

Anchoring the neighbourhood

North Woolwich Development Brief Creating a critical design response

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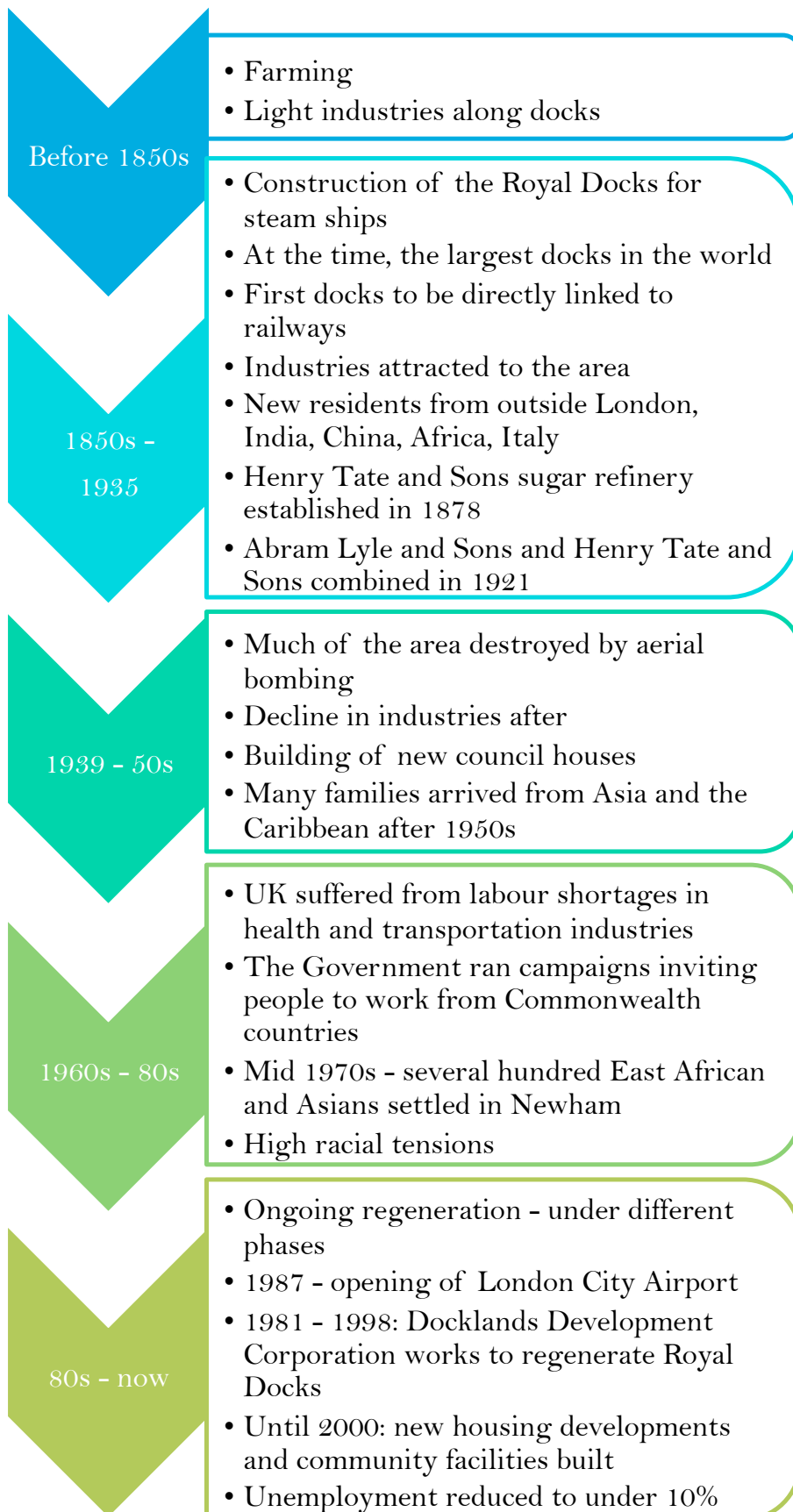
Introduction



Over the past decade, London has gone through accelerating regeneration, led by strong mayoral visions that harnessed the strength of a market forces and state power (Carmona, 2012). On a global level, theorists such as Saskia Sassen have questioned the process of regeneration in world cities, noting a trend of “speculative government” (Goldman, 2011). In the midst of all the regeneration taking place across London, a tight squeeze on borough budgets due to the global economic crisis has led to a reduction of services, disproportionately affecting those on low incomes. We might ask the questions, regeneration for whom? And, for what purpose? (Frediani, 2013)

This design response takes these questions into consideration as it questions the current regeneration plan envisioned by the Newham Borough for the Royal Docks, and proposes an alternative vision for North Woolwich in particular. The regeneration interventions proposed here are inspired by progressive and inclusionary concepts around community empowerment through urban design.

To inform the design response, a study of North Woolwich was conducted through different lenses of analysis in order to identify areas of strengths and weaknesses and subsequent opportunities these present. These opportunities are synthesised into two main goals, to be implemented through several interventions. These goals are driven by overarching guidelines and principles, based on an alternative vision to the one currently pursued by Newham Council. Carried out in the short, medium, and long term, the interventions will revitalise the economy and enhance the quality of public realm in North Woolwich, while maintaining the area’s industrial heritage. In this way, North Woolwich is anchored and stabilised, at once re-establishing its identity and reinventing itself.



Source: Group B, Cultures and Economies Report.

North Woolwich is a residential neighbourhood located on the north bank of the Thames, in the Royal Docks Ward of the east London Borough of Newham (see image 1.1). The area has a long industrial history based around maritime trade and related industries. As technology has changed over the years and England has experienced de-industrialisation in general, North Woolwich has lost much of its sustaining lifeblood. Many of the families formerly employed by the docks and factories have moved out of the area, while others, especially immigrants, have moved in. Large infrastructures, namely the City Airport to the north and the factories to the south have made North Woolwich an insular community; the more recent DLR line and Crossrail construction intensify this characteristic.

The Newham Council has identified The Royal Docks area, which includes North Woolwich, Royal Victoria, Royal Albert Basin, Royal Albert Docks, and West Silvertown, as a place for regeneration within a wider swath of eastern Newham, forming an “Arc of Opportunity” for redevelopment and investment. More widely, Newham has been experiencing increased urban renewal fuelled by the Olympic Games held in Stratford, Newham in 2012. North Woolwich has started to experience this desired trend with the new housing development on the east end over the Thames.



Image 1.1: North Woolwich is bordered by the City Airport and DLR line to the north and an industrial belt and Crossrail construction to the south. It is exposed to the River Thames through the Royal Victoria gardens on its southeast end, with access to a private riverfront walkway reinstated as part of the new residential development around Gallions Lock.

1.3 Newham's Regeneration Plan for North Woolwich

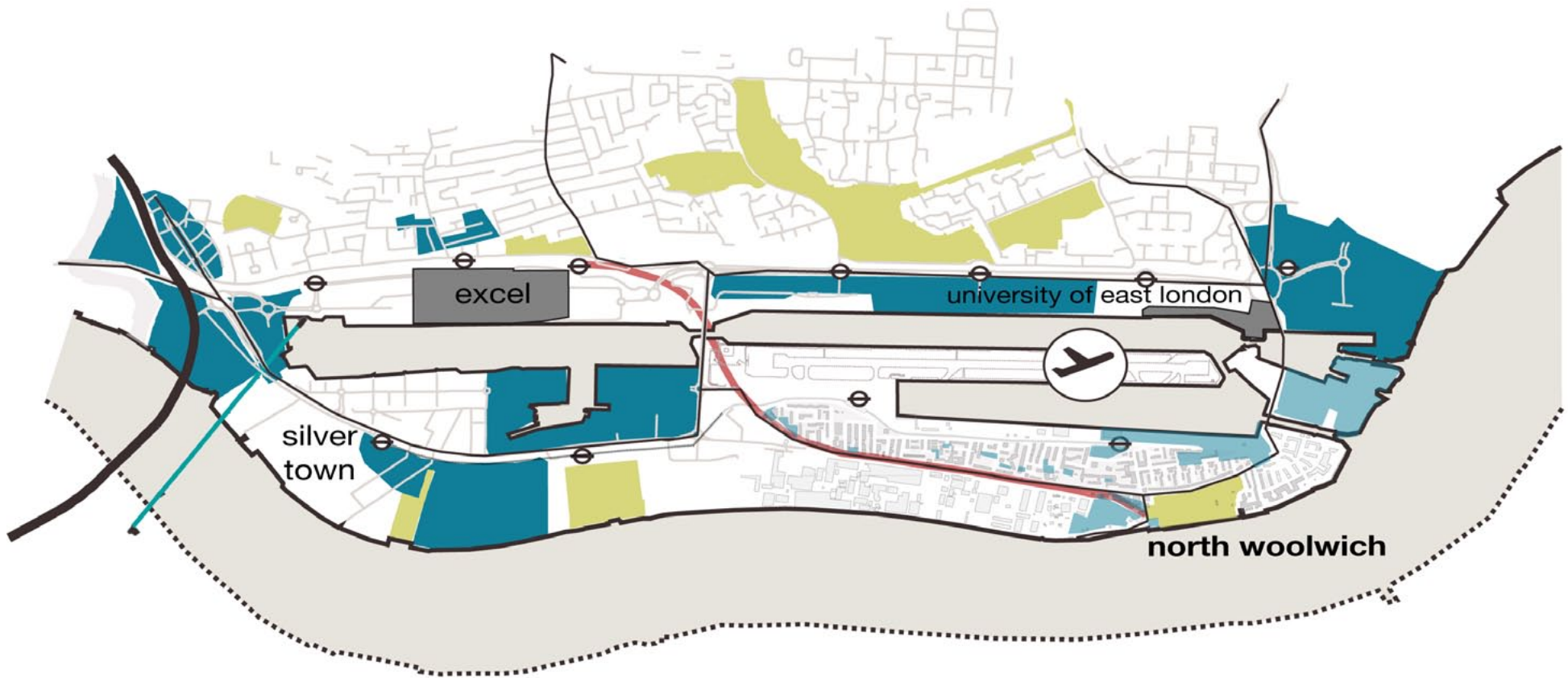


Source: Group C, Leftovers and Thresholds Report.
Grey swath highlighting the Arc of Opportunity

Newham's current plans for the Royal Docks call for building a legacy to the 2012 Olympic Games held in Stratford, whereby the socio-economically deprived borough reaches 'convergence' with the rest of London, offering its residents the same quality of opportunities as anywhere else in the city within 20 years' time. The strategy for reaching this ambitious goal is to attract investments in urban redevelopment projects, especially in the "Arc of Opportunity", for housing, tourism, and technology- and knowledge-based enterprise.

Using partnerships with Siemens, London City Airport, ExCeL, and University of East London, Newham plans to create a world-class business district in the Royal Docks that specialises in the knowledge, green, and technology economies. Newham also plans to build 2,500 new dwellings every year in the Arc of Opportunity to help meet London's housing shortage, but in contrast to the prevailing views about east London, make these homes a "place of choice to live." In addition, Newham envisions a strong weekend tourism economy drawn to the Royal Docks' privileged riverfront location and supported by high-quality urban design for the public realm and desirable restaurants, hotels, and leisure activities. It is expected that the benefits of renewing the Royal Docks will accrue to the wider Newham population in the form of new job opportunities and more amenities, and through more stable communities that are able to support vibrant town centres.

Newham has begun to set the stage for these expected new actors by starting to improve the landscaping in the Royal Docks as well as welcoming new transportation initiatives like the Crossrail, which will connect Central London and Newham with the southwest of England, and the DLR overground. As analysed in "Transportation and Infrastructures of (Im)mobility," these infrastructures have made access to the Royal Docks easier for people going to major centres such as the Airport or the ExCeL complex, but have done less for improving transportation options for local residents.



Legend

| | | | |
|--|------------------------|--|--------------------------------|
| | DLR | | |
| | crossrail intervention | | |
| | emirates airline | | Newham development sites |
| | London city airport | | Newham development sites in NW |
| | global connections | | green system |

Image 1.2: map shows strategic development sites in Royal Docks



Image 1.3: The riverfront walkway is privately owned by the housing development, and open to the public during certain hours. It exudes a feeling of exclusivity if one does not live in the development, which could deter other North Woolwich residents from using it.

Newham's vision for the Royal Docks is laudable because it addresses the need for more stable communities, a revitalised sense of place in areas that have experienced economic decline, and better jobs. However, there are several problematic implications of this vision. The vision is based on attracting new, high value investments rather than improving the base of the economies and communities that currently exist in the borough, and especially in the Royal Docks. Injections of national and international capital into the area will demand high returns on investment, limiting the uses of these new developments to high-income earners and high profit activities which are out of reach for most Newham residents. The residential development at the east of North Woolwich, with its riverfront walkway that is publicly accessible only during certain hours, shows how new housing developments could potentially exclude non-residents from the public realm through urban design features such as gates and security cameras (see image 1.3). Finally, redevelopment on the borders of North Woolwich could result in gentrification within the neighbourhood due to rising land prices.

The changes expected to take place in the Royal Docks can be foretold by similar redevelopment for the Games and currently in Stratford. It is still up for debate as to whether the low-income local residents will have access to new jobs and housing opportunities arising with the new development that replaced pre-existing businesses, housing, and community facilities. Residents have also been absent from the planning and implementing process, and their voices ignored by major redevelopment actors (Frediani, 2013). The plan for the Royal Docks differs from that for Stratford because much of the area marked for redevelopment is currently vacant or industrial, yet the process envisioned by Newham Council appears no different. Current redevelopment in Stratford raises the questions of "what kind of legacy" and "for whom" that are equally relevant for the Royal Docks.

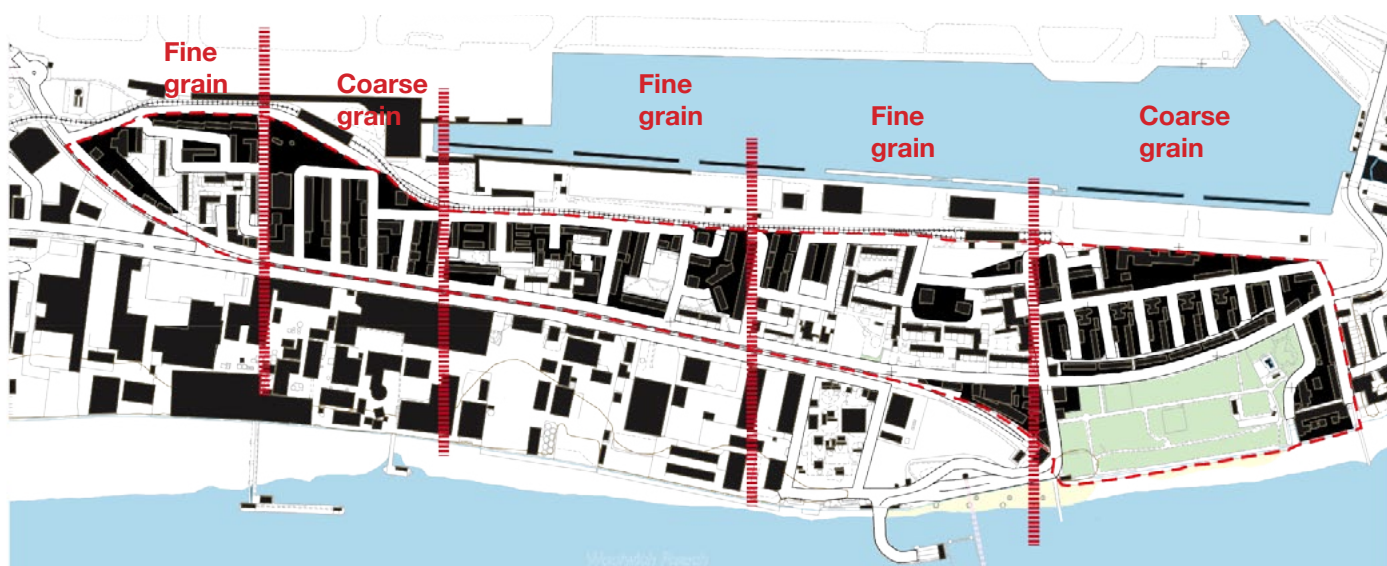
We see the plans for the Royal Docks as a suggestion to improve the area by fundamentally changing its uses and users. At the very best, the plans lacks a way to achieve cohesion between new and existing uses and users. There are other ways to achieve the goals of revitalised economy and stable communities that are based on home-grown, small-scale interventions, rather than huge injections of capital.

Synthesised Analysis

The urban and spatial analysis of North Woolwich and its surroundings was undertaken through five different lenses of analysis:

- Urban Fabric and Landmarks
- Cultures and Economies
- Leftovers and Thresholds
- Infrastructures and Spaces of (Im)mobility
- Open and Public Spaces

An analysis of the study area through these five thematic lenses provided a greater understanding of its political, economic, cultural and spatial dynamics, thus enabling us to identify areas of strengths and weaknesses as well as opportunities to then create a vision for the development of North Woolwich. Various methods were used for the analysis including extensive mapping of features like typologies, open spaces, urban grain and location of landmarks; observation and sensory analysis as well as interviews with local residents. This section will visually represent the general findings that were found from the different lenses of analysis.



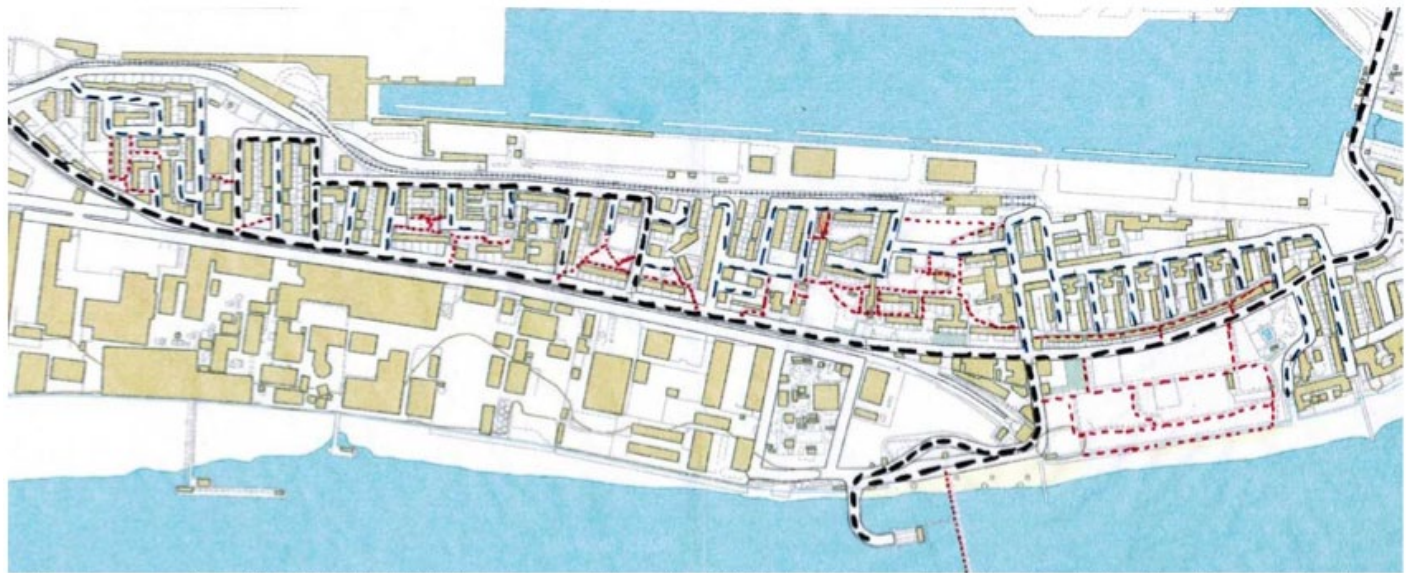
Source: Group A, Urban Fabric and Landmarks Report.

Image A: An analysis of the urban fabric and landmarks revealed an urban form that is characterised by coarse grain on both the eastern and western ends, with much finer grain at the centre of the area. Furthermore, a general deterioration of the area's major landmarks was identified.



Source: Group B, Cultures and Economies Report.

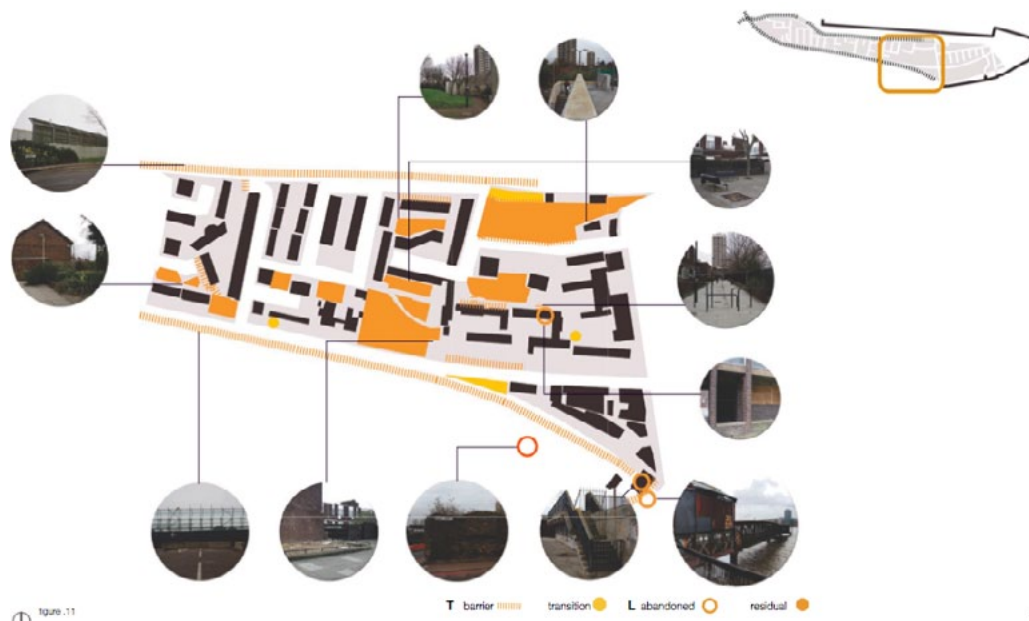
Image B: North Woolwich displays higher income residential areas on the east and west points with a high concentration of social housing in the middle. The eastern and western points also represent the area's main zones of economic activity in close proximity to both DLR stations. The study area displays a deterioration of both cultural and economic activities.



> This map shows the types of routes in North Woolwich. The thick black lines indicate routes with heavy traffic and HGVs, the thinner blue lines are streets used mostly by local traffic, and the red lines are pedestrian only.

Source: Group D, Infrastructure and Spaces of (Im)mobility Report.

Image D: North Woolwich displays good connections to the rest of London through the DLR as well as to the rest of the world due to its proximity to London City Airport. On the other hand, there are poor connections to nearby areas in Newham mostly due to the poor bus connections. Yet, there exist good alternative interior paths connecting the interior of the neighbourhood.



Source: Group C, Leftovers and Thresholds Report.

Image C: The analysis of leftovers and thresholds revealed an abundance of different forms of barriers within the study area as well as unused spaces and ambiguous spaces. This analysis also demonstrated how certain urban forms may vary depending on different perceptual visualisations.



Source: Group E, Public and Open Spaces Report.

Image E: This lens of analysis demonstrated that there exist a large number of public space that could be better used as well as a possibility to generally extend public space in the area. Furthermore, North Woolwich presents a difficult pedestrian and cycling experience along major roads such as Pier and Albert Roads.

2.2 Political, Economic, Cultural, and Spatial Characteristics



Image 2.1: The Tate and Lyle Factory is one of the last major industries operating in North Woolwich.



Image 2.2: Chinese store amidst construction.



Image 2.3: An abandoned store front portrays socio-economic decline and urban decay.

The SWOT analysis shows that there are a number of social, political, economic, and spatial forces that have had an effect on the spatial characteristics of the area.

At a macro scale it is possible to attribute the 'rise and fall' of North Woolwich as a focal live and work place to the political and economic forces acting on the area. Emerging as a strong industrial location, it thrived up until the closure of the dockyards in 1984. Gradually, the remaining industries have moved out, with the Tate and Lyle being the most prominent remaining economic entity, but still only operating at a lower capacity than at which it once prospered. London City Airport now stands as an image of global political and economic power, connecting North Woolwich to the global market, and is a symbol of the changing economic forces. The DLR and now Crossrail are also huge investments in an attempt to revitalise the surrounding neighbourhoods that experienced decline and isolation from the city centre. At the meso scale prevalent socio-economic forces are observed; perhaps unwittingly, what appears to have emerged from the pepper-potting approach of the planning process over the last few decades reveals segregation of social classes that can be interpreted from the distribution of highly mixed housing typologies. The historic urban character as a homogenous working class neighbourhood has almost disappeared entirely. Honing in on the local scale, one can also observe that local commercial activities are directly or indirectly impacted by political decisions. For example, Livingstone's plan to build a new Chinatown in Royal Docks attracted some Chinese stores and restaurants to invest in North Woolwich, before plans for the Olympic Games site reversed this decision (Chinese Business Gazette). Similarly, the London Borough of Newham and the Homes and Communities Agency initiated physical regeneration in Pier Parade, at the centre of North Woolwich. However, this initiative failed because it did not sufficiently take into account local residents' views and wasn't flexible enough to change. All of these factors have resulted in a poor socio-spatial experience, making North Woolwich feel like an area of persistent decline and decay.

The following maps represent the interrelationships of main urban elements that emerged and how together they define the derived key strengths and weaknesses. The maps then visually represent the opportunities that have evolved from the strengths and weaknesses and how they subsequently inform potential sites of interventions. Furthermore, several external threats were recognised:

- Gentrification from planned developments
- Loss of industrial and cultural heritage
- Worsening economic crisis leading to eroding opportunities
- Increasingly viewed as a volatile migratory neighbourhood
- Increased isolation and disruption from Crossrail developments

Together, the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats form the basis of the two core goals addressed by this development brief.

Urban Analysis Urban Grain & Form

Fig 5



Legend

ITN

- A road
- B road
- Primary route
- Secondary route

Urban Grain

Summary Key Findings

- Course urban grain resulting in a lack of activity nodes
- Large areas dedicated to expansive concrete car parks
- Mixed back to front blocks resulting in a lack of active frontages
- Routes masked by illegible urban grain

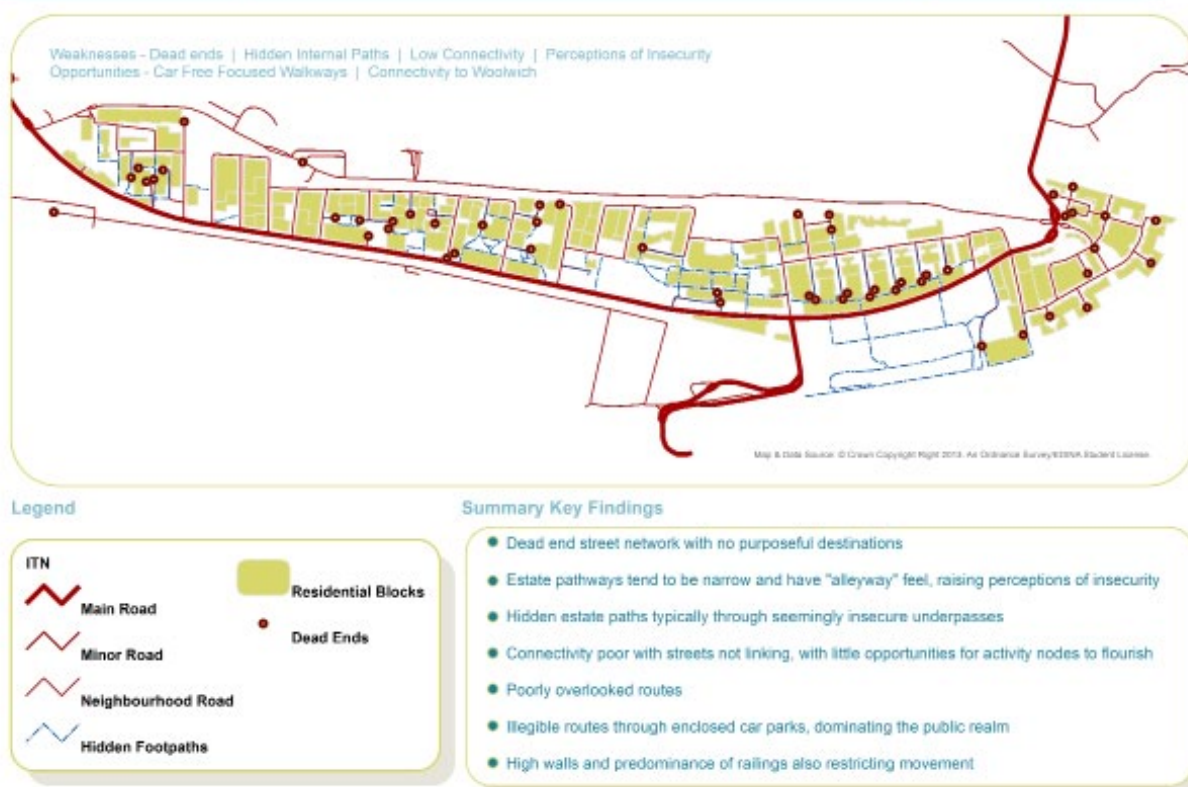
Urban Analysis Building Typologies & Landmarks

Fig 6



Urban Analysis Street Network & Connectivity

Fig 7



Urban Analysis Major Infrastructure Barriers & Thresholds

Fig 8



Legend

Summary Key Findings



Weaknesses - Major Infrastructure Severances | Landuse and Landcover Impemeability
 Opportunities - Provide the Major Public Transport Links beyond North Woolwich (eg, DLR) |
 Reinstatement of Piers | Waterfronts

- Major infrastructure routes causing severances between the neighbourhood and surrounding area (Crossrail, DLR)
- River and docks creating landcover and landuse thresholds
- Industrial belt creating a barrier between the waterfront and the neighbourhood

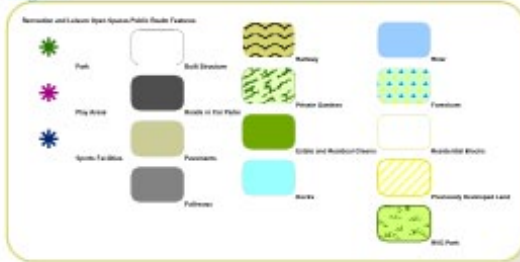
Urban Analysis Public Realm

Fig 9



Legend

Summary Key Findings



Weaknesses - Lacking Fluency | Extensive Concrete Compounds | No Connectivity |
 Poor Green Spaces

Opportunities - River Front | Park | Small Open Spaces

- Majority of open spaces are leftover estate greens, with little value and mostly unkept
- Lack of coherent green route network or prevalence of trees
- Predominance of hard scaping
- Public realm not currently helped by numerous holdings and brownfield sites
- Pinch points currently restricting movement through public realm

Urban Analysis Social & Economic Infrastructure

Fig 10



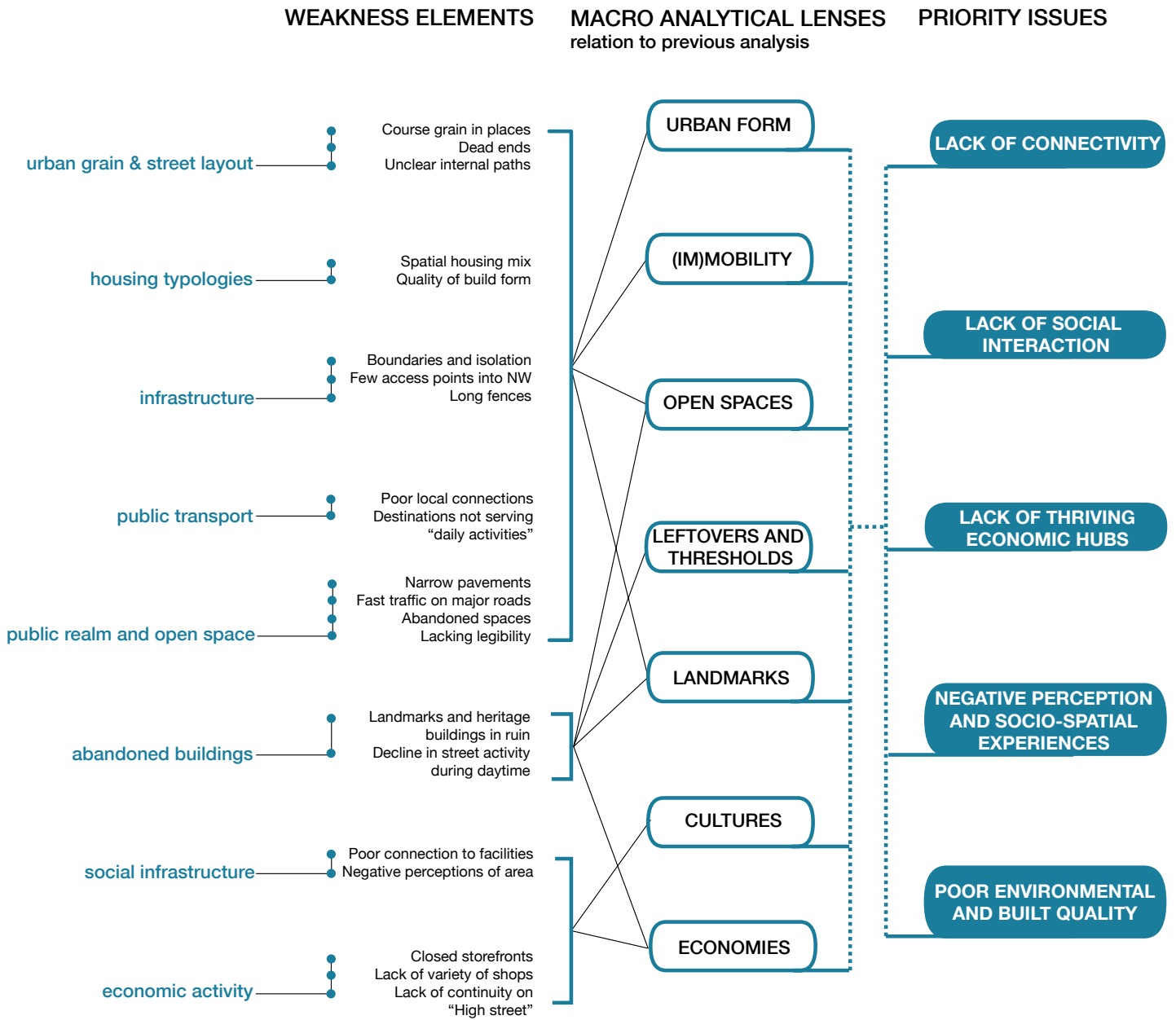
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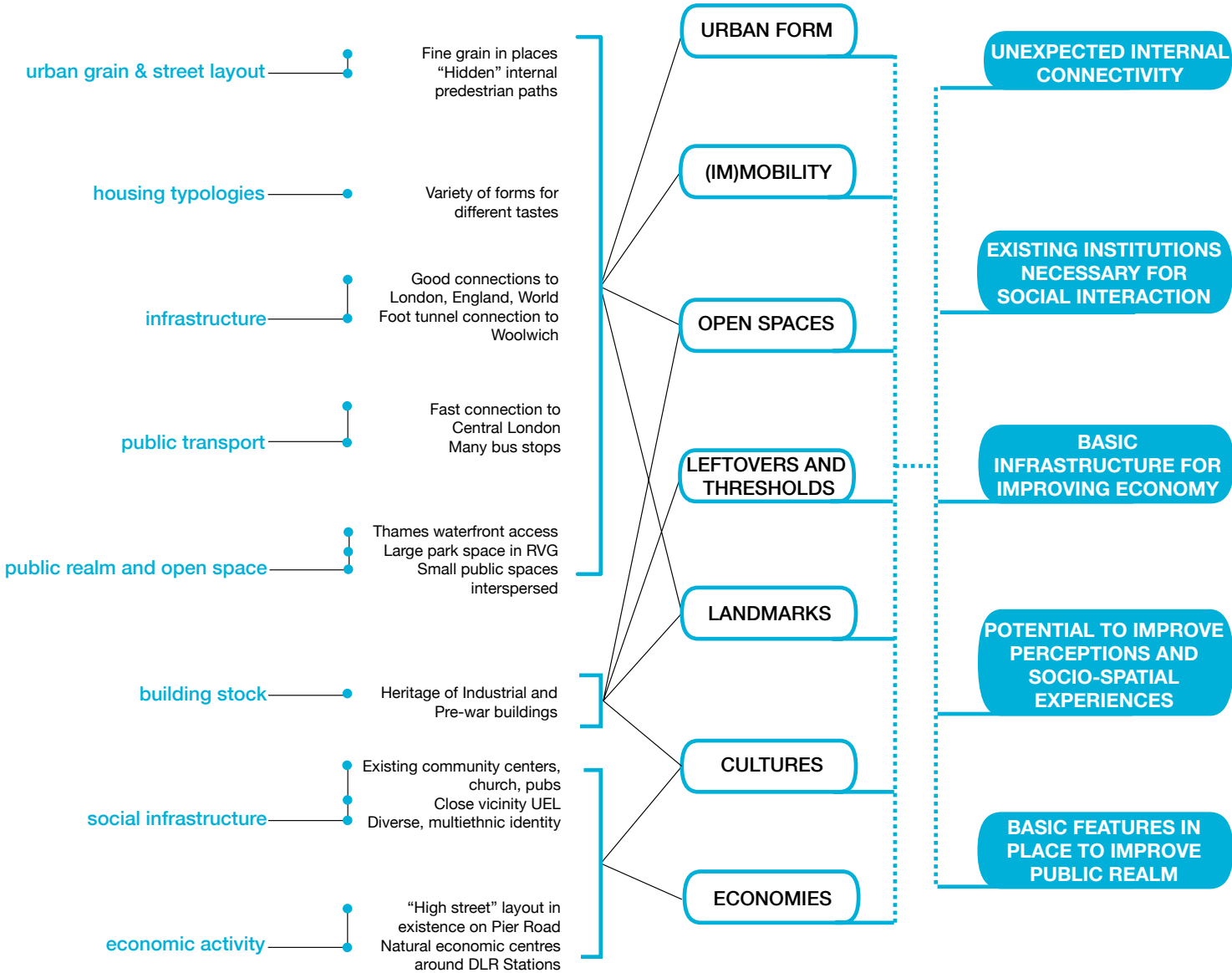
Summary Key Findings

Weaknesses - Lack of distinctive town centre | lack of choice | Poor Variety of Facilities
 Opportunities - Existing Centres for Expansion & Improvement

- Low grade and low choice local shops
- Lack of variety and shop closures
- Good selection of sports facilities
- Closest main shopping centre in Woolwich, further than 20min walking for most residents
- Pier Parade & road provides a good focal service centre



STRENGTHS ELEMENTS MACRO ANALYTICAL LENSES relation to previous analysis POTENTIALITIES



Strategic Development & Design Framework for North Woolwich

North Woolwich seizes its promising and unique heritage in order to provide its local residents, business owners, and visitors with a thriving, living and working neighbourhood.

Compared to the existing plan of the Royal Docks, this vision for North Woolwich could be seen as more modest in nature. However, it is still ambitious in the sense that it has the possibility of reversing the perception of environmental decline and image of dereliction through using local resources. As such, it will once again thrive as a neighbourhood providing affordable living and working opportunities with a mix of tenures to create a socially just and liveable urban quarter.

This design response is being driven by two overarching principles: connectivity and preservation of local industrial heritage. These principles are reflected not only in the final vision but also throughout the proposed interventions. While participation is a key element to a healthy and long-lived urban transformation process (Sanoff, 2006, Atlee, 2003, Creighton, 1994), it is not explicitly addressed in this design response. The limited scope of this exercise and its focus on built environment issues did not provide sufficient data or time to satisfactorily analyse social dynamics in order to propose a participatory process. Nevertheless, this is an important area for further consideration in order to ensure a just and optimised development of North Woolwich.

Connectivity

Increasingly, the value of places is defined by their connections to elsewhere (Graham & Marvin, 2001). While this contention is explicitly linked to large-scale transportation systems, it also bears meaning for local social and economic connections. On the neighbourhood level, small-scale connectivity and in a variety of ways fosters well-being and sense of place (Lynch, 1960). This design response's aim is to encourage social and economic connectivity as well as physical connectivity within and around North Woolwich. In fact, these types of connectivity are inseparable; physical connectivity provides the pathways for social and economic connectivity, and social and economic connectivity provide the rationale for physical connectivity.

Local heritage

North Woolwich is one of London's only remaining industrial areas and this is greatly manifested through its built form. This design response is in part driven by a principle that local heritage can be capitalised upon to revitalise the economy by providing opportunities to small and medium-scale businesses. The preservation of older, industrial buildings enables smaller businesses to operate within the area due to the lower costs while also providing a wider variety of building uses (Jacobs, 1961).

The guidelines represent pragmatic considerations as to how the design response's vision can be fulfilled. These guidelines, along with the principles, are the basis upon which the interventions are being formed.

- Make the area more pedestrian and bike friendly
- Soften and reduce hard barriers
- Maintain industrial heritage style structures where possible
- Incorporate vernacular design at core and cleverly mesh with more contemporary structures
- Work with the existing community centres and emerging citizen groups to increasingly have citizen input and ownership over interventions
- Orient new structures towards small and medium businesses' needs for affordability and size

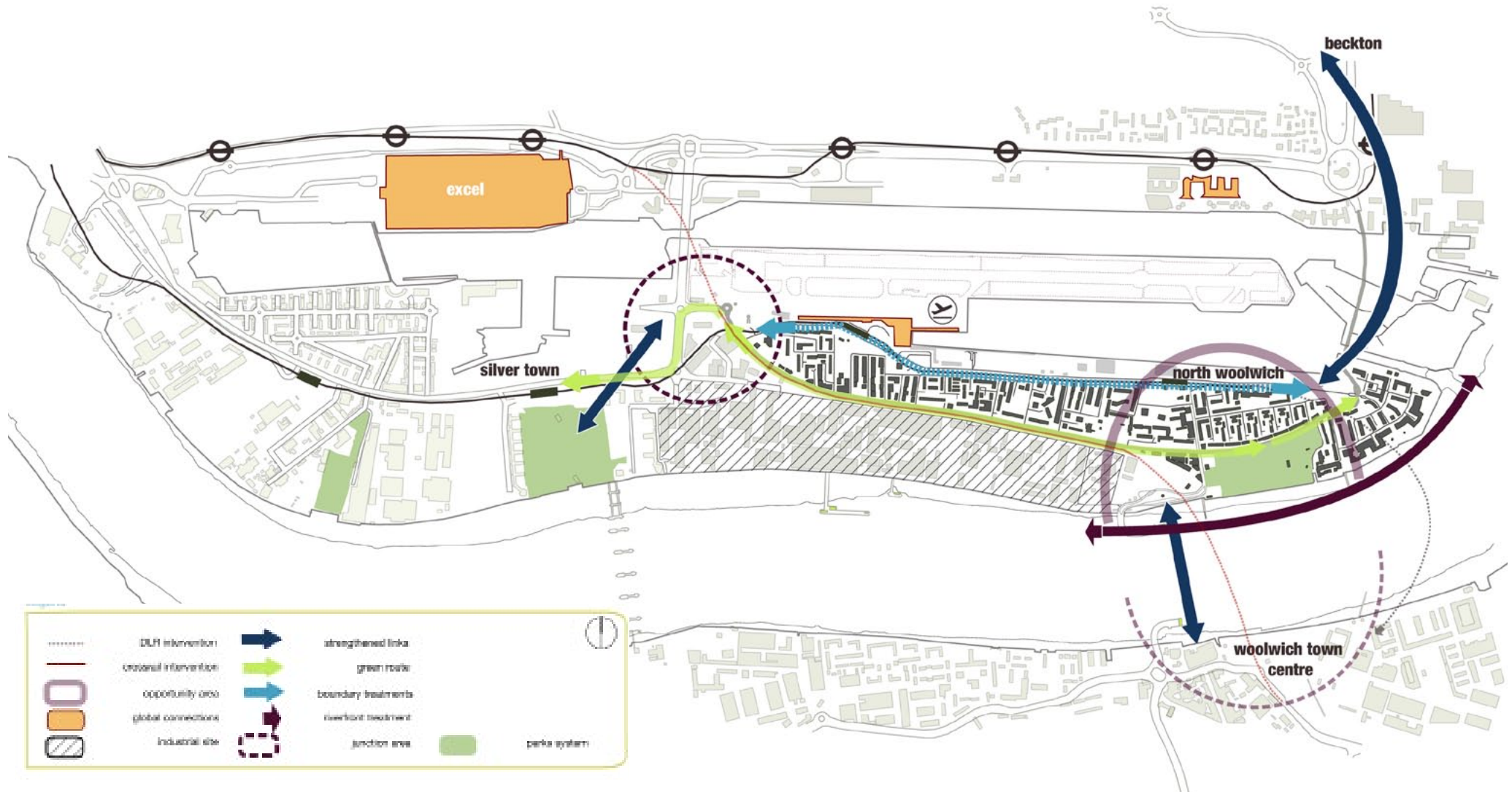
Goals

Goal 1: To enhance the quality of the public realm and the places for positive social interaction.

Goal 2: To revitalise economic activity by using industrial heritage in new ways and to strengthen small-firm economy.

These two goals are to be implemented through several interventions in order to fulfill the design response's vision. The interventions are divided according to their potentiality in achieving either goal. Yet, in actuality, some of the interventions contribute to achieving both goals. Although all of these interventions are essential to the accomplishment of the goals, those that are most relevant will be 'zoomed' into, so as to provide greater insight and detail.

Goal 1: To enhance the quality of the public realm and the places for positive social interaction.



Goal 1:

To enhance the quality of the public realm and the places for positive social interaction

- Make Pier and Albert Roads more cycle and pedestrian friendly
- Connect to East Silvertown, Woolwich, and Gallions Reach through a multiplicity of usable and attractive transport links. This includes walk, vehicular and cycle ways.
- Ease severances made by infrastructure barriers via interventions such as a 'green' walkway.
- Design coherent walkways throughout the neighbourhood, connecting public places and hidden pathways — See page 28
- Turn area between Ferry terminal and Royal Victoria Gardens into a soft-scaped park by rerouting traffic on Pier Road — See page 29
- Create meeting, gathering, and event spaces, possibly by providing street furniture or using abandoned spaces for seasonal events — See page 30
- Create a waterfront promenade to link Royal Victoria Garden with Thames Barrier Park alongside the current industrial area. — See page 31

- Design coherent walkways throughout the neighbourhood, connecting public places and hidden pathways

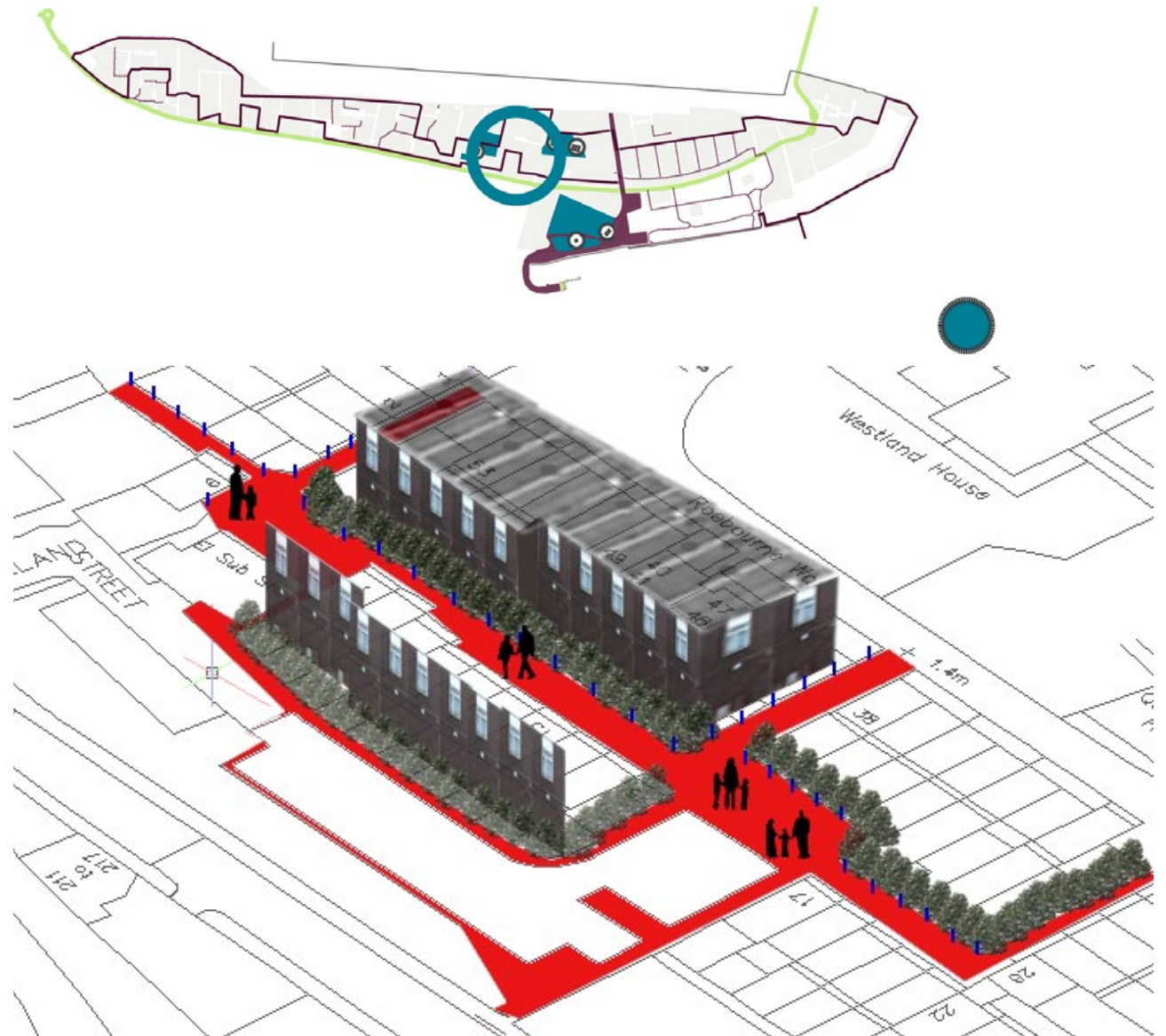


Image 3.1: Visual aids help the pedestrian to navigate through “hidden” internal pathway network

- Turn area between Ferry terminal and Royal Victoria Gardens into a soft-scaped park by rerouting traffic on Pier Road

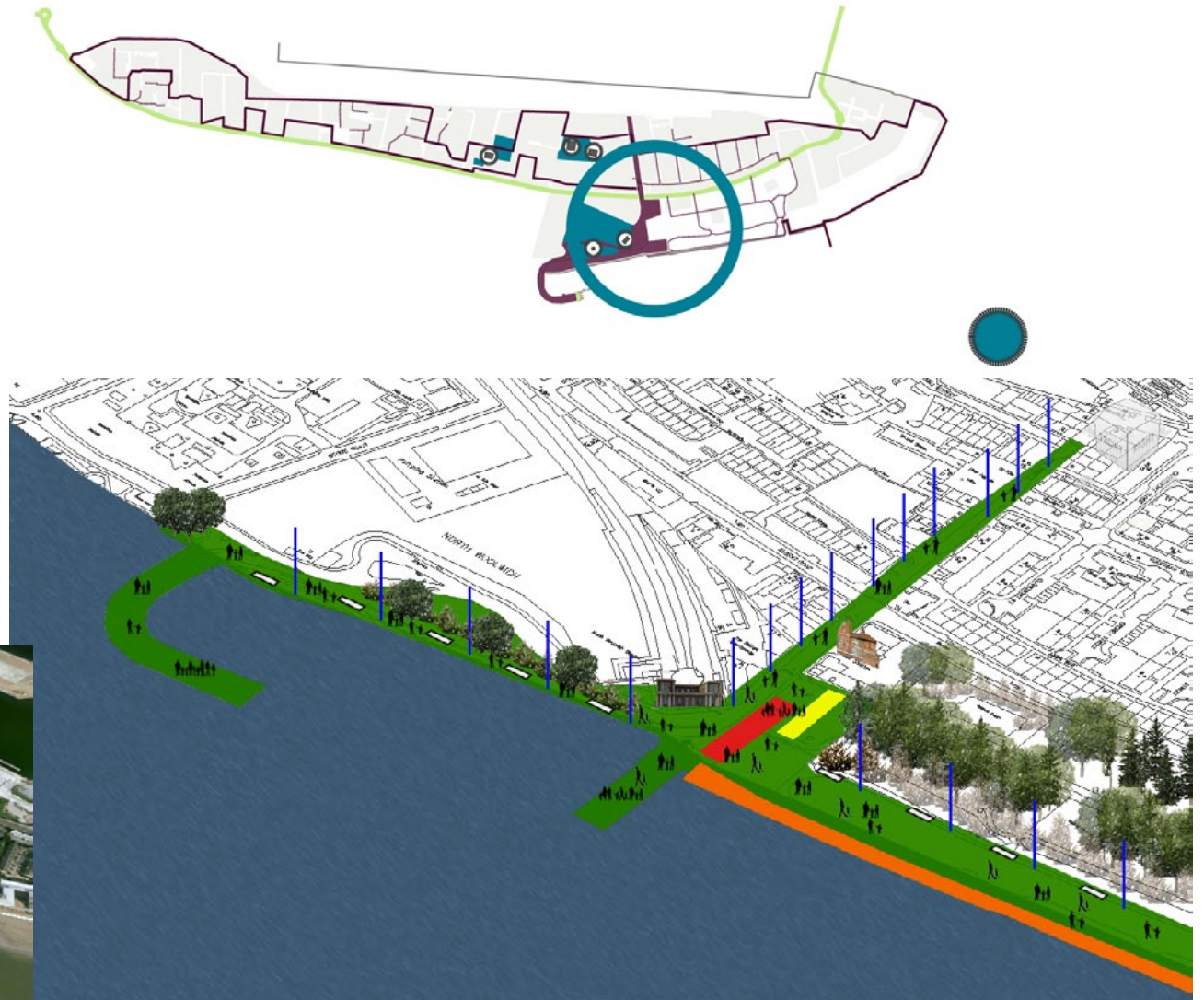


Image 3.2: Junction at Pier Road with river becomes pedestrianised with continuous “green” landscape

- Create meeting, gathering, and event spaces, possibly by providing street furniture or using abandoned spaces for seasonal events

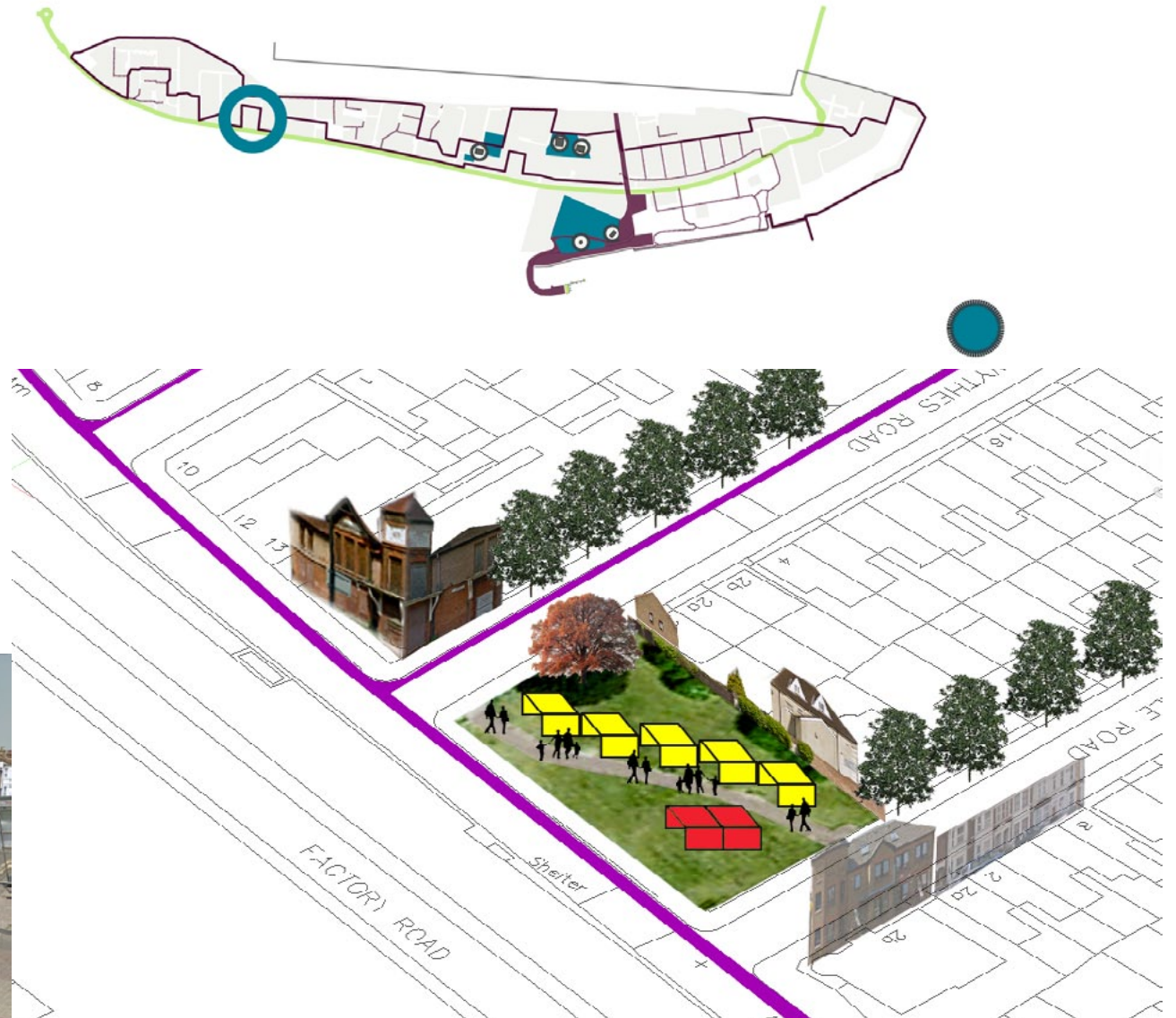


Image 3.3: A little used park becomes a flea market on seasonal basis

- Create a waterfront promenade to link Royal Victoria Garden with Thames Barrier Park alongside the current industrial area.

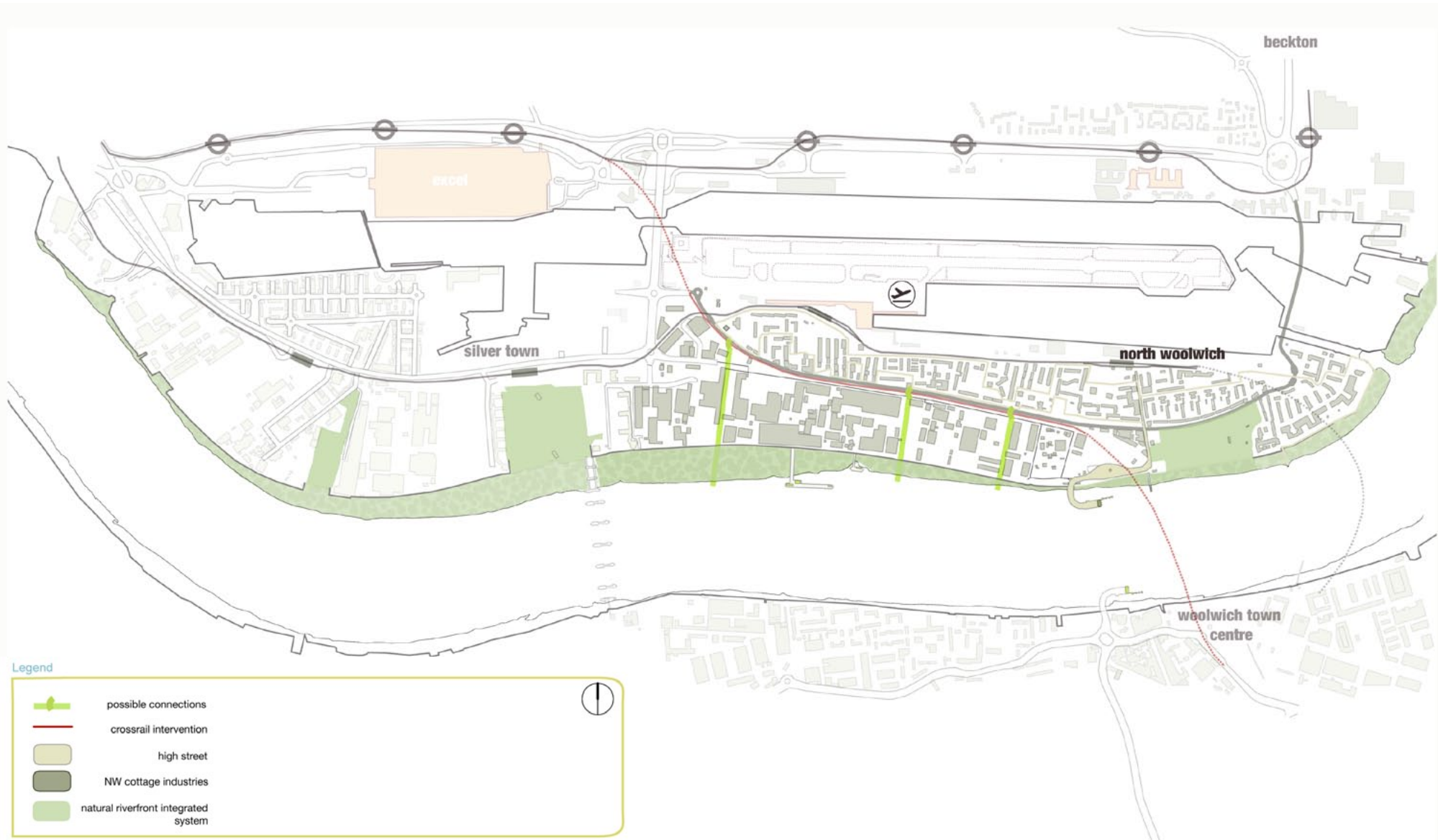
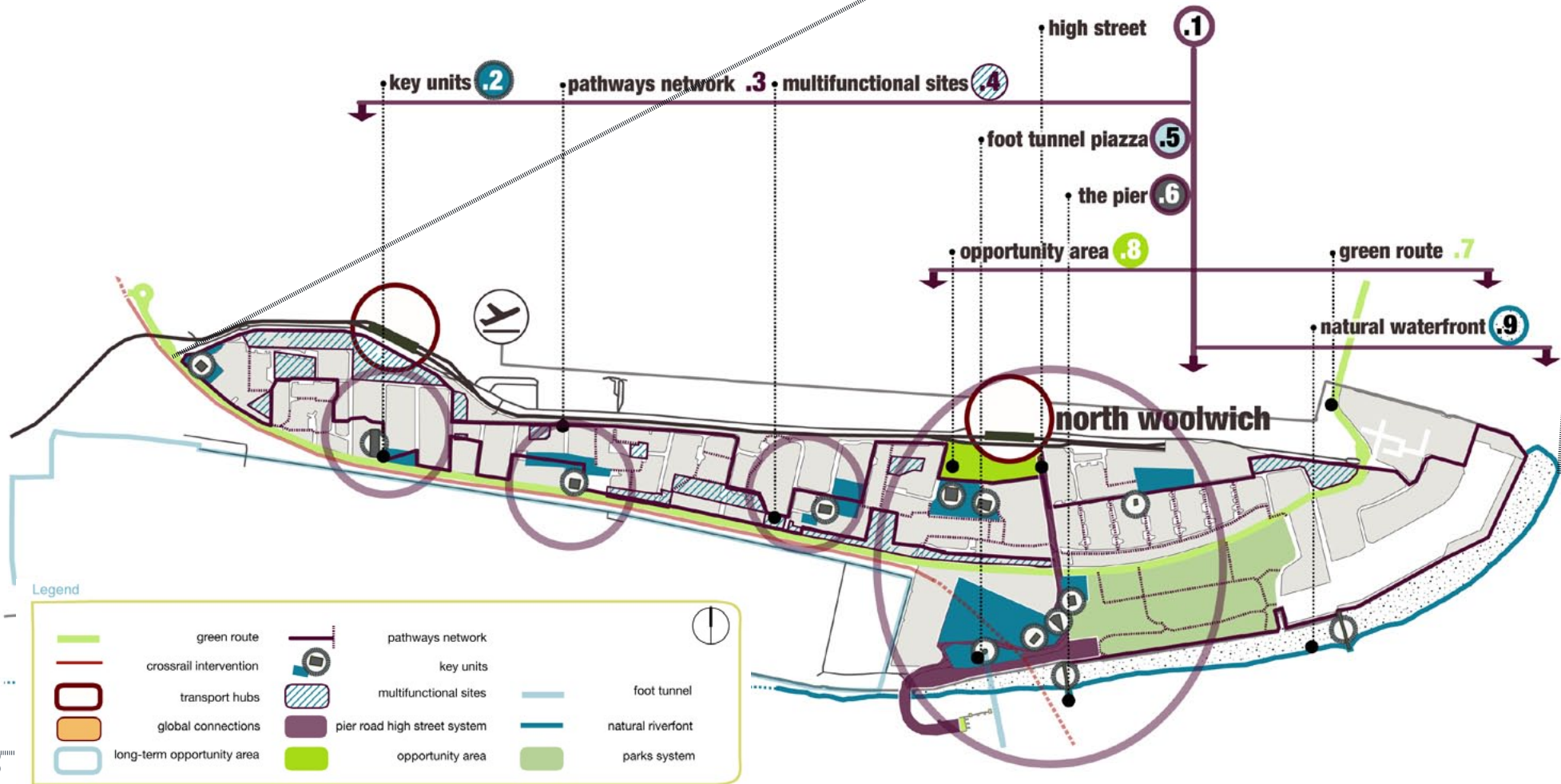
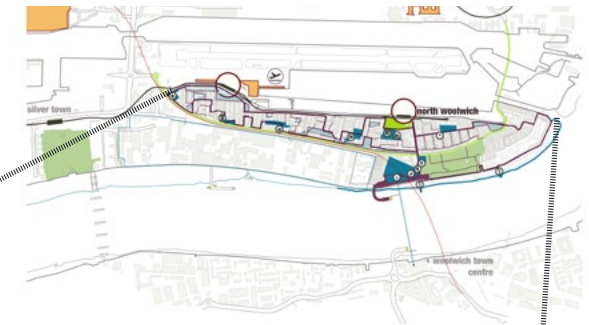


Image 3.7: The long term vision of the Royal Docks, including a “green” riverfront walkway connecting the Thames Barrier Park up to the urban forest in Beckton, and connecting the post-industrial site and the waterfront with the rest of North Woolwich through a network of pedestrian and three bridges over the Crossrail

Goal 2: To revitalise economic activity by using industrial heritage in new ways and to strengthen small-firm economy.

Interventions



Goal 2:

To revitalise economic activity by using industrial heritage in new ways and to strengthen small-firm economy.

- Redevelop the derelict site at KGV station in order to incorporate mixed-use housing and needed local amenities.
- Through increased internal connectivity, connect KGV economic area to that of City Airport station.
- Preserve industrial heritage buildings on either side of the Cross-rail, with the aim of converting some to mixed-use live and work spaces, targeted towards cottage industries. — See page 34
- Promote Sunday street markets or farmers market at the Pier — See page 35
- Promote temporary uses of spaces such as “dye gardens” or “make it yourself workshops” in abandoned buildings.
- Over the long-term, incorporate refitted industrial buildings into North Woolwich neighbourhood and East Silvertown neighbourhood through landscaping and multiple bridges over the Cross-rail. — See page 36
- Create a High Street connected to the foot tunnel as a central zone within the neighbourhood to attract people from Woolwich and other parts of London for shopping and leisure

This intervention is the main strategy to fulfill this design response’s vision for North Woolwich. Although this intervention comes under the goal of revitalising the area’s economic activity it will also play a pivotal role in enhancing the quality of the public realm. This intervention can be started at a smaller scale in the short term and continue to expand and extend. The lack of a high street in North Woolwich has contributed to the erosion of the area’s economic activity. In addition, it has led to scattered business and retail development within the community which has added to the area’s lack of cohesion. By targeting the high street as a main intervention, it is expected that it will act as a catalyst and thus enhance the effectiveness of the other interventions.

- Preserve industrial heritage buildings on either side of the Crossrail, with the aim of converting some to mixed-use live and work spaces, targeted towards cottage industries.

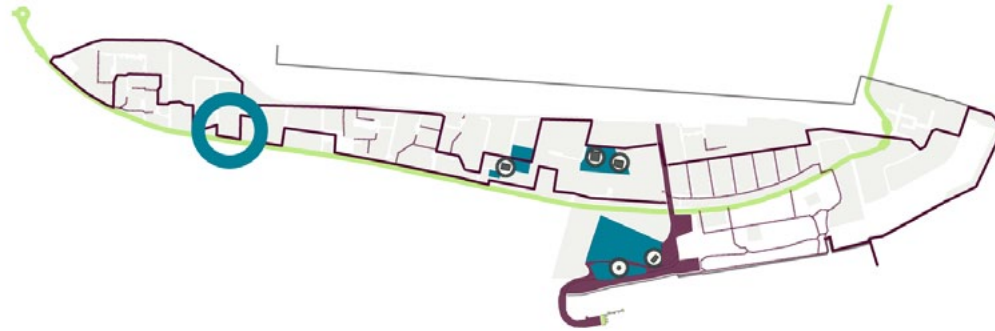


Image 3.4: The Tate Museum Building is renovated and transformed into a local cultural facility

- Promote Sunday street markets or farmers market at the Pier

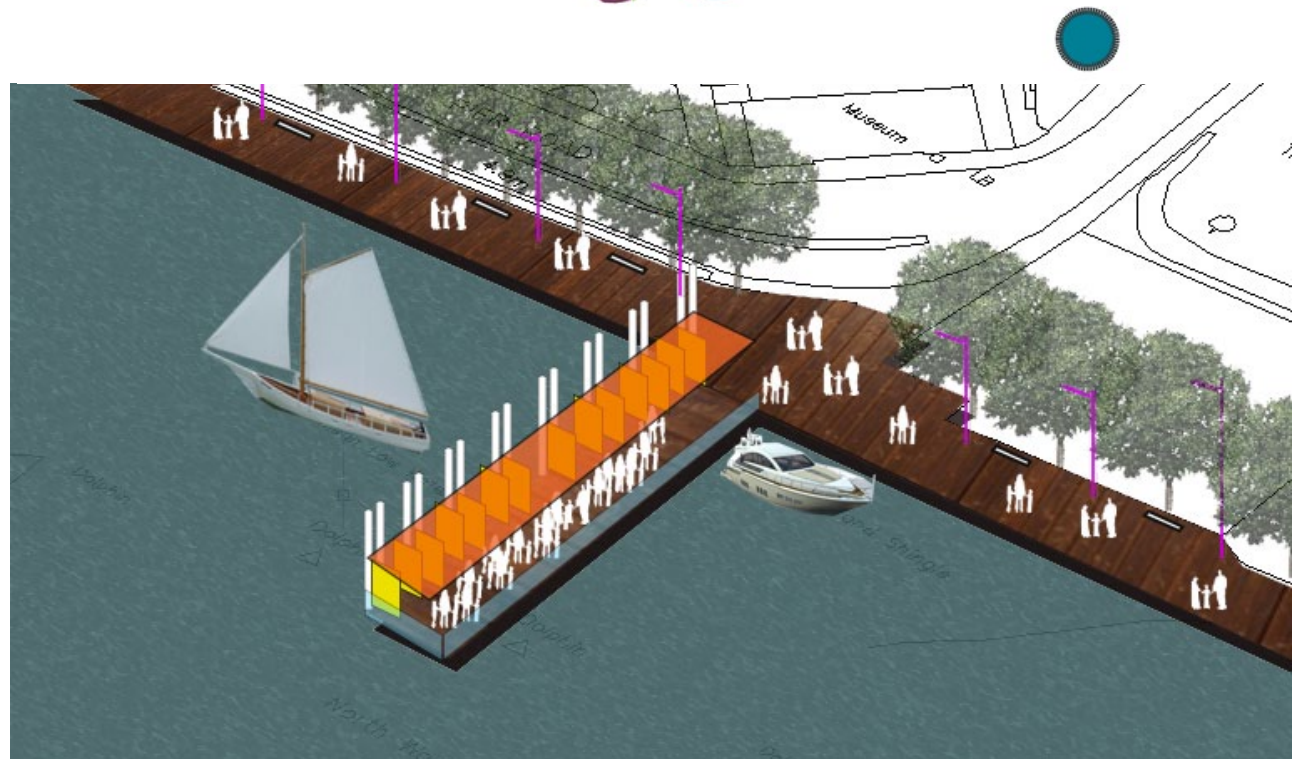
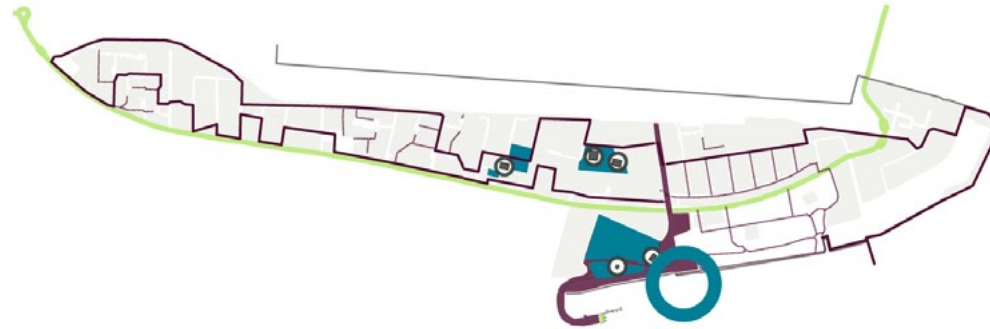


Image 3.5: A Sunday market at the currently unused pier which connects to a “green” waterfront walkway

- Create a High Street connected to the foot tunnel as a central zone within the neighbourhood to attract people from Woolwich and other parts of London for shopping and leisure

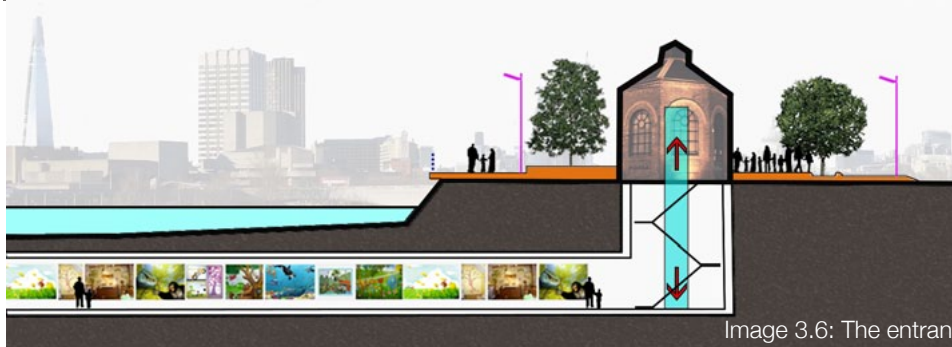
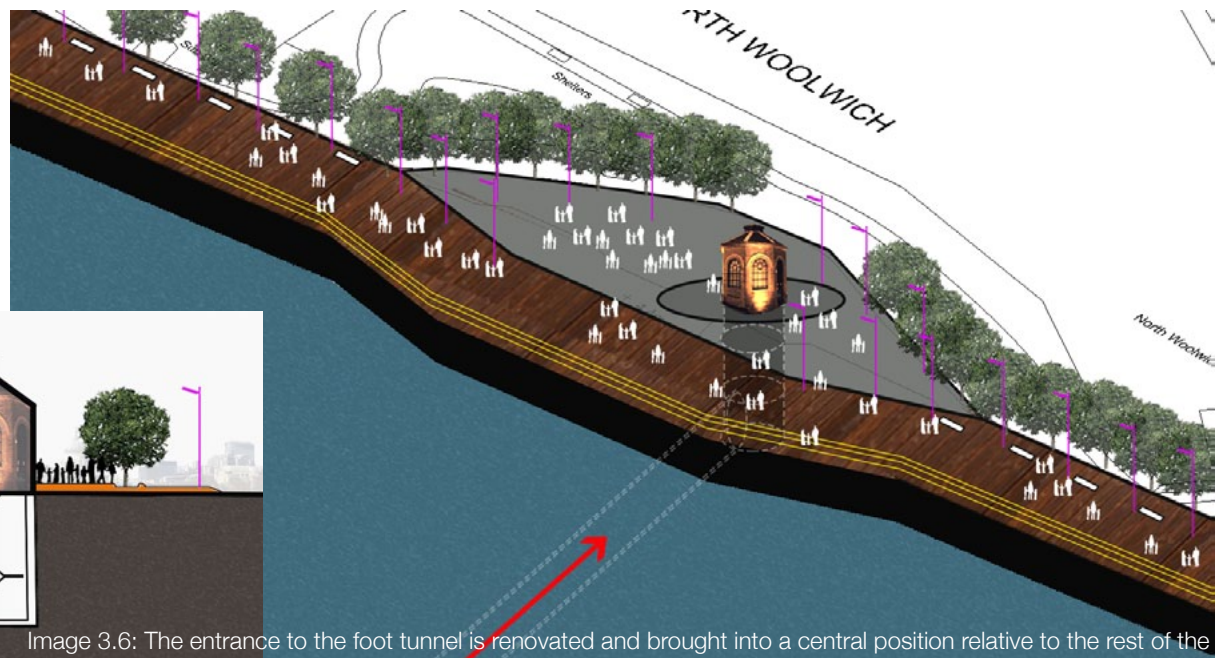
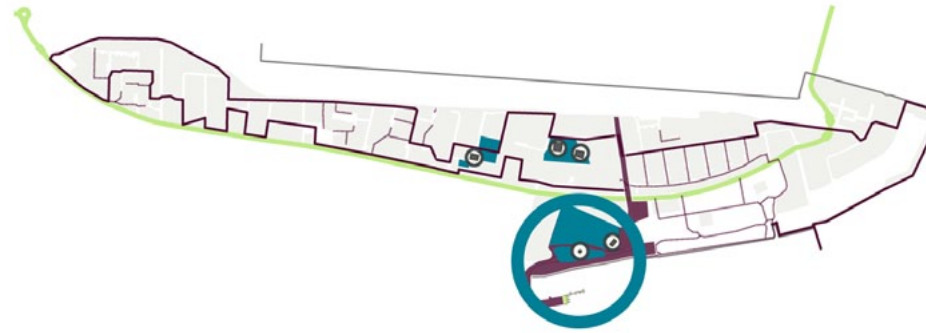
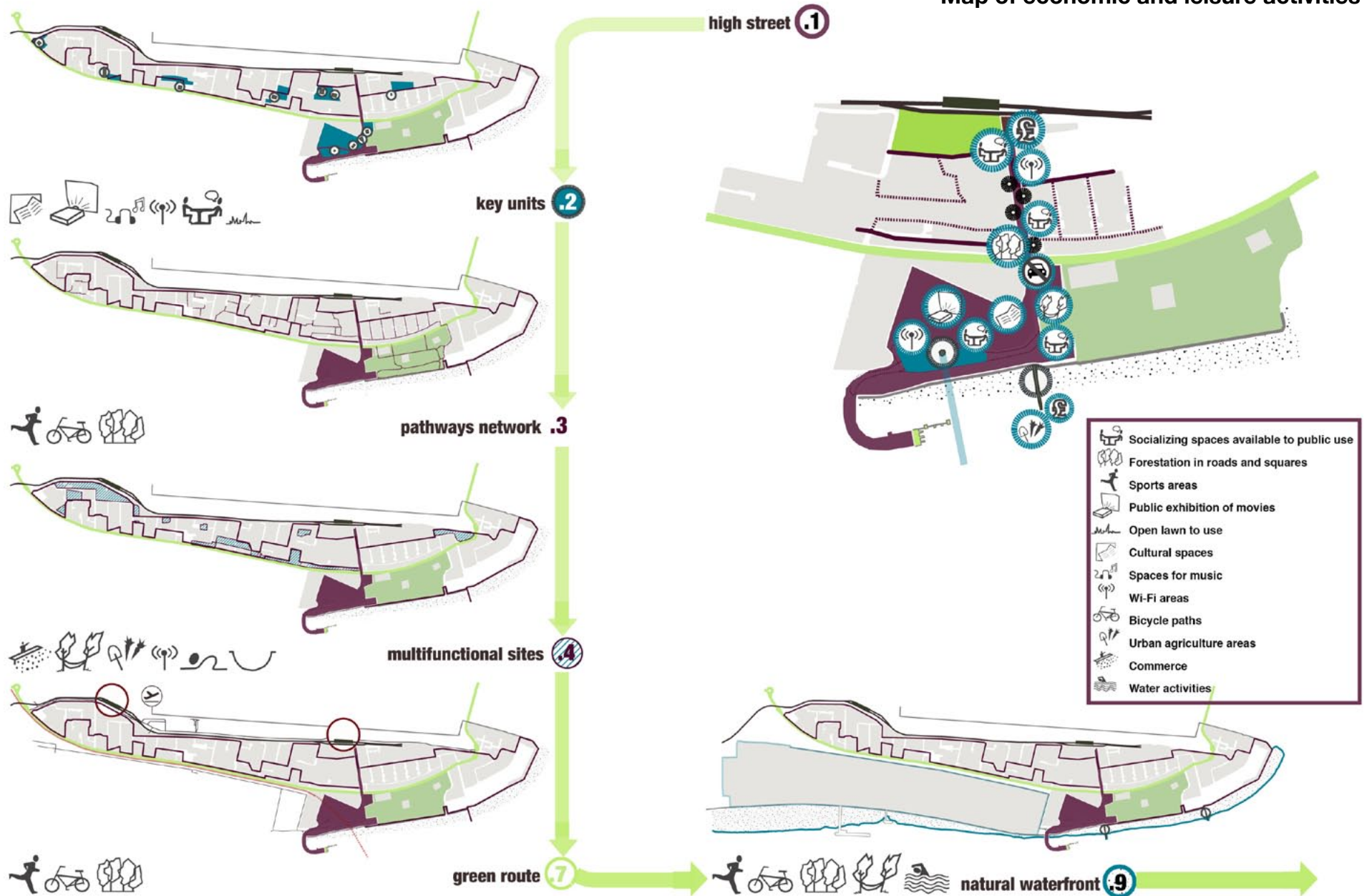


Image 3.6: The entrance to the foot tunnel is renovated and brought into a central position relative to the rest of the waterfront and high street regeneration

Map of economic and leisure activities



This map represents the main activities that are part of this proposal. The sequence exhibited correspond a trajet from the door of a house till the public area which is the Thames Waterfront.

This design response proposes an alternative vision of North Woolwich to that intended by the Newham Council. It contests the notion that capital-intensive developments are the only solution to reversing deteriorating economic activity or quality of public realm. By abiding to the principles of connectivity and preservation of local heritage, this design response targets the creation of a high street to act as a catalyst in fulfilling the vision of an economically and socially sustainable neighbourhood. As a positive side effect, the vision serves to re-conceptualise barriers as opportunities for sustainable development and historic structures as spaces for dynamic trans-community interaction.

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