



UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON

THE BARTLETT - DEVELOPMENT PLANNING UNIT

BENVGBU1 - TRANSFORMING LOCAL AREAS: URBAN DESIGN IN DEVELOPMENT



A LIVING NEIGHBOURHOOD

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Silvertown Quays is a site ripe for development. Situated in the historic Royal Docks in the borough of Newham, it benefits from a rich history and a diverse community. The vision of “a living neighborhood” hints at a place that is vibrant and dynamic, continuously adapting to the needs of its residents.

In order to achieve this vision, we structured our design response in three key sections. First, we present a critical analysis of the current situation and the proposed plans by reviewing previous reports and consolidating the key issues and potentialities. Second, we developed the vision, principles and guidelines considering how best to respond to the issues while building upon the potentialities. These culminated in our third section on the design strategies. Our proposed interventions range from location-specific projects, such as transforming the highway to a High Street, to higher-level programs such as developing local participatory networks. The strategies are not co-dependent so any one or combination of strategies can be implemented; however to truly achieve our alternative vision, we would recommend that all five strategies be implemented.

CHAPTER 01

INTRODUCTION

HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT

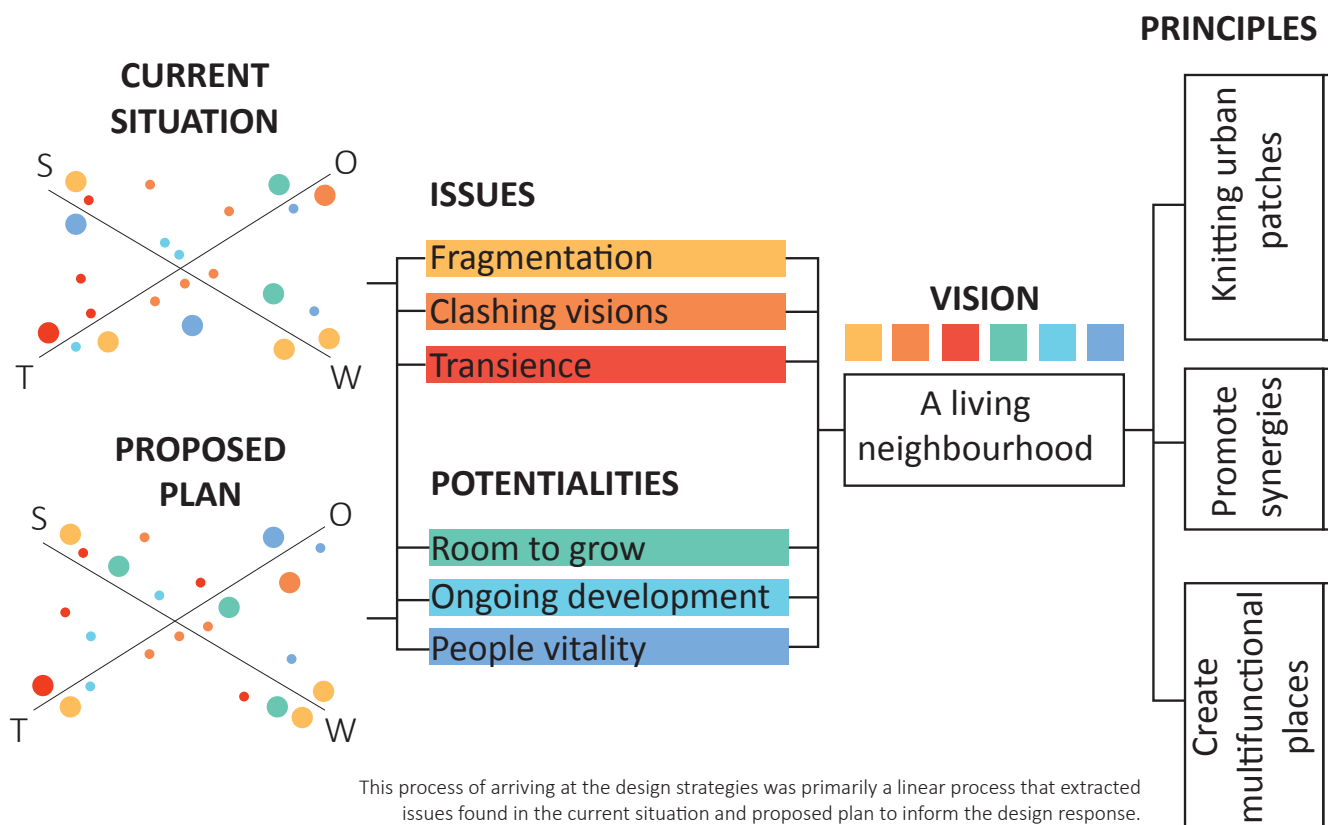
The study area, Silvertown Quays, is located in the heart of Royal Docks and is part of Borough of Newham. The geography of the site has been a defining factor in much of the site's history and future plans. Its strategic location at the far east of London and at the wide end of the Thames River made it the optimal location for the development of the Docklands and industries that were pushed out of central London due to new regulations in the mid 1800s. During the industrial area, the area gradually transformed into the Gateway to London for the rest of the world. After the industrial decline, when Thatcherite market-led redevelopment plans reimagined the wider area of docklands as a new centre of global financial and service industry, the

proximity to central London and Canary Wharf became the focus of development (Brownhill 1999). A new layer urban uses, physical infrastructure and associated meanings were imposed on the area, such as the DLR, London City Airport, ExCel and Britannia Village. The historically disconnected transformations created a fragmented space and identity. The future plans for Silvertown Quays have a vision of bringing in global brands and economies with the intention to promote local community. Based on the analysis of the existing situation and future plans, this report presents the design response that aspires to create an alternative vision of a living neighborhood.



Aerial view of the Royal Docks and surrounding area in 2014.

Source. Google earth



This process of arriving at the design strategies was primarily a linear process that extracted issues found in the current situation and proposed plan to inform the design response.

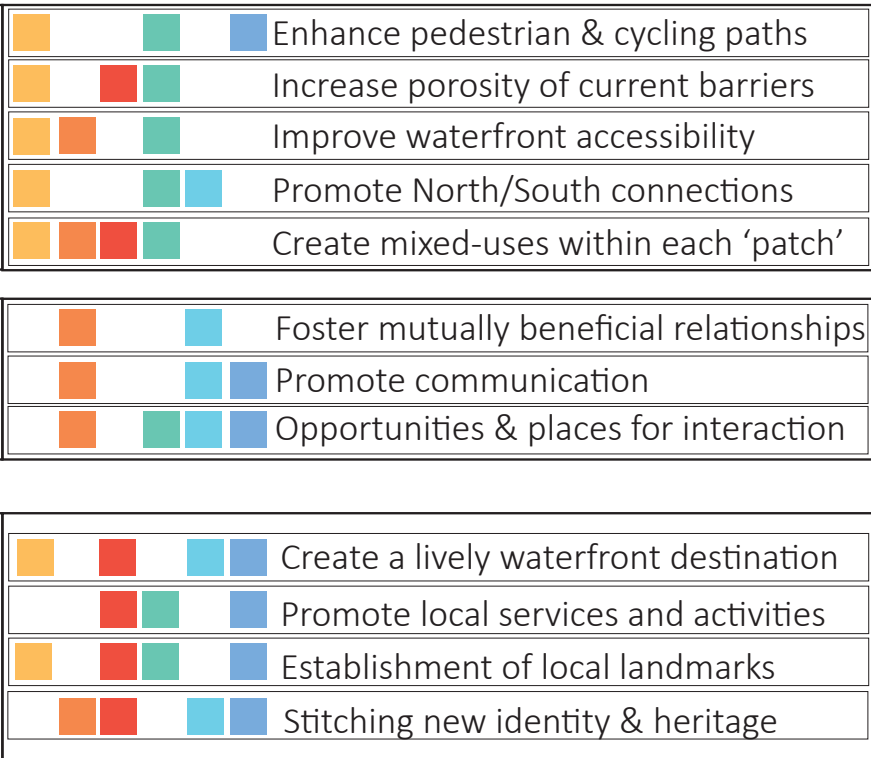
METHODOLOGY

The design strategy for Silvertown Quays presented in this report is a site-specific reaction to both the present situation and the proposed plans for the site. The process to arrive to this strategy began with an analysis that considered factors of both space and time. Different characteristics of the site were analysed at various scales in order to understand it as an entity in relation to different contexts. This in-depth, multiscalar analysis was captured by the SWOTs in order to extract the overarching issues and potentialities from the documented strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of both the present situation and proposed plans.

From these issues and potentialities,

the group formulated a vision that drives the subsequent principles, guidelines and strategies towards a common goal. The vision shaped the three main principles from which specific guidelines emerged. Every guideline addresses more than one of the issues or potentialities, so together they provide a complete menu for addressing all issues and building upon all potentialities. Similarly, the design strategies do not respond to guidelines or principles on a one-to-one basis, but rather are grouped based on the nature of the intervention and collectively provide a complete response to the proposed guidelines and principles, as well as the issues and potentialities that have been raised.

GUIDELINES



STRATEGIES



Source. Produced by the group

CHAPTER 02

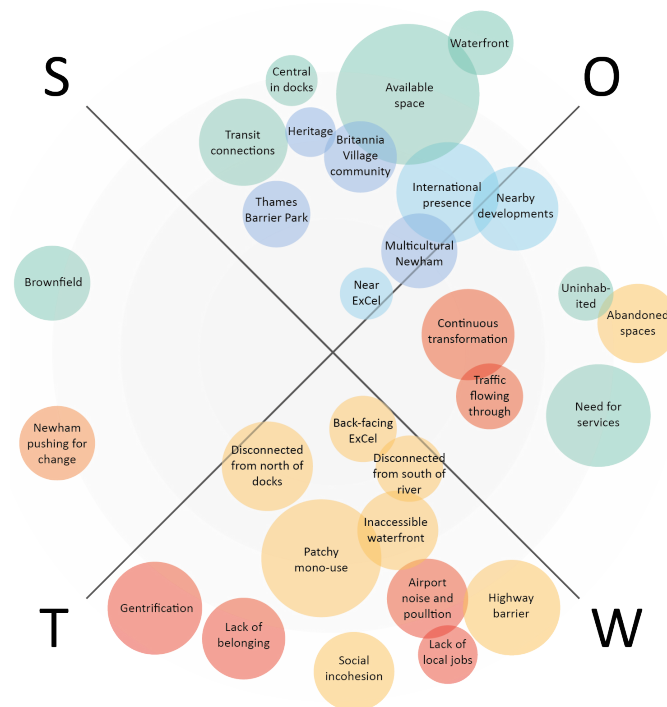
ANALYSIS

SWOT ANALYSIS

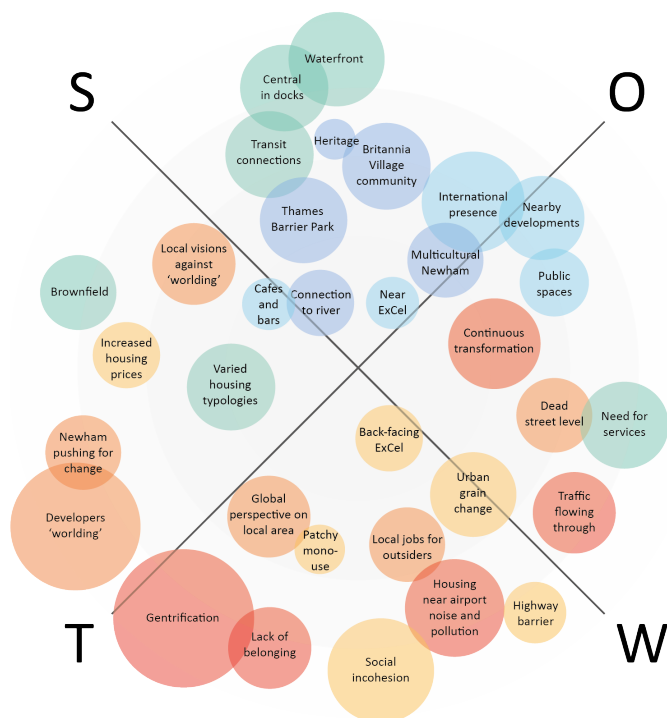
The SWOT analysis demonstrated that many of the site's characteristics can not be neatly categorized, but are more dynamic. Additionally, we found that not all characteristics fall into categories with equal prominence as others. This is demonstrated in the graphic by the size of the circles where larger circles demonstrate their relevance to or presence in the site.

In addition, in doing this analysis of both the current and proposed plan, we saw that many new threats and weaknesses appeared in the proposed plan. These emerged as the issues we attempt to address throughout this report and with our design strategies.

In order to transform the broad SWOT analysis into a more concrete and workable interpretation, the group created three different categories of issues and potentialities out of all the observed characteristics of the site we presented in the SWOT analysis. Although in many ways, this could be seen as a simplification, it allowed us to understand the site in a more comprehensive manner and effectively target our efforts

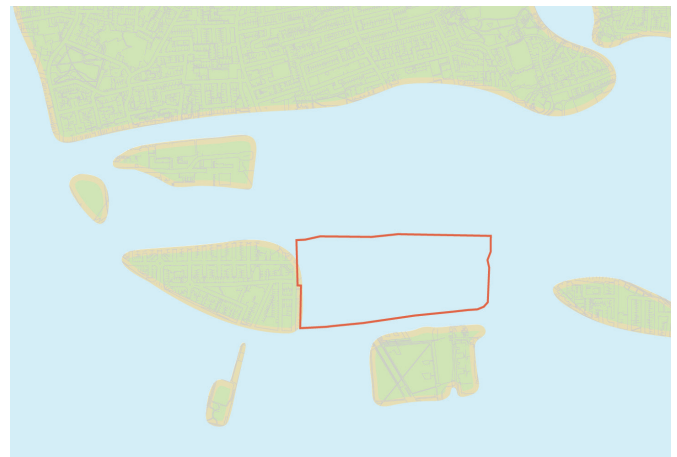


SWOT analysis current situation



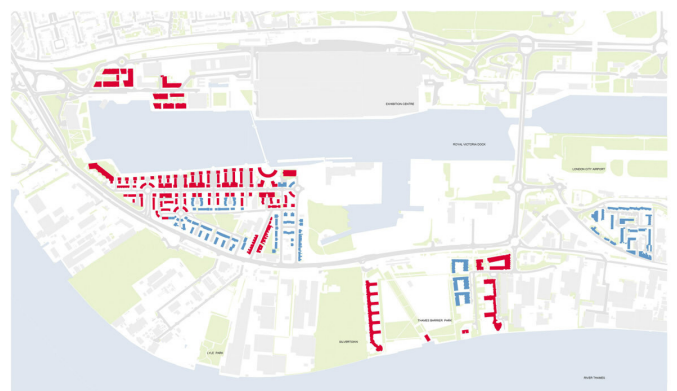
SWOT analysis proposed plan

Source. Produced by the group



Source. Source: Mobility and Infrastructure Urban Analysis Report 2015, p.28

This conceptual map of the Royal Docks captures the ingrained fragmentation of the area by demonstrating in green the islands of walkable areas and in blue the barriers to these connections.



Source. Housing and Dwelling Analysis Report 2015, p. 15

Fragmentation in the type of housing with privately rented areas (red) are in optimal locations and social rented areas (in blue) in less desirable locations, i.e. closer to the airport.



Source. Source: Mobility and Infrastructure Urban Analysis Report 2015, p.20

DLR station infrastructure in the area creates a visual and physical barrier.

FRAGMENTATION

The Silvertown Quays site is a distinct fragment of the surrounding urban fabric. Currently, the space is void of use and cut off from neighboring areas. The site's borders to the north, the Royal Victoria Dock, and to the south and east, the highway and DLR, function as both physical and visual barriers, despite the fact that they facilitate the flow of people. Pedestrian mobility is highly limited due to the lack of pedestrian crossings or sufficient sidewalk infrastructure. These clear barriers create an "island-effect" that separates local communities.

Segregated housing tenure typologies in the Royal Docks reveals social fragmentation. Prime real estate along the waterfront accommodates wealthier inhabitants, while the social housing tenants are relegated to less favorable real estate locations.

Unfortunately, the proposed plans seem to add to these issue rather than solve it. Proposed 'brand pavilions' and 'pop-up pavilions' do not respond to the needs of local residents, and the clear separation between residential and commercial areas will likely increase fragmentation.

'Silvertown is not for everyone, it is for the visionary. Where those at the forefront of business, brands, tech, learning, living, culture and social – collide'

(Silvertown Development Website, nd)

"I don't usually hang out around here, because there is nothing even grocery stores. I usually buy stuff around my workplace and come back here"

- Web Developer (24), resident of Britannia Village

CLASHING VISIONS

While it might not be surprising to find differences of opinion in a neighborhood, the clashing visions of the Royal Docks occur across various scales and are sometimes physically manifested. For example, local visions clash with more global perspectives over the identity of the area and use of public spaces. Britannia Village is a residential area with a locally-based identity. However, just across the water prominent international actors, such as the ExCel Centre, Emirates Airline and the Siemens Crystal, present a conflicting identity for the area as a globally significant tourist attraction.

Additionally, there is inconsistency between the visions of local residents and local authorities and developers with regards to the proposed Silvertown Quays plan. While the plan aspires to attract new business, new residents and tourists to the site, it provides little in the form of services for local residents. The developers' and authorities' vision of an "efficiently organised, sanitised cities" is perhaps somewhat delusional and ultimately, when considering the real needs of real residents (Campkin, 2013 p.1). The plan threatens to exacerbate the conflict between the desire for social equity and local services and profit-driven development.



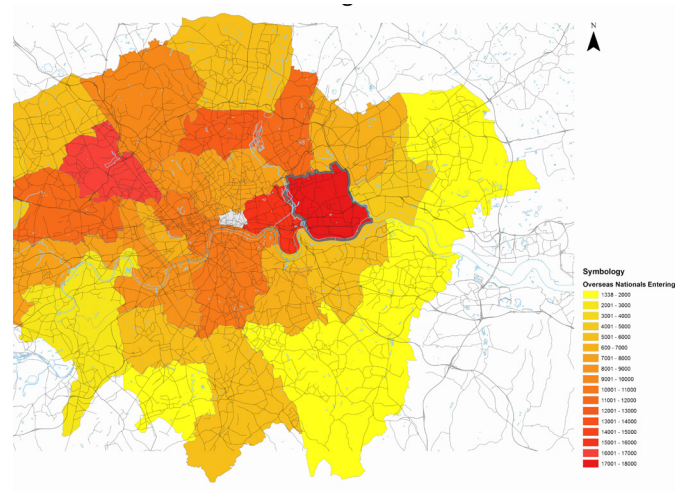
Source. Housing and Dwelling Analysis Report 2015 (p. 19)

Activities in public spaces are restricted. This raises questions about the identity of the area and if the targeted users are tourists or residents.



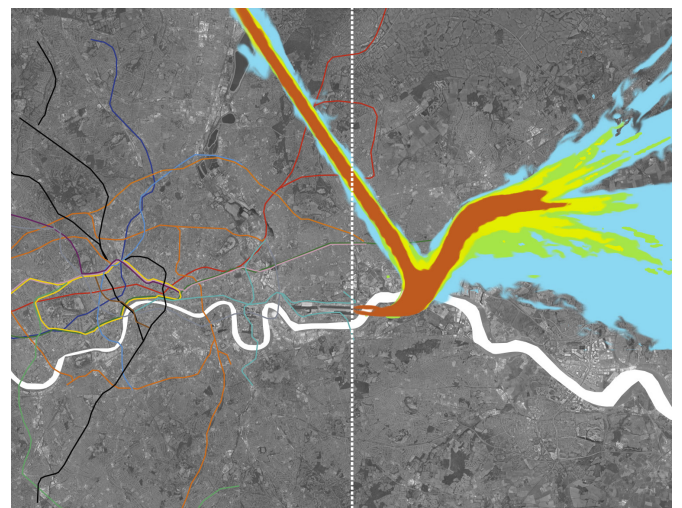
Source. Culture and Economies Analysis Report 2015 (p.10)

This map shows the scarcity of sites of leisure within the site and its proximate surroundings. A concentration of leisure spaces can be observed near touristic sites, which demonstrates that they cater to tourists, not residents.



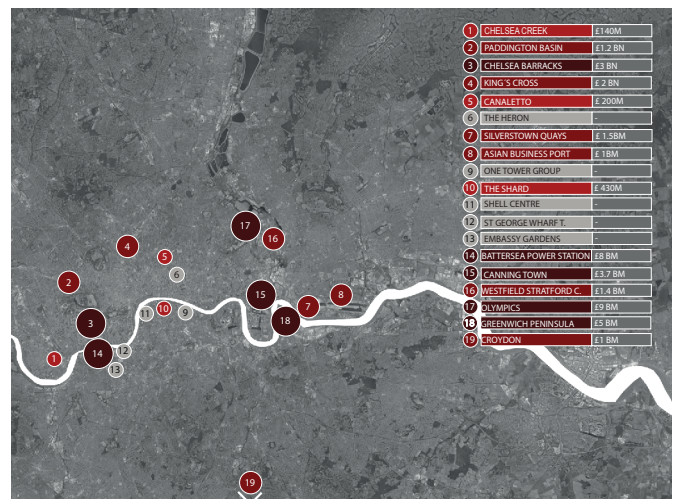
Source. Mobility and Infrastructure Analysis Report 2015, p. 25

This map shows that Newham has highest absolute number of international migrants.



Source. Mobility and Infrastructure Analysis Report 2015, p. 23

Trajectory of flights arriving at London City Airport along with underground lines.



Source. Mobility and Infrastructure Analysis Report 2015, p. 27

Monetary value of capital investments throughout London.

TRANSIENCE

Transience emerged from the analysis as a primary issue. The site is always in movement in various ways. People from outside London and the UK pass through the site as they move west from the airport to more popular destinations such as Canary Wharf or City of London. Transience is also a character of the local population as Newham has the highest number of incoming migrants in London as well as high rate of outgoing residents. In addition, financial capital is constantly flowing into the area with major investments, but flowing out from the pockets of local residents due to the lack of local services and activities. Overall, the site has always been a place of continuous transformation beginning with its industrial history, through the LDDC redevelopment processes, to today. These aspects have defined the docklands a space to move through, but not a place to stay.

Although the proposed plan's desire to develop the area as a destination might reduce the site's transient identity, it disregards many of the larger trends, such as migration patterns, and would likely negatively contribute to them.

POTENTIALITIES



Source. Urban Fabric and Landmarks Analysis Report, p.5

Empty and open spaces on the site can be seen as threats, but also as potentialities



Source. Urban Fabric and Landmarks Analysis Report 2015, p. 6

This transformed aerial image highlights the areas where there is room for growth.



Source. Culture and Economies Analysis Report 2015, p.5

This population density map of Silvertown Quays and the surrounding areas captures the low population density of the area.

ROOM TO GROW

Silvertown Quays exhibits high potential for future growth. When compared in size to central London, its enormous area, and subsequent potential, of the area becomes exceedingly clear. The existing built spaces in the Royal Docks are relatively low density and there are large areas of underused and dead spaces that can be developed and reanimated.

Furthermore, there is a general lack of services and leisure activities for existing communities (Silvertown Partnership, 2014). With the expected population growth associated with new residential developments in Silvertown Quays, as well as other emerging single-use developments around Royal Docklands (D&A Statement: 22), the demand for different functions and services will only increase. Therefore, the mismatch between demand for services and the lack of supply will become more evident, which would further highlight the potential, and the need, to (re)activate underused spaces.

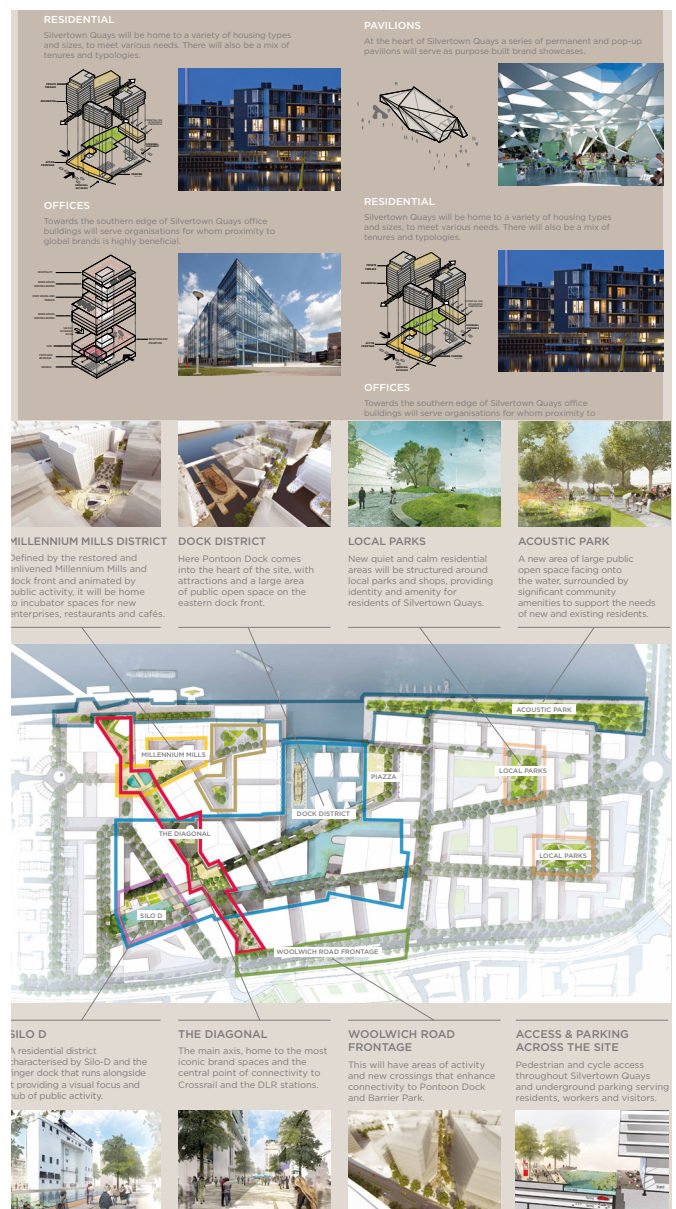
POTENTIALITIES

ONGOING DEVELOPMENT

The SWOT analysis conducted for the proposed plan for Silvertown Quays concluded that despite the development's weaknesses and threats, it brings positive interventions and its mere existence provides opportunities.

The proposed mixed-use development combining different types of housing, offices, commercial and public spaces could bring vitality and new economic prospects to the area, although questions around housing affordability and the diversity of future job opportunities persist. Nevertheless, the new development would invest in physical improvement and in public infrastructure delivery, like the new bridge connecting the Thames to the far side of the Royal Victoria Docks and new public spaces such as the waterfront Acoustic Park (D&A Statement). Other nearby developments also provide opportunities for negotiating change.

There is real and potent potential for negotiating with and harnessing ongoing development to create a more inclusive and sustainable transformation.



Source. Development Plan Silvertown Quays

PEOPLE VITALITY

Silvertown Quays' rich history of transformation provides an existing identity base upon which a vibrant community can flourish. Vestiges of its past as the 'Gateway to London' for seafaring passengers and cargo are evident in both the physical elements built into the design of the waterfront and the industrial leftovers in the area. In modern times, Silvertown continues to fulfill this function as a 'gateway', but now the principal mode of transport is the plane, which brings in visitors and immigrants from across the globe.

As mentioned in the previous section and identified as an issue, Newham has the highest rate of international migration out of all London boroughs. This is characterized as an issue for Newham because the high level of in-migration is matched with a similarly high level of out-migration, resulting a transient community. However, the flip side is that Newham hosts one of the most diverse communities in London. There is a richness of culture that is nearly unmatched in this global city. A food market that truly engages the community could naturally evolve into an international festival celebrating the many corners of the world. The people vitality of the Royal Docks provides the ideal groundwork for a truly transformative development.



Source. Airbnb, 2014



Source. Bolsin, 2013

Community activities in Newham, one of the most diverse boroughs in London, are vibrant cultural expressions.

CHAPTER 03

DESIGN FRAMEWORK

OUR VISION

A LIVING NEIGHBOURHOOD

Active and vibrant places that people want to use and feel connected to define the core of our vision for the future Silvertown Quays. The proposed vision of “a living neighborhood” aims to make this site more than a place to pass through, but one to live in. This means creating an active and attractive place out of a currently dead space. Space here is understood as something with a weak identity that encourages movement through it. In contrast, a place is that which is created when a space is endowed with value and gains an identity. While space allows movement through it, places are points of pause to which people can connect (Tuan 1977). This is what our vision for Silvertown Quays proposes, a location not just for passing through, but a place where there is activity and connection on both a physical and social level. By acknowledging the site’s heritage and transforming its issues into potentialities, the proposed principles, guidelines and strategies aim to transform the pattern language of Silvertown Quays into a truly living neighborhood.



Source. Produced by the group

PRINCIPLES AND GUIDELINES

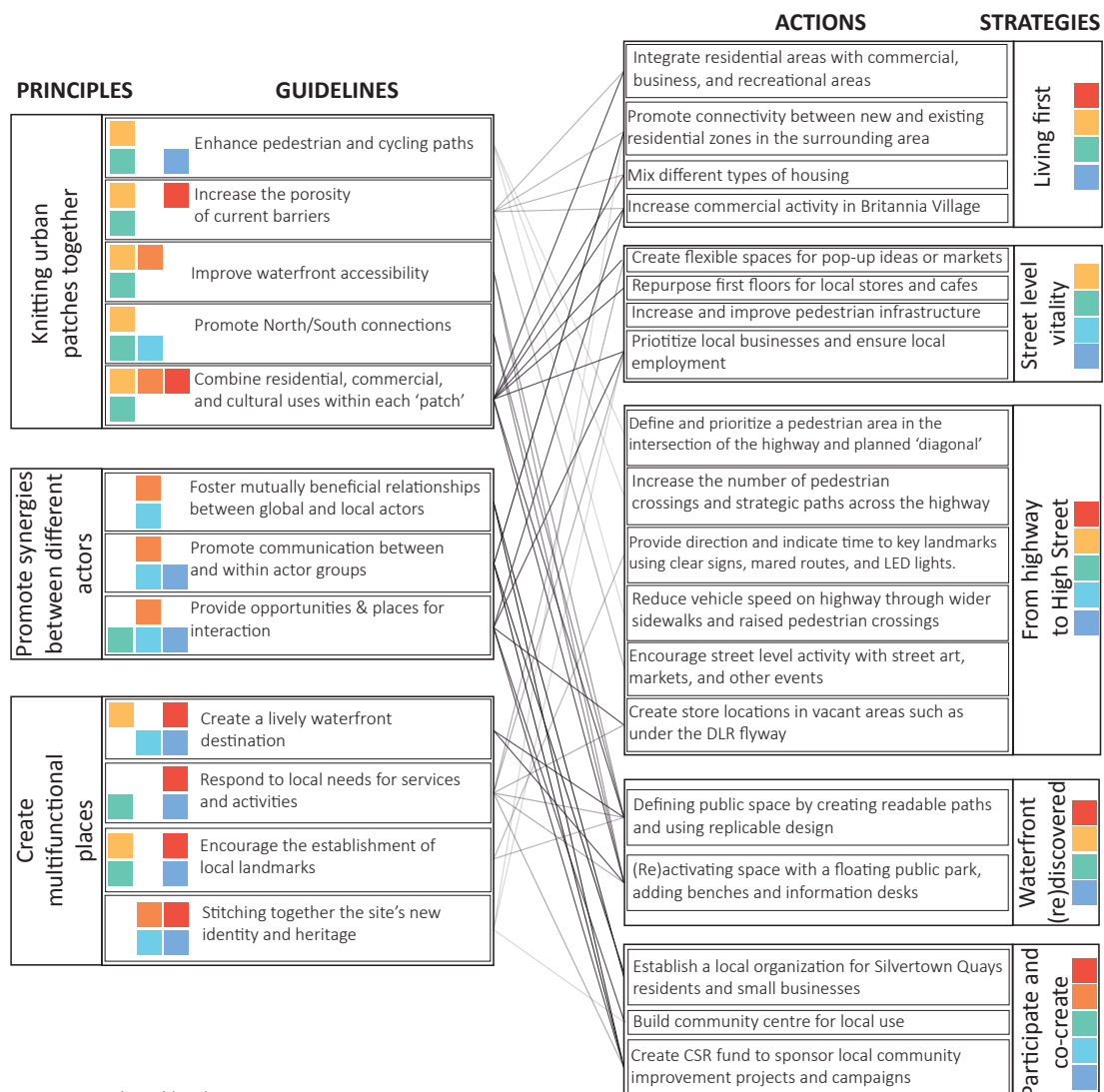
The principles and guidelines, which were formulated with the consideration of the identified key issues and potentialities present in the site, provide the basis for our proposed interventions. The three principles and their corresponding guidelines are presented in detail at below.

The first principle, to knit urban patches together to increase livability, promotes the cohesiveness of the urban fabric. In its current state, many barriers disrupt fluidity, but breaking these barriers and enhancing connections, currently isolated patches can gain new life and greater area cohesion.

The second principle is to promote synergies between different actors to enhance inclusiveness.

This principle focuses primarily on the social fabric of the site. It takes into consideration that creating a unified built environment is not enough to make a workable place if social characteristics are not taken into consideration. This principle therefore recognizes the importance of encouraging the structure and environment for people to interact and communicate with each other.

The third principle is to create multifunctional spaces to foster a local identity. This principle recognizes the value of encouraging a sense of identity by acknowledging the site's unique heritage while leaving room for the incoming residents to define their own spaces and develop a more permanent attachment to the area.



Source. Produced by the group

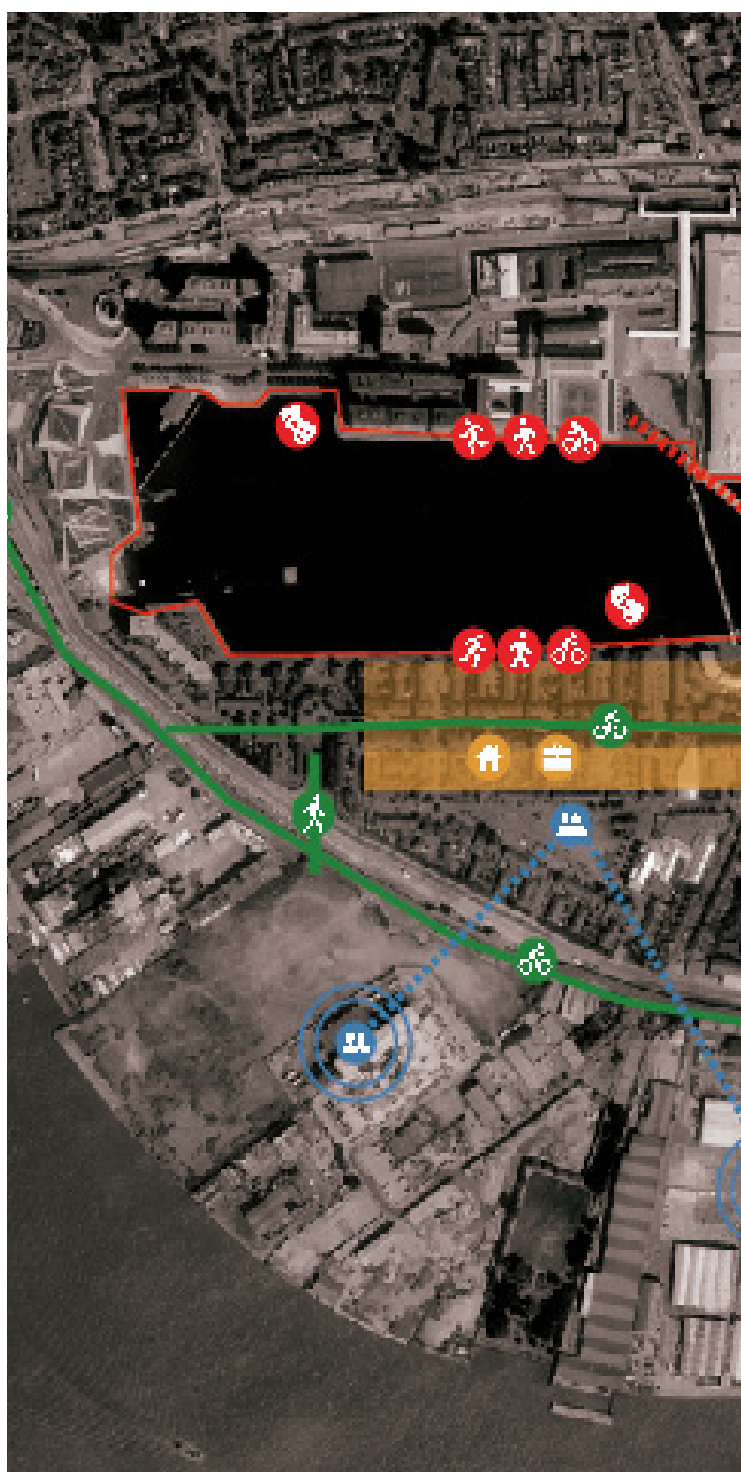
CHAPTER 04

DESIGN STRATEGIES

The following strategies were derived based on a contextual understanding of the vision, principles and guidelines. Each strategy responds some of the issues and capitalizes on some of the potentialities. They vary by scale, level of spatial specificity and type of intervention.

We hope that the robustness of our analysis will convince developers to adopt all our strategies. However, we are aware that financial and political constraints exist. For this purpose, our strategies range from the easily implementable to the more complex to increase the likelihood that at least one of our proposals is integrated in the future development. Nonetheless, each individual strategy has the potential for substantial positive impact on the urban fabric of Silvertown Quays.

- Living First
- Waterfront (re)discovered
- Street Level Vitality
- From Highway to High Street
- Participate and co-create



OVERVIEW



Source. Produced by the group

LIVING FIRST

A vital part of this strategy is to prioritize the needs of residential development. In order to accomplish this, the strategy proposes the increased integration of residential communities with business, commercial, and recreational areas. This strategy represents the belief that a truly mixed-use and well-integrated site creates a more animated living experience and encourages people to engage with their environments (Coupland, 1997).

To ensure that living is indeed first in this new site, residential areas should be spread throughout the site and further away from the airport noise, contrary to the proposed plan. This will ensure that living spaces will not become isolated within themselves or create new borders in an already fragmented site. Although, this strategy does consider the importance of maintaining a sense of

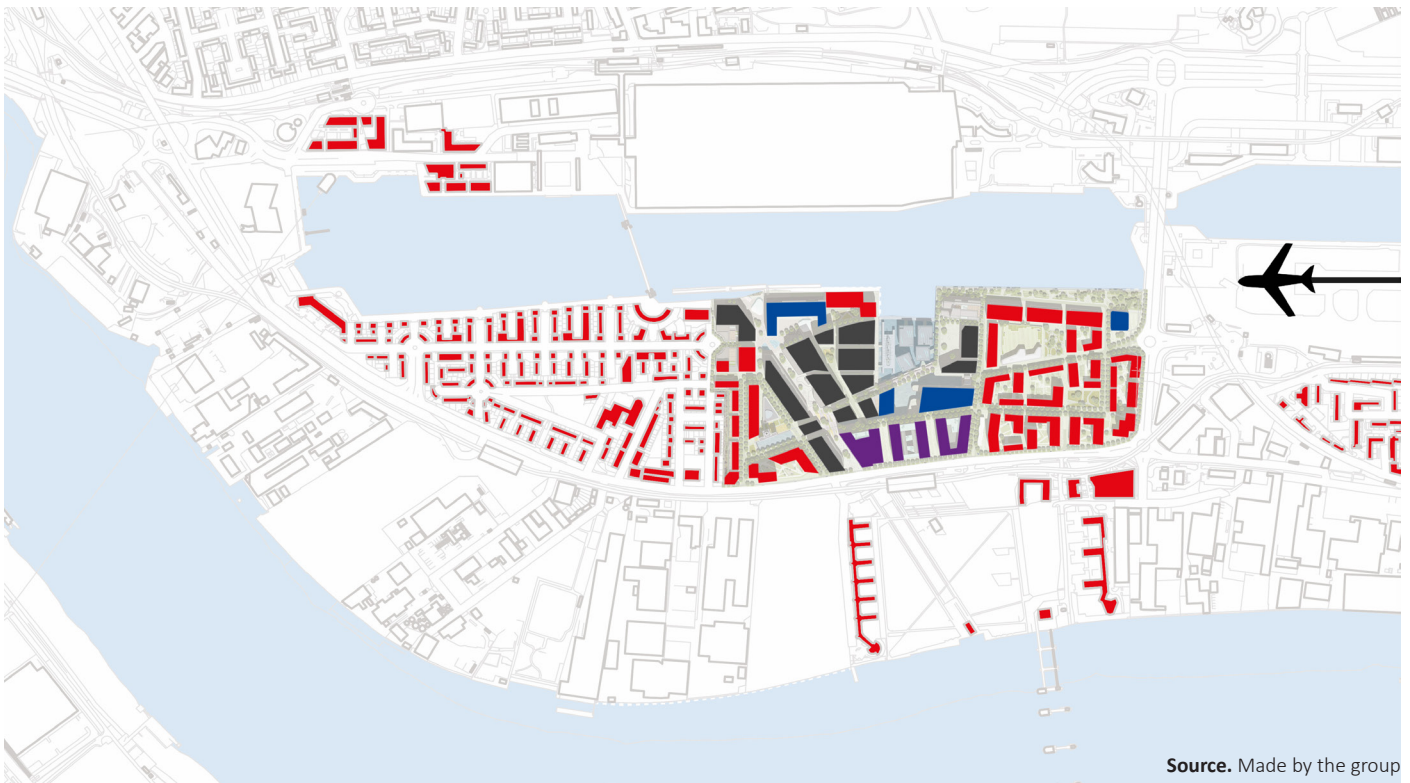
privacy within residential areas, the goal is to soften the borders of private and public space and make this a people first, not business first, site.

Part of this strategy also includes mixing different types of housing, for example social and private housing in order to encourage a heterogenous identity. This will discourage a sense of mass production and encourage the diversity of the population within the site (Alexander, 1977).

Furthermore, this strategy extends beyond Silvertown Quays into the surrounding areas. This means finding opportunities for encouraging mixed development in Britannia Village, the residential developments to the south and the residential areas east of the site. This can be done by creating smaller residential zones and placing them close to commercial and leisure uses in order to promote movement and integration.

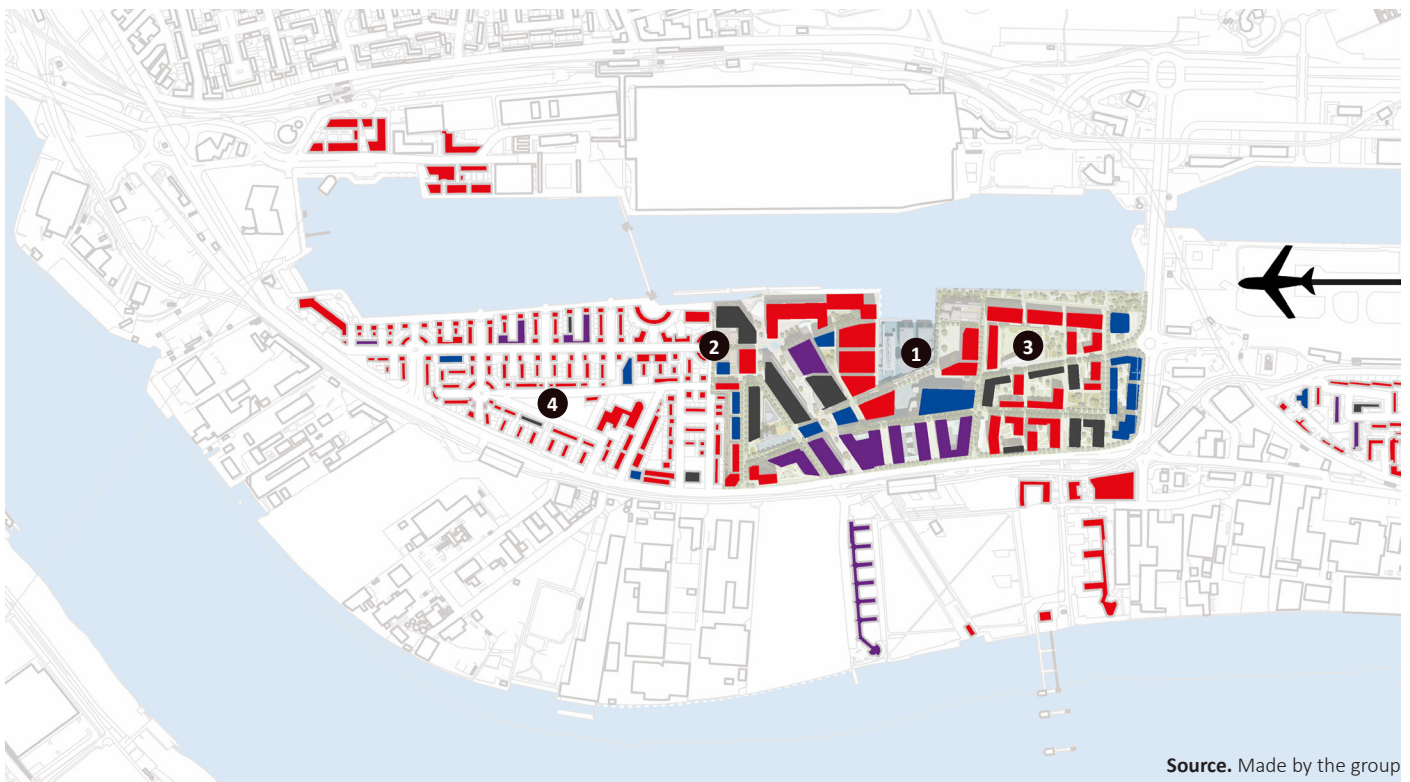


Source. Produced by the group



Source. Made by the group

Current situation



Source. Made by the group

Proposal

- Residential
- Retail
- Offices
- Offices and/or Residential

1. Integrate residential areas with commercial, business, and recreational areas.
2. Promote connectivity between new residential zones and existing residential zones in the surrounding area.
3. Mix different types of housing.
4. Increase mixed uses in Britannia Village

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P

Long regarded as a technique for creating urban vibrancy, developing the street level frontages into spaces of activity could help create a sense of liveliness in Silvertown Quays. The key factors that define space vitality are character and convenience (Davis, 1997). Character attracts people to the area, while convenience allows people to access and utilize the space comfortably and safely.

In order to attract people to the streets of Silvertown Quays, destinations of interest should be created. One potential intervention is to take back and repurpose the ground floors of brand pavilions, offices and residential buildings to accommodate a variety of stores and other uses. By creating street level store spaces in a variety of sizes, some very small, this can reduce the barriers for small businesses to set up shop and allow them to flourish in the area, as has already been piloted in Britannia Village (urbanspace.com). This would diversify employment opportunities for residents in the area, who may not have the skills to match the demands of the planned brand pavilions and corporate offices.

Beyond standard tenancies, flexible or vacant spaces could be made available for pop-up concepts or markets. Allowing the community temporarily take over vacant spaces would reduce dead frontages and increase foot traffic thereby increasing the sense of security in the many currently deserted streets of the Royal Docks. Prioritising pedestrians on the street level and spreading services throughout a neighborhood also significantly improves convenience, the second crucial component of this strategy. Safe streets and nearby stores ensures street level vitality.

STREET LEVEL VITALITY



An active street is a vital component of a lively and vibrant neighborhood.

Source. Made by the group

1. Create flexible spaces for pop-up ideas or markets
2. Re-purpose first floors for local stores and cafes
3. Increase and improve pedestrian infrastructure
4. Prioritize local businesses and ensure local employment



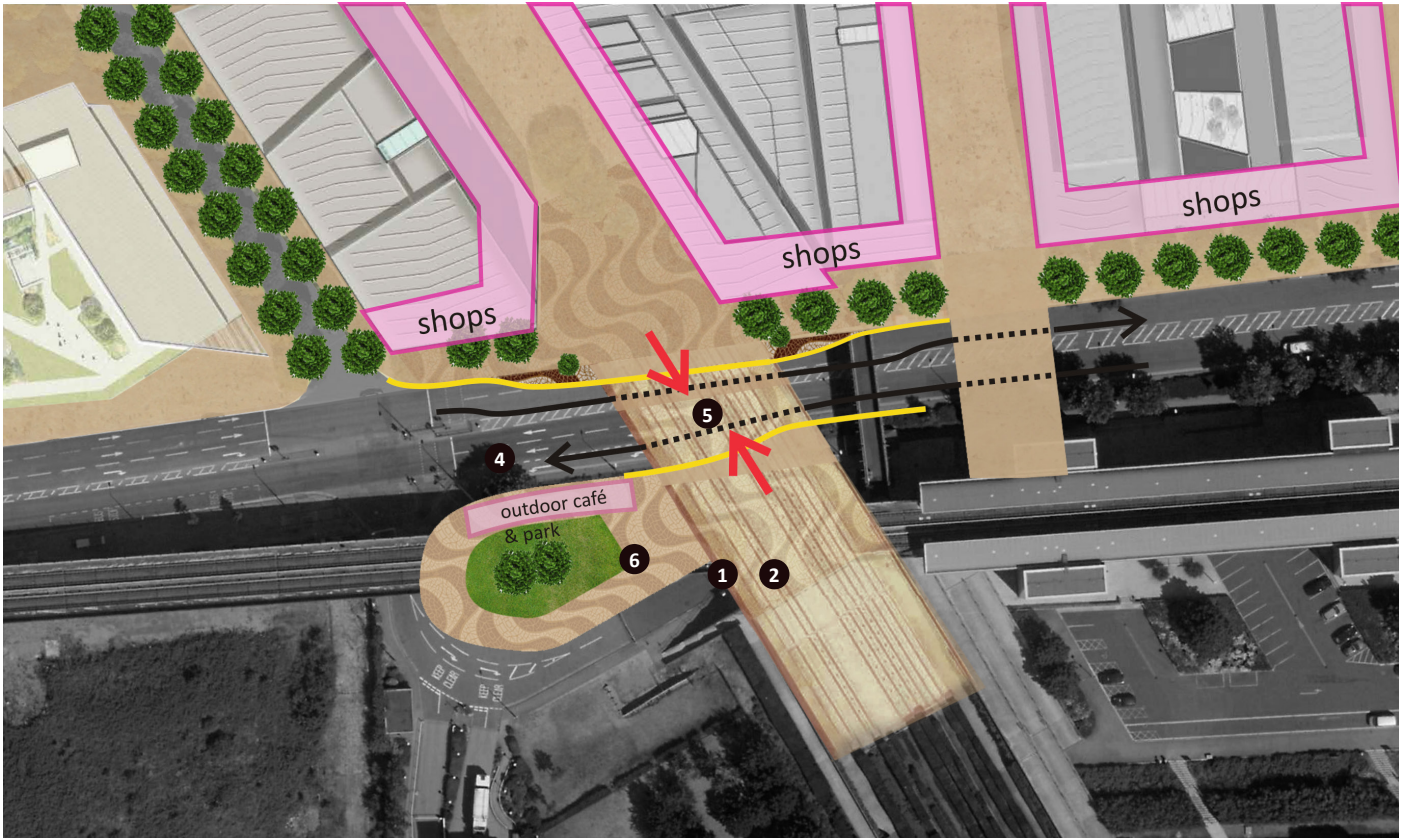
FROM HIGHWAY TO HIGH STREET

The highway that follows the southern border of Silvertown Quays is perhaps the most visible barrier in the area. The future plan does little to address this beyond creating the 'diagonal' that flows through the site, linking the proposed bridge to the Thames Barrier Park. Our suggested intervention takes a critical step towards transforming this highway into a High Street. We recognize the potential of the 'diagonal' and want to capitalize on the likely increased flow of people through that axis by creating a High Street surrounding the intersection of the 'diagonal' and the highway. If successful, commerce should spread across the highway and provide further spaces of leisure and gathering for the surrounding communities

As mentioned in the previous section, the main determinants of a successful public space, such as a High Street, are convenience and character. These two traits are lacking in the proposed plan, with brand pavilions and office buildings that cater to

tourists and large businesses, not current, or even future, residents. Unless a decisive effort is made to provide accessible spaces that are attractive to local people, the new proposed patch of urban fabric will further increase fragmentation of the area.

The highway to high street strategy aims to create an inclusive place for the broader community. As the adjacent figure illustrates, the space would be transformed into a convenient place of leisure and interaction. Connectivity would be increased through enlarged pedestrian paths, separated cycles lanes and more bus stops. Comfort and a sense of safety would be developed through traffic calming techniques, such as lane reduction, guiding traffic pavements, raised pedestrian crossings and LED-lit paths. Activating the dead space with varied interventions such as stores, small parks, street furniture and cultural events that capitalize on Newham's diversity would build the character of the area, the most critical factor.



Active crossing points soften the hard border that the highway currently creates

Source. Made by the group

1. Define and prioritize a pedestrian area at the intersection of the highway and planned “diagonal”
2. Increase the number of pedestrian crossings and strategic paths across the highway
3. Provide direction and indicate time to key landmarks using clear signs, marked routes, and LED lights.
4. Create separated cycle paths across the highway and adjacent roads.
5. Reduce vehicle speed on highway through wider sidewalks and raised pedestrian crossings
6. Encourage street level activity with street art, markets, and other events.
7. Create store locations in vacant areas such as under the DLR flyway.

T F O R P





Source. Made by the group

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T F O R P

WATERFRONT (RE) DISCOVERED

Currently the waterfront of the Royal Docks is the sum of underused and disconnected spaces despite the demand from local residents for vibrant public spaces providing different leisure facilities. Silvertown Quays redevelopment plans bring some increased accessibility and use to the area with, for example, the Acoustic Park, but misses several opportunities to create a truly vibrant waterfront. This strategy aims to unlock the potential of the both waterfront of the docks and the nearby river by creating cohesive and vibrant public spaces.

To knit together the diverse and disconnected urban patches, a pedestrian and cycle loop encircling all of Royal Victoria Dock should be completed. This will improve accessibility and flow around the waterfront, create an excellent jogging loop and should include the creation of clearly defined paths. To further define public space, these paths can use distinct pavement, signs, sticker or maps to encourage use. The replication of these and other elements, such as benches, would help create an integrated waterfront path. Accessibility to the Thames waterfront, and the river at large, can be improved with the addition of a bus boat stop that can serve the expanding population of the Royal Docks, connecting them with their neighbors across and along the river.

Finally, activating the dock waterfront would encourage local residents to stay in the area for leisure and overall make the area more attractive which could encourage local economic growth. Building upon existing summer activities, we propose a floating park that would be functional year-round. In winter, floating saunas and seasonal markets could increase the use of the space. Summer-time uses could be diversified to appeal to wider range of residents, such as an outdoor cinema, seating areas and local historical information. By transforming the waterfront, the docklands will capitalize on one of its most unique and untapped resources.

As mentioned in the previous section, the main determinants of a successful public space, such as a High Street, are convenience and character. These two traits are lacking in the proposed plan, with

1. Designing Public Space by creating readable paths and using replicable design
2. (Re)Activating Space with a floating public park.
3. Add benches and informations desks to invite people to stay in the area.





Completing the loop around the dock, as well as diversifying activities and creating a more cohesive path language, will encourage use and appeal to a wide range of people.

Source. Made by the group



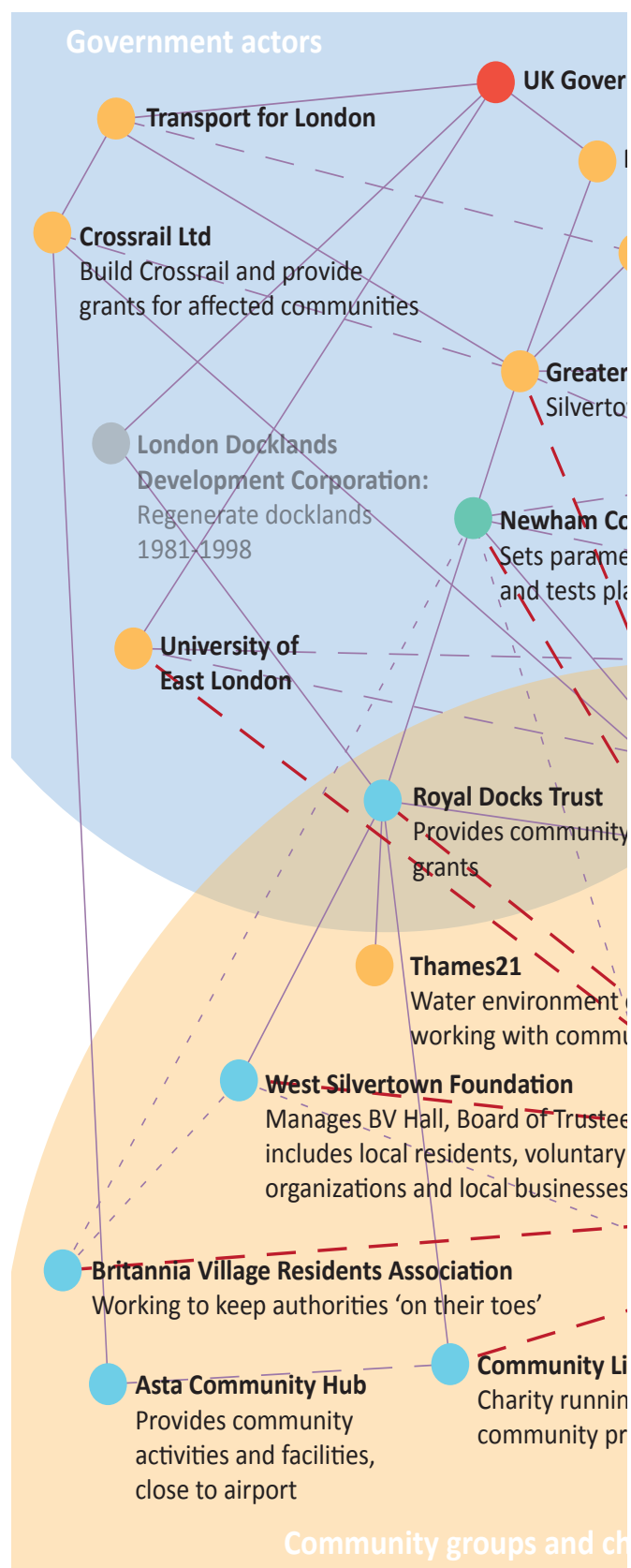
Year-round use of the waterfront would create a dramatic increase in local vitality in the colder half of the year and help develop and reinforce local identity and community.

Source. Made by the group

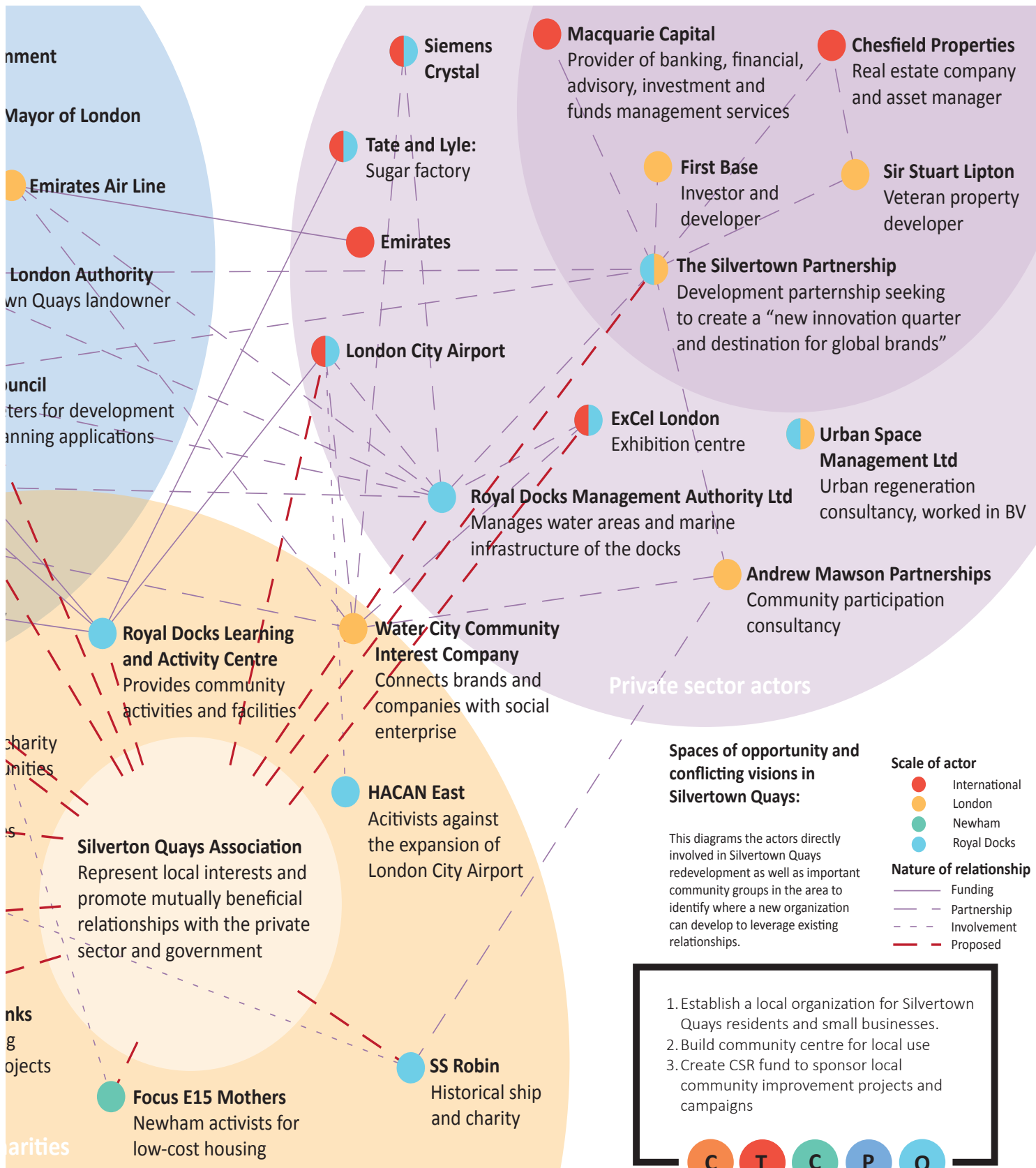
Currently the Royal Docks hosts a number of small charities, NGOs and CBOs that work to represent the interests of local residents and provide opportunities for community improvements. However, these organizations seem to suffer from the general trend that people are “unaware of them or found them irrelevant” (Cultures and Economies, p. 9). Considering the proposed Silvertown Quays development, the visions of “a place for talent” that “will express the identity of multiple brands,” (D&A Statement, p. 13) might not be purposefully malicious, but are distinctly incompatible with the desires and needs of the existing community to encourage a diverse and friendly greater dockland community, with opportunities for training and employment for an often unskilled workforce. Despite these clashing visions, the potential for transformation built into the development occurring on the site and the existing networks of organizations and people vitality, although in some places weak and under-funded, provides opportunities for fostering diversity and inclusiveness with the new development.

This strategy proposes the establishment of a local organization for Silvertown Quays residents and small businesses, with an aim to represent local interests improve the livability of the area. This organization should collaborate with other local community groups and help to strengthen the network of the grass-root organizations in the Royal Docks. Additionally, the proposed plan for Silvertown Quays should include the provision of a community centre to be used by this and other local organizations.

For funding, this organization can create a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) fund to which incoming corporations and businesses would contribute. The fund could be used for local projects or campaigns as requested by the community. These projects would help with the image of the large businesses in the area and improve the visibility of the organisation, allowing for a mutually beneficial relationship.



PARTICIPATE AND CO-CREATE



CONCLUSION

The first thing we noticed when we arrived to the site is the astounding sense of emptiness. Despite Silvertown Quays' location just moments away from places of bustling activity, there is an undeniable shadow of lifelessness cast upon the site and its surrounding area. We struggled to find people to interview in the streets of a city with over eight million people. The proud history of the Royal Docks and the high levels of diversity of Newham are practically invisible in the current, and the proposed, Silvertown Quays.

Our job as students is to examine the site and propose an alternative vision by using our unbiased lenses. After consolidating the wealth of critical analysis provided by our classmates from phase one of the project, we came up with a new vision for the site: "A Living Neighborhood." We recognize the critical issues and promising potentialities of Silvertown Quays and the surrounding urban fabric, and propose this vision with supporting principles and guidelines to help convince developers and local leaders to adopt our strategies:

- 1 – Living first
- 2 – Street level vitality
- 3 – From highway to High Street
- 4 – Waterfront (re)discovered
- 5 – Participate and co-create

Each of our strategies aims to bring life into the area. The proposed plan does attempt to do this, but does so by bringing in global brands and corporations that do not serve the local communities. Our alternative vision accepts that attracting some business is necessary for developing the site, however our interventions simultaneously decrease the threats posed by these new actors and address the needs of local communities. We urge the development leadership to consider implementing our strategies in order to achieve a truly inclusive "Living Neighborhood" in Silvertown Quays.

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