communities in the area. While there were various attempts to regenerate the area, they were largely unsuccessful, and the area fell into further disrepair.

### 1981-2018 REGENERATION

In 1981 the London Docklands Development Corporation (LDDC) was formed with the objective of regenerating and finding new uses for the abandoned docks of London. The LDDC was given considerable power in pursuit of their goal to produce an investment and business friendly environment. Major infrastructure projects that were undertaken

in the Royal Docks were the construction of the Docklands Light Rail (DLR) and the London City Airport. While the LDDC was successful in "regenerating" surrounding areas such as Canary Wharf through the construction of a new financial centre, much of this regeneration only created greater inequality with unemployment increasing, and the locals with jobs being largely relegated to the service industry. Regeneration in this area has failed to address poverty and socio-economic inequality and has built greater boundaries for its people.

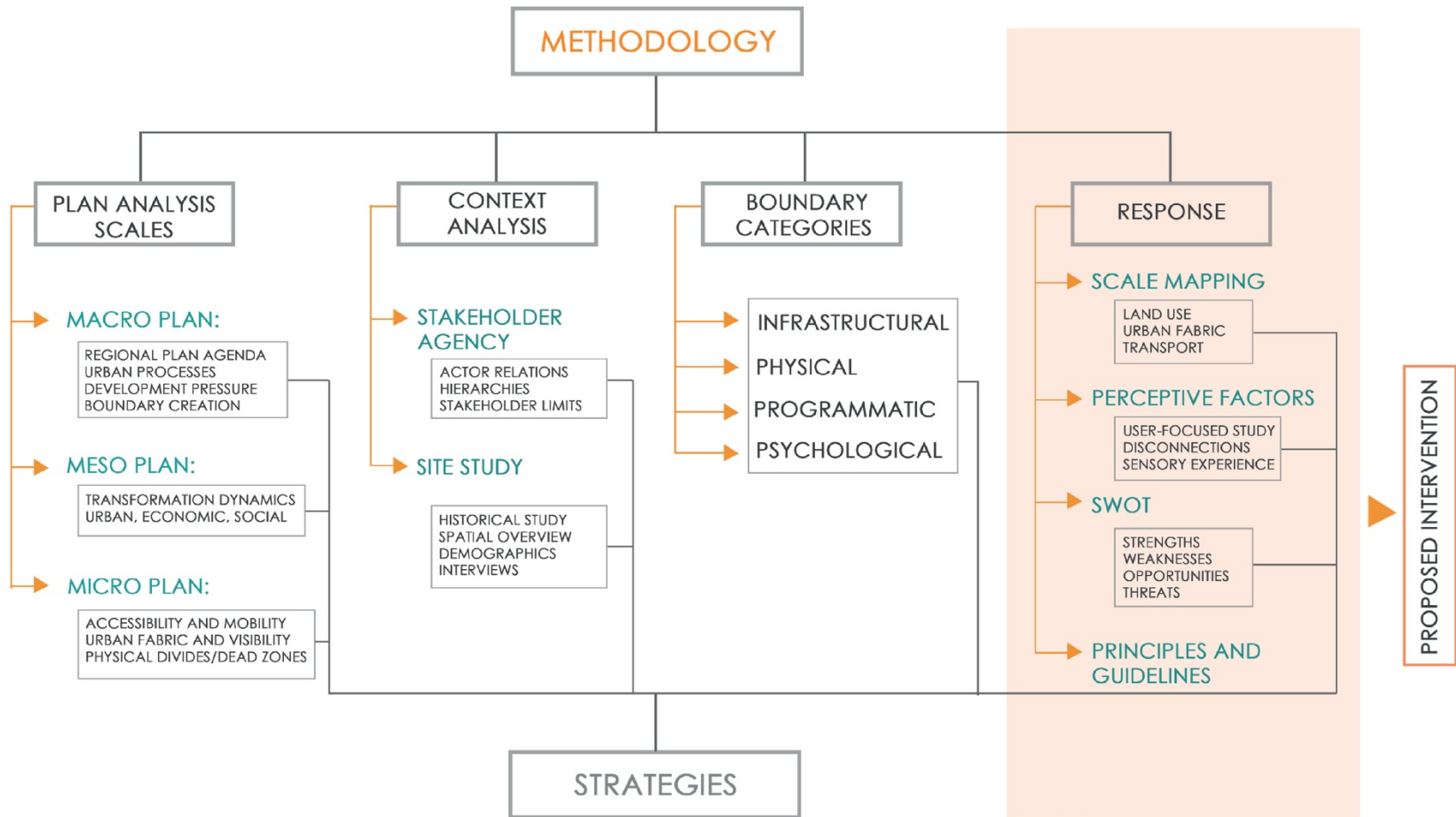
### From 2018 NEW CHAPTER

The Royal Docks is embarking on an exciting new chapter.

<b>Development</b> 1800-1939	1855 Victoria Dock opened 1880 Albert Dock opened 1921 King George V Dock opened
<b>Suffering</b> 1939-1945	World War 2
<b>Decline</b> 1945-1981	1962-3 Peak activity in Royal Docks
<b>Regeneration</b> 1981-2018	1981 Final dock closed 1981 LDDC formed 1987 London City Airport opened
<b>New chapter</b>	2013 Newham Strategic Plan released Intervention: breaking down boundaries

Figure 1

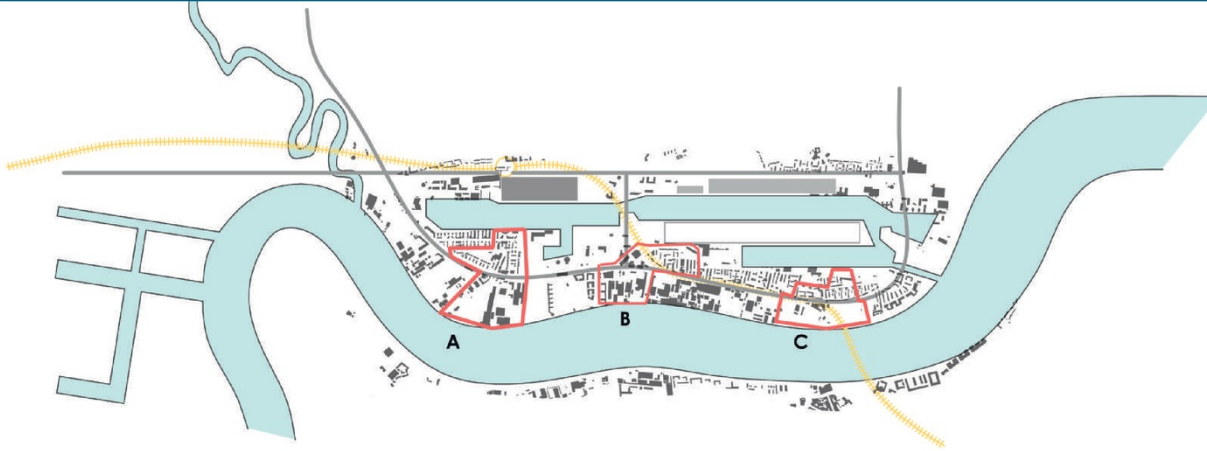
# \_Methodology



The focus of this study is both an urban analysis of Newham's Royal Docks and our proposed design intervention for the area in various ways. Our analysis of Newham was under the lens of boundaries and how they manifest in the area in various ways. Initially, we identified programmatic boundaries arising from the Urban Agenda on a macro-scale, then boundaries on the borough-scale, and finally on the neighbourhood-level in the Royal Docks. These boundaries can be visual and tangible, or psychological and intangible. We then identified issues and potentials that arise from those boundaries. As such, our proposed intervention for the area was undertaken with the aim of how to soften the boundaries in the area and breathe a new life into the Royal Docks.

## **\_Critical identification of opportunities and weaknesses**

# Dynamics of transformation



## Comparing the urban fabric of the neighborhoods

We use the study of urban fabrics of the different types of neighbourhoods to convey the boundary of visibility experienced by the residents. The newer tower developments have larger landscaped area between them at many points in comparison to the neighbourhoods with the low-rise houses. This causes a lower level visual block to be experienced between these towers, while they have a large-scale clearance due to their height. The smaller houses have more clearance and visual comfort when walking through the roads as there are frequent openings, and the general height is human-scale, but they do not have sight of further areas. This contrast in the fabric, especially when specific to certain zones, creates differences in the neighbourhoods. We feel that this divide could be bridged by creating sites for collective activity which detach residents from separate identities and encourage shared experiences.

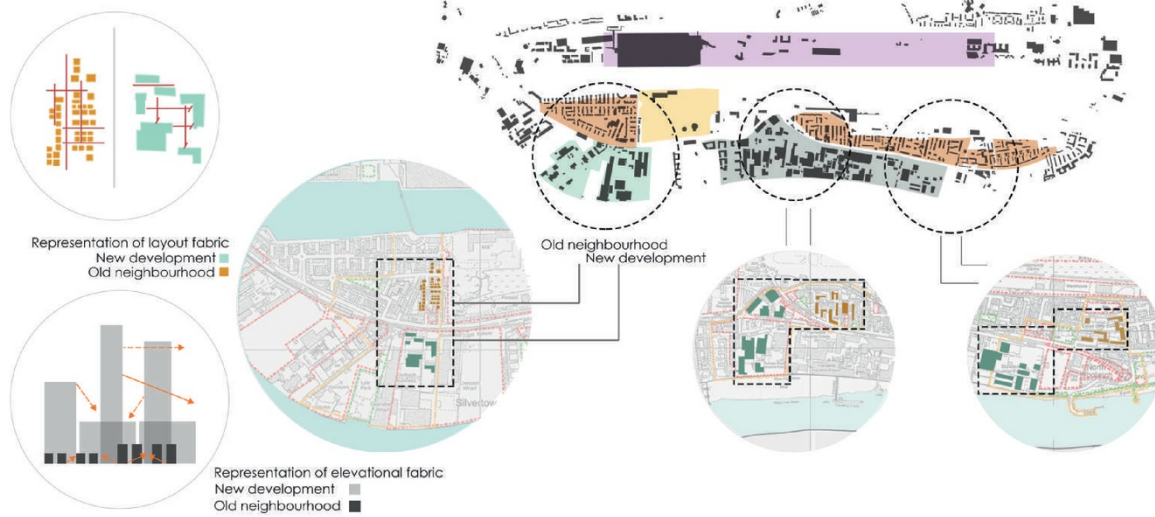


Figure 2

### Critical identification of opportunities and weaknesses

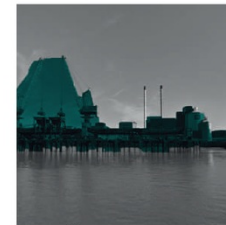


Figure 3

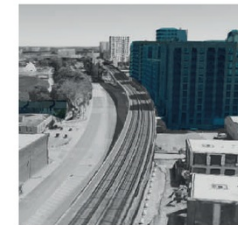


Figure 4



Figure 5

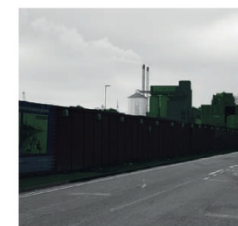


Figure 6

## Dynamics of transformation

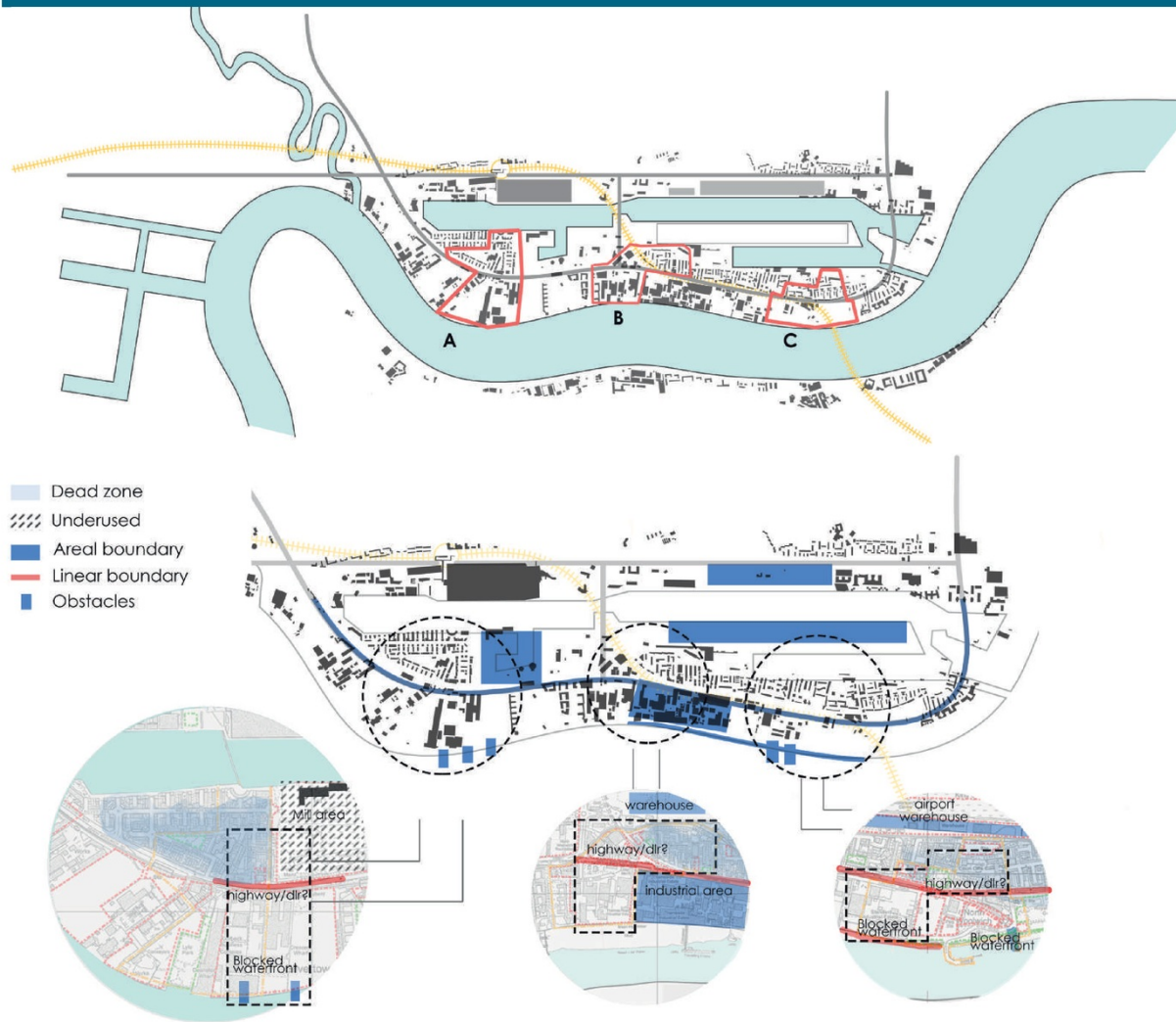


Figure 7

### Critical identification of opportunities and weaknesses

### Identifying physical divides and dead zones

Physical divides in the site can be noted in the infrastructural factors such as the highway dividing neighbourhoods, programmes such as industry creating unrelatable functions adjacent to housing or land under transformations such as the mill area. The divide can also be experienced in the Site C northern neighbourhood which is experiencing low maintenance while sitting between two enterprise zones, this is highlighted in the lack of pedestrian friendly walking space just along the Woolwich Road. The promenade along Victoria Dock seems much more maintained which we note is due to the investment and commercial zone across the water, creating further inequality.

As the area transforms, the new developments cause blockages in many areas which disrupts the residents' daily orientation of the area, creating psychological discomfort. This includes new enclaves which reshape the access, as well as the crossrail construction creating a prominent divide in the area through a physical boundary. We see these factors as the causes behind the fragmentation of the area, reducing the desired coherence of the Royal Docks when seen through the lens of use experience.

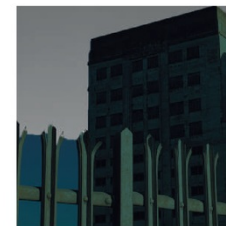


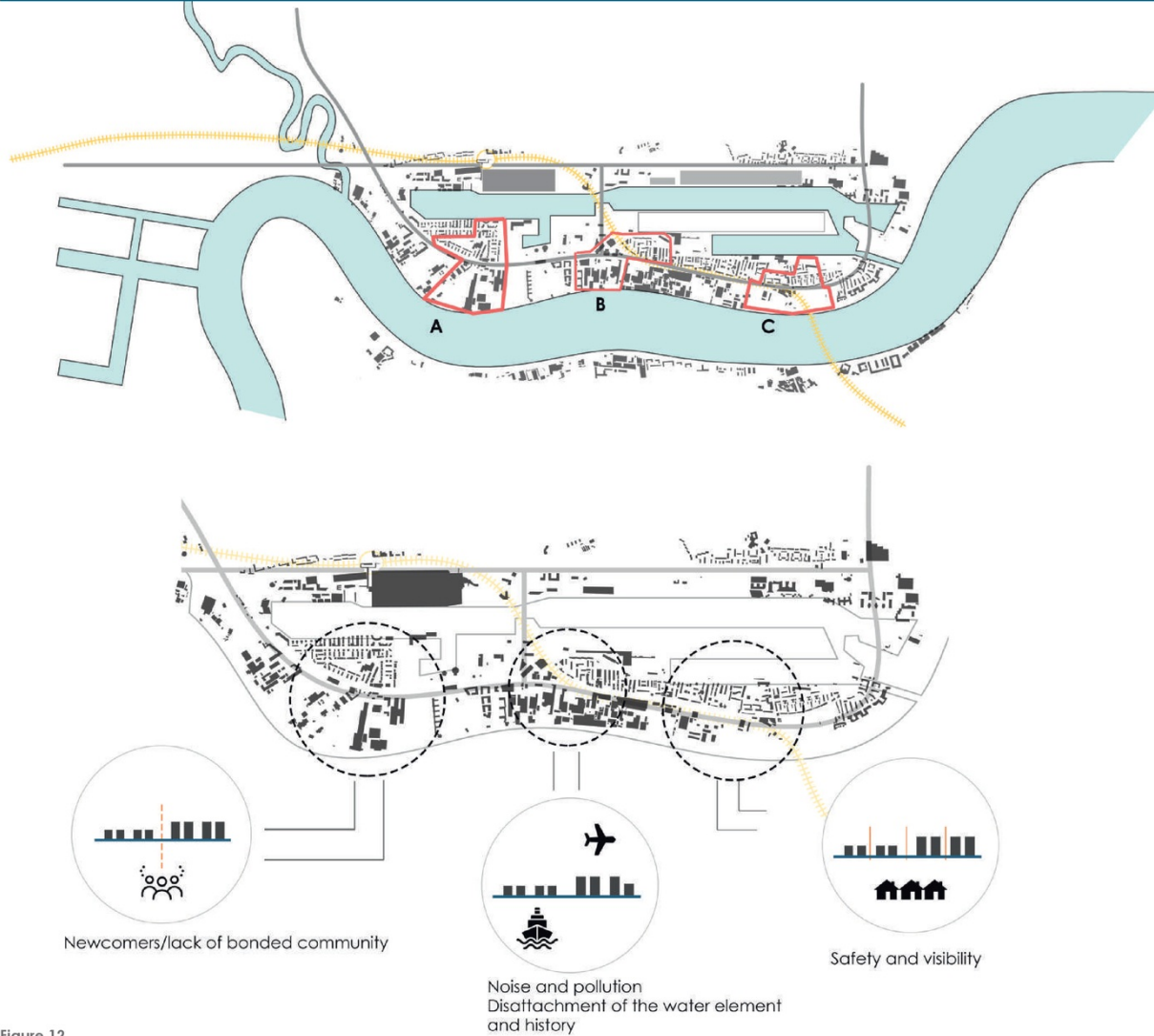
Figure 10



Figure 11



## Dynamics of transformation



### Critical identification of opportunities and weaknesses

#### Identifying psychological boundaries

As we have already mentioned, boundaries also manifest themselves psychologically.

In **Site A** we noticed that there is not only a physical divide between the new and old neighborhood, but also a distance between the newcomers and the older residents, that do not seem to blend together. This was also a comment we received while interviewing the locals, stating the lack of bonding and interaction.

**Site B** is located near the airport and that causes a lower quality of life due to noise and pollution. The area also seems detached from the waterfront and the location between two impermeable areas, airport and industries, create a sense of isolation.

In **Site C** residential use is dominant and the lack of shops and retail intensifies the feeling of being unsafe. The lack of socializing areas reduces the collective activity meaning that there are no 'eyes on the street' except in the residential streets.



Figure 13

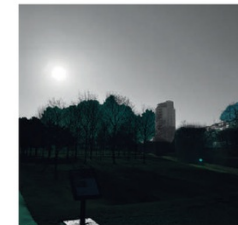


Figure 14



Figure 15



Figure 16

# Identifying patterns of the programmatic boundaries

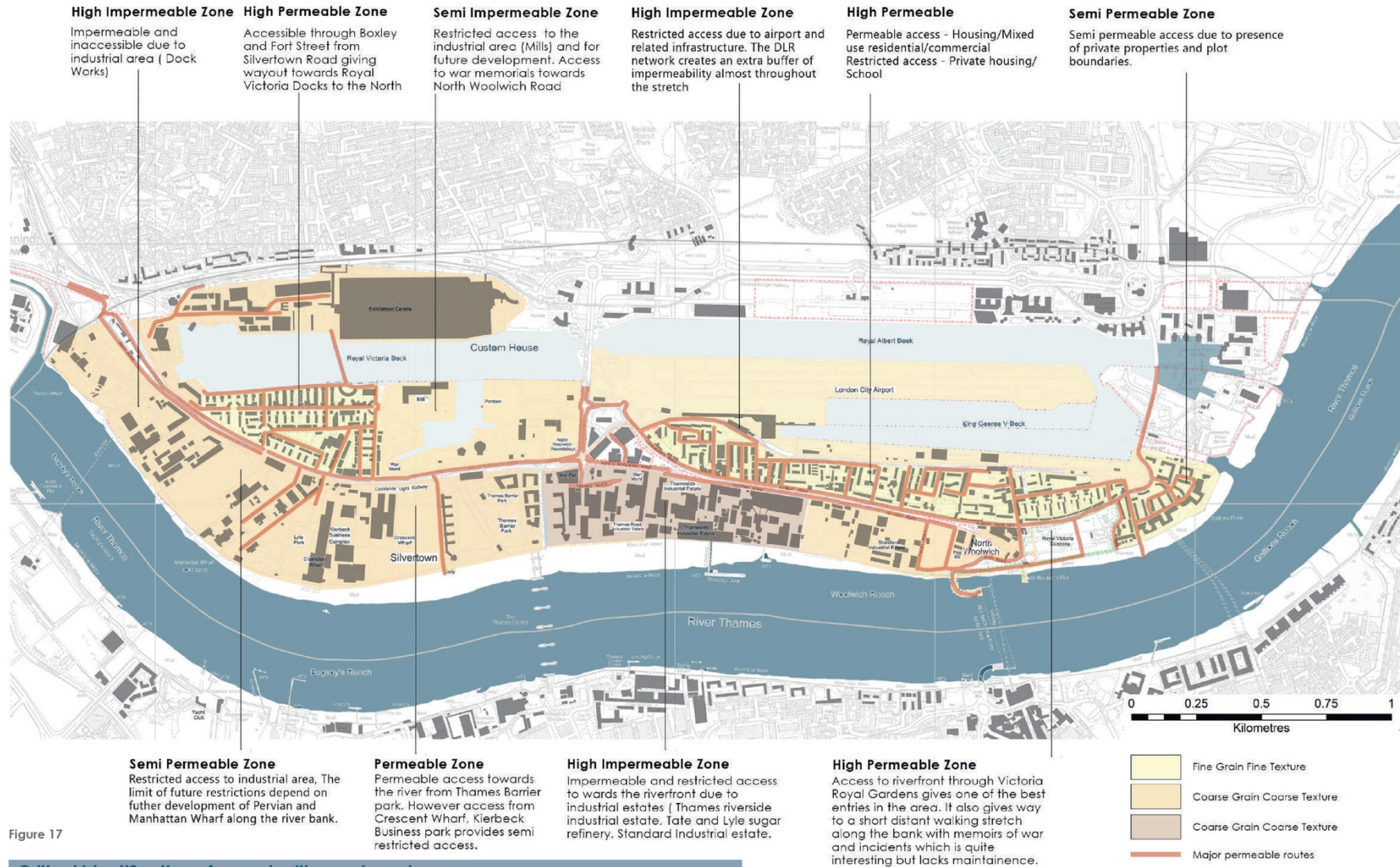


Figure 17

## Critical identification of opportunities and weaknesses

# Identifying disconnections

## Infrastructure disconnections

DLR and highways are creating physical/visual boundaries between the urban fabrics.

## Investment disconnections

Especially in this area, the various residential projects seem disattached from each other, with no natural continuance.

## Investment disconnections

The Mill area is planned to become a private studios area??? that seems completely disattached and gated.

## Disconnected parks

Although this park is new, well-designed and it has facilities, we noticed that the access to it was difficult.

## LandUse incompatibility

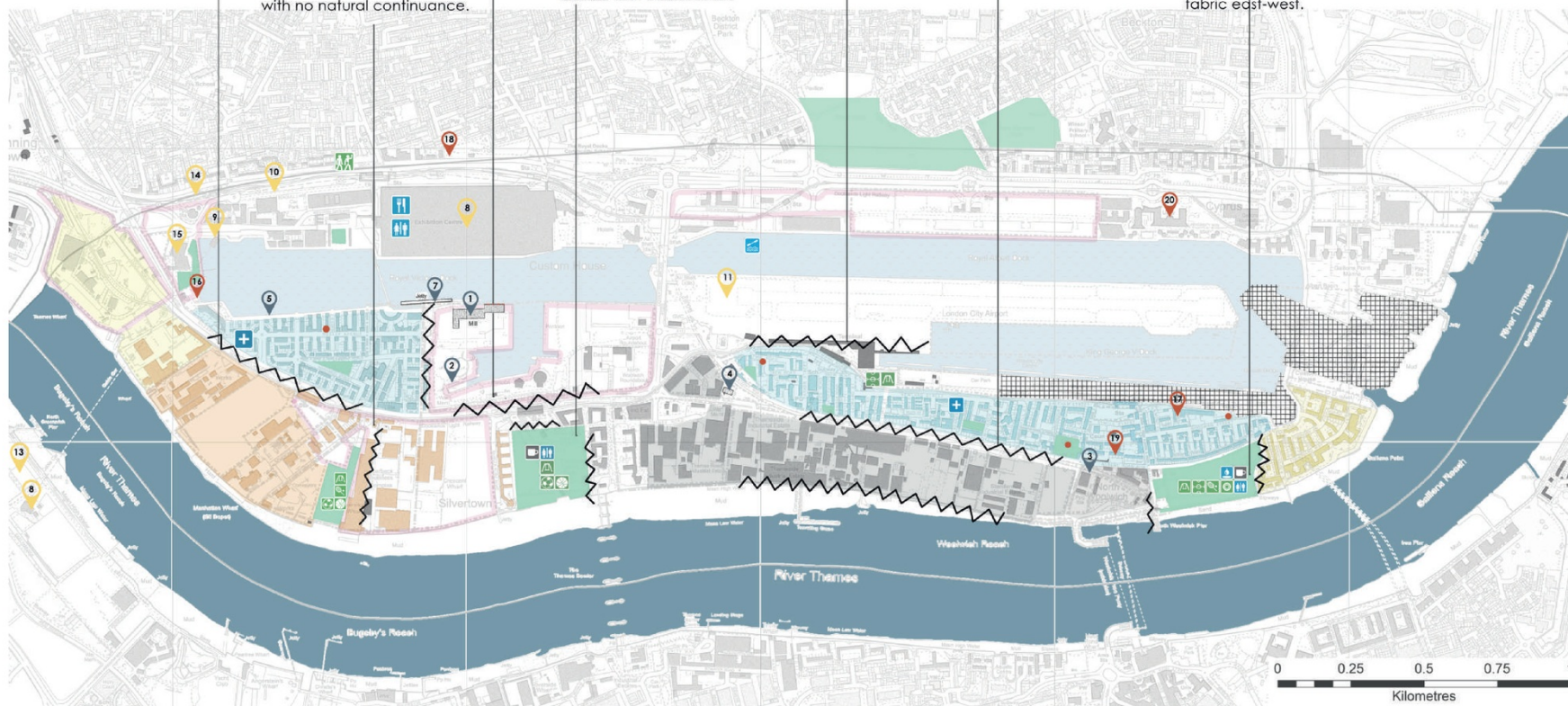
Airport - its existence is creating urban fragmentation, and causing noise and pollution to the area.

## Infrastructure disconnections

DLR and highways are creating physical/visual boundaries between the urban fabrics.

## Disconnected parks

Victoria Park - although in a strategic location, it was not well maintained and not used to its full potential. We also felt it disattached from the waterfront and the urban fabric east-west.



### HISTORICAL LANDMARKS

1. MILLENIUM MILLS
2. SILO D
3. NORTH WOOLWICH RAILWAY STATION
4. BRICK LANE MUSIC HALL
5. DOCKSIDE CRANES
6. TASE AND LILE INSTITUTE
7. SS ROBIN SHIP

### CONTEMPORARY LANDMARKS

8. EXCEL BUILDING
9. CABLE CARS
10. CROSS RAIL
11. CITY AIRPORT
12. THAMES BARRIER PARK
13. O2 ARENA
14. ROYAL VICTORIA STATION
15. CRYSTAL BY SIEMENS

### COMMUNITY LANDMARKS

16. BEACH (DEPENDING ON SEASON)
17. FIGHT FOR PEACE NGO
18. HIGH STREET LOCAL STORE
19. NORTH WOOLWICH LIBRARY
20. UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON

● COMMUNITY CENTERS

### FACILITIES/ACTIVITIES



### LANDUSE

- STRATEGIC SITES
- STRATEGIC INDUSTRIAL LOCATION (UNDER DEVELOPMENT)
- RESIDENTIAL VILLAGE
- LOCAL INDUSTRIAL LOCATION
- GREEN SPACES
- INDUSTRIAL AREA

### DISCONNECTIONS



Figure 18

Critical identification of opportunities and weaknesses

# Transportation and mobility overview

### Planned cycling route

Planned cycling route facility runs along the main vehicular artery

### Route along tunnel

Route cuts through mill area, perhaps along the proposed tunnel crossing the dock.

### Route conditions

The quality of cycling route is evidently decreasing even in the 2025 plan as eastern zone has 'good enough' track or 'poor condition'.

### Strategic route

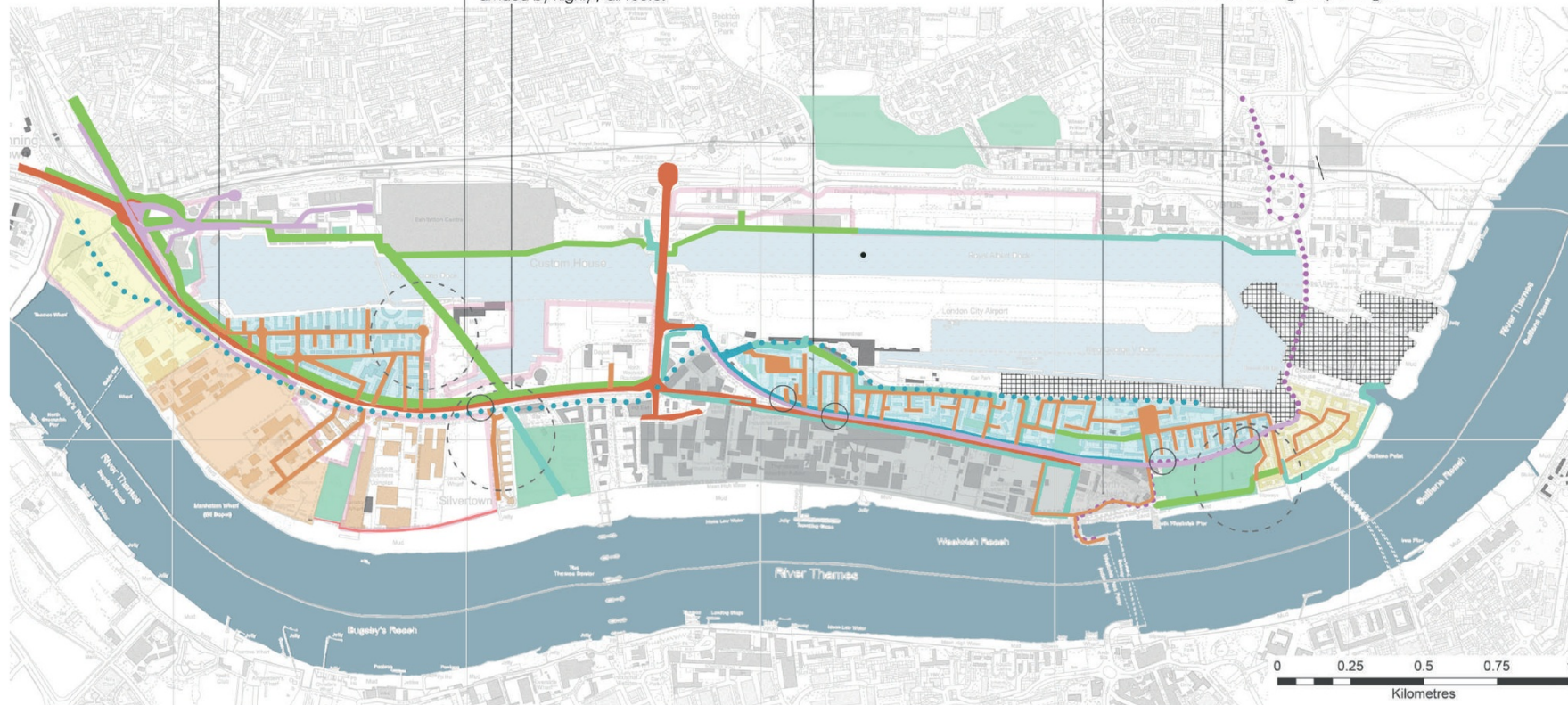
Strategic cycling route links to access towards jetty, can be used as main link to other stations.

### Cycling/pedestrian junction

Possible junction for cycling route to connected the two neighbourhoods divided by highly / dlr route.

### Route conditions

'Good condition' of cycling route is proposed along the victoria garden promenade, but disconnected as highway emerges.



- PRIMARY ROADS
- INTERVENING ROADS/ OVERHEADS
- SECONDARY ROADS ACCESSING NEIGHBOURHOODS
- RIVERSIDE PROMENADE
- DLR ROUTE
- PEDESTRIAN CROSSING

- BIKE ROUTES GRADING
- GOOD ENOUGH
- IMPROVED CONDITION
- POOR CONDITION
- TFL STRATEGIC CYCLING ANALYSIS CORRIDOR

BASED ON LONDON BOROUGH OF NEWHAM CYCLING STRATEGY 2024/25

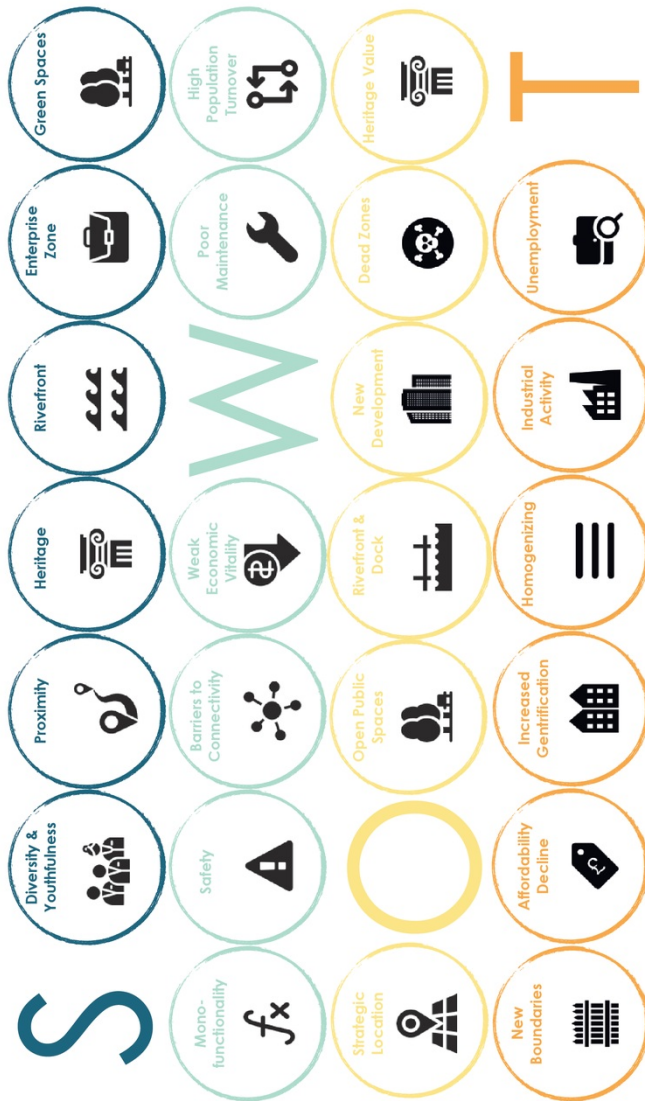
Figure 19

## Critical identification of opportunities and weaknesses



**\_Vision: Bridging the divide**

# \_SWOT Analysis



\_ Vision

## Evaluating Strengths

Newham borough, containing the Royal Docks, features an incredibly diverse demographic in terms of age, ethnicity, culture and religion. This is advantageous as it promotes intercultural enrichment and social sensitivity. Furthermore, having diverse cultural perspectives can act as a catalyst to drive creativity and innovation. On the other hand, a youthful population (47.6% under 30) has the ability to bring forth an abundance of economic and social benefits and boost development (Newham London, 2018).

## Recognizing Weaknesses

A significant weakness of the area is in its high population turnover and net out-migration which is among the highest in the UK. This lack of population stability can be attributed to age dynamics, with young populations being the least stable. This is a major drawback as stability is an influential factor on crime or deviant behavior and general happiness. In 2018 the area endured the highest levels of crime in London, which can negatively impact both social and economic activity. High levels of multiple deprivation, and employment dominated by lower paid jobs, has resulted in weak economic vitality of the area. Other main weaknesses include barriers to connectivity such as the river and infrastructure, and also the poor maintenance and mono-functionality of spaces, thus weakening community networks.

## Embracing Opportunities

The area provides several opportunities such as the existence of open public spaces, underutilized spaces or 'dead zones' that can be transformed to offer more spaces of public use and interaction. The strategic location of the Royal Docks, the allure of its riverfront and

dockside along with current regeneration efforts, offers the formidable opportunities of attracting both local and international tourists, which can advance the local economy and promote its heritage.

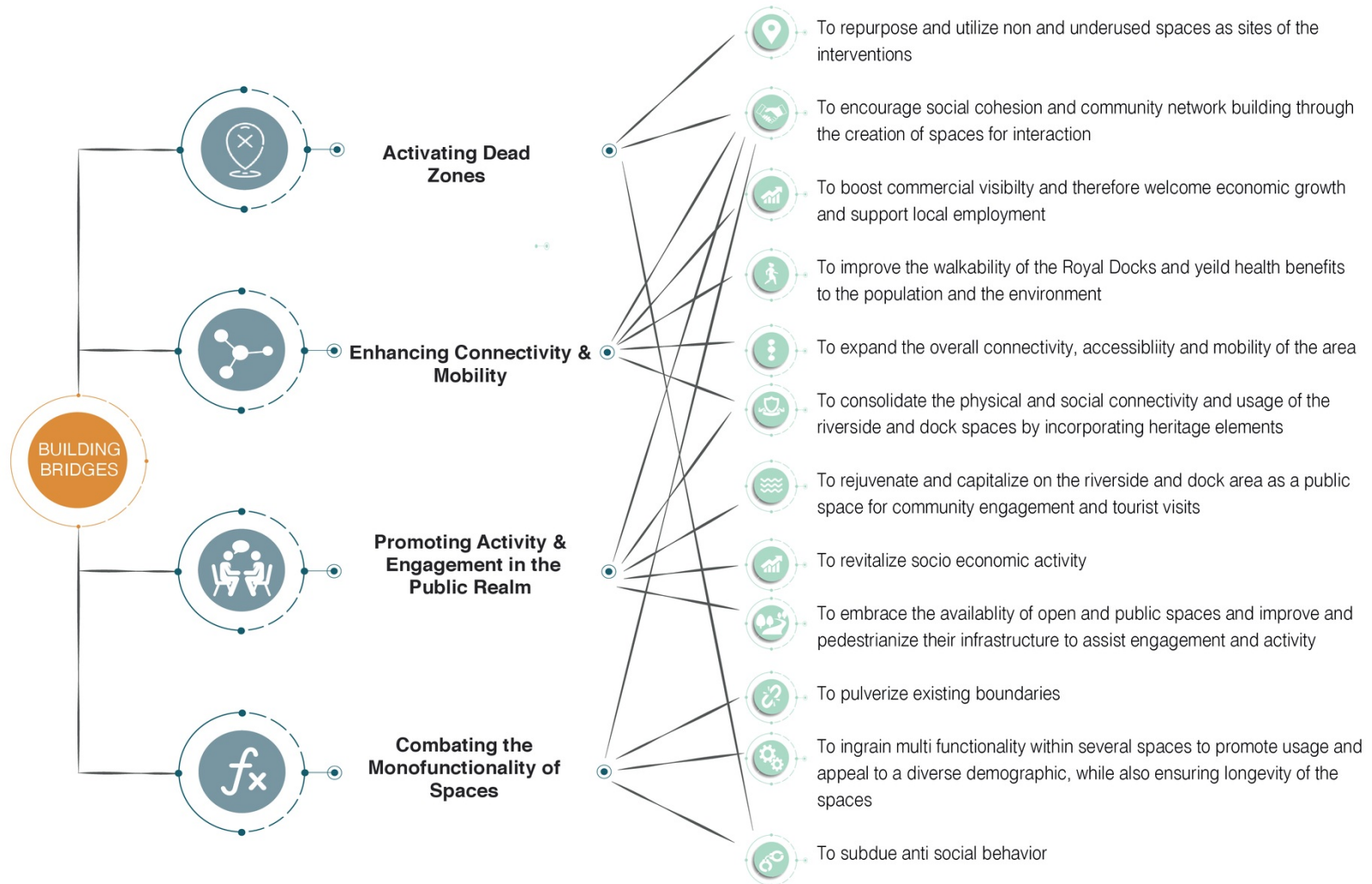
## Identifying Threats

Ongoing gentrification of the area poses a great threat in terms of widening the economic disparity amongst residents, which when coupled with the creation of new private developments and spaces, forms new boundaries and can have exclusionary and segregating effects on different groups. Additionally, gentrification along with the reduction of affordability for housing and small businesses, has the potential to dramatically alter the demographic landscape and create tensions between old and new residents, while also threatening the local economy.

# \_Principles and Guidelines

## Principles

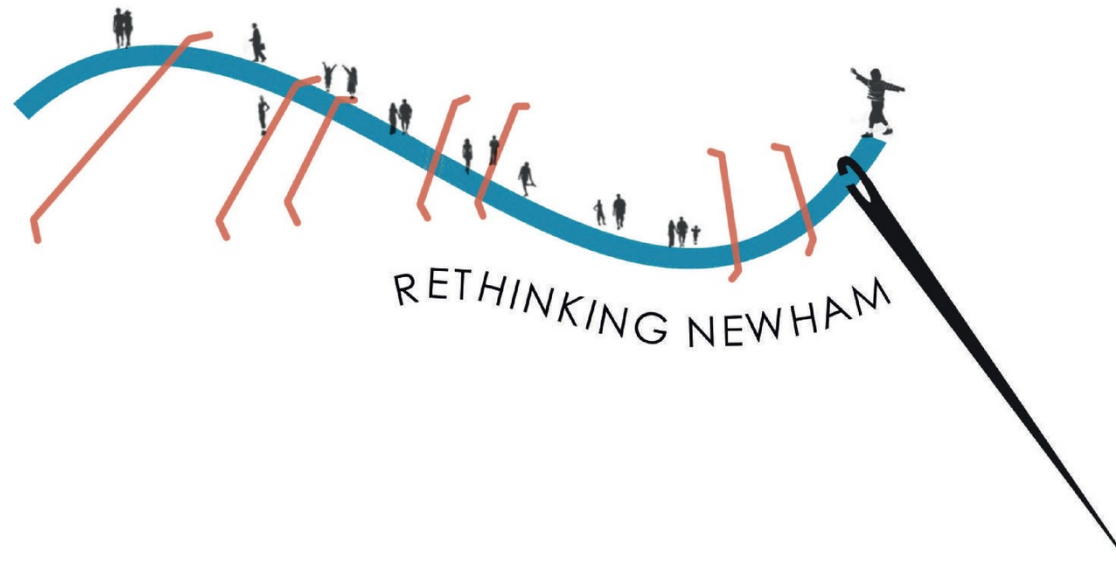
## Guidelines





**\_Strategic response**

## \_Conceptual representation



Our intervention, with the aim of softening boundaries, is based upon four guiding principles: reactivating dead zones, enhancing connectivity and mobility, promoting public activity and engagement, and combating the monofunctionality of space. Our intervention aims to tackle physical, non-physical and programmatic boundaries in the Royal Docks, stitch the neighbourhoods together and fight fragmentation in the area.

We believed that heritage was a strong starting off point for creating a sense of unity for both longtime residents and newcomers, and believe that the installation of interactive kiosks and screens would be useful in reinforcing this notion. The idea of heritage is further reinforced by the integration of dock equipment and war memorials into our interventions, and also the construction of a mesh pavillion in the Royal Victoria Gardens to symbolise the historical foundations of the park. Dock heritage is also reinforced in the Victoria Docks through the construction of a new gate that utilises the area's history as a major dock for London.

The promotion of public activity and engagement was another vital aspect of our intervention, with areas such as the Victoria Docks and Royal Victoria Gardens being the entry points. In the Victoria Docks we aim to reactivate the underused facilities by attracting families to the area through the construction of a new playground. This playground would be dock-themed so as to connect with the area's heritage and locals. The construction of an amphitheatre in the Royal Victoria Gardens would help facilitate cultural activities in the area by providing a space for people to interact and perform.

Figure 21

## \_Spatial manifestation

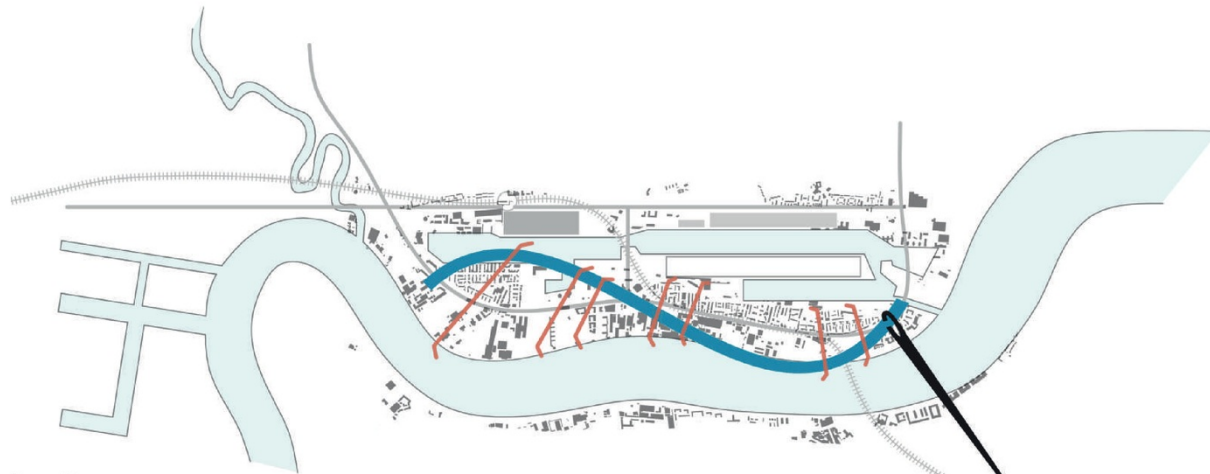


Figure 22

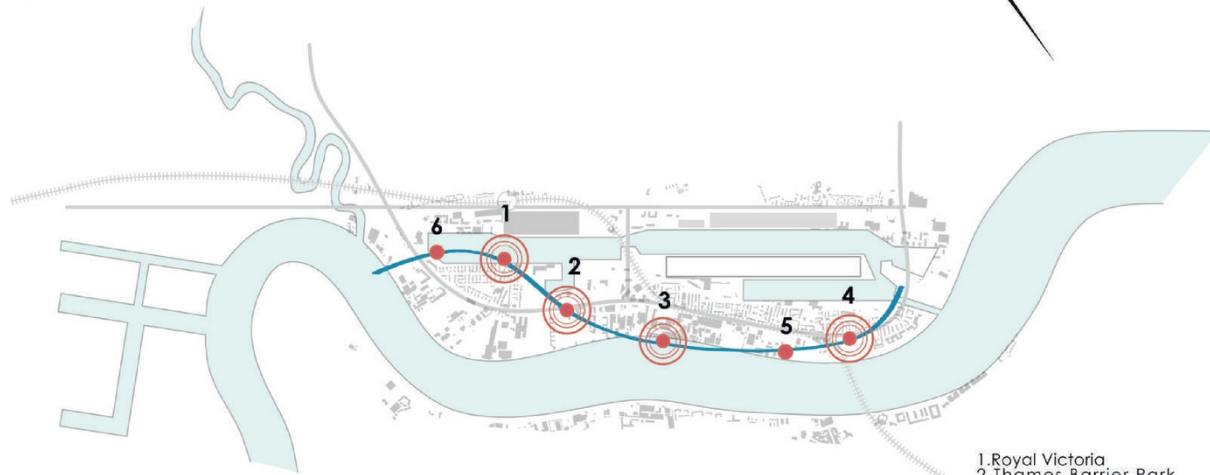


Figure 23

1. Royal Victoria
2. Thames Barrier Park
3. Industrial Estate
4. Royal Victoria Gardens
5. Jefe
6. Beach

The previously mentioned kiosks and screens would also help improve public activity and engagement by providing real-time information about the area, and cultural events going on nearby such as Young London and Newham Word Fest. Such information would help facilitate the breaking down of psychological boundaries such as isolation through the strengthening of a sense of community. The revamping of these areas would also be vital to reactivating dead zones. Additionally, this would break down the monofunctionality of these spaces, and allow them to become new centres for culture and community.

Connectivity and mobility in the area would also be vastly improved in our intervention, largely through the revitalisation of walkways in our three intervention sites. Particularly in enabling greater connectivity and mobility is vital to breaking down the physical boundaries in the area and creating a greater sense of unity between neighbourhoods in the Royal Docks. In particular, our intervention in the Thames Barrier Park aims to make the park more welcoming for people, through the installation of step free access to the park, and blending this access with stairs so as to dissolve division.

**Overall, we believe that our intervention would be a key step in breaking down boundaries in the Royal Docks, and would help facilitate unity between all inhabitants of the area.**

## \_Specifications of site interventions

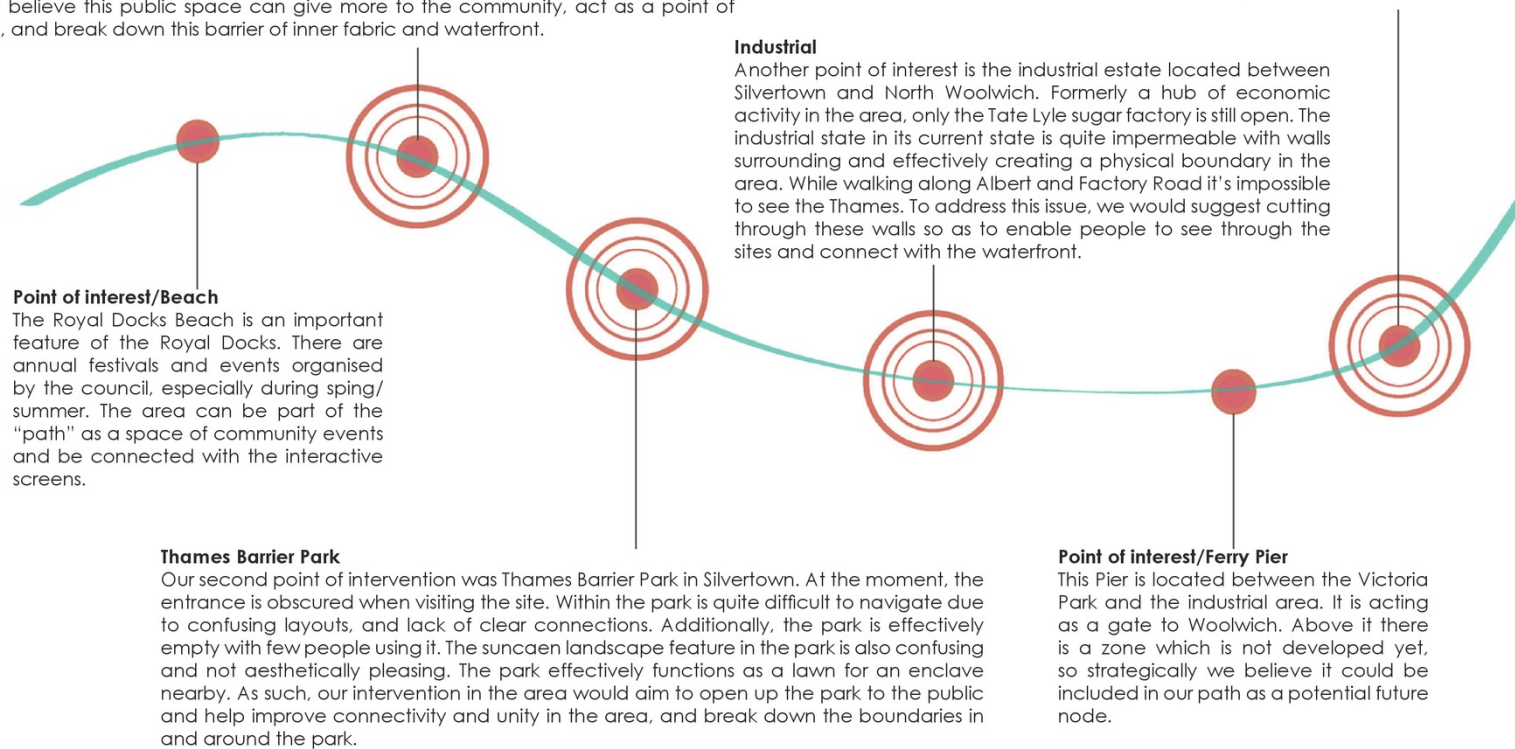
### Royal Victoria

Our first point of intervention was the waterfront in Royal Victoria Dock and the neighborhood of Victoria. We sensed that the waterfront wasn't used to its full potential and there was a disconnection between the inner fabric and the waterfront. By introducing a more interactive experience for the user while walking down the riverfront, and referring to heritage, it would trigger the sense of belonging and attract more people. We also felt that the waterfront of Silvertown would be mainly used by the residents of the new developments and the disconnection between Silvertown and Victoria Village would remain. So we wanted to give them a reason to cross to the opposite side.

Also, the park nearby is currently seen as a space to walk through rather than a destination point. We believe this public space can give more to the community, act as a point of gathering, and break down this barrier of inner fabric and waterfront.

### Victoria Park

Our fourth point of intervention was Victoria Park in Site C. At the moment, the site isn't very well maintained, lacks recreational and fitness facilities, lacks toilets and is aging. Our vision for the park aims to optimise the overall landscape and functional space in the area, which in turn would help attract attention to the area while also breaking down psychological boundaries for the inhabitants of North Woolwich. We would propose the construction of a theme park in the area and promote functional division in the park (e.g. an outdoor activity area, scenic area and rest area).



# Specifications of site intervention

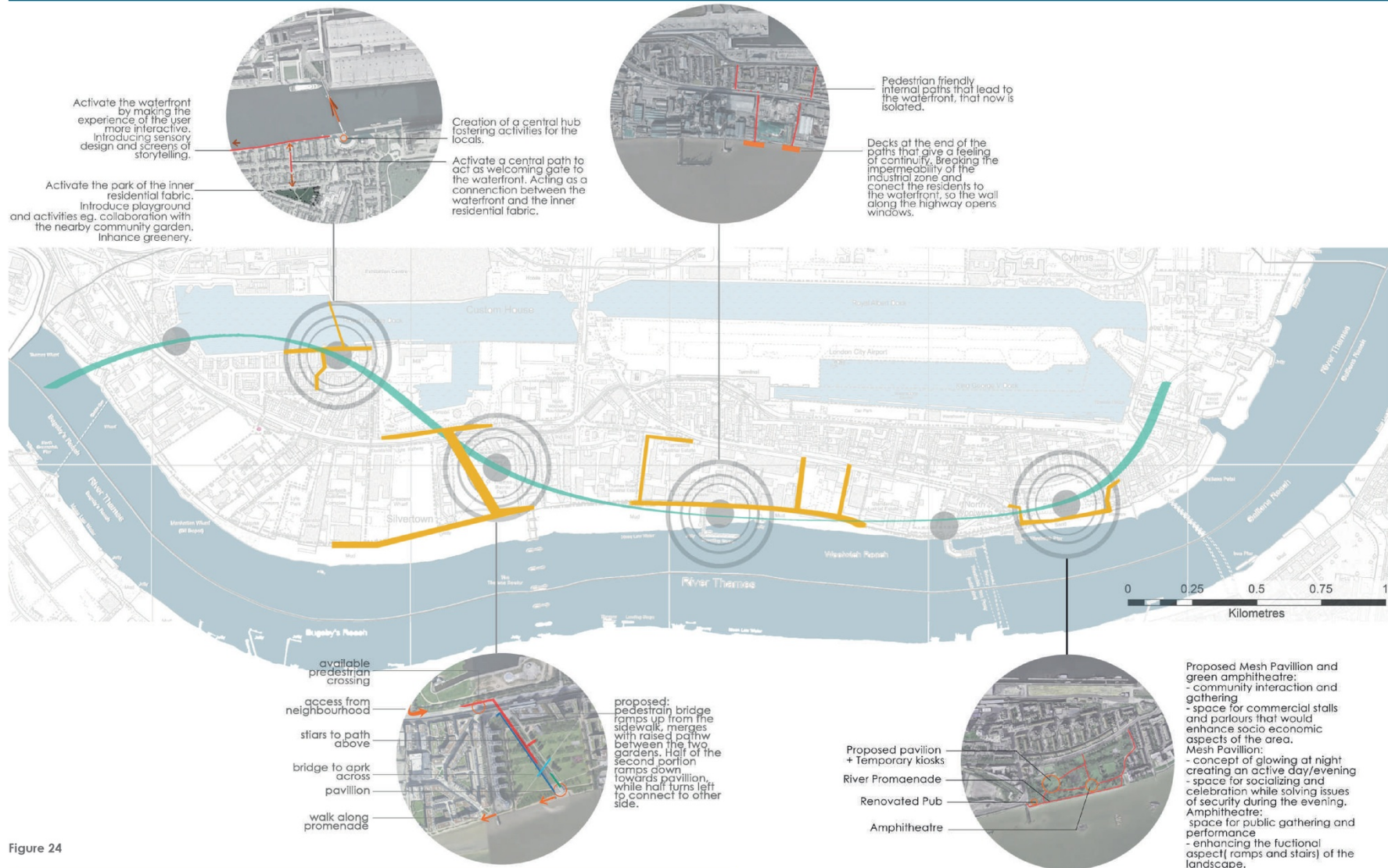


Figure 24

## \_Strategic Response

# \_Intervention Proposal 1

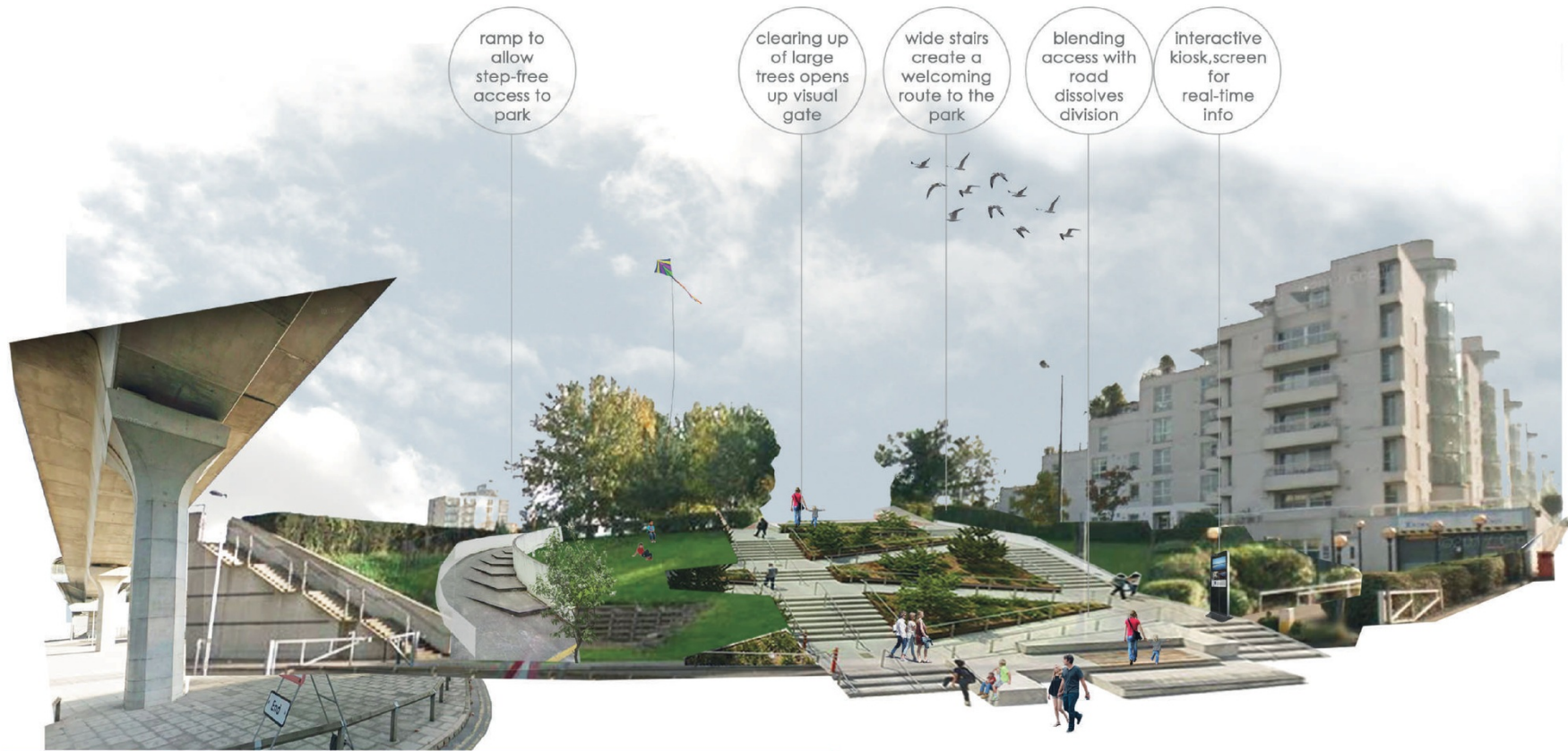
Figure 25



\_Strategic Response

## \_Intervention Proposal 2

Figure 26



\_Strategic Response

## \_Intervention Proposal 3

Figure 27



\_Strategic Response



Our study in the 2nd phase picked up from our research in the first phase where we engaged with the planning strategies and user experiences in great detail through secondary material, site visits and mappings. We furthered this research through identifying zones in the area which could play a crucial role in softening the boundaries, and bridging the divides we previously identified. Our study and intervention involved working at different scales, moving from masterplan-level to neighborhoods-level, allowing us to propose acupuntural solutions to improve the Royal Docks while also connecting the urban fragments together on a meso-scale. We have named this intervention strategy as a 'stitching' of urban fragments through a metaphorical 'thread' which brings coherence and excitement into the currently dull and divided atmosphere.

## **\_Conclusion**

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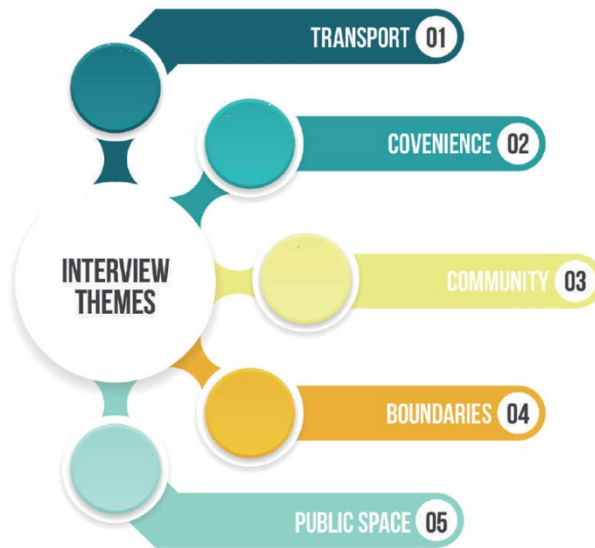
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## APPENDIX



**Interview 2** - Leanne, British, Nisa Local worker, residing in Newham for 18 years

**Transport:**

- "The DLR is quite a convenient way to get into London"
- "[I believe] that there area could use a supermarket, as the Nisa [I] work at is only open from 6:30 to 22:30 everyday"

**Convenience of Life:**

- "lack of supermarket is inconvenient for residents as many have to do shopping on the way home from work"

**Perception of Community:**

- "The area hasn't changed much during [my] time here...not many people have moved into or left Newham during [my] lifetime"
- "Royal Victoria Garden is still used for Fairy Fest every summer"
- "There is a strong sense of community in the area, everyone knows each other"
- "Crime (knife, gun and drug) has increased, particularly in the last two years"

**Conception of Boundaries:**

- "[I] don't exactly see the City Airport as a 'boundary', but [I] feel that it is inaccessible for [me] as the flights are quite expensive and mainly serve business people"

**Public Space:**

- "[The] community center is quite active, hosts a monthly market and other activities"

**Interview 1** - Mr. Tan Shuting, middle-aged Chinese immigrant, residing in Newham since 2014

**Transport:**

- "Only two buses here (one is 24 hours and another close at 00.00)"
- "lack the bridge cross to the other side"
- "DLR is very important. If I want to drive my private car in central London, it cost more than £10"

**Convenience of Life:**

- "Lacks market and shopping center (stuff here are more expensive than other areas in London)... the community is not attractive to attract capital (like investing in a market here, but if the developing area nearby brings the market, the residents will gain convenience from this"

**Perception of Community:**

- "[I] work in London and live here, and because [I am] Chinese, like many Chinese, [I] don't care about the community"

**Conception of Boundaries:**

- "[I have] no idea about what is the boundaries of urban and community"

**Public Space:**

- "[I believe] that [the] government should provide more public space, [be]cause there is only one garden in this site"

## \_LIST OF FIGURES

- Figure1 : The timeline of Royal Docks
- Figure2 : Dynamics of transformation
- Figure3 : Comparing the urban fabric of the neighborhoods -New industrial barrier
- Figure4 : Comparing the urban fabric of the neighborhoods -New vs OLD Neighborhood
- Figure5 : Comparing the urban fabric of the neighborhoods - Old houses
- Figure6 : Comparing the urban fabric of the neighborhoods -Visibility barrier of new development
- Figure7 : Comparing the urban fabric of the neighborhoods
- Figure10 : Identifying physical divides and dead zones - Factory
- Figure11 : Identifying physical divides and dead zones - SiteA DLR Barrier
- Figure12 : Identifying psychological boundaries
- Figure13 : Identifying psychological boundaries -Lack of visibility and safety
- Figure14 : Identifying psychological boundaries -Empty Park
- Figure15 : Identifying psychological boundaries - Traffic and pollution
- Figure16 : Identifying psychological boundaries
- Figure17 : Identifying patterns of the programmatic boundaries
- Figure18 : Identifying disconnections
- Figure19 : Transportation and mobility overview
- Figure20 : Scale mapping Overview
- Figure21 : Rethinking Newham
- Figure22 : Stitching urban fabric 1
- Figure23 : Stitching urban fabric 2
- Figure24 : Specifications on site intervention
- Figure25 : Intervention proposal 1
- Figure26 : Intervention Proposal 2
- Figure27 : Intervention Proposal 3