



NORTH WOOLWICH | Development Brief



Fabien Cante - Aubrie Eisenhart - Myrsini Glinos - Yang Luo - Anuar Makhayev - Alice Morterol - Cristian Olmos - Seth Pyenson - Wenshi Yang




Executive summary

North Woolwich, situated on the edge of the Inner London Borough of Newham, is rapidly being excluded from London's evolving socio-economic landscape. Enclosure by water and large transport and industrial infrastructure threatens to turn the space into a void. Since the closure of the docks in 1981, the link between North Woolwich and its industrial sites has diminished and the social fabric of the area has changed. Today, North Woolwich has a diverse population - a significant part of which is constituted by recent arrivals - and a fragmented sense of community.

We begin by summarizing the opportunities and challenges that lie within the neighbourhood. We believe that by harnessing its internal social and spatial opportunities, North Woolwich can transcend the constraints that hinder it from playing a more integral role in the transformation of the Royal Docks. North Woolwich can provide heightened interaction on a variety of scales, foster stimulating experiences in its streets and on its waterfront and offer an alternative template for urban regeneration.

Suggestions for North Woolwich's redevelopment are embedded in strong community participation and rest on three main principles: connecting the neighbourhood, breaking the feeling of enclosure and fostering neighbourhood identity. From these principles we draw guidelines to direct practices and future interventions, at different scales and with incremental phasing.

Our proposals begin with a coloured pathway that connect different parts of the neighbourhood and act as a flexible springboard from which further interventions can be launched. In addition to sites along the pathway and Pier Road, we envision aesthetic and commercial projects on the waterfront. Together, these proposals seek to transform North Woolwich into a living, thriving community.

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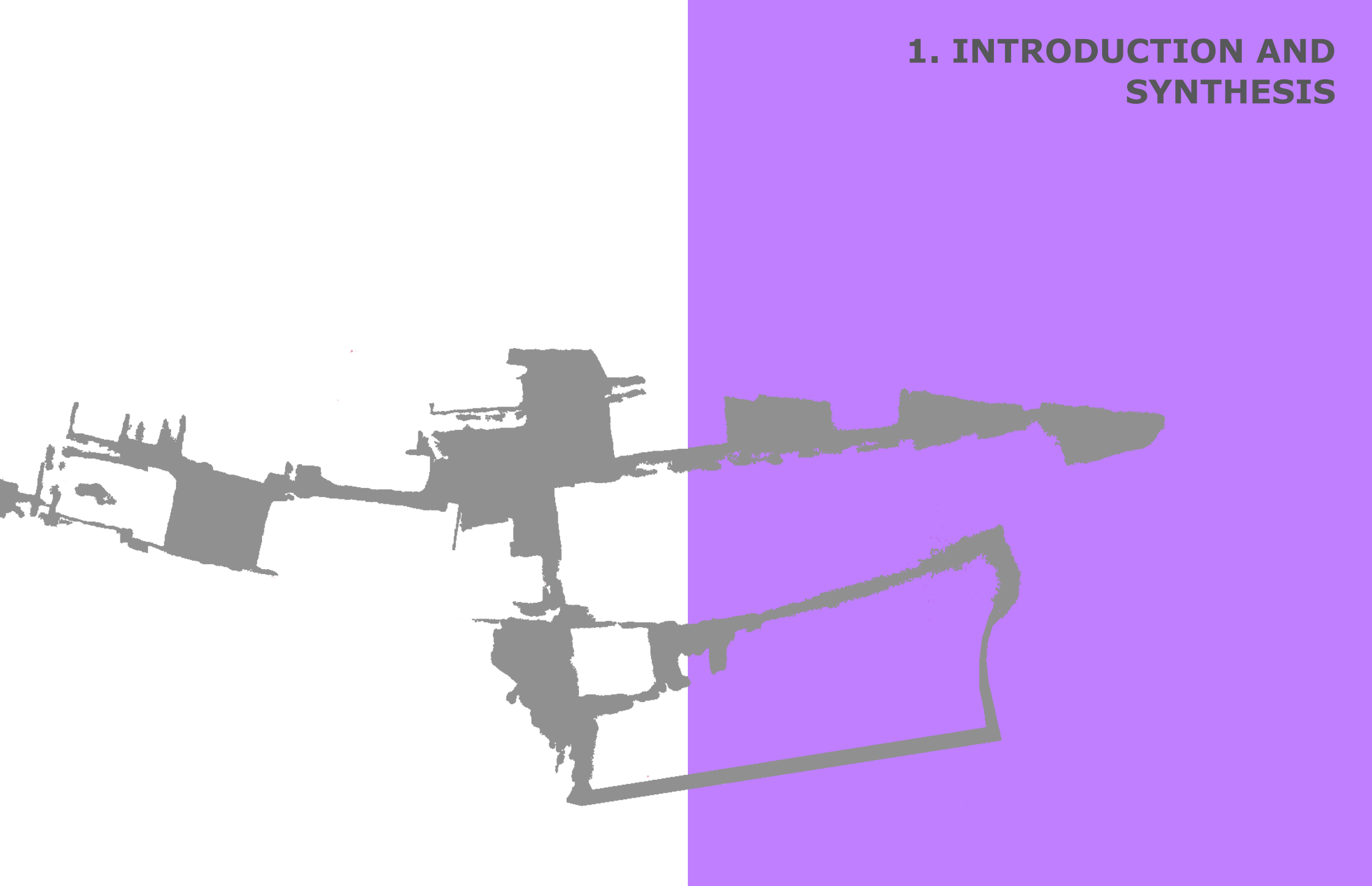
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1. INTRODUCTION AND SYNTHESIS



1.1. Synthesis of the urban analysis

North Woolwich is an enclaved neighbourhood under threat of turning into a void. With the closure of the London docks in 1981, it lost crucial connections to wider geographic scales and spheres of activity; more than that, the neighbourhood lost the intense industrial rhythms that pumped life and sustenance into its streets and working-class homes. Although active industrial clusters remain – and the Tate & Lyle factory remains a landmark – the links between industry and neighbourhood have been severely diminished, not least since construction for Crossrail has removed Factory Road from view. As a result, industry now acts as a barrier, scrambling legibility in the western part (coming from Silvertown) and reinforcing the feeling of enclosure, through its mismatched scale, on the riverside.

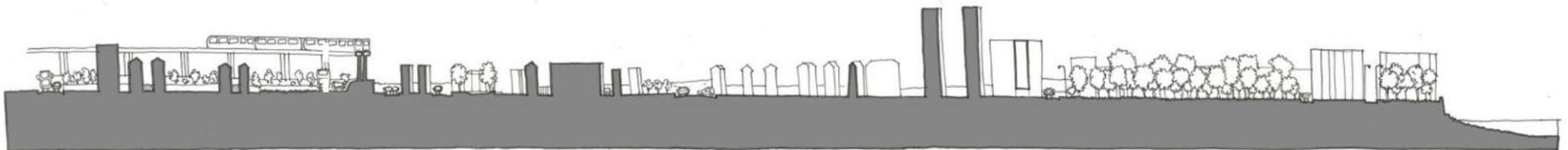
Indeed the effects of de-industrialisation are felt both socially and spatially. The fact that jobs are no longer localised would not be so significant were the neighbourhood more open to the surrounding area. Similarly, the mobility constraints recently mitigated by the opening of the DLR in 2005 would not be so urgent were the population not affected by unemployment and relative deprivation. Many residents did not choose to live in North Woolwich, being council tenants with few

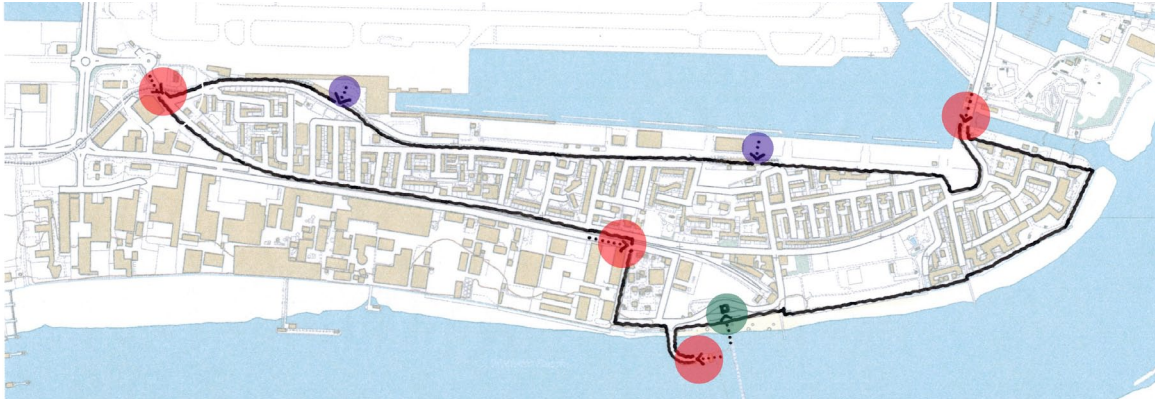
options around London. In addition, many newly arrived residents, particularly since the late 1990s, have been migrants of diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds – which in itself is not unusual, but means that new approaches to culture-based place-making have to be developed. Finally, physical and perceived enclosure have had adverse effects on the North Woolwich's commercial landscape and usage of public space.

Efforts at regeneration so far have not demonstrated an ability to connect North Woolwich to wider dynamics in the Royal Docks. Nowhere is this more visible than at the level of transport infrastructure, which for all the possibilities it has recently opened does not integrate well with the surrounding environment, nor connect to 'softer', smaller-scale mobilities; in the worst of cases, it acts as a further segmenting force cutting through the area, adding to enclosure without contributing to North Woolwich's identity, and threatening to turn it into a dormitory outpost. Efforts focused on Royal Victoria Garden have been welcomed by residents, but run the risk of further splitting the neighbourhood between east and west.

North Woolwich retains many opportunities for renewed attempts at place-making, and some suc-

cessful initiatives – carried by neighbourhood institutions like the Asta Centre – can be looked to as examples to develop further. A guiding argument of this brief is that the neighbourhood's residents are its biggest potential resource, though its rich history, its multicultural present, its proximity to water, and the availability of leftover or under-used space also provide key resources for strategic intervention. If North Woolwich is to play its full part in the renewal of the Royal Docks, intervention must take place from within: only with a strengthened identity and sense of place can the neighbourhood negotiate new metropolitan connections on equal terms.





> Map 1: Impermeable barriers and limited entry points



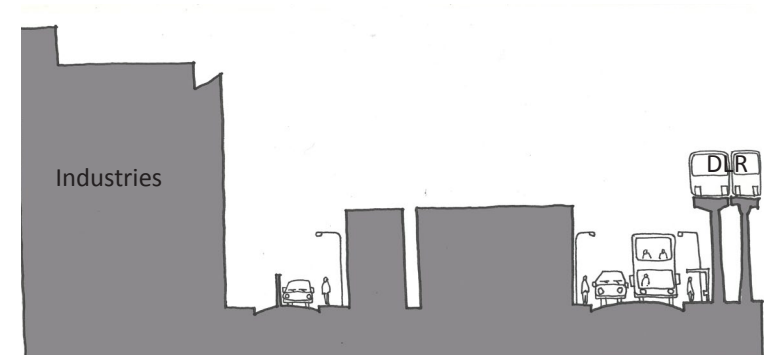
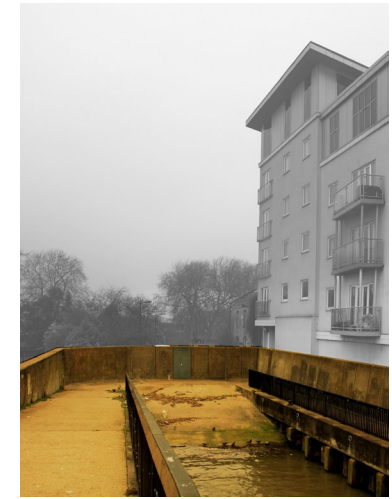
> Map 2: Economic activities



> Map 3: Paths, nodes, landmarks



> Leftover spaces of North Woolwich



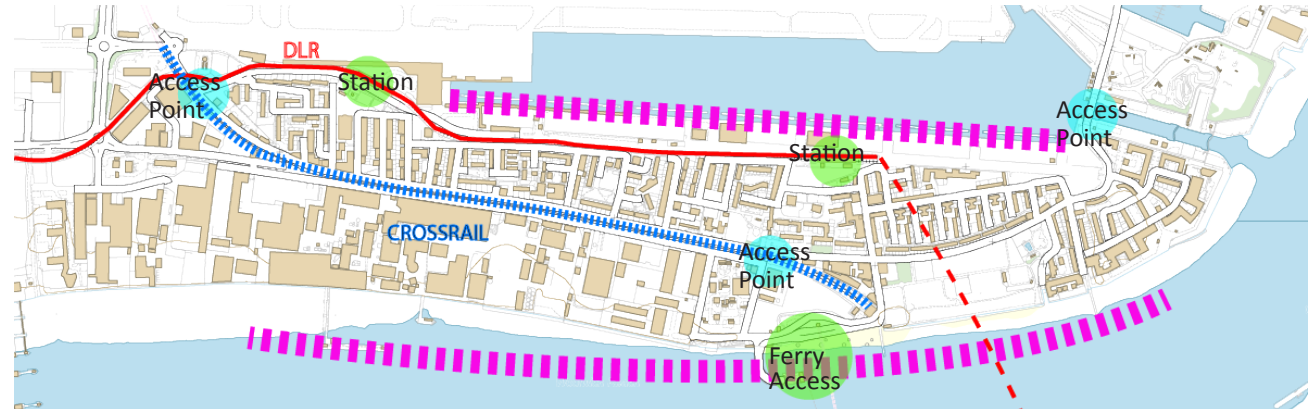
> Figure 1: Landscape-dominating infrastructure

1.2. SWOT Analysis

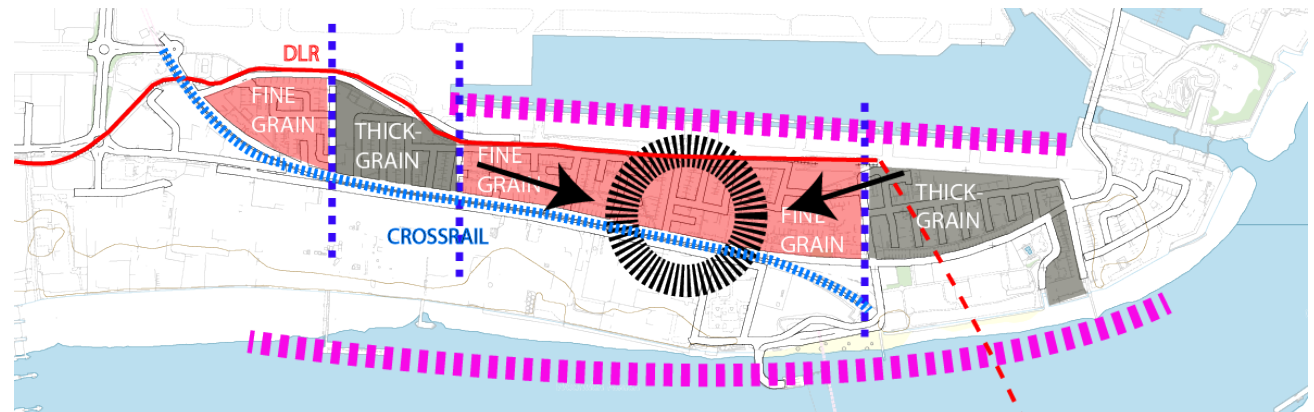
STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<p>Location next to the Thames</p> <p>Good public transport connections to London (DLR) and the rest of the world (City Airport)</p> <p>Sport infrastructures</p> <p>The Royal Victoria Garden</p>	<p>Impermeable barriers and few entry points</p> <p>Mismatch of mobility connections</p> <p>Thick grain on the West and East edges of the neighbourhood, the area is 'sinking in' with no joining together of the two edges and a lack of centrality</p> <p>Lack of sense of place</p> <p>Lack of legibility</p> <p>Safety concerns</p> <p>Scattered business/retail development</p>
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<p>Empty buildings and leftover spaces</p> <p>Historic background</p> <p>Diversity and multiculturalism</p> <p>Distinctive and localized mobility infrastructures (foot tunnel and ferry)</p> <p>Water front</p> <p>The hidden paths and green spaces to be connected</p> <p>Olympic legacy: North Woolwich belongs to the 'arc of opportunity' defined by Newham and is an integrated part of the Royal Docks. The associated regeneration schemes are an opportunity to give a new impulse to improve North Woolwich</p>	<p>As North Woolwich becomes more and more enclosed, risk of being transformed into a void</p> <p>Crossrail fragmenting even more the space</p> <p>A multiplication of identity-less new developments</p> <p>Olympic legacy and the redevelopment of the Royal Docks: whom will the regeneration process really benefit?</p> <p>Gentrification in the long term</p>

Four main observations can be drawn from the SWOT analysis:

- Physical constraints due to the infrastructures are major but are strengths as well as weaknesses;
- Most of the weaknesses are intertwined;
- The context of the Olympic legacy and the redevelopment of the Royal Docks is an opportunity but could generate tensions between attracting businesses and addressing the needs of the local communities;
- North Woolwich's opportunities lie mainly in the area itself.



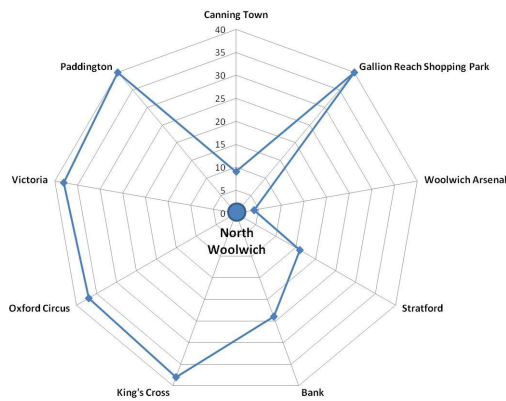
> Map 4: Constraints - North Woolwich, an enclosed area



> Map 5: Constraints - North Woolwich, sunk between two centres



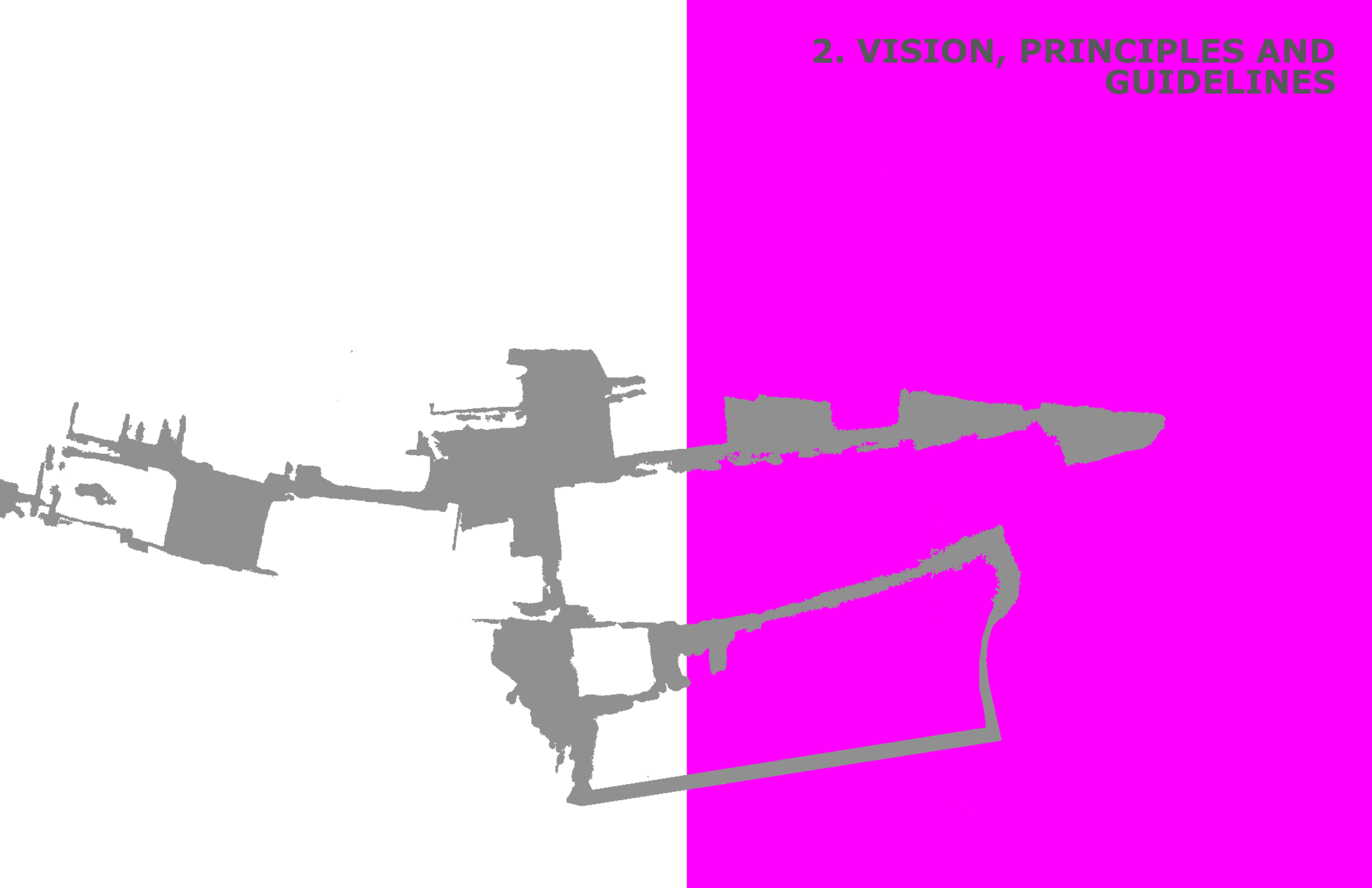
> Map 6: Opportunities for North Woolwich



> Figure 2: Time to travel from King George V station to main nodes in London (calculated using TfL journey planner and Google maps). Going to the Gallions Reach Shopping Centre can prove as long as going to Paddington, although it is less than 2 miles from North Woolwich



2. VISION, PRINCIPLES AND GUIDELINES



2.1. A vision for North Woolwich

We envision North Woolwich not only as a place to live, but as a living, thriving place.

There is room for North Woolwich's diverse communities to further assert a shared local identity, which acknowledges the neighbourhood's unique past and connects it to its present – to the people who live and work in the area, whose cultures and aspirations constitute its current landscape.

By harnessing its internal social and spatial opportunities, North Woolwich can transcend the constraints that hinder it from playing a more integral role in the transformation of the Royal Docks. We believe North Woolwich can provide heightened interaction on a variety of scales, foster stimulating experiences in its streets and on its waterfront, and offer an alternative template for urban regeneration.



2.2. Principles and guidelines

This alternative template rests on three overarching and interconnected design principles: making room for a firmly established neighbourhood identity, breaking the (social and spatial) feeling of enclosure, and connecting the neighbourhood – both within its boundaries and to larger networks.

Connecting the neighbourhood



Breaking the feeling of enclosure



Making room for developing an identity





barriers throughout the area. We aim to **better-connect the neighbourhood**.

Connections are not just spatial, but also economic. **New and distinctive economic connections** can provide North Woolwich with better access to a variety of products and services, as well as jobs and training for its diverse population. They can also make North Woolwich a destination for visitors from Woolwich, the Royal Docks and beyond.



Fluidity is key to the development of North Woolwich, and derives from enhanced connectivity at several levels.

The **points of entry** must be improved as much as possible and following input from both residents and potential visitors. The two DLR stations must be better integrated with the neighbourhood's architecture and social habits, as well as with softer and smaller-scale mobility networks.

Internal mobility is no less important in a neighbourhood whose two mixed-use centres (in West Silvertown and around Pier Road) feel disconnected – due in part to differences in urban grain, to North Woolwich's elongated shape, and to various

1

Connecting the neighbourhood

Improving the points of entry of the neighbourhood

Connect local centres and improve transitional areas

Launching new economic connections

2

Breaking the feeling of enclosure

Opening up to the water

Altering the perception of the walls

Enhancing the navigability of the area

The fact that North Woolwich is at the water's edge, and yet sectioned off from both river and dock, plays a large role in the feeling of enclosure one experiences in the neighbourhood. A key guideline for this proposal concerns **opening up to the water**, which can involve several processes. Re-designing the waterfront, ensuring that inner pathways lead easily from the river (east) to the dock in Silvertown (west) and Gallions' Reach (north-east), and integrating water as a design/architectural element in later projects are some of the ways this guideline can be manifested.

Walls and barriers are dominant features in North Woolwich, and although they can contribute to a feeling of shelter and safety, they often participate in enclosure. Where they are identified as problematic by residents, yet cannot easily be removed, **the perception of walls can be altered** in a variety of ways.

Furthermore, **enhanced navigability in the area**, signaling new and established landmarks to residents and helping visitors find their way to the neighbourhood's attractive but 'hidden' pedestrian pathway, will contribute to making North Woolwich feel more 'fluid', thereby facilitating mobility both at a perceptual and spatial level.



3

Making room for developing an identity

Neighbourhood identity is fostered by **ensuring the community is implicated in place-making processes**. Community involvement will take place in an incremental way.

Identity can also rely on **distinctive visual components** which are conceived here both as outcomes of community participation and ‘triggers’ for engagement.

In a similar way, **creative public uses of North Woolwich’s history** as a global industrial portal will turn the past into an interactive and informative arena.

Engage the community in place making

Using visual components

Generating public uses of North Woolwich’s history



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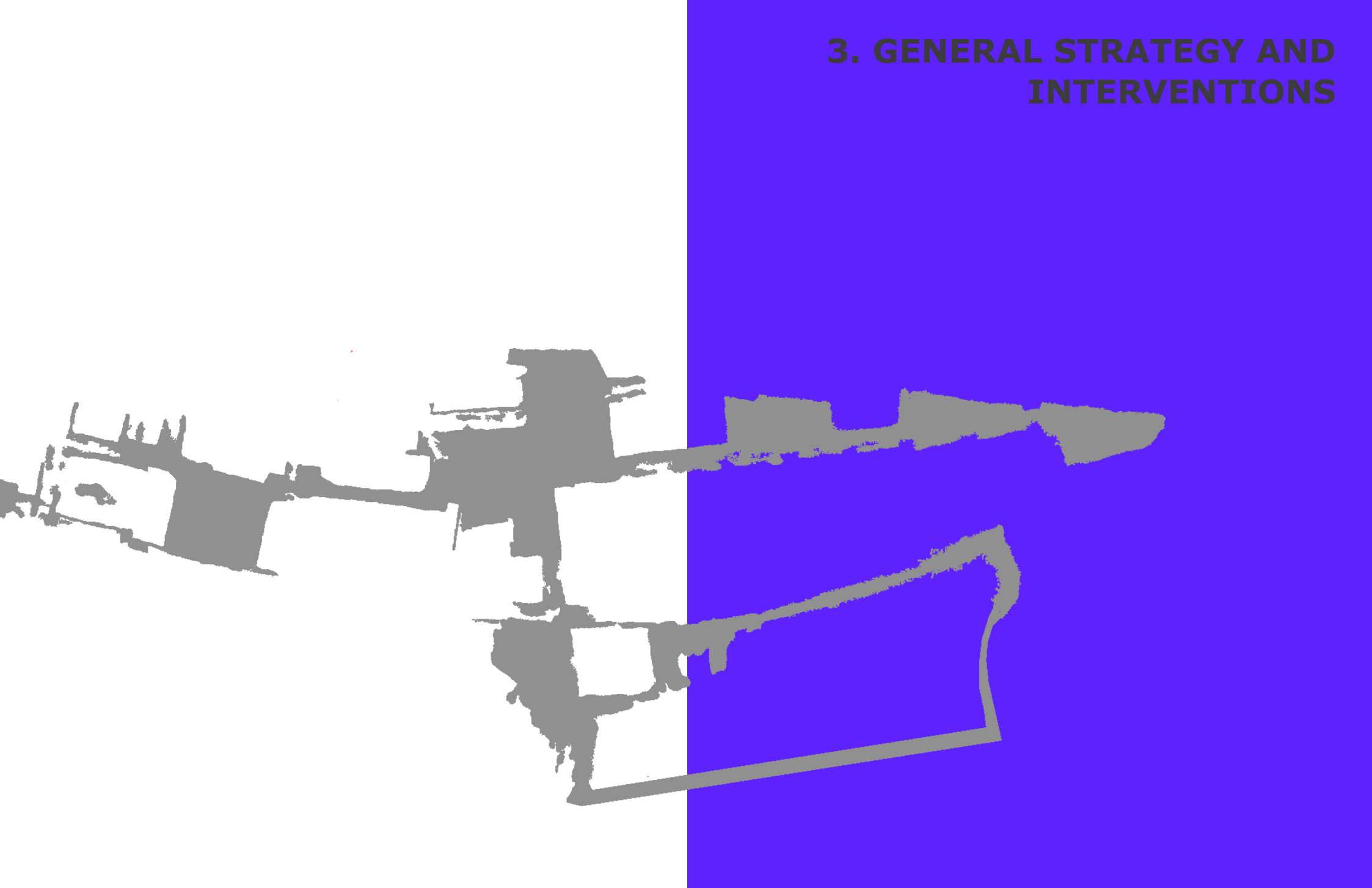
Involving the community in place-making process

Using visual components

Generating public uses of North Woolwich's history



3. GENERAL STRATEGY AND INTERVENTIONS



3.1. General strategy

Our overall spatial strategy for intervention in North Woolwich begins with a coloured pathway. The pathway is meant to generate new perceptions of public space, better connectivity and heightened engagement with the built environment. It is seen as a flexible yet strong signal to launch holistic neighbourhood design following North Woolwich's west-to-east axis, intersecting the existing north-south axis on Pier Road. As partnerships are formed and investments secured, the pathway will see new commerces, public art sites and waterfront amenities burgeon from its branches. In the process, it will become a symbol of North Woolwich's solidified neighbourhood identity.

Our design intervention in North Woolwich must reach beyond space, and incorporate the social fabric as well.

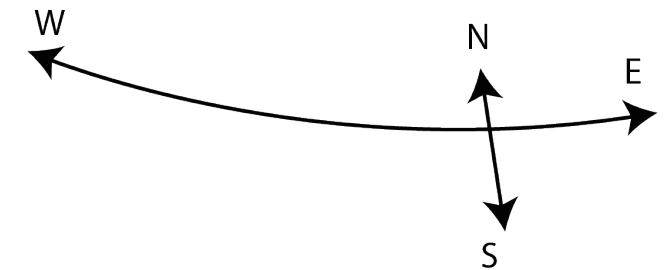
COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

North Woolwich is a neighbourhood lacking vitality and a fully coherent local identity. Its population is diverse: approximately 30% of the population arrived in the country during the last ten years. The neighbourhood's economic and ethnic composition varies from street to street. To realise our vision of North Woolwich as a place to live and a living, thriving place, residents and local employees will be at the heart of our design intervention.

Community participation will begin in the earliest stages, parallel to the creation of the coloured

pathway. One of the first participatory projects is based on Candy Chang's "I Wish This Was..." project, in which local people, through attached stickers, decide on new uses for abandoned buildings. Through similar methods, not only will the sense of place be reinforced on a large scale, but the end-users' participation in the intervention will ensure greater use and ownership of the outcome of the redesigned buildings.

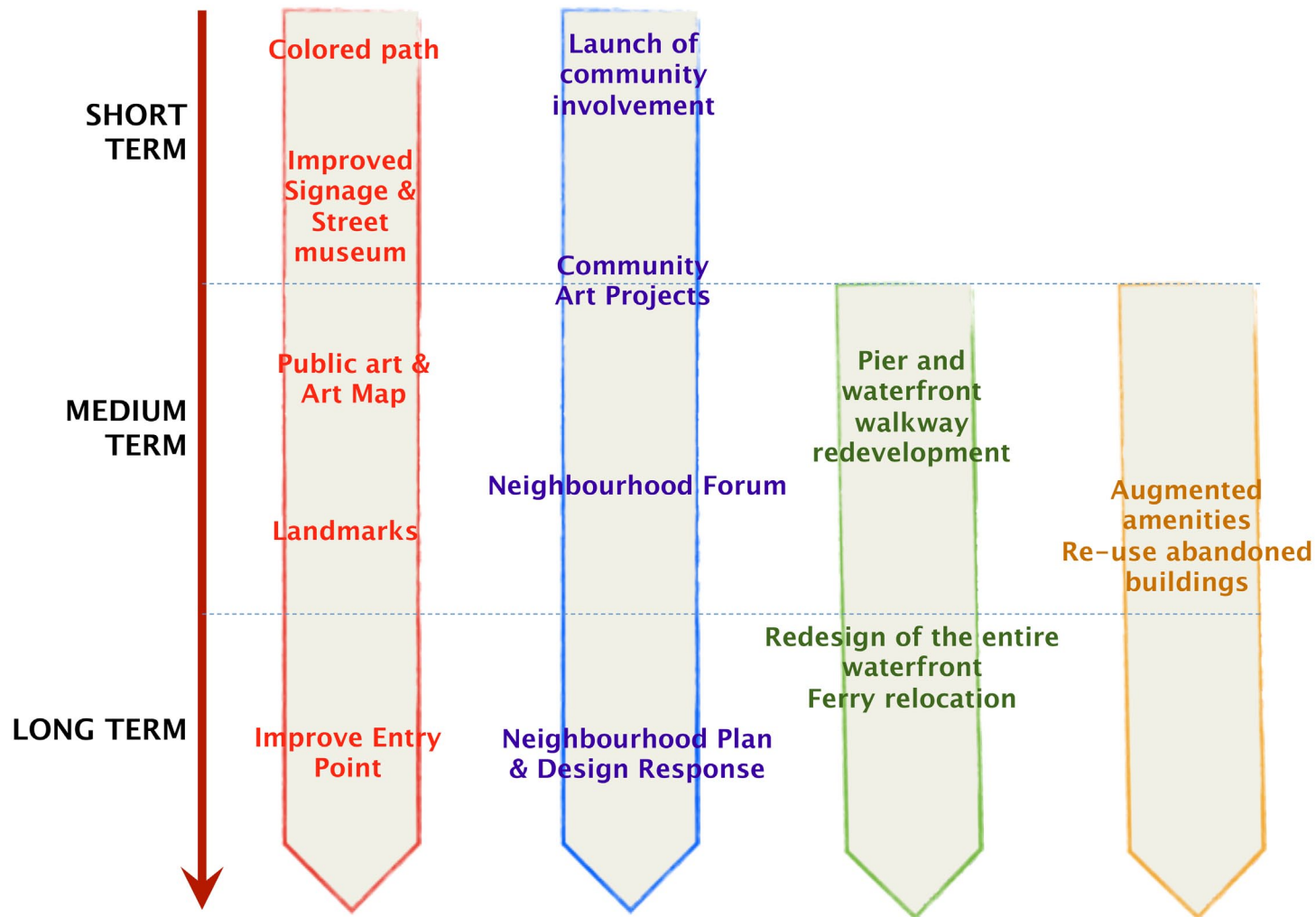
Longer term we propose the establishment of a neighbourhood forum, which would sustain participation and establish a network between existing community centres. Keeping with the current localism agenda expounded in national and London planning and policy, the neighbourhood forum aims to sustain widespread community involvement over time, leading to a collectively recognized neighbourhood identity and locally produced planning and design frameworks. As part of policy requirements, it would also offer opportunities for funding of community-led projects.



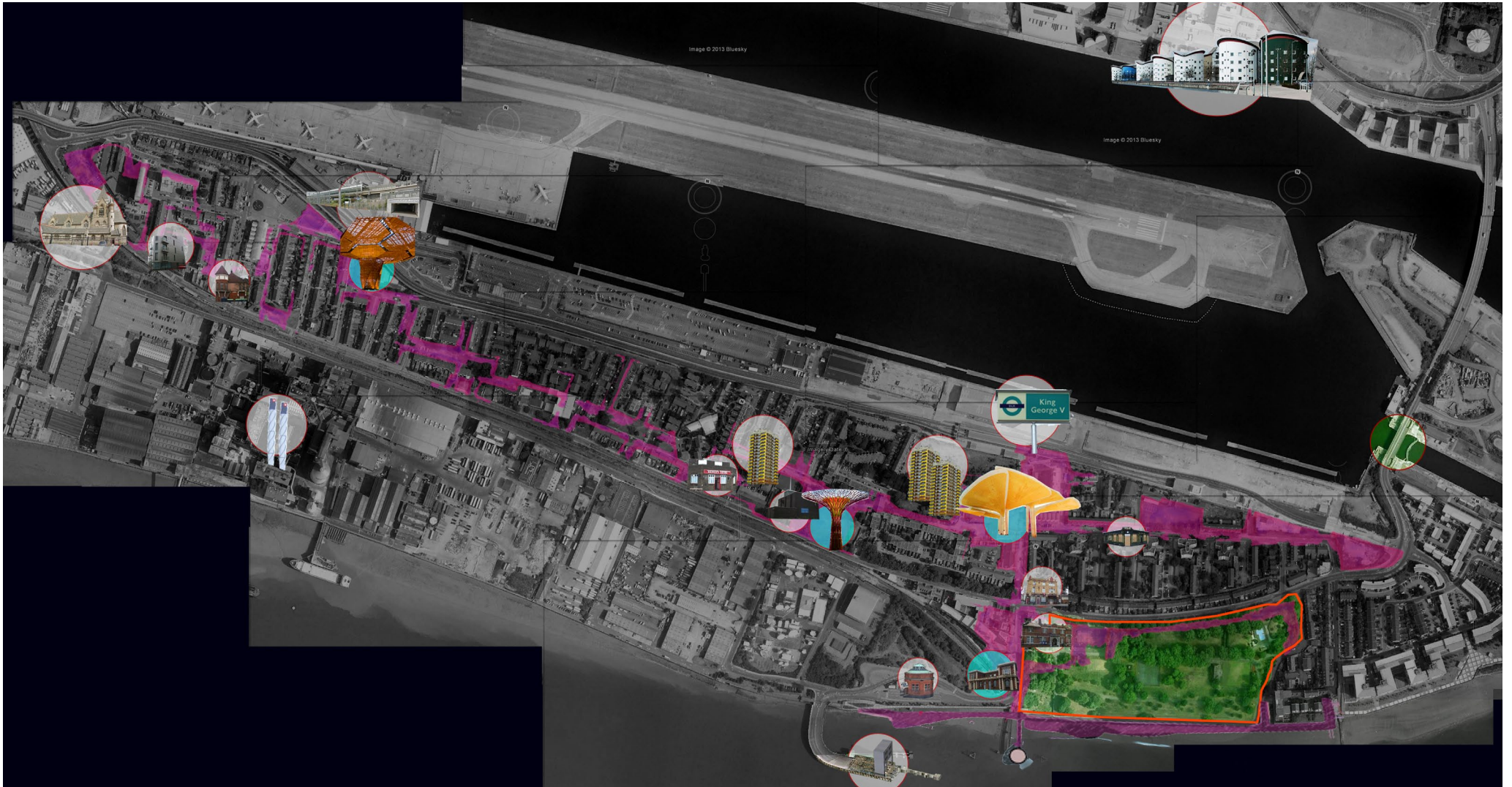
> Figure 3: The two axes of North Woolwich's redevelopment



> Visual 1: Expressing hopes for abandoned structures

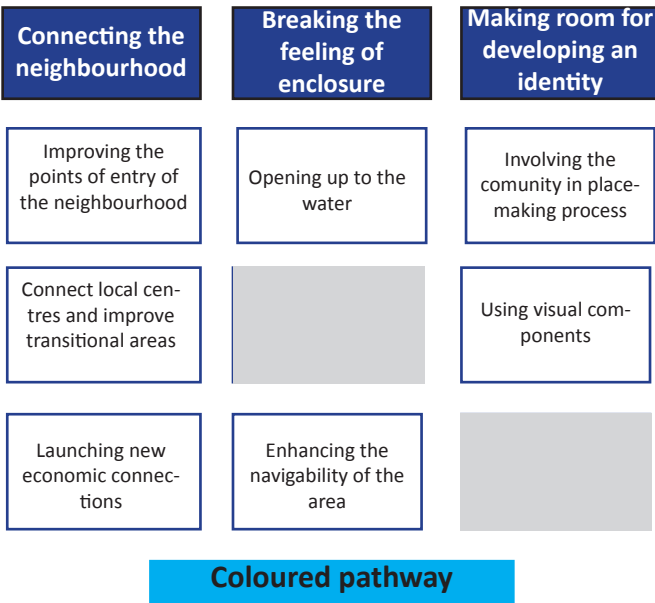


> Figure 4: Timeline of redevelopment interventions



> Map 7: Intervention Map

3.2. Interventions



COLOURED PATHWAY

We designed this intervention as a bold visual statement of North Woolwich's east to west axis, emphasizing connectivity in a space that currently feels disconnected. It is designed to be interacted with on a daily basis by residents, but will also serve as an attraction. For that purpose, the pathway will invite visitors to transverse the thresholds from each point of entry. In addition, the pathway will act as a 'backbone' from which further place-making processes will branch off.

The aesthetic process will involve the transformation of the numerous walls and barriers along the pathway and installation of street furniture to be selected, organized and executed by the community. We hope, for example, that the primary school and youth centres will be involved in several of these projects.

Clear signage, identifying local landmarks and destination points will make the space navigable. Drawn by the novelty of the design, the pathway will invite residents to become more connected to – and more familiar with – lesser known areas of North Woolwich. It will open up spaces for local residents to meet and interact with those they have never met.

In the long term, we envision the creation of a set of three landmark 'towers' in the area to serve as multi-purpose meeting points and internal points of reference. Currently, the landmarks identified within North Woolwich consist mainly of indus-

trial structures and tall social housing towers. Inspired by Grant Associates' Garden Bay project, we hope to create new landmarks that combine the historic industrial character of North Woolwich, i.e. steel and cement structures-with the organic and natural elements of the neighbourhood. The exact nature and function of these landmarks will ultimately be defined by the community.



> Landmarks in Singapore (Grant Associates' Garden Bay project)



> Superkilen, Copenhagen For the Danish urban designer, Jan Gehl (1987), the right approach for designing city space is "first life, then spaces, then buildings - the other way around never works"



> Map 8: Enhanced green spaces



> Map 9: Open spaces & Landmarks



> Visual 2: Landmark
As Lynch (1960) defines landmarks, they are reference-points, visible from any part of the neighbourhood, and familiar to the community.

1

> Map 8: Enhanced green spaces

Extension of the green spaces along the west-east axis is designed to more evenly spread out the community's green spaces that are now highly concentrated in the eastern part of the neighborhood.

> Map 9: Open spaces

The map below shows the areas with potential for open spaces. At the moment the existing open spaces are disconnected and under-utilized by people in the community. Our approach aims to "rediscover" these open spaces and link them with pedestrian connections.



2

> Visual 3: Landmark



> Map 10: Colored Path

Residential communities are currently characterized by small, broken-up green spaces that are disconnected from the larger public green spaces in the community. The map above shows how the coloured pathway creates and enhances linkages between these green spaces. Lynch (1960) defines path as the channel along which the observer customarily, occasionally, or potentially moves. People observe the neighborhood while moving through it, and along these paths environmental elements are arranged and related.



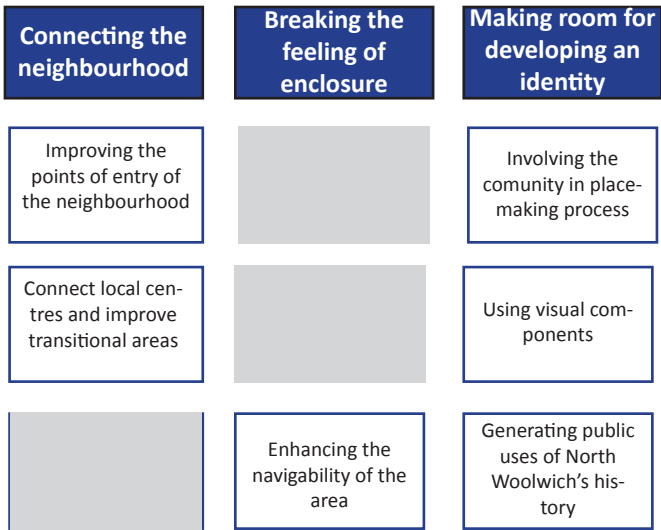
> Visual 4: Vision of the colored path



> Visual 5: Vision of the colored path



> Visual 6: Vision of the colored path



Museum in the streets and Signage

MUSEUM IN THE STREETS

This low-cost, low-maintenance intervention would serve to highlight North Woolwich's history and invite both its current residents and people from outside the area to explore the space. These panels would intersect with the coloured path at different spots adding historical points of interest to the pathway to encourage its use.

The panels are intended to "foster a sense of historical identity, educate, [and] encourage preservation of historic sites..." (Museum in the Streets website, undated). Additionally, the panels would act as a 'teaser,' enticing visitors with the local history and encouraging them to explore it more in depth through The Newham Story and/or The East London History Society websites and/or at The Museum of London Docklands.

Residents who once passed by historically significant spaces without notice it will now be alerted to its presence and given the opportunity to stop and read about its history on one of the panels. Individuals flying out of the airport that have time before their flight could pick up a brochure highlighting the Museum in the Streets walking tour of North Woolwich to do before their flight. Since it is a self-paced tour and you can see as much or as little as you like it would work with whatever amount of time the individual had.

Suggested actors working on this intervention would include the Newham Council, The East London History Society and The Museum of London Docklands.



> Map 11: Path of the museum in the streets. Panels erected at historic sites throughout North Woolwich would display information about the area's history with accompanying pictures.



> Visual 7: VSION of the museum in the streets



> Visual 8: Vision of the museum in the streets - people reading the panel
Panels erected at historic sites throughout North Woolwich would display information about the area's history with accompanying pictures.

SIGNAGE

At this time there are no signs denoting that you are about to cross the threshold into North Woolwich. From the DLR one either enters at the London City Airport or King George V station, nothing noting North Woolwich.

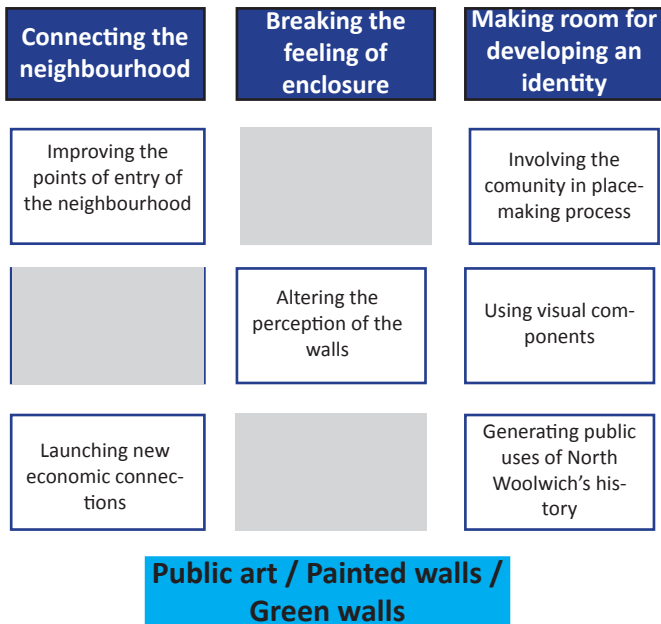
A welcome sign with the name of the particular community gives the space a spatial identity - effectively putting North Woolwich back on the map. Welcome to North Woolwich signs would be placed in strategic spots throughout the community (by the DLR stations, the ferry crossing, and also where the Capital Ring enters the community).



> Visual 9: Arriving to North Woolwich from the airport



> Visual 10: Arriving to North Woolwich from King George DLR station



cooperation with local artists and/or art students from the University of East London. These art projects will provide points of interest along the colored pathway.

Light, water and living walls are key elements in making North Woolwich's landscape "softer". The vertical garden walls of the Caixa Forum in Barcelona inspired us to "dress" walls along the streets as a way to create a more pleasant environment. Inspired by the Nodal Water Garden project, a solar powered light sculpture by Zischke, we aim to enhance North Woolwich's existing landmarks, such as its riverfront or the old industrial buildings, by using light-art. Water features within the cityscape can help regenerate the public spaces and strengthen North Woolwich's waterfront character.



> Candy Chang's Before I Die Wall



> Luke Jerram's Play Me, I'm Yours project



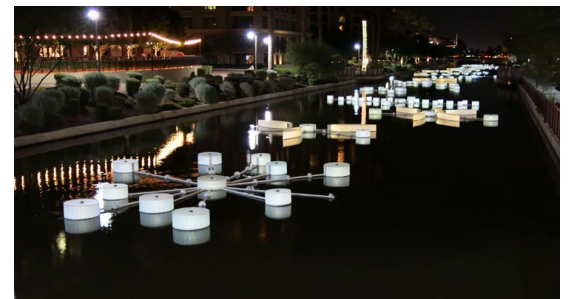
> Caixa Forum



> Tagtool iPad - people's drawing projected on an industrial building



> Projection on the wall of a building in New Cross, London (Artmongers)



> Zischke's Nodal Water Garden project

PUBLIC ART | PAINTED WALLS | GREEN WALLS

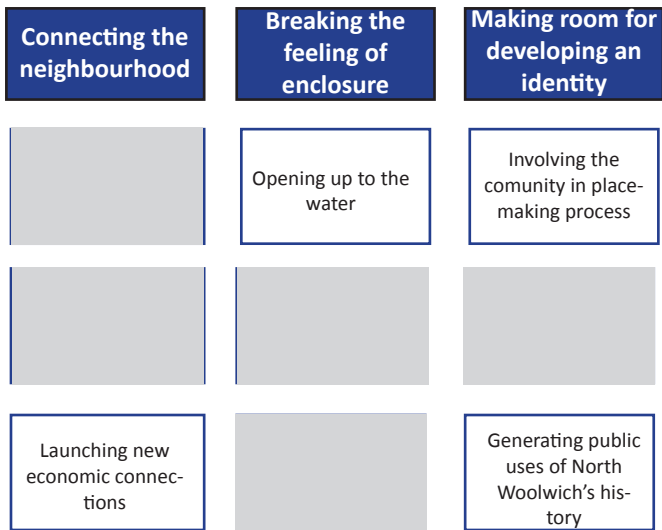
The purpose of public art is not only to enrich North Woolwich's landscape, but to include locals in this aesthetic endeavour. Inspired by projects such as the Tagtool iPad app, which turns walls into a virtual canvas, the "Play Me, I'm Yours" artwork by Luke Jerram and Candy Chang's "Before I Die" wall, we hope to encourage inhabitants to interact with each other and with their spatial and built environment. Abandoned buildings' facades and high walls along the streets can be redefined by the local residents who will have the opportunity to experiment and make meaningful connections with their built environment. Temporary or permanent art projects could be implemented in



> Visual 11: Vision of the street with public art interventions



> Visual 12: Vision of the pedestrian path and green walls



Community kitchen in the old railway station

COMMUNITY KITCHEN IN THE OLD RAILWAY STATION

The North Woolwich Railway Station, built in 1847, is a local landmark. Its notable architecture and waterfront location make it an attractive venue from which to launch new economic connections while preserving a significant vestige of the neighbourhood's 19th century identity.

Although the station has space to accommodate multiple uses, food – with its social and commercial potential – can provide a starting-point to revitalise the building. Food, linked to culture, is easily shared; it involves a variety of actors and skills in its chain of production, preparation and sale – three stages at which the North Woolwich community can play a leading role. If the initial project is successful, this chain can

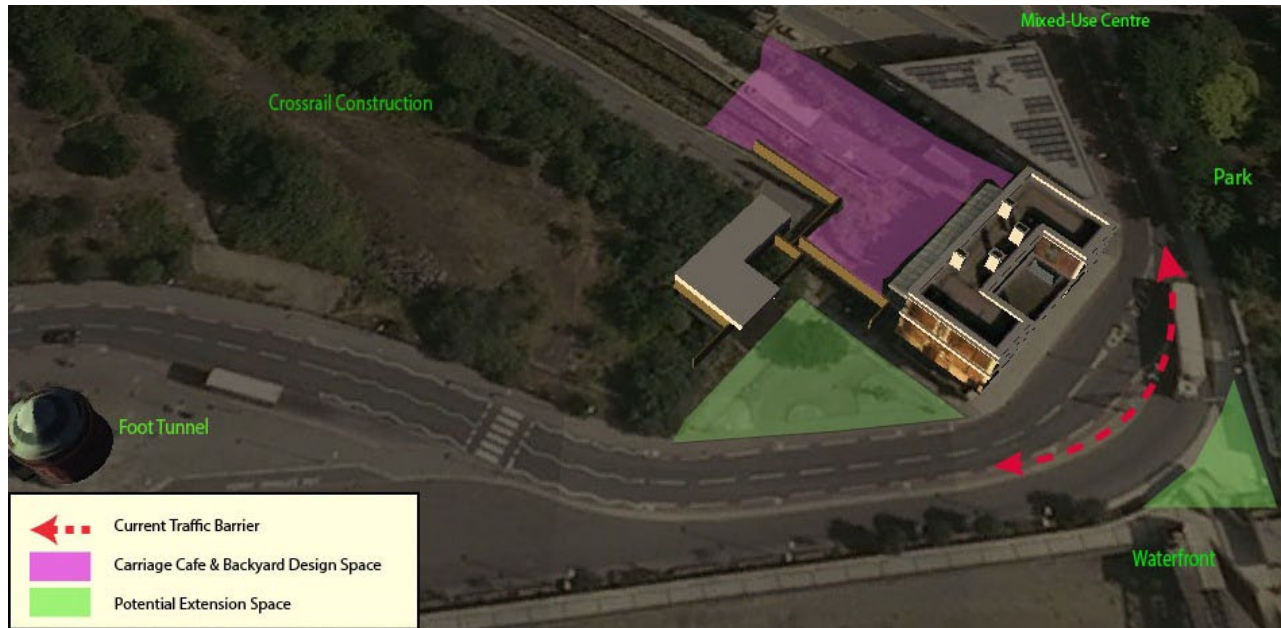
also grow in economic importance (for example, partnering with Tate and Lyle to offer facilities for food-production start-ups).

We believe that, with support from Newham Council and other relevant partners, the North Woolwich Railway Kitchen & Café can function as a viable business on a 'social enterprise' model. To ensure success and attractiveness to a wide audience, the enterprise will involve organisations with proven expertise. Additionally, the station can be re-designed in partnership with UEL's School of Architecture, integrating community input.

The development will remain geared towards the local community. The Café will use locally produced food from the community greenhouse, which will bring different community groups together to grow produce from around the world. The Railway Kitchen & Café will train and employ local residents, with special emphasis on youth groups. Its menu will celebrate North Woolwich's multiculturalism. The Kitchen will cater community events as well as allow residents to use its facilities. Finally, it will develop mobile extensions – such as a bicycle food cart and food truck – to reach different parts of the neighbourhood and promote North Woolwich's identity further out in Greenwich and Newham.



> Visual 13: Community kitchen and cafe



> Map 12: Overview of the old railway station showing constraints and connections



> Visual 14: Cafe Carriage



> Visual 15: Old Railway Museum
 Currently the building is in disrepair and there is discussion of sale in the near future (as well as uncertainty about the extension of Crossrail work). Immediate re-development is further constrained by the state of the waterfront, and by heavy traffic to and from Woolwich Ferry. However, the waterfront intervention and the ferry's relocation will turn Pier Road into a pedestrian street. This will allow the café to prosper as a community-oriented business.

Connecting the neighbourhood

Improving the points of entry of the neighbourhood

Connect local centres and improve transitional areas

Launching new economic connections

Breaking the feeling of enclosure

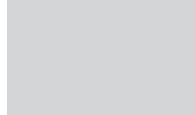
Opening up to the water

Altering the perception of the walls

Enhancing the navigability of the area

Making room for developing an identity

Involving the community in place-making process



Redevelopment of the waterfront

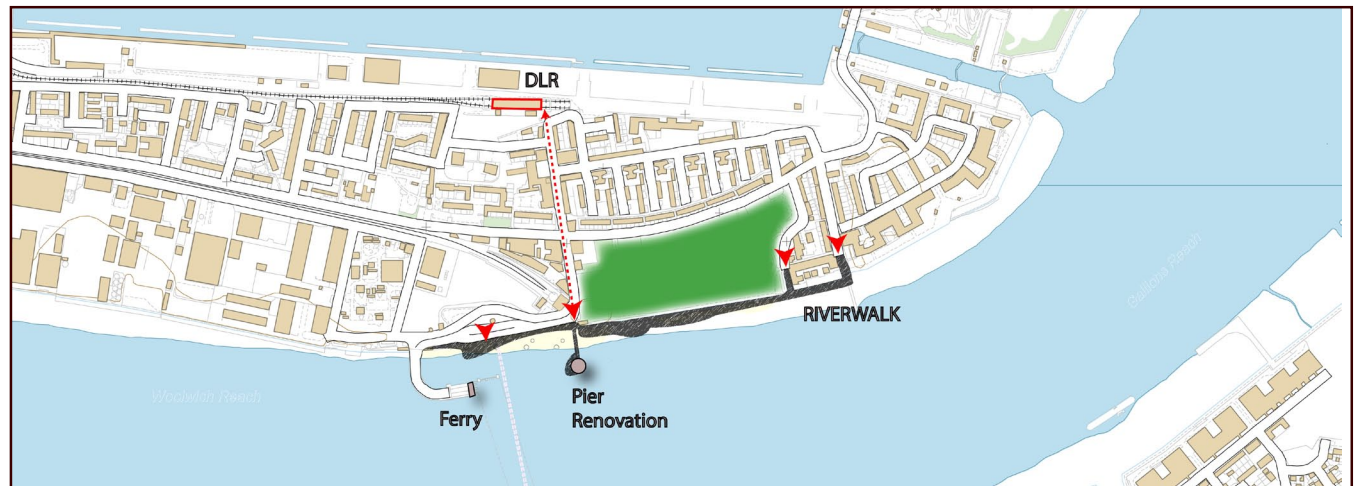
REDEVELOPMENT OF THE WATERFRONT

As part of the Royal Docks, North Woolwich’s history is tightly connected to the River Thames. Today the area is turning its back on the river, partly because of anti-flood infrastructure. We want to reconnect North Woolwich with the river so that it can once again function as a local landmark. A walkway exists along the river, as part of the Capital Ring, yet it is narrow, fragmented, hardly legible at points and not welcoming. We propose to enlarge the walkway, to improve its landscape and to provide benches facing the river. In this way the river and the neighbourhood are both promoted and enhanced and the feeling of enclosure is diminished.

The old North Woolwich pier is a landmark of the river walk. Currently, it is a place where individuals vent their frustration over the regeneration efforts undertaken by Newham Council. Closed and abandoned for years, as the graffiti reminds us, the pier

is an opportunity to intervene on a symbolic element of the ‘urban decay’ of North Woolwich. In the short term, the pier can be turned into a light installation. Further renovation, such as a long promenade with benches, can provide a pleasant public space where the community can enjoy the river, especially given its southerly orientation. It holds promise for future investments, possibly a commercial venture such as a café. These renovations will strengthen the north/south axis and incite people, residents and visitors alike, to come enjoy the waterfront. Additionally, by making the waterfront more attractive, it will rejuvenate commercial activity along Pier Road.

The improvement of the waterfront will involve Newham Council, the Environment Agency and the local community.



> Map 13: River walk



> Visual 16: River walk



> Visual 17: Pier by night

Our initial analysis of North Woolwich revealed a neighbourhood constrained by major transport and industrial infrastructures and lack of legibility and connection, which has contributed to scattered business and retail development.

We envision holistic design interventions to transcend the enclosure, fragmented identity and disconnected mobility which is currently stifling North Woolwich's rebirth. These interventions, geared towards the redevelopment of North Woolwich, will build upon the strengths and opportunities in the area, namely the riverfront, the green spaces, the vacant buildings and the rich historical background. Drawing strength from within its current urban fabric, we conceive of a place that has a distinct identity which acknowledges its past and which is connected and accessible to the people who live in the area. Only a cohesive, socially and spatially articulated neighbourhood identity can make North Woolwich's surroundings more permeable, leading to an increase in its visibility, usage and inclusiveness.

Our spatial strategy begins with a coloured pathway that leads to a wide range of interventions branching off from it. The redevelopment involves a strong community participation, which will be implemented gradually, in particular through the creation of a neighbourhood forum.

The development brief considers not only the spatial elements but also the social dimension to provide opportunities for North Woolwich to transform into a socio-spatially integrated and economically active place to embrace and sustain a renewed dynamic.

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