

Re-imagining Central  
Croydon  
“The Organic City”



DEVP0002 - Transforming Local Areas - A DEVELOPMENT BRIEF  
FOR THE STUDY AREAS:  
COMING UP WITH A CRITICAL DESIGN RESPONSE

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The following report presents a design response to the urban transformations of central Croydon. This project derives from empirical findings, secondary research and several conceptual theories, such as alterity, ageing and boundaries, outlined in the first stage. In order to recommend adequate interventions, we conducted a critical urban analysis of the three main concepts, followed by a SWOT analysis to determine which are the most important strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to take into account in the area of intervention. This therefore, inspired us to draw our vision, principles and guidelines. According to these results, we narrowed down interventions that can tackle issues associated with all three critical perspectives in the most strategic way.



Figure 2: Surrey Street Market  
Source: Croydonadvertisement.com

## INTRODUCTION

Croydon, a southern borough of London, underwent numerous social and spatial transformations throughout its history that have impacted the way in which the city is shaped today. The redevelopments of the central area, during the 1960s, gave birth to a new image; passing from an old Victorian town to a new business district with a concrete skyline. Nowadays, this modernist architecture serves only as a reminder of Croydon's past aspirations "as the town lost out to the City and Canary Wharf as a business centre" (Watts, 2015). The following economic decline and the devastation of 2011 riots further undermined the development and perception of Croydon.

The rapid construction works initiated by James Marshall, gave birth to the Whitgift Centre; being contested today. The mall has played an important role into the lives of the local communities by hosting everyone in an inclusive way. Throughout the years, the local population developed a sense of belonging to the shopping centre and thus appropriated their routine around/within it. Nowadays, the central area is facing a new redevelopment, which includes the construction of the Westfield Mall, as well as the creation of many new commercial and residential spaces. The regeneration plan is a contested process and one that is looked at in this project. And the aforementioned sense of attachment to Whitgift adds another layer of complicatedness in the regeneration plans of the area.

Alongside the aforementioned changes in built environment, a demographic shift took place, and central Croydon became one of the most diverse sections of the borough. Some streets (e.g. Surrey Street) display a wide variety of ethnicities, socio-economic classes and age groups, intersecting, competing and sharing, and has contributed to a complex process of evolution which provides challenges as well as opportunities. Our interventions will attempt to reconcile the tensions between different collectives and to establish pathways through which its assets are preserved and enhanced.



Figure 3: Whitgift centre

## URBAN ANALYSIS

The study area has experienced significant changes that have impacted how the city is shaped, as well as the social relations between and within communities, and their built environment. These changes and perceptions were evident during field trips and are identified in the urban analysis which we conducted as a part of the first stage. In order to enhance our understanding of these changes, 3 frameworks were utilised: Alterity, Boundaries and Ageing. This was done to conceptualise the context of the study area and to identify key features, potentialities and weaknesses.

Croydon experienced a shift in planning and architecture, from the post-war years, to the modernist and commercial developments during the 1980s and 1990s. The subsequent economic decline and lack of investment has led to a specific spatial manifestation where the Victorian-style houses, post-war residential high-rise developments and commercial buildings are set in an area in need of regeneration (Ageing, 2019). Additionally, there is a significant change in the age and ethnic demographics of Croydon due to immigration, as well as changes in second and third generation minority groups. The interdependent elements of alterity: spatial difference lived experience and identity correspond considerably to the three main themes identified in ageing: uses, users and the periodic city where the periodic city represents the way layers of identities through different eras (Ageing, Alterity, 2019). The diverse communities represent a richness that has become an asset and an identity of Croydon, as represented by the vibrancy along the main artery from High Street to London Road. However, the development of Croydon has also led to marginalisation, especially in “unrepresentative spaces designed by and for a different age” (Alterity, 2019). This has led to a shortage of practical public space for those who need it most, such as for women with young children. Furthermore, boundaries, both psychological in nature (such as “places of fear”) and physical structures can act to restrict a more inclusive use of public space.

Communities create memories and meanings through their lived experience, therefore, the “uses” of space are spatial bridges that can:

- 1) connect different communities and identities;
- 2) enhance the presence of the existing communities/identities;
- 3) create new ones through a shared “user” experience.

This relationship between communities/identities, users and uses are negotiated and shaped through boundaries such as mobility features (transportation networks and pathways), or walls and fences that act as a separation mechanism (Boundaries, 2019). As mentioned, alterity and otherness are developed through both social and spatial elements. The “usage” of these spaces, even at a minutiae level (trivial activities, such as the everyday walks, shopping or just “hanging out”) initiates the creation of attachment and the sense of belonging, and thus, operates at a personal dimension.

A significant proportion of proportion of retail (8% in the Metropolitan Centre) and office buildings (70%) (Ageing, 2019) are vacant and underused respectively. Furthermore, there are many sites that are characterised as undeveloped wastelands or as being currently under construction. These sites, though temporary, can still pose significant boundaries that restrict physical connections (walkability) and act as inconveniences to its residents, due to the enclosed nature of sites. In addition, they can contribute to visual unpleasantness, excessive noise or traffic disruption.

The potential future development of Westfield Mall, along with other commercial and residential projects also threatens certain communities, such as artists, or lower income residents due to the consequential gentrification (Alterity, 2019).



Figure 4: Three frameworks of Croydon.

# SWOT ANALYSIS

We decided to present a critical identification of potentialities and weaknesses through a SWOT analysis, since it is a useful analytical tool with which we put in perspective our understanding of the context. The summary below is only concerned with the built environment and is supported by the map.

## SWOT LEGEND

- STRENGTHS
- WEAKNESSES
- OPPORTUNITIES
- THREATS

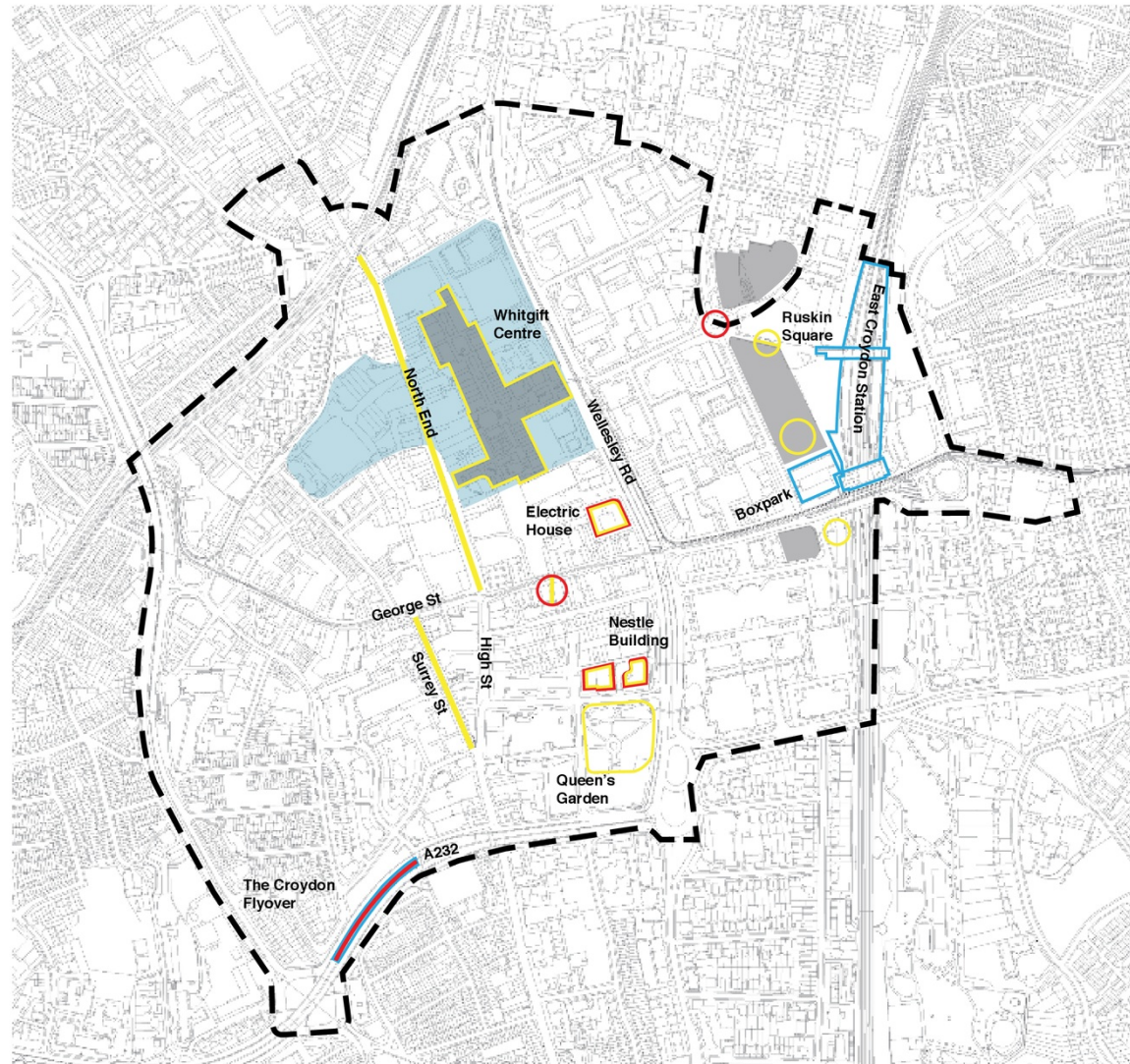


Figure 5: SWOT map



## SWOT ANALYSIS



The East Croydon Station located within the intervention zone makes the town well connected with the other cities, such as London or Brighton.  
Boxpark Croydon attracts visitors from and within the city as well as from other cities.



Croydon has many wastelands and vacant buildings that partially result from bankruptcies of business owners that have closed their commerce due to it being underused. This leaves the city with many abandoned locations that are targeted by squatters.  
There are few poor designed pedestrian crossings that make it very difficult for people and individuals with reduced mobility to traverse streets (e.g. accessing the WhitGift Centre, crossing certain roundabouts).  
Central Croydon lacks outdoor public spaces, while some of the existing ones are underused despite the impressive urban design (Ruskin Square).  
Some underpasses (including the east flyover) that are located within the intervention zone are not perceived as safe. This is contributed to by the fact that Croydon struggles with high crime rates.  
The overabundance of construction works (creation of new commercial and residential spaces) that takes place within the intervention zone is a source of many inconveniences for the pedestrian experience.



Vacant buildings such as the Electric House and the Nestle building are sites where future developments can be developed. Additionally, they can be renovated or readapted to fulfil existing needs.  
Improving pedestrian crossings would enhance the mobility within the study area and make it a more user-friendly space.  
Open spaces, such as Ruskin Square, can benefit from revised design.  
The current state of the underpasses presents an opportunity to turn them into safe and welcoming spaces and thus increasing connectivity and permeability.  
Through the creation of residential neighbourhoods within central Croydon, the crime rates can be mitigated as there will be a higher concentration of potential witnesses (Interview With WhitGift Management Team, 2019).



Urban renewal projects may reduce the sense of communal identity that was already established before and can generate new alterity—create more otherness. Aside from that, the new developments of the residential, commercial and retail spaces can potentially have gentrifying effects. This can lead to adverse effects for vulnerable groups and lead to separation of communities.  
Based on our observations of the Boxpark facility, it appears as if the users represent only a certain portion of socio-economic class (middle—and upper-class citizens).

## VISION OF CENTRAL CROYDON



To reimagine Croydon as an organic city, we took inspiration from the Banyan tree. Like many beautiful Banyans, Croydon has a long history which has led to a fascinating layout developed through layers of growth and stagnation. Our vision then will recognize such a history and approach design from an organic bottom-up perspective through 5 key characteristics inspired by the Banyan Tree that symbolise our vision for Croydon:

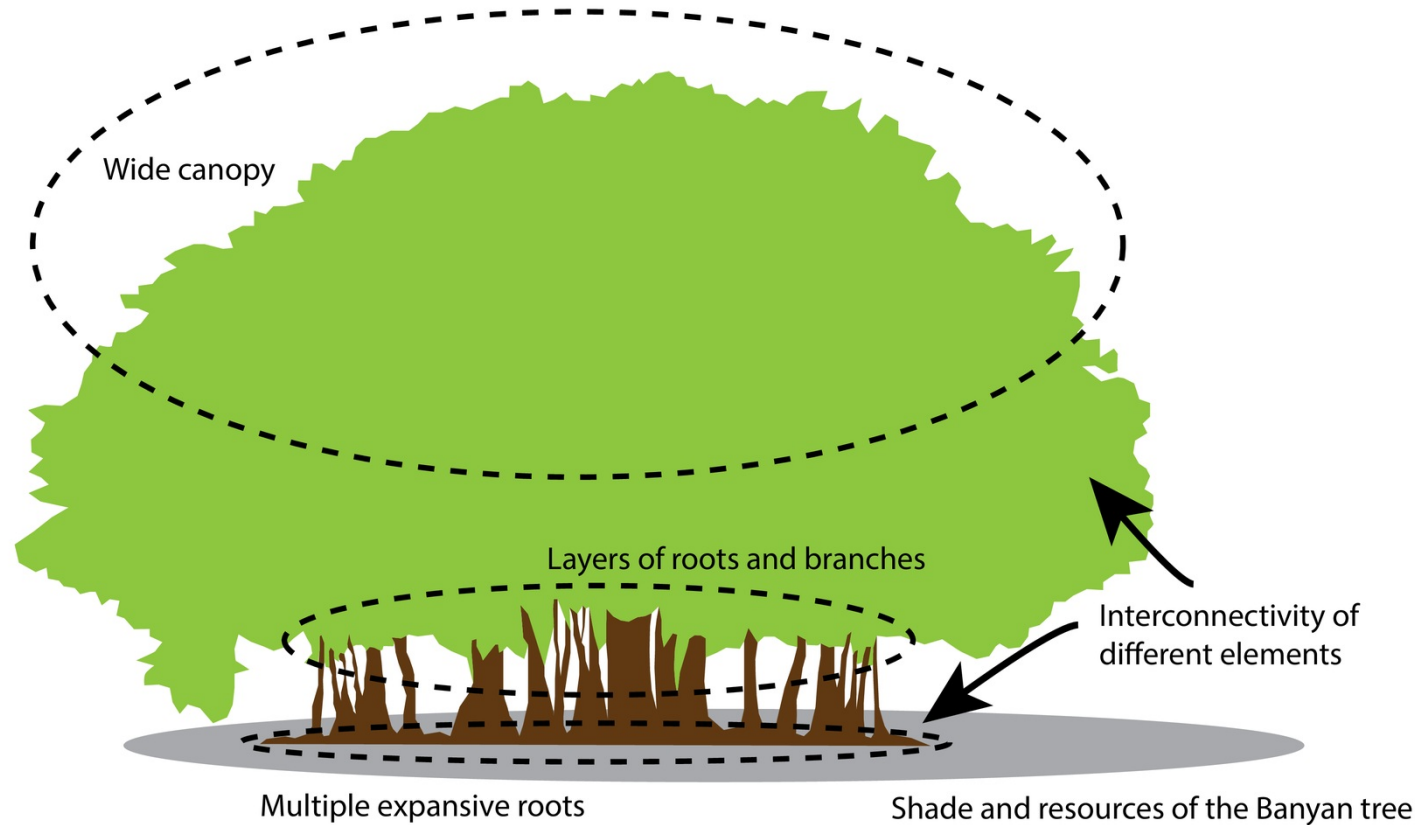


Figure 6: Vision: Banyan Tree

## VISION OF CENTRAL CROYDON

1) **Multiple expansive roots**– We recognize not only the distinctiveness but also the importance of rooting our project in the diversity (historical and demographic) of Croydon. Thus, our approach will be sensitive to an expansive group which considers different ages, interests, cultures and history. It also creates opportunities and spaces to allow each Croydonians to create new roots and identities.

2) **Interconnectivity of the tree**– Just like the unique interconnectivity of the tree where the roots, branches and trunks are intricately connected, our aim is to reconfigure urban physical boundaries to better connect the various spaces. Equally important is to recognize the social and psychological boundaries that can be reconfigured through space, allowing for better inter-social connections between people through communication and urban practices.

3) **Layers of roots, branches and trunk**– The unique characteristic of the Banyan tree is the way in which the roots, branches and trunks are woven and interlaid. This layering is what makes the Banyan Tree resilient and adaptable. Putting into the context of central Croydon, our design seeks to give spaces to institutions, ideas and people to come together to support and strengthen Croydon. This means that sites are flexible and multifaceted where different groups can have a shared sense of ownership. This represents a “thickening” of social infrastructure that will lead to greater vibrancy, sense of ownership and place making.

4) **Wide canopy**– The wide canopy of the Banyan tree is only possible because of the density and strength of its multiple trunks and branches. Our design seeks to allow a diverse and open-ended future potentiality where a diverse range of people can fully explore their talents and dreams, and with it improves the area together. This also recognizes the centrality of communication, civic participation and advancement through a democratic “bottom-up” process.

5) **Shade and uses of the Banyan tree**– To create Croydon as a place that provides security, care and resources for all Croydonians.

The health of Croydon, like the Banyan tree, lies in the robustness of each of its constituent parts. We recognize the economic importance of the future Westfield Mall development, its potential and its role in job

creation for the people of Croydon. Therefore, our plan seeks to create interventions in and around the future Westfield Mall, and other new developments through the integration of space, while bringing nascent possibilities and inclusivity to the fore through spaces for conversation and practice.

The heritage of the Victorian architecture such as the listed buildings in the conservation area, as well as the collective histories of different communities will also be incorporated through improving pathways and squares for a more dynamic everyday experience. As the heart of Croydon Borough, the proposed interventions will seek to improve the daily lives, shared experience and future for all Croydonians. This will be galvanised by putting creativity and resources available to all. It is through this that we can create an enhance liveability and a unique Croydon experience.

# DESIGN PRINCIPLES & GUIDELINES

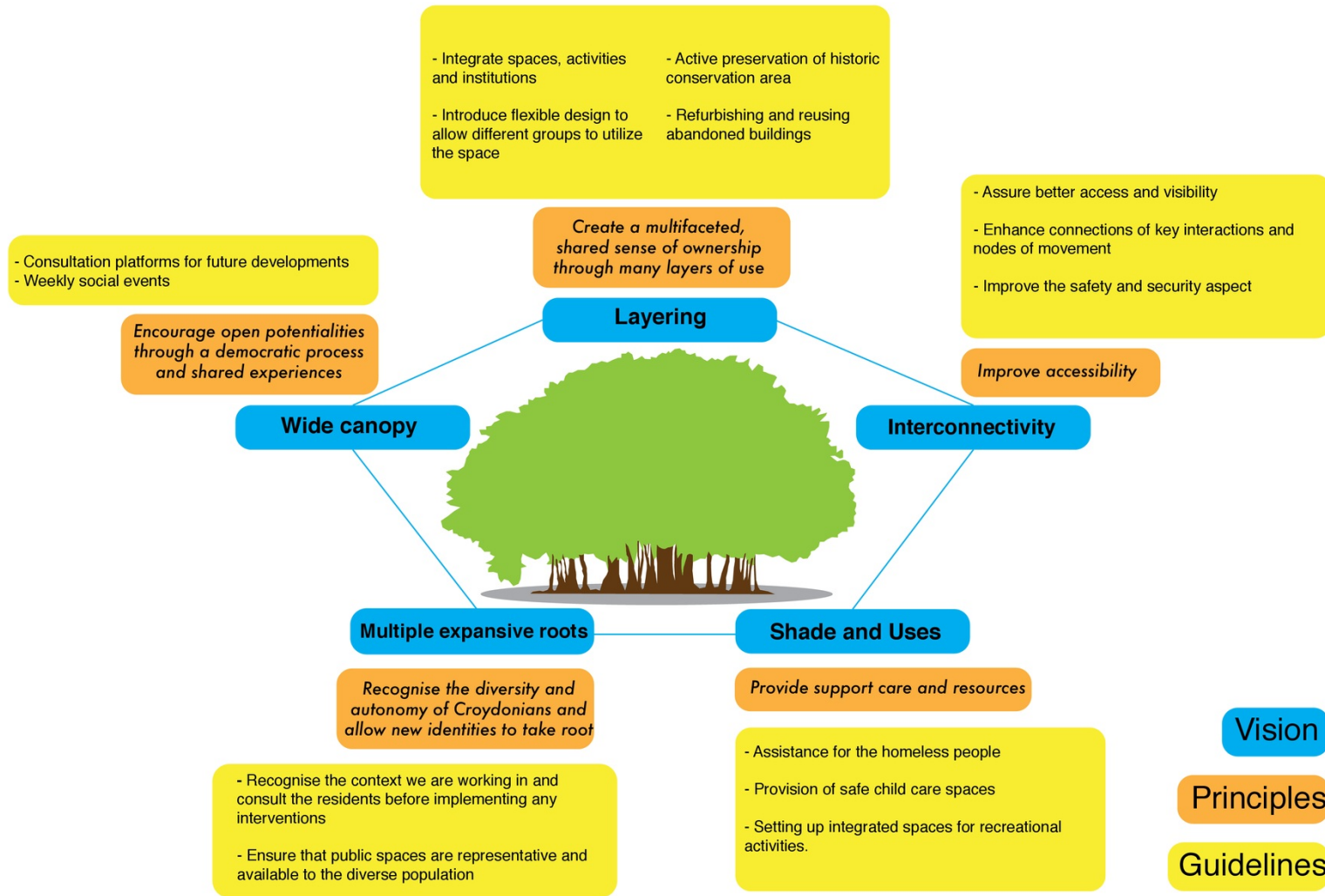


Figure 7: Banyan tree vision, principles and guidelines

# INTERVENTIONS

The following intervention sites and strategic responses have been chosen after a spatial analysis which considers the suitability and availability of the space as well as the potential for generating a maximal effect:

## INTERVENTIONS LEGEND

- Westfield Mall
- WithGift Centre
- Queen's Garden
- Youth Centre
- Shelter for homeless people
- The Croydon Flyover
- Ruskin Square
- Underpass
- Intersections
- Electric House

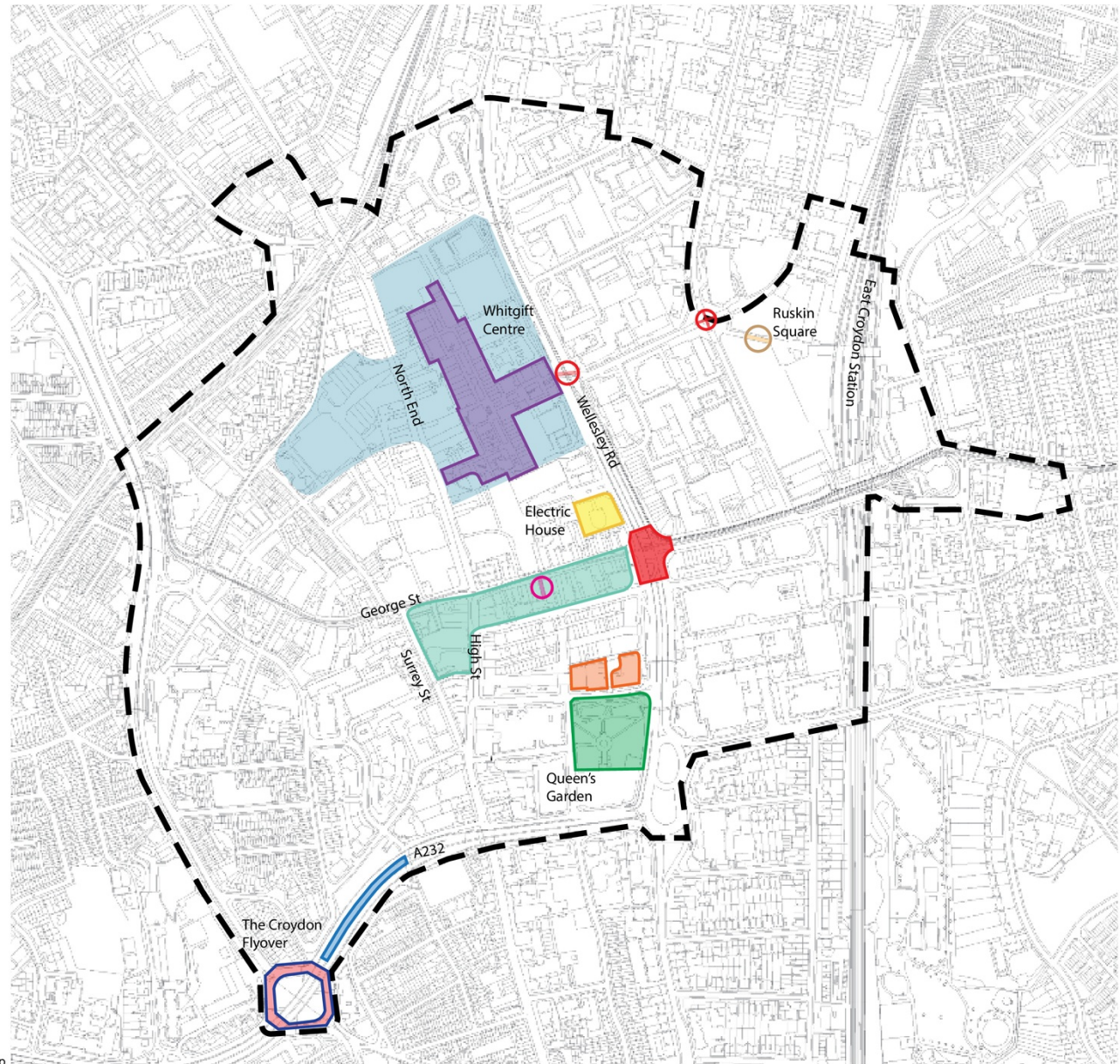


Figure 8: Intervention location map

# INTERVENTIONS

## Improvement of Intersections:

The improvement of the two intersections is one of the measures to enhance liveability, accessibility and safety in the city, especially for vulnerable people groups, such as women, young children, the elderly and the people with disabilities.

The other intervention takes place on the junction of Lansdowne Road and Dingwall Road. The pedestrian traffic on this intersection has been increasing since the opening of the East Croydon station footbridge in 2013, and more pedestrian movement is expected after the development of Westfield along with new office and residential buildings. This intervention aims to enhance safety by adding Zebra Crossing (where motorists must give way when someone has moved onto a crossing) at this roundabout.



Before intervention (actual)  
Figure 9: Intervention- intersection 1



After intervention  
Figure 10: Intervention- intersection 1

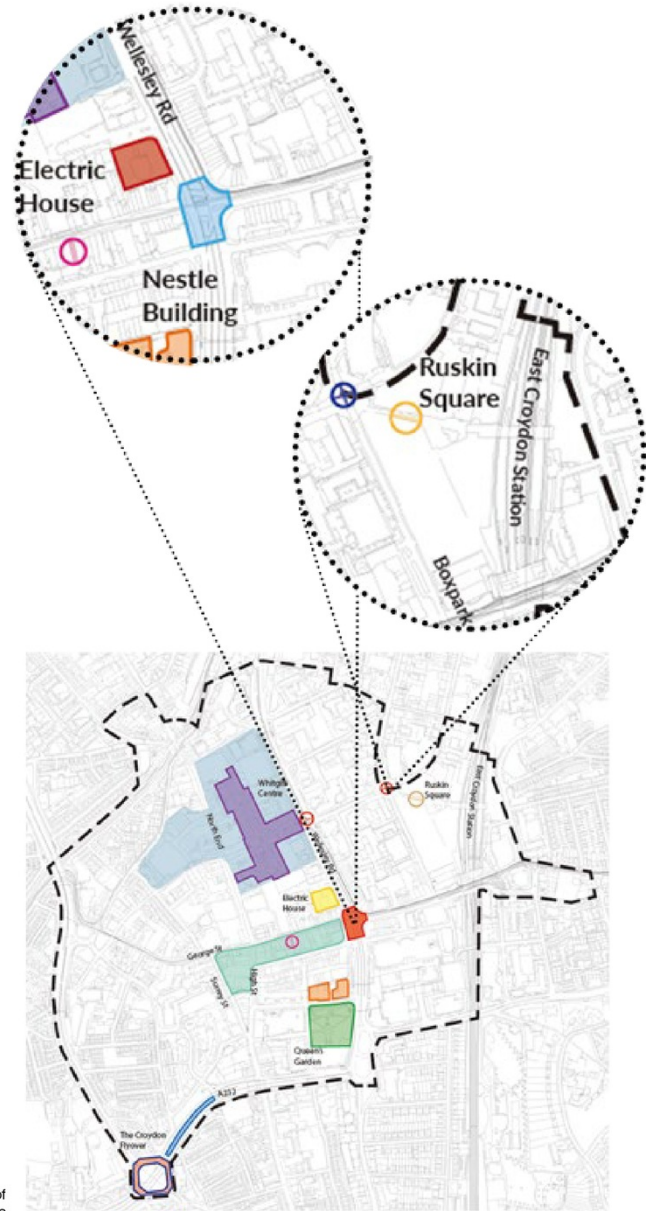
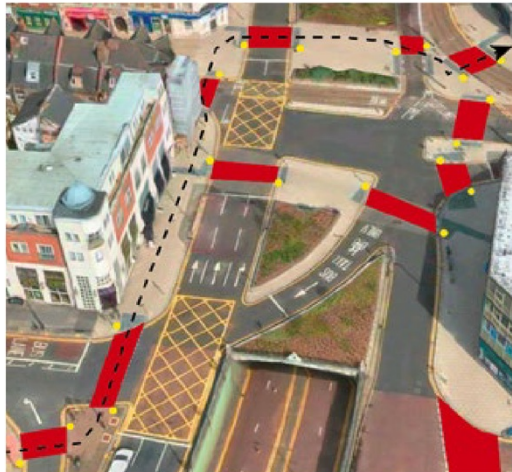


Figure 11: Zoomed location of intersections

# INTERVENTIONS

The junction on George Street, Wellesley Road and Park Street is one of the most crowded areas in Croydon. However, the junction is car-centred designed, and pedestrians have to deal with poor walkability. People have to cross at least six motor roads when going from Nestle Building to East Croydon Station direction. In addition, the junction socially and physically divides the space. Therefore, this intervention aims at realising people-centred design by improving connectivity.

Before intervention  
Figure 12: Intervention-  
intersection 2: present



- Traffic Light
- Pedestrian Crossing

After intervention  
Figure 13: Intervention-  
intersection 2

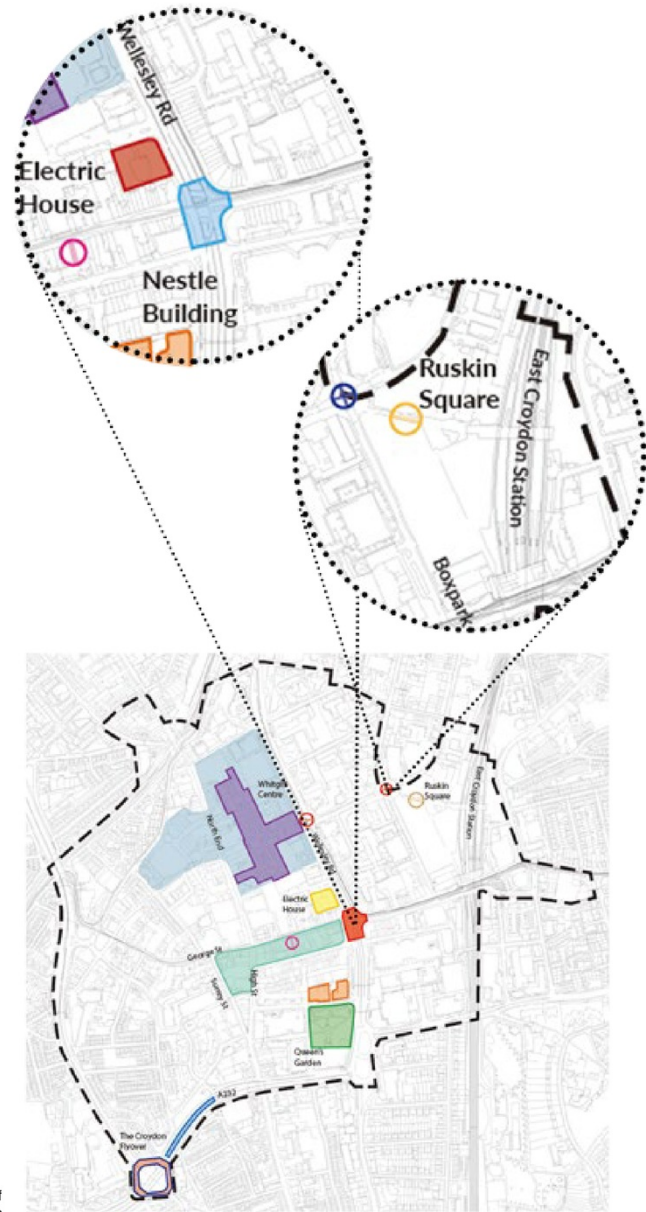
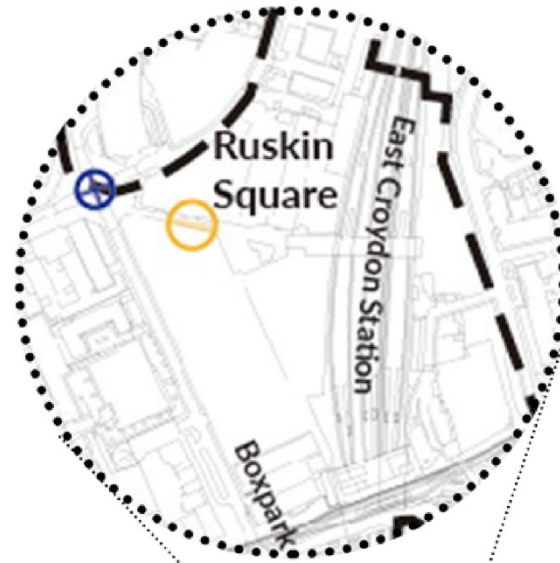


Figure 14: Zoomed location of  
intersections

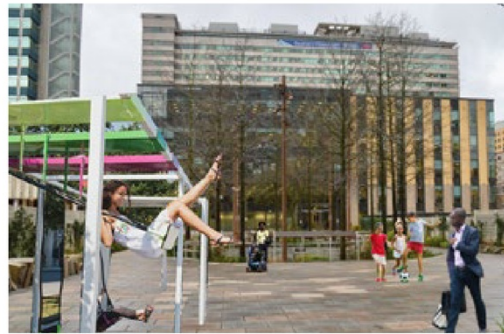
# INTERVENTIONS

## Musical swings:

When we did the first visit of the intervention zone, we passed next to Ruskin Square and realised that this well-designed open space was unfortunately underused for unknown reasons. Therefore, we saw the opportunity to use this space in our interventions, by implementing a specific design that will attract different categories of people in order to improve the liveliness of the area. The installation of musical swings has shown, in the city of Montreal, that it brings "strangers to make beautiful music together" (Podrazik, 2013). Music is known to bring people together therefore, by implementing this structure into this square the chances of making this open space more appealing to children and adults are highly positive. In addition, the modernist and brutalist architecture of this area can benefit from melodies and harmonies, that each seat creates from a musical instrument, to make this work environment more joyful.



Before intervention  
Figure 15: Ruskin Square before intervention. Source by Alterity group



After intervention  
Figure 16: Ruskin Square after intervention. Source by Alterity group

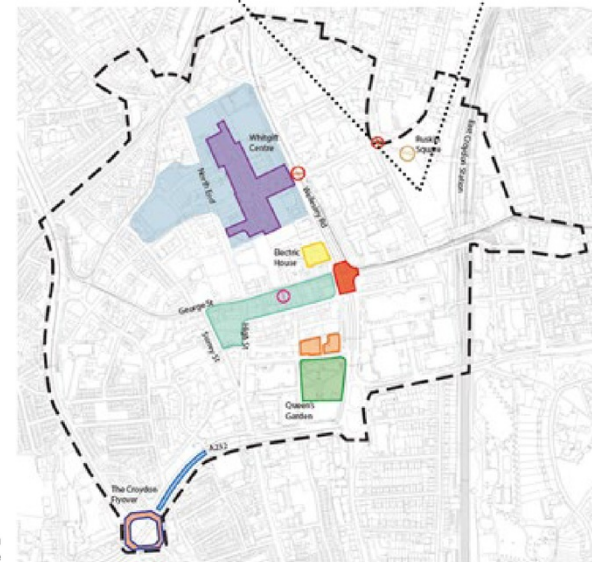


Figure 17: Zoomed location of Ruskin Square



# INTERVENTIONS

## Underpasses: lighting, art and CCTV:

There are two 'pedestrian subways' that are located within the zone of intervention along with the underpass underneath the flyover. Underpasses are known to be the spaces of tension and are even depicted as such in popular culture (Irréversible, 2002). An unfortunate and horrific crime incident took place in May of 2017 (Inside Croydon, 2017) in the space between East Croydon flyover which highlights the need to improve the security within this area. The overall high crime rates also played a part in prompting us to propose an intervention that would transform the underpasses into safer, secure and aesthetically pleasing spaces. This will be done by installing the CCTV inside the passages, improving the lighting and decorating the walls of the underpasses with the help of the local talent. The artwork can be renewed from time to time, and that way we can assure a broader involvement of Croydon's artists, who might otherwise engage in potential acts of vandalism in order to express themselves (e.g. graffiti).

In total, three underpasses will be renovated: one leading to Whitgift, one below the East Croydon Flyover and the set of underpasses next to Croydon Fire Station.



Before intervention  
Figure 18: Intervention- underpass:  
present



After intervention  
Figure 19: Intervention- underpass,  
Munich

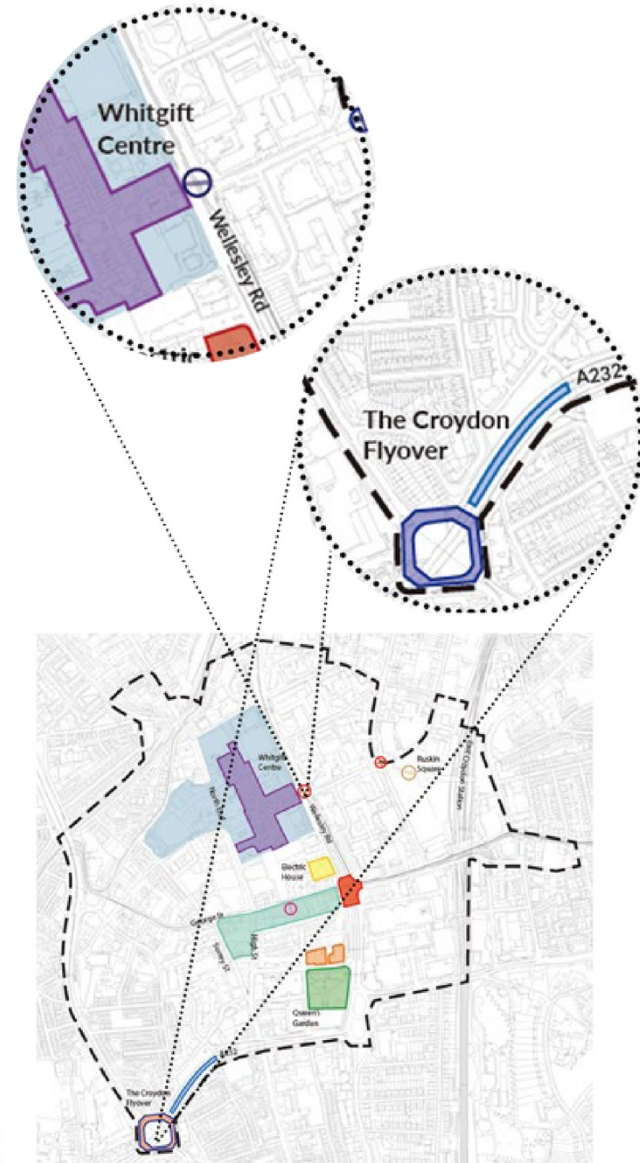


Figure 20: Zoomed location of  
underpass

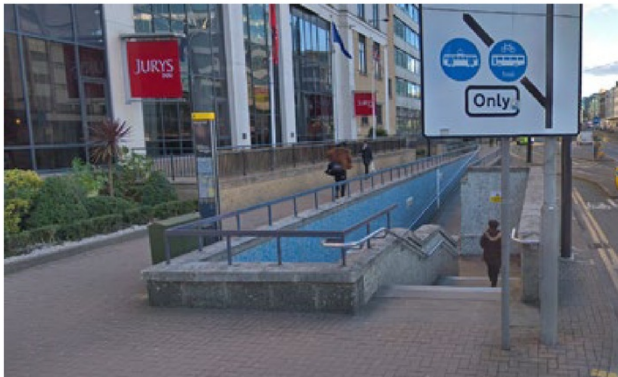
# INTERVENTIONS



Before intervention  
Figure 21: Intervention-  
east Croydon flyover:  
present



After intervention  
Figure 22: Example of  
flyover, India



Before intervention  
Figure 21: Intervention-  
east Croydon flyover:  
present



After intervention  
Figure 22: Example of  
flyover, India

# INTERVENTIONS

## Queen's Gardens – Playground:

The idea is to install a children's playground in the Queen's Gardens Park. One of the observations that were made by our group during multiple site visits was that zone of intervention lacks both indoor and outdoor facilities for the younger population. We did find a small playground inside BoxPark Croydon and another one in the Whitgift Centre; yet the first one only caters to a small number of children, while the latter will soon be demolished as a part of the new Westfield development with no guarantees of a substitute being provided in the new shopping mall.

We are aware of the existing dynamics within Queen's Gardens: many individuals that are perceived as homeless can be found in the park during night-time, late hours and sometimes even during the day. Their presence will certainly be disrupted by the installation of the playground; however, we do have other interventions that will offer the homeless an opportunity for shelter.

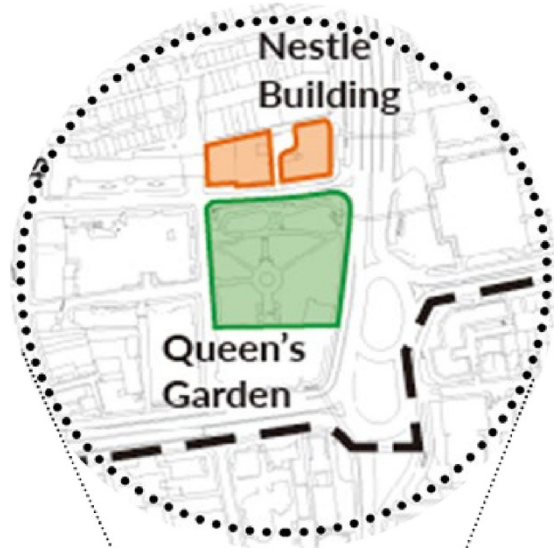
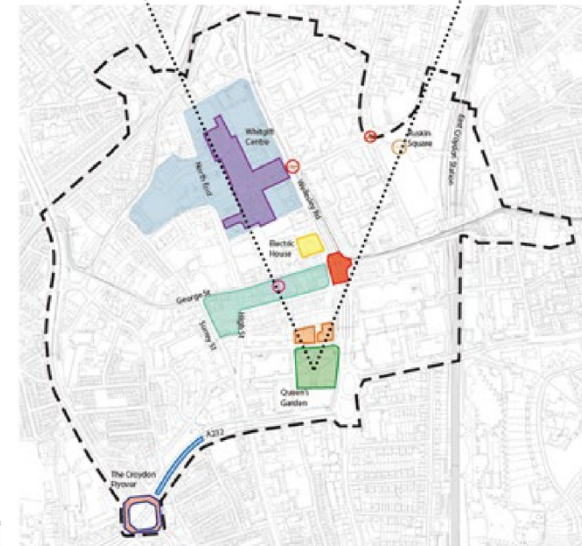


Figure 25: Plan of Queen's garden



Before intervention  
Figure 24: Queen's garden  
Source: Apple Maps



After intervention  
Figure 26: intervention- Queen's garden

Figure 27: Zoomed location of Queen's garden

# INTERVENTIONS

## The Westfield Centre:

The proposed Westfield Centre will replace the Whitgift centre as Croydon's landmark building. There are important ties, collective memories and significant heritage that has developed over the years and we hope to preserve as much of it as possible.

Specifically, the proposed intervention for this mall is to:

- Preserve the passages that link Wellesley Road and North End, as well as George Street and Poplar Walk. This increases the convenience, physical interconnections as well as preserve the sense of space from before. The main artery can be enhanced by amenities such as vending machines and washrooms. This area can also act as the main shelter during rainy weather.
- Situate a play area for children in the common indoor space of the Westfield Centre. A provision of a safe and regulated space will encourage parents to bring their kids out to play and also serve as a place for parents to share. We also suggest a childcare centre which will be very important to working parents. Café and benches will also be situated for the welfare of the supervising parents.
- Along the main artery, we want to set aside a space for an artist's studio and heritage gallery that will exhibit a model of the central area of Croydon with the participation of the residents and showcase the historical evolution of Croydon Borough.



After intervention  
Figure 28: Art studio and gallery



After intervention  
Figure 29: Main passageway of Westfield and indoor playground

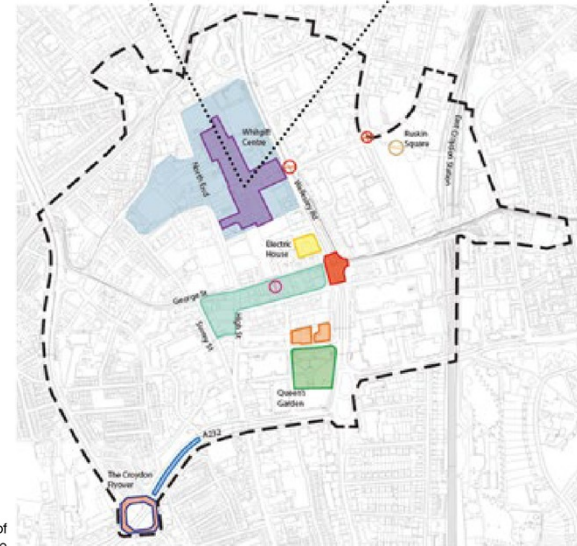
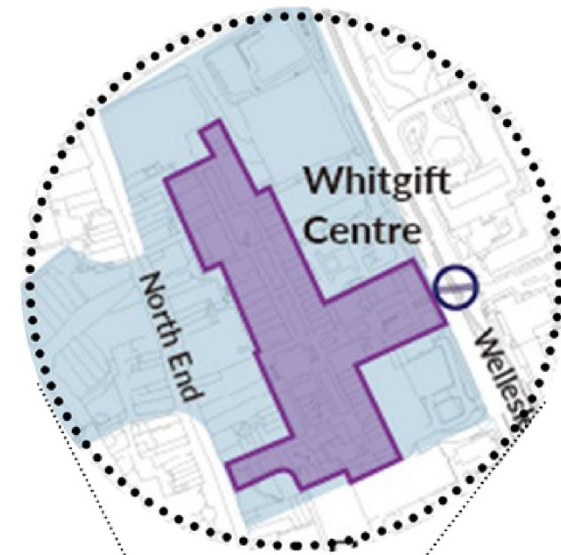


Figure 30: Zoomed location of Whitgift centre

# INTERVENTIONS

## Events Hall:

Integrated event hall at the junction between Poplar walks and north end street. We propose that this section will be part of the future Westfield Centre with an independent entrance and public square facing Poplar Walk. This event hall will be a place where different communities can go for social events such as ethnic festivals, communal gatherings or interest groups meet ups. There will also be a group of workers from the Westfield management team that will manage and facilitate events in the area to create meaningful jobs for local residents who have a stake in the community. We also propose that this space can be used for weekly classes or events that are relevant to the local demographics. The site is chosen specifically because it is accessible and in a central location. The separate entrance and distinct visuality of the space will underscore the communal rather than the commercial aspects of the space. This will bring different communities into central Croydon to create a sense of ownership, participation and establish stronger social networks.

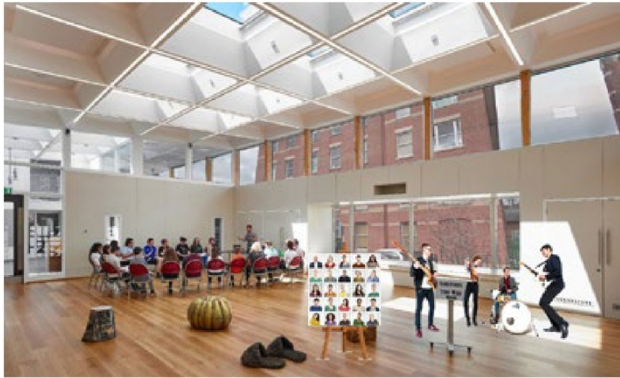


Figure 31: Events hall



Figure 32: Facade and entrance of Events hall

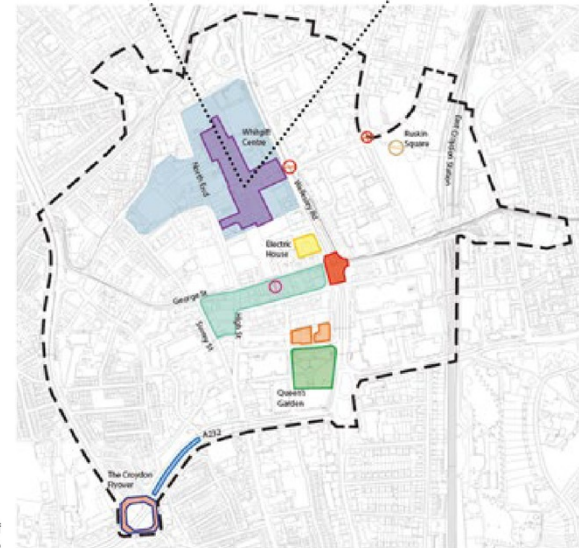
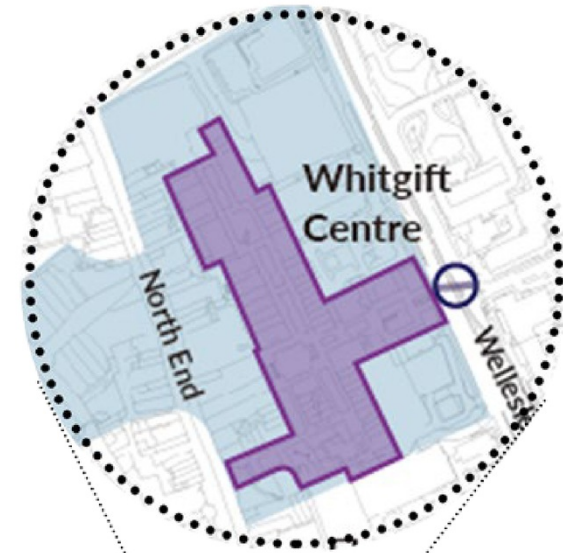


Figure 33: Zoomed location of Whitgift centre

# INTERVENTIONS

## Revitalisation heritage street:

This area is a key part of heritage area south of the Westfield development. We want to retain its historical nature, while enhancing the accessibility and interest to the area. The Surrey Street Market area and Grants Entertainment Centre and the surrounding pathways will thus be renovated and expanded to provide a vibrant, distinctive ambience and less dense alternative to the Westfield redevelopment site. In addition, there will be shared tables, chairs and spaces for buskers while any additional architecture complements the historic nature of the area. This will also facilitate an enlarged market space in the morning and the entertainment venues at night. This area will also serve as a connection between the future Westfield developments in the north, and key public areas such as the proposed youth centre, Queen's garden and public library in the south.



Figure 34: Map of listed buildings and heritage buildings: Public consultation 2018

■ GRADE I LISTED ■ LOCALLY LISTED ■ GRADE II LISTED ■ CENTRAL CROYDON CONSERVATION AREA

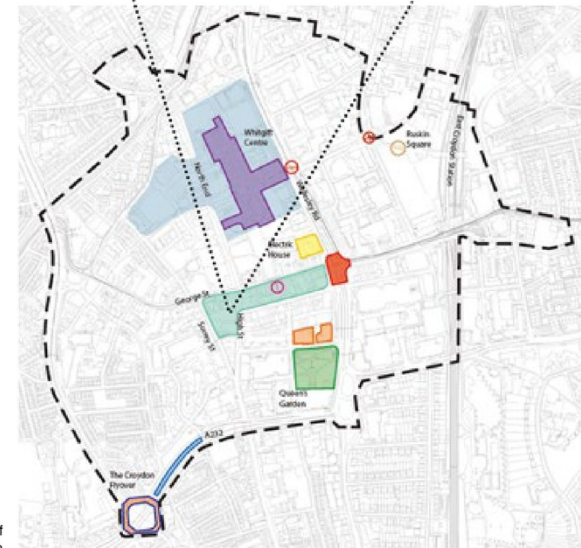


Figure 35: Intervention: Surrey street market

Figure 36: Zoomed location of Heritage area



# INTERVENTIONS

## Shelter for homeless people:

The following intervention has the purpose to transform this vacant building into a temporary shelter to host homeless people at night. In order to reduce the sense of alterity in central Croydon, we are aiming at giving more recognition to this marginalised group by helping them to have a safe and secure accommodation to sleep at night. In order to do so, the wooden sleeping pods created by Reed Watts, architecture studio based in London, has made it available for this particular group. They are easy-to-assembled with the accessible design available online, through a Creative Commons licence which makes this concept available to be reproduced and inspired by other shelters in the area, if needed (Frearson, 2018).



Figure 37: Example 1 of wooden sleeping pods: Reed Watts



Figure 38: Example 2 of wooden sleeping pods: Reed Watts

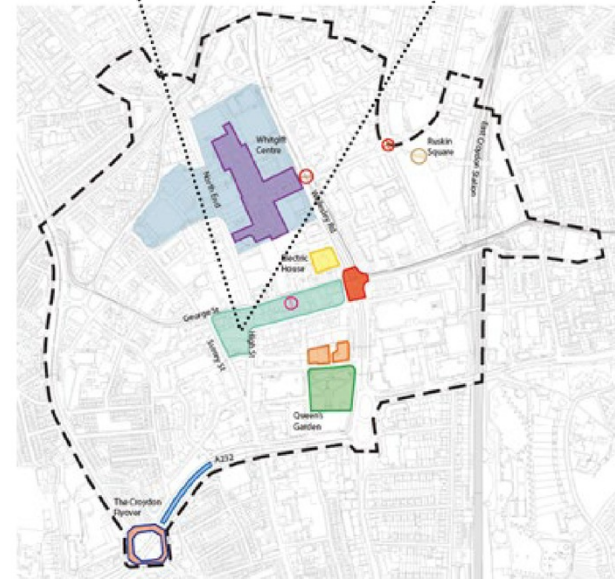
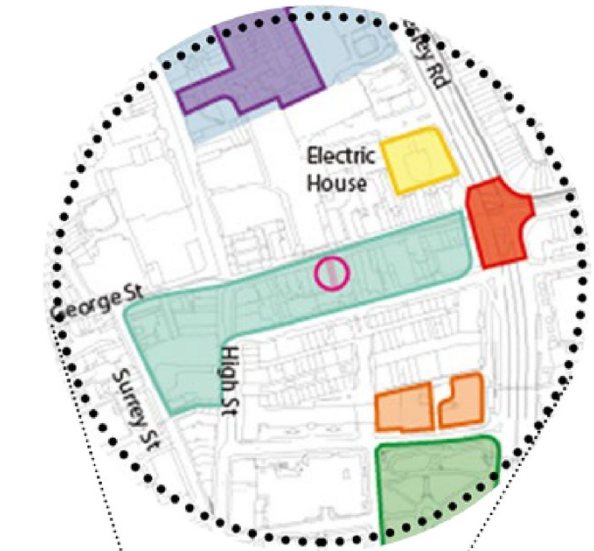


Figure 39: Zoom location of potential building for sleeping pods

# INTERVENTIONS

## Youth Centre:

The following intervention has the purpose to offer a safe, joyful and secure place for the young children since the study area has shown that it is lacking these kinds of facilities. By offering this club, young people will finally have a place to interchange and demonstrate their ideas and needs in/for the neighbourhood. The younger generation is part of the future of Croydon since they represent one of the biggest demographic and this shouldn't be disregarded.



Figure 39: Youth Centre 1



Figure 40: Youth Centre 2

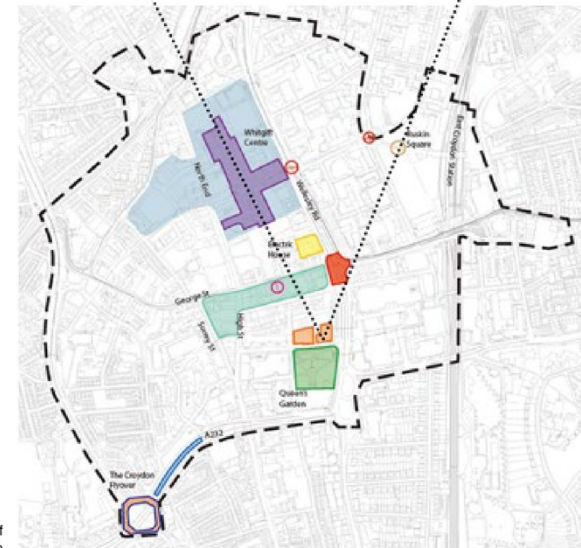


Figure 41: Zoomed location of potential building for Youth Centre



# INTERVENTIONS

## Museum: Post-war, brutalist architecture.

We plan on setting up a museum that would commemorate the post-war brutalist architecture. We hope to gain the support of both SOSBrutalism and wider architectural circles along with the financial aid from the municipality, the council and other potential donors.

Croydon is a particularly fitting place for such museum, due to the history of its transformations. The museum will not only display and give historical and architectural background of the buildings and present trends in Croydon, but in the United Kingdom in general. Many of the structures that are a part of the brutalist architecture tradition are at risk of being demolished as a part of the renovation process (Nestle), since they are not accounted for in the Croydon conservation reports.



Figure 42: Museum 1



Figure 43: Museum 2

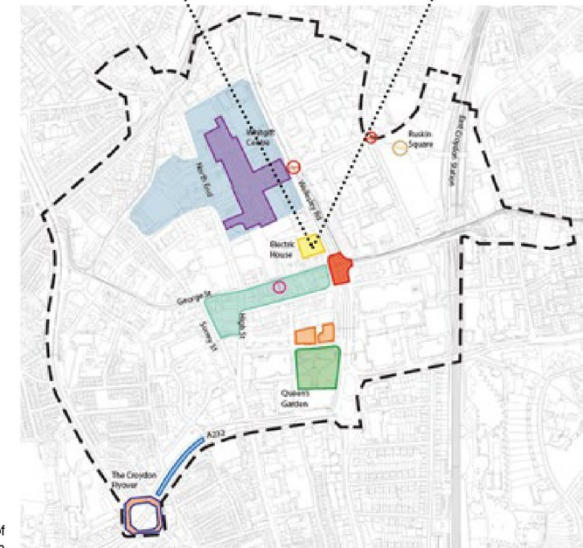
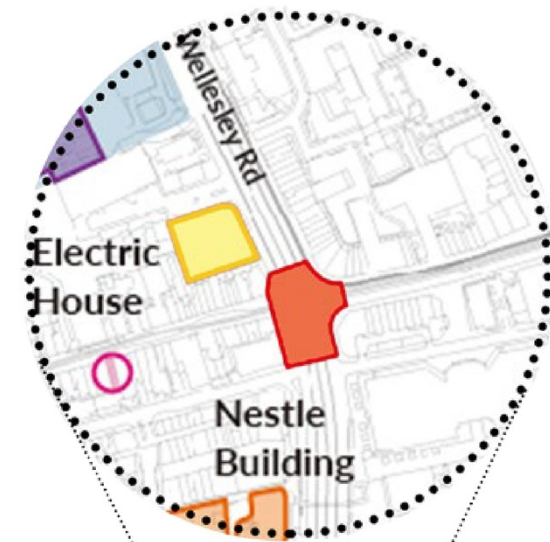


Figure 44: Zoomed location of potential building for Museum

## CONCLUSION

The borough of Croydon is an urban space defined by its complexity. The diversity and context that has been brought into view through the urban analysis have motivated us to approach design through a nuanced, person-centred approach. The new redevelopment of the area will result in contestation and transformation of the community. With our interventions, we aim to be considerate to all stakeholders, ensuring that all can have a sense of belonging and ownership. This multifaceted approach to place-making project will aim to negate potential threats and weaknesses as identified, while maximising the opportunities and strengths of the area. Like the Banyan tree, we hope to give recognition to Croydon's history, and like the layers of the roots and branches develop both institutional measures—such as the youth centres and event halls—, and the social, psychological and physical needs of each resident.

We must recognize that the borough is an organic and comprehensive system. Therefore, if these measures are taken collectively, its effect will be immeasurable more than the sum of its parts. Through future consultation with the community and in recognition of the potential limitations with respect to funding, we hope that this project can inspire new possibilities for the future of Croydon.



Figure 45 Conclusion vision image

## APPENDIX

Transcripts of the interviews

### **Homeless person #1.**

Gender: Female.  
Ethnicity: White British.  
Age: 30–40.  
Location: George St.

She is not from Croydon, but we were not able to find out exactly where the woman was coming from. She has been occupying the same spot on the George Street for three years now and does so because of the close proximity of this place to the East Croydon train station. There is a great flow of people in and out of the station which makes it a desirable location for many homeless to occupy. The lady does not belong to any communities or organisations, but she does receive support from two local charity organisations, specifically from “Crysis Skylight” and the “Outridge” (we could not verify the existence of the second organisation). She feels good about Croydon, but did not comment on any particular features of the borough that she deems positive or any potential improvements that the area might need.

### **Homeless person #2.**

Gender: Male.  
Ethnicity: Black Caribbean (British-Grenadan).  
Age: 30s.  
Location: George St.

The man’s family comes from Grenada. He became homeless recently, after an accident with his girlfriend. According to his words, his partner drew out a knife on him and kicked him out of the apartment that they shared together. He did not want the police to be involved and chose to sleep on the streets instead. The man spent most of his life within the close proximity to East Croydon and has good opinion of the area. He did not specify much in terms of any potential improvements that should take place. The only comment that he made was in regards to the amount of people that are living on the streets: he feels that more support should be offered to them (and

himself). He noted that the high crime levels were always characteristic of Croydon, but now it seems like more crime tends to occur in the outskirts of the town rather than in the city centre. He also believes that the appearance of the Westfield Mall will improve the livelihoods of the Croydonians but did not go into much detail when explaining how exactly he thinks it will enhance the experience of the local population.

### **Local Business Owner (British-Ghanan).**

Gender: Male.  
Ethnicity: Black African (British-Ghanan).  
Age: 30–40.  
Location: Station Road.

He was born and raised in Croydon and is a part of Croydon’s Ghanan community. He has little time to participate in the community events, since he is preoccupied with the business and his kids. Most of his leisure time he spends at home, in the company of his family members. The man is uncertain of when exactly the redevelopment of the Whitgift will take place. He did, however, comment on the fact that many local businesses will suffer as a direct result of the Westfield development. The nature of his product is ethnically specific, hence he himself is not concerned about the change. The gentleman is concerned with the lack of affordable parking spaces in the central area, and states that once the new shopping mall is opened, the town centre will not be able to offer enough parking for the people. He also noted that the place lacks public spaces, particularly the ones that would offer young kids ways to occupy their leisure time. According to him, most public spaces were sold out to private developers, which that negatively impacted the life quality of the Croydonians.

### **Working Woman #3**

Gender: Female.  
Ethnicity: Black African.  
Age: 30–40.

Location: East Croydon Station.

The woman thinks that there are enough public spaces in her own neighbourhood but she could not say the same about East Croydon. She feels that Croydon is already too dense and too crowded and fears that as a consequence of the development of Westfield Mall, the city centre will become overcrowded to a higher extent. However, she does acknowledge the benefits that Westfield will bring (jobs, service, etc.). The lady genuinely loves Croydon. She has no comments to make regarding potential improvements (apart from the above-mentioned lack of public space and zones for recreational activities). However, she did mention the high levels of criminal activity were characteristic of Croydon and hopes that someday this issue will be resolved. As of right now, she could not state whether they were decreasing or increasing, and believes that they remain at the same level. The woman is not affiliated with any local organisation or community, yet she did go on to say that Croydon can offer a lot in that sense.

### **Manager of Whitgift #4**

Gender: Male.  
Ethnicity: White British.  
Age: 50–60.  
Location: Whitgift Mall.

The man gave us some clarification in terms of the timeframe of the construction works: the Whitgift Mall will be demolished in August of 2019. The basement area and the foundation are not being removed and will be incorporated in the final design of the Westfield Mall. The whole process will take around 3 years and will have a big positive impact on the Croydon community (mainly offering services and providing locals with job opportunities). The manager is particularly excited about the technological advancements that will be introduced in Westfield and uses the example of the new cloakrooms which will be supplied with hi-tech mirrors. According to the gentleman, they will be able to visually project pieces of clothing on the individual and allow the customer to request

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assistance right from the changing booth. Croydon is now undergoing a massive construction phase. There are a lot of office buildings in the area, which are slowly being transformed into residential ones. There is a great benefit to it, since when the residential spaces become present in the city centre, the crime rates go down: people tend to resort to crime in the areas where there are pubs and nightclubs and especially during nighttime. Once the locals are able to move into the city centre, the crimes will start to occur less frequently, since there will be a lot more potential witnesses. The issue with that, according to the gentleman, is the consequential diminishing of the office space in the city centre. The manager points out that nowadays the companies tend to need flexible working spaces, and hence the aforementioned process might become an issue (if the office/residential proportion is not managed correctly).

Contrary to the testimonies of the other interviewees, he does not believe that the crime rate is on a rise. As a matter of fact, he says that it has been steadily dropping and over the last 10 years it has declined significantly.

He also mentions that currently there are plenty of artists working in this area, particularly musicians. There are certain spaces being organised for the creative activities (we could not recall the exact names of the locations that he is referring to, but they mostly have to do with visual art).

### **Local Business Owner from Latvia #5**

Gender: Female.

Ethnic groups: White Eastern European/Baltic.

Age: 40–50.

Location: Station Road.

The lady has been living in Croydon for decades and overall have warm feelings towards the town. However, she does not feel a sense of belonging there and still perceives herself as an outsider, referring to urban space as 'foreign'. Among the things that make Croydon attractive to her, the shop-owner highlights the transportation infrastructure (both bus network and rail), and even goes as far as to say that this feature was the primary reason as to why she made her decision to stay

there. She is quite enthusiastic about the Westfield project and does not feel like it is a threat to her shop in particular, as it offers ethnic-specific food products (Eastern European/Baltic/Ex-Soviet). She also notes that she would have loved to be involved in the developments that are taking place in the city centre. When it comes to the negative features of Croydon, she points out the high crime levels in both the borough and city centre. According to her daily observations, over the past 5–6 years, the crime rates have risen. She connects it with the influx of people to Croydon (particularly, non-white ethnic minorities). Yet she does not feel threatened herself as there is a high police presence who seems to be able to control the situation in the central part of the town. She also noted a curious fact: the members of the police force appear on the streets more often once the school ends. She links it with the fact that a lot of youngsters contribute to the criminal activity in the area, hence why police can be seen in the city centre where the youth is gathering after their classes. She believes that most of the crime is drug-related and the testimonies of the other interviewees reinforce that. The lady also does not think that there is a lack of public spaces in Croydon, but does state that the centre is overly crowded and too busy.

The shop owner told us that there are quite a few Turks, Romanians and black people from different backgrounds (mostly African, some Caribbean) in the area. She mentioned that there were some Albanians too, but she did not come across them. There are some 'male-dominated' spaces where the businesses of a specific ethnic group are located. These places are the ones that she and her female friends and acquaintances try to avoid.

Even though the shop-owner mentioned numerous ways in which Croydon is failing to satisfy the needs of the locals from her perspective, she was quite happy about the developments that are taking place in the centre and seem to have good feelings about the borough.

### **Security Guard of Whitgift #6**

Gender: Female.

Ethnic group: White British.

Age: 60s.

Location: Whitgift Shopping Center.

The woman was born and raised in Croydon, so her perspective on the matter was invaluable. Unfortunately, we did not have the opportunity to speak to her for any longer than several minutes. Yet, she did manage to provide us with some useful information. The lady pointed out that crime levels in Croydon are on the rise (understandably, she did not provide us with any statistical data – it was just a personal observation). She told us that the area in which she used to live changed quite drastically and transformed from a nice suburban neighbourhood to a crime-ridden location. When it comes to the Whitgift Center demolitions, the woman stated that the nearby buildings were cleared out in anticipation of the construction works. She herself used to work in a nearby high-rise tower, where there were several floors occupied by the metropolitan police force. Now that the building is unoccupied, the police presence is felt less. In addition to that, the guard told us that the process of demolition of Whitgift and construction of the Westfield Shopping Mall is taking a lot longer than many people were expecting. According to her, several businesses, which rely heavily on the opening of the Westfield, have opened up. And since the new shopping centre is taking longer to be built, the aforementioned business owners are left in limbo for now. She was also concerned with the inflow of people that the new shopping mall would create, as it might lead to the rise in already high crime rates. Overall, the lady seemed to be quite pessimistic both about the current state of Croydon and the developments that are taking place there.

### **Local gentleman with a granddaughter. #7**

Gender: Male.

Ethnic groups: South Asian.

Age: 70s.

Location: Boxpark.

The man was spending time with his granddaughter next to the kids' playground in the Boxpark. He had a hearing disability

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which limited our conversation, but he did comment on certain things. The gentleman told us that he had good feelings about the development of Westfield, primarily because of the new job opportunities. He felt like there were enough spaces in the central area to spend time with his granddaughter. He did not add much and we got the impression that the man is for the most part satisfied with his life in Croydon.

**Peter Rees (Professor of Places and City Planning - UCL):** Satellite areas—for central London—used to help accommodate businesses when there is a huge boom, in terms of very rapid growth. When I go down to Croydon, I tell the politicians and planners in Croydon, you guys built the first Canary Wharf. Back in the 1970s, Croydon was the office overspill satellite for central London. Ten minutes by train from London Bridge on the edge of the city—City of London—. 10 min by train from the west end in Victoria, 15 min by train from an international airport in Gatwick. Incredibly well connected by transport, all of which was already in place. Lots of hinterlands of housing around it, so it's a really good location to have commercial expansion. And a number of companies like Nestle and Phillips chose to site their British headquarters there. Apart from that most of the office space was taken up government departments—the Back Office, the Home Office took up a lot of space and in fact, they're still in Croydon. That meant that in the 1970s the whole of the centre of Croydon was replanned; new roads, new shopping centres, new arts centre, and as a result of them all being done at the same time, it all aged at the same time. So by the time we got to around the millennium, a lot of the buildings in Croydon was looking rather tired, it was quite an old-fashioned space and a lot of people were starting to move away from Croydon and with that move their businesses away. So then it is going to be really difficult for Croydon to relaunch itself as a business centre. Most of the construction activity we are seeing in central Croydon is residential property—and also speculative property—. For people living there and commuting to central London.

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Sean Councillor of New Addington, Croydon

Croydon was incorporated into London in 1966 with the creation of the Greater London Council, and that incorporated Croydon into London for the first time. In the 1950s and 1960s, the Croydon corporation act was passed and that allowed them to compulsory purchase large swathes of the town centre, which at that time had many Victorian residential buildings. Also the ban against tall buildings around central London. Croydon was effectively outside of that legislation...

Most dangerous places in the whole borough: Outside Macdonald behind Westfield. Fights, knifing, etc. Children in Croydon travel long distances for school. Lots of them arrive at West Croydon or East Croydon and they end up meeting their mates around this area—North End—. This is where groups of teenagers hang around. Occasionally that spills into violence, but also it puts other people off. This is a schoolchild place. At 4 p.m. in the afternoon. You see loads and loads of teenagers in school uniform wandering around, with Macdonalds as the epicentre.

Question: Do you think the kids here practise self-segregation? The fact is that there are parts of Croydon and there are Schools in Croydon where the BME school going population is 70–80%. However, within the BME population—and here we saw 2 groups—it looks like it can be any combination of the BME kids hanging around. However, while 20 or 30 years ago this would have been an area where there are lots of different types of people living in here, it has become a predominantly younger person space. There is evidence that older white people have left this area due to fear/ fear of the unknown of young people who are not of the same colour as them. And if you talk to people from the south of the Borough—richer areas—, many of them would not come to this area at this time of the day... You have people—Black Asian and Minority Ethnic—living in Thornton Heath with 3 or 4 children, and you have people living in Pearly with 1 kid. Most of the people living in Pearly shifted 5 decades ago when it was first built and are still living there. But what happens is Mr Jones is dead, and Mrs Jones is 80 years of age, and they are living alone in a big home in the outskirts that were built for cars and driveways. That is actually a big issue where we have parts of

Croydon which has 25% of a ward over the age of 65.

Question: I suppose in the reverse these people are becoming the marginalised group as well?

Well, yeah, and those are the ones who are going to cost the Borough a lot of money for their care. Social care is bankrupting local authorities. It is this single widowed 80-year-old ladies with dementia that need a few visits a day who lives in this 500,000 GBP detached houses in the middle of nowhere that cost the most money. In fact, the people who lived in Broad Green —?—who have much firmer family/immigrant community connections, who are also young and vibrant—economic migrants that come and work for a better life—, even if they have elderly residents, they look after them better.

London Road is the dividing line, not the town centre, the town centre does not really have a divide, London Road is particularly the centre for Black Asian and Minority Ethnic Croydon, particularly of South Asian and Caribbean but also other BME groups. —London Road has extensive diversity in food and other amenities (African wigs shop) many self owned individual shops unlike at High Street that has more franchise shops—. There are also some white shops as well, supposedly mostly eastern European shops. They are congregated not segregated... Thornton Heath is the home for the Caribbean community now. Lots of people came from Brixton because they could buy a bigger place here by selling up.

London Road is where the 2011 riots happen, this is where contestation happens.

Question: Do you think there will be gentrification in the OAC area when this place is redeveloped?

The new Westfield Croydon will be one of the 4 largest malls in London, though it will be different from the other 3 because it will be residential led. It will essentially be a residential scheme that is backed up by shopping. No one is willing to lend to build a shopping area anymore because no one is sure if the shopping centre can pay back the cost it takes to build it. By building a large number of residential units, they will

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pay off the capital cost of building the shopping centre quite quickly which reduces their risk. This will also be an added assurance that when they put operators in the malls—food and shopping—, there will be people coming in. Hence there is a distinct possibility that in the future, these areas will have to be catered for the middle class taste and expenditure levels... It was clear that for the conservative administration, they were interested in building a middle class, professional city with 10,000 residents. And this is where politics come in. due to the change in demographics, there was potential for Croydon to become a permanent Labour borough. What the Conservative did was to try to create another Tory area within the borough, which will give them 3 more councillors which will give them political power.

In London Road area: This is a much more lively parade of shopping and walking area. If you want to get some cheap food, this is the place to come. Most of the people here are not living in Council Estates. Instead of replacing offices with offices in the central area, what they are doing is to replace office buildings with residential buildings. There are two kinds of residential houses, what the conservative party want to do, is to build middle class, professional housing that would be expensive. But the government came along with permitted development, and lots of the development build was low quality, rental accommodation, that had no space standards. So, these developments, which are converted from office buildings into private rental housing which are 0 or 15 sq metres so they can pack more rent into a building.

Question: Is there tenure security?

No, they will protect you from a short-term immediate eviction, but they can serve you notice and you have to leave within 2 months.

Question: What can I know about homelessness in Croydon? There are 2 types of homelessness, Croydon is tops for homelessness in the more general sense. And that is driven by that fact that lots of people who have been evicted from the private rental sector through no fault of their own and who are staying in cheap bed and breakfast or hostels. Many of

these may have lived in Croydon for a while, some of them may have come to Croydon because it was cheaper as their benefits cannot match the rental rates. Homelessness cost Croydon millions and millions. We have the second group of homelessness which is the street homelessness, predominantly men, many of them are eastern Europeans but not exclusively so. Thirty years ago, most of the street homeless were the Irish and Scottish, as well as from the north of England who were attracted to London for work. And it is sort of repeating itself, but with a different group, the eastern Europeans. Some of them were unable to claim benefits because they have not been here long enough, but the experience I have of the street homeless are people who are socially isolated, without any support network. You can find quite a number of them visible, but also many of them are hidden in car parks and other less visible areas.

Question: Because of the immigration centre, are there a lot of immigrants here?

Not necessarily, the idea that the immigration centre-Lunar House—acts as a place attracting loads of immigration is a myth. For the adults, they are spread across the country, what Croydon has is a high number of children of asylum seekers as Croydon takes care of them. The long queues in front of the centres are perhaps more due to the inefficiency of the system than the number of immigrants. So I think the issue is more of perception and prejudice.

Many of the buildings you see have been knocked down but have not been built because they just want to avoid business rates for the property. Many of the future redevelopment will be built higher, but in return the developers will cede some of the areas in the margins.

Question: What about marginal areas?

Many of these marginal areas are in London Road, or Surrey Street, at least in the heart of Croydon. It is not so much that they are marginalised, but it is more likely that they exist in a different environment. Within those groups and area, of course, you will find individual persons who are marginalised, but that is because there is where you find the cheap shops,

the cheap food, the cheap alcohol. So it is not so much that the environment that creates this marginalised, but that the margins attract these people. The area around London Road is the poorest region in central Croydon. Besides that you have the New Addington area, and the Broad Green-Thornton Heath area, which has a much more BME population, much more diversity, but quite a lot of them are in work, but they are in really low pay, insecure work. Much of the problems stems from their chronic poor health due to past sickness, diet, diabetes who do not exercise. And this is a problem in Croydon. You can check it on the public health report. So the problem stems not so much from spatial segregation, but is a public health issue. Health inequality is spatial. However you have to be careful with equating that with spatial causes causing the health issue.

North end is the main street. This was formerly a Victorian street.

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