

The London 2012 Olympics

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This article aims to provide a background for teachers and students wanting information about the London Olympics. It can be used in its own right for study, or as background before embarking on field study.

On 6th July 2005, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) announced that London would host the 2012 Olympics. Whether it is the prestige of hosting a global event, love of sport and competition, enthusiasm for a major spectacle, or a combination of these, there is no doubt that London's celebrations in winning the bid for the 2012 Olympics gave the people in Trafalgar Square great cause for celebration. Whilst many people remember the London bombings 24 hours later, most will probably also remember these jubilant scenes (Figure 1) similar to those witnessed in Sydney 12 years previously in September 1993, where over 1 million people crowded into the centre of the city to learn that the city would host the 2000 Olympics.



Figure 1: Scenes in Trafalgar Square as London wins the 2012 Olympics. Source: www.uktravelbureau.com/regions/uk-travel-search-engine-england/london2012.cfm

Sport and Geography

There is a good deal about the Olympics that engages Geographers, and makes the Olympic Games a valid area of geographical study. Sport has for some time been a facet of geographical study. Geographers such as John Bale and Stephen Essex have written about sports Geography; Bale's focus on sporting events and their impact on the environment have been joined by his cultural studies on sport and society. Urban Geographers such as Essex have focused on sport as a user of space.

However, Sydney's Olympic bid changed the focus, in that it used the Olympics as a means of bringing about change. Its use of the Olympics as a means of delivering urban regeneration also placed environmental credentials to the fore of thinking about sport and change. Sport is now for many cities and countries a vehicle for generating inward investment and both regenerating and remediating brownfield sites; the strategy was used in Manchester and Melbourne (Commonwealth Games of 2002 and 2006 respectively), in Germany (2006 World Cup) and is currently being used by Glasgow in its bid for the 2014 Commonwealth Games. Sport and the Olympics have become useful frameworks on which to assess concepts such as regeneration, re-branding and sustainability.

As a result of Sydney's Olympics, the IOC has sustainability written as a focus for its mission statement (Figure 2). It makes clear now that would-be Olympic hosts must think beyond the Olympic events and

consider the concept of legacy; what is left after the Olympians and Paralympians have departed is at least as important as the capacity for holding and managing a successful sports event. The IOC's commitment, it states, is to the Olympics as a means of delivering '*environmental protection and, more importantly, sustainability*' in their planning and operations, and '*positive legacies*' that last beyond the events.

London won its bid on the back of three factors each of which factored in the concept of legacy;

- a) its status as a global city with one of the world's most culturally and ethnically diverse populations;
- b) its focus upon regenerating one of the poorest areas of the city, which is on-going, where the Olympics have a specific role to play in providing a legacy of amenities for local people;
- c) a focus upon children as the benefactors of the Olympics, and the inspiration that could link nations through sport. This was said to be the factor that separated London's bid from the rest.

Figure 2: The IOC mission statement and its references to sustainability. Source: IOC website (2005) Mission Statement.

The Olympics should provide ...

"sustainable environmental legacies, such as

- rehabilitated and revitalized sites,
- increased environmental awareness,
- improved environmental policies and practices,
- further encouragement and facilitation of strong environmental actions, technology and product development in a city, country and beyond, through the educational value of good example."

The rationale behind London's bid

The process for staging and hosting the Olympics is a seven-year process, on top of the 2-3 years in preparing the initial bid. London's 2012 Olympics and Paralympic Games together will involve, over the period of one month –

- 11 000 athletes in 300 events, with 5000-6000 coaches & officials, attended by 4000-5000 other members of the Olympic community;
- over 7000 sponsors;
- 4000 athletes and 2500 officials in the Paralympics, itself equivalent as an event to Manchester's 2002 Commonwealth Games;
- 20 000 newspaper, radio, TV, & internet journalists;
- The sale of over 9 million tickets, and 500 000 spectators each day at events in and around London;
- 63 000 operational personnel, of whom 47 000 will be volunteers, e.g. as stewards, marshals, and drivers.



Figure 3: Computer-generated image of London's Olympic Park. Source: www.london2012.com

The costs of hosting the Olympics are considerable, and have huge impacts upon people, space and financial commitment. London's bid – unlike that of Paris – was focused upon a complete re-brand and re-construction of a brownfield site along the Lea Valley in east London. A range of new facilities is to be built in the area, together with the use of existing stadia for football. The central hub will be Olympic Park (Figure 3), parallel to the Lea River, and containing several Olympic venues, each located within walking distance of each other. Like Sydney's 2000 Olympics, most facilities are centralised, with only very limited access to road traffic, in order to reduce the traffic congestion which had brought Barcelona and Atlanta to a halt during their respective Olympics. Such centralisation is a recent concept; although tried with great success by Sydney, it was not used in Athens, and only to some degree in Beijing.

The main Olympic Park will house –

- the main Olympic Stadium for track and field events, together with the opening and closing ceremonies for the Olympic and Paralympic Games;
- the Aquatic Centre for swimming, diving and water polo;
- a multi-sports complex on the site of the old Hackney Stadium (Figure 4) with indoor arenas for basketball, volleyball and handball;
- a two-stadium hockey complex;
- a new Velodrome and BMX track;
- the Olympic Village, which will accommodate 17 500 athletes and officials. Every athlete will stay in the Village, 15 minutes from venues in the Park or other venues such as the Dome and ExCel.

Some facilities will remain after the Olympics though in altered form.

- the main Olympic Stadium will be reduced in size to 25 000 capacity; plans are at present to retain this as a world-class athletics venue;
- the Aquatic Centre will be retained in its entirety except for temporary seating which will be removed so that its capacity post-2012 will be 6000 people;
- though under discussion, the multi-sports arenas are likely to be removed, and relocated elsewhere in the UK;
- the Olympic Village will be converted into 3000 new homes. The purpose is to create up to half of these as 'affordable' low-cost homes for the rental and shared ownership market.

In this way, both facilities and housing remain as part of London's legacy.

Central to the park are the walkways and running tracks, with broad thoroughfares to the main transport links at Stratford. Like Sydney, there will be no private car parking. Although no plans have as yet been released, public access is likely to be by public transport, with large parking venues at connecting stations well away from the city. One of the IOC's main criticisms of London's bid at an early stage was the lack of extra capacity of London's road system, together with reservations – since much improved – about the capacity of the public transport system. In Sydney, public bus and rail access was included in ticket costs for those who lived up to 100km from the Olympics.



Figure 4: The current Hackney Stadium prior to July 2007, and until recently used by Stagecoach as a bus depot. One of the issues facing the ODA and LDA is how to provide the servicing facilities that are essential to any city, as well as the other benefits which, it is hoped, the Olympics will bring. At one point this bus depot could have faced a move to as far away as Ilford. Copyright Bob Digby.

Other events in London use existing facilities in the city –

- ExCel, the Exhibition Centre for East London, for contact sports (boxing etc),
- The new stadium at Wembley for football,
- Wimbledon for tennis,
- Lord's cricket ground,
- Greenwich Park for Equestrian and the modern pentathlon,
- Hyde Park for the Triathlon and road cycling,
- Horse Guards Parade – a triumph of imagination surely! – for beach volleyball.

Outside London, four sporting events use facilities elsewhere in the UK –

- Bisley in Surrey, where shooting events will take place;
- Eton/Dorney in Berkshire for rowing;
- Weymouth harbour for sailing;
- a range of football grounds, including Old Trafford, for the football tournament.

Among these, Weymouth has a regeneration project which focuses upon the use of the harbour and legacy of its amenity value after 2012.

Who is responsible?

The complexity of responsibilities for delivering the Olympics reflects something of the web of responsibilities shared between central UK government agencies and London's local boroughs.

Responsibility for the development of infrastructure and the provision of physical facilities (Figure 5) lies with the Olympic Delivery Authority (ODA), though its responsibilities overlap considerably with those of the London Development Agency (LDA) where land purchase and relocation is concerned. UK Development Agencies are government-appointed, dating back to the Thatcher era of the 1980s, in which government quangos (Quasi-Autonomous National Government Organisations) were free to override locally-elected councils in respect of planning decisions. In spite of this, local boroughs now see government agencies as a major source of revenue, so that each agency works closely with the Greater London Assembly (GLA) and the Mayor (currently Ken Livingstone) in order to ensure that the Olympics are planned with the needs of Londoners in mind. Uppermost in the minds of the GLA and the Mayor is the issue of housing.

Figure 5: Responsibilities for 2012 Olympics

IOC	The International Olympic Committee – its members voted in the decision to award London the 2012 Olympics
LOCOG	London Organising Committee for the Olympic Games – a government-appointed agency responsible for organising the Games themselves, e.g. events, athletes, drug-testing etc.
ODA	The Olympics Delivery Authority – a government-appointed agency responsible for delivering the Olympic infrastructure, through every stage from planning and design, to land purchase, and construction and completion of the stadia and all other facilities.
The Local Boroughs	The elected councils of five of London’s 32 Boroughs will consider the Olympics Planning Application for approval – Tower Hamlets, Newham, Hackney, Greenwich and Waltham Forest.
The Greater London Assembly	London’s regional government, headed by the Mayor, and responsible for transport via Transport for London (TfL), for development strategy, and for London’s image as a host city. Responsible for the introduction of £20 annual Olympics levy for every London household until 2012.
LDA	London Development Agency, a government-appointed agency responsible for overseeing London’s economic development, and therefore involved in decision-making over issues such as relocation of companies from the Olympics sites in Stratford. Legally, it has the powers of compulsory purchase of land over local boroughs.

Figure 6: Location of the new Olympic Park.

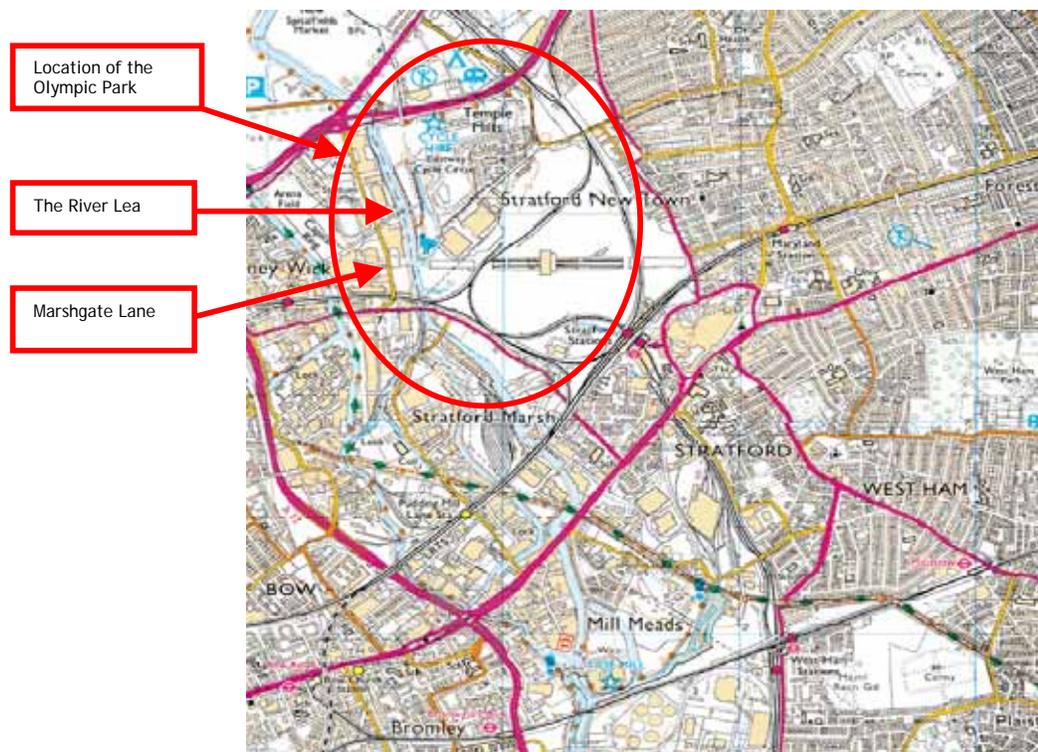


Image produced from the Ordnance Survey Get-a-map service. Image reproduced with kind permission of Ordnance Survey and Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland.

Newham	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The London Borough in which most Olympic facilities are located e.g. the Olympic Stadium
Olympic Park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A new park created for the 2012 Olympics • The location of most Olympics facilities. • The first major park to be established in London for over a century, • Extends along the valley of the River Lea towards the Thames.
Lea Valley	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The area alongside the River Lea, a tributary of the Thames, • Extends from north-east London through most of the Olympics sites, • Forms the focus for the new Olympic Park.
Stratford	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The largest community within Newham • The main commercial heart of the borough. • London's biggest transport hub outside the CBD, the main reason for the selection of this location as the site for the 2012 Olympics.

East London's geographical background

At the heart of the new Olympic Park is an area of industrial estates forming one of east London's major industrial areas, Marshgate Lane (Figure 7). Nearly 300 out of a total of 400 companies for whom relocation has been necessary to create the park are located in this area. On July 1st 2007, the site was transferred into the ownership of the ODA, by which time all companies had been relocated. Most companies were service- and utility-based e.g. waste recycling, bus depots and office supplies, though a substantial number were manufacturing, including food processing.

Even now, east London is London's manufacturing heart. That said, the area has undergone deep-rooted change since the 1971 census, in which about 30% of the working population worked in manufacturing, the UK's greatest concentration. A combination of factors – such as the rise of container shipping, increasing size of ships, and unionisation of London's docks – led to the emergence of deeper container ports away from the shallow stretches of the Thames estuary in locations such as Felixstowe and Dover. The Port of London closed in 1981, with the loss of over 10 000 jobs in the port and several times more in related servicing. The regional shift in food processing companies to docks elsewhere – only Tate and Lyle remain in the former docklands area now – together with the global shift in manufacturing means that only 7.5% worked in manufacturing in 2001.



Figure 7a: H Forman warehouse on Marshgate Lane, the heart of the Olympic Park in February 2007 - prior to clearance. Copyright Bob Digby.



Figure 7b: Bywater’s recycling plant, off Marshgate Lane in July 2005 – prior to clearance.
Copyright Trevor Llewellyn.

The collapse of the traditional economy has now been overshadowed by the massive regeneration and growth of finance and banking in the Canary Wharf area of London’s Docklands. This remains the world’s biggest single urban regeneration project in the past 25 years. However, whilst there has been huge growth in service sector employment (particularly in banking, insurance and financial services), there are pockets of economic deprivation in east London. In 2001, Newham and Tower Hamlets were the UK’s two most deprived boroughs in spite of their location adjacent to one of the western world’s most dynamic and prosperous engines of the economy.

Associated with this has been a shift in the middle classes into east London, sometimes involving wholesale destruction of working class communities, as bulldozers moved in and new riverside communities were created. Such a middle class shift has transformed east London’s population structure and characteristics. There remain housing estates – almost always of public housing – in which the Canary Wharf regeneration has had little impact. Although unemployment is much reduced from its 1981 census highs of over 60% for adult males, local council wards such as Canning Town South show significant indicators of deprivation when compared to London and to the rest of England (Figure 8).

	Canning Town South	Newham (London Borough)	London	England
Age groups				
Age Groups - Summary; Aged 0-4	8.7	8.5	6.7	5.9
Age Groups - Summary; Aged 5-15	17.7	17.6	13.5	14.2
Age Groups - Summary; Aged 16-19	5.4	6.3	4.7	4.9
Age Groups - Summary; Aged 20-44	38.1	42.2	42.7	35.3
Age Groups - Summary; Aged 45-64	19.2	16.4	20.0	23.8
Age Groups - Summary; Aged 65+	10.9	8.9	12.4	15.9
Ethnicity				
Ethnic Group - Percentages; White	61.0	39.4	71.2	90.9
Ethnic Group - Percentages; Mixed	3.0	3.4	3.2	1.3
Ethnic Group - Percentages; Asian or Asian British	6.4	32.5	12.1	4.6
Ethnic Group - Percentages; Black or Black British	26.9	21.6	10.9	2.3
Ethnic Group - Percentages; Chinese or Other Ethnic gp	2.7	3.1	2.7	0.9
General Health				
General health: Good	65.0	67.9	70.8	68.7
General health: Fairly good	22.4	21.9	20.9	22.2
General health: Not good	12.6	10.1	8.3	9.0

People with a limiting long-term illness	20.7	17.3	15.5	17.9
Employment status for people aged 16-74				
Employed Full-time	37.6	40.0	51.6	49.1
Employed Part-time	8.1	7.7	8.6	11.8
Unemployed	6.7	6.7	4.4	3.4
Full-time student	11.1	13.7	9.6	7.3
Retired	9.7	7.8	9.8	13.5
Looking after home / family	10.9	10.4	7.2	6.5
Permanently sick / disabled	9.1	6.8	4.6	5.3
Other	6.8	7.0	4.3	3.1
Education and Qualifications for people aged 16-74				
No qualifications	43.1	33.6	23.7	28.9
Highest qualification <5 GCSEs	12.1	13.9	13.0	16.6
Highest qualification = 5 GCSEs grade C+	15.3	16.3	17.1	19.4
Highest qualification = A level	6.5	8.9	9.8	8.3
Highest qualification = University degree	16.5	21.3	31.0	19.9
Home ownership				
Owner occupied: Owns or has a mortgage	25.4	43.7	56.5	68.8
Rented from: Council (local authority), HA or private landlord	74.6	56.3	44.5	31.2

Figure 8: Deprivation indicators of Canning Town South, a ward of Newham borough in east London. Source: <http://neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk>

Whilst market-led regeneration of the 1980s and early 1990s, led by a partnership of central government, private companies and property developers, has had spectacular effects on the built environment, upon employment and upon the skyline of east London, its impacts remain fragmented amongst Londoners.

- The revival and economic expansion of Docklands has transformed London into – by many indicators – the world’s leading financial centre, and a major destination for professional and managerial migrants.
- However, whilst inward investment and migration has helped to fuel economic growth, it has failed to provide similar opportunities for communities in areas such as Canning Town South, just a mile or two away from Canary Wharf.

One of the questions regarding the Olympics, therefore, is that of legacy, in terms of tackling deep-rooted inequalities.

What are the impacts of London’s Olympics likely to be?

There is little doubt that the media will focus upon the impacts of the Olympics in terms of their costs. The same focus occurred in Sydney in the 5-6 years leading up to 2000, particularly in respect of costs arising from the remediation of polluted sites. If London’s Olympics are to create a legacy, these ought to be assessed by geographers in terms of their economic, social and environmental impacts. Economic costs have of course risen since the initial bid. However, social and environmental factors tend to be ignored by the media, and it is worth highlighting some of these.

Economic Impacts

Engineering consultants Arup carried out a feasibility study published in 2002 which expressed the impacts of a London Olympics in terms of its costs and benefits. Although the figures have been superseded enormously since then, their analysis (Figure 9) showed that projected benefits ought to exceed costs by £500 million. For this, they drew heavily upon the impacts of Sydney’s Olympics and upon a report commissioned by PriceWaterhouseCoopers in 2001 which assessed the financial balance sheet of the 2000 Games.

As with Sydney, projected costs have proved to be gross underestimates. It is fair to ask whether the figures can now balance. The UK Government estimated in mid-2007 that costs would reach £10 billion, over four times the original estimate, but that these would be exceeded by the scale of benefits.

Of course, projected impacts are conjecture at this stage, more than four years prior to the event. However, four points are worth making –

- plans for the Olympic Park have altered considerably in terms of their scope since the original feasibility study.
- new estimates contain significant contingency funds.
- Arup estimates were that additional tourist spending alone would be in the region of £400-£700 million as a result of the Olympics. This is likely to be much greater in view of data from Sydney (Figure 10).
- The economic ‘ripple effect’ of regenerating one of the UK’s most deprived areas would be substantial. Any accounting procedures post-2012 would have to take account of increased land values as the ‘desirability’ of the area increased. Already, land values in some parts of the area close to Olympic Park have more than doubled since 2005.

It is worth noting here that – Wembley Stadium apart – virtually every sports regeneration and construction project in the UK in recent years (e.g. Arsenal Emirates Stadium, Manchester Commonwealth Games) has been completed on time and to budget. The likely outcome is, therefore, that budgets will have been revised, but will be delivered, and that the deadlines are likely to be met with room to spare.

Figure 9: Costs and benefits of the 2012 Olympics

Costs:

- Land purchase, Construction of venues and infrastructure,
- Decontamination of sites
- Costs of hosting the Games themselves e.g. ticketing and security

Benefits:

- Direct – e.g. ticket revenue, sponsorship from e.g. media and brand companies;
- Indirect – e.g. land values after re-development, tourist spending

Consultants PriceWaterhouseCoopers showed a range of benefits to Sydney, arising from 2000 Olympic and Paralympic Games (Figure 10). Their data show substantial benefits and impacts spatially and economically within Sydney, across New South Wales and Australia as a whole.

Figure 10: The economic impacts of Sydney’s 2000 Olympics
Summarised from PriceWaterhouseCoopers’ report of 2001

1. AU\$3 billion worth of business investment and production came to Sydney, including sports facilities lasting well beyond the Games.
2. Nearly 20% of all Olympics investment went to businesses located in regional New South Wales
3. Over AU\$6 billion was invested in infrastructure developments in New South Wales (NSW)
4. Over AU\$1.2 billion worth of convention business came to NSW between 1993 and 2007
5. Tourists to Australia spent a record AU\$6 billion from an *additional* 1.6 million visitors during 2001
6. The Olympics gave Australia expertise and confidence in competing for large-scale projects after the Games e.g. construction of Wembley Stadium.
7. Transport and construction projects upgrades included AU\$2 billion on Sydney airport, a AU\$700 million Eastern Distributor Road in Sydney.
8. The Sydney Convention Centre hosted 210 events between 1993 and Games time, attracting more than 250 000 delegates bringing AU\$1 billion into Sydney's economy
9. Income from the Games brought AU\$1.1 billion from broadcasting rights, AU\$680 million in sponsorship revenue, ticket sales of over AU\$600 million.

Separating an economic assessment of the Olympics will be difficult in view of the broader regeneration programmes that started in 1997, parallel the Olympics, and are due to run until beyond 2020. For instance, the opening of the new high-speed Channel Tunnel Rail Link (CTRL) from St Pancras in November 2007 has brought east London to within 2 hours of Paris and Brussels in 2009 when Stratford International Station is opened. The new commercial and retail development in central Stratford, known

as Stratford City, is independent of the Olympics, and will undoubtedly bring its own impacts. The impacts of regeneration as a whole are clearly substantial. The transport infrastructure in and around Stratford has been fundamental to the success of regeneration schemes. Stratford has London’s most dense suburban transport ‘hub’ with nine surface and underground rail links (Figure 11). This was fundamental to the Olympic proposals; in 2002, the IOC had identified transport as the issue on which London was most likely to fail in its bid.

Mass transit in east London will be transformed with the CTRL link between St Pancras and Ebbsfleet in Kent, and new Japanese ‘Javelin’ trains which will link the two. This link alone has transformed the prospect of moving huge numbers of people during the Olympics at peak times between 4.30 p.m. (the end of afternoon events) and 6 p.m.(the start of evening events), during which Stratford and Stratford International will have to accommodate 500 000 people. Again, London follows Sydney’s example in this respect, where public transport handled the numbers with some ease.

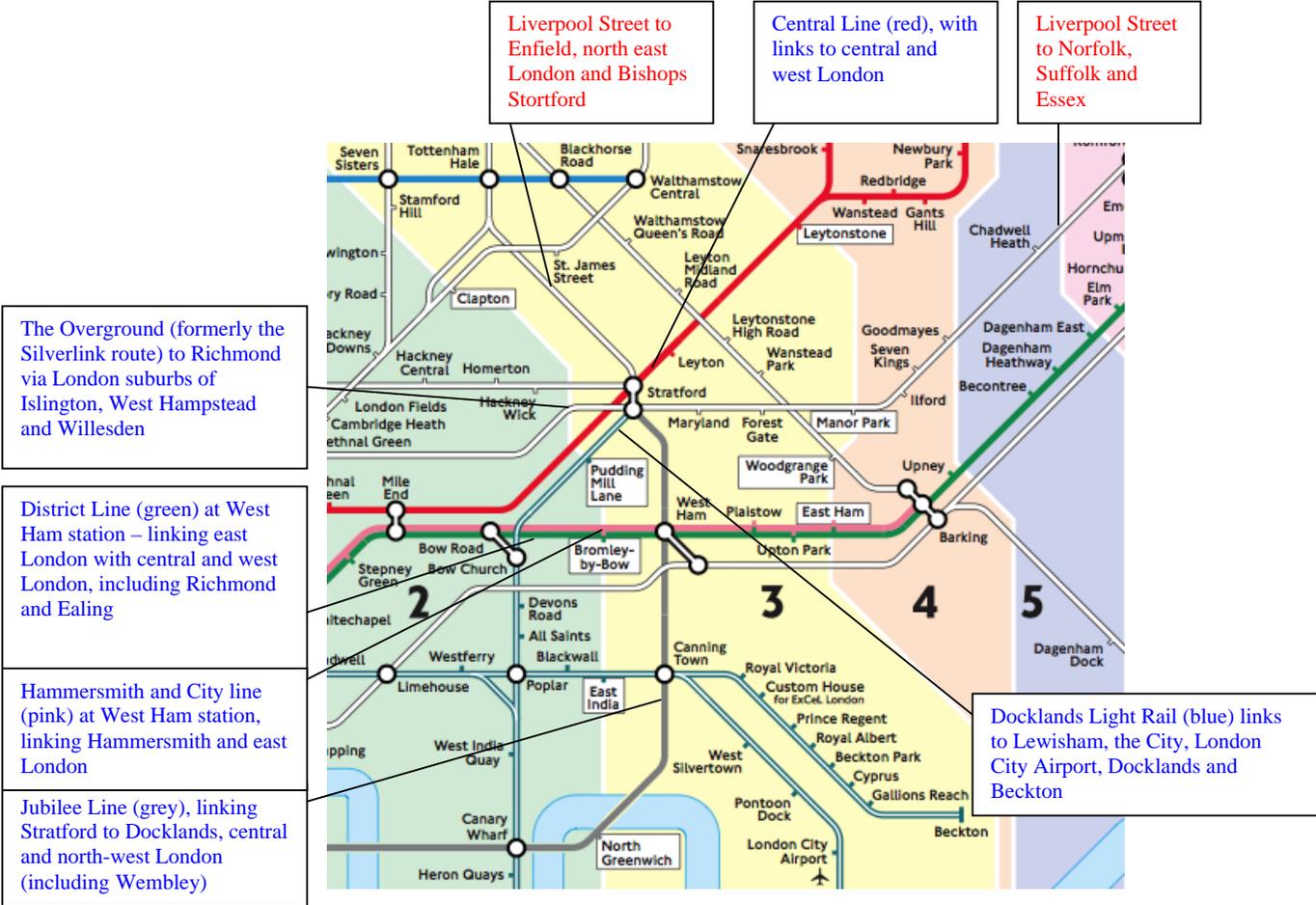


Figure 11: Stratford’s transport links

Environmental Impacts

Sydney branded itself as the world’s first ‘Green Olympics’. The plans for London have developed this concept further, with a focus upon environmental improvement, in some cases designed by the same design personnel responsible for Sydney. The central focus is Olympic Park, the first major park in London for over a century. None of the Docklands regeneration projects have to date incorporated any major public open space – something which Sir Peter Hall has judged as ‘a lost opportunity’. The thrust for the new park is the environmental regeneration of the Lea Valley and a new Lea Valley Regional Park. The idea of such a park is not new; it was first put forward in 1944 in Abercrombie’s plan for London to create ‘a green lung’, and playground for Londoners. But it has taken this long to prove a reality.

The Lea Valley now reflects east London's recent past;

- A considerable amount of land is contaminated, either with chemicals from wartime munitions dumps, or from bombsite clearance after World War 2, or from industrial waste, which has been covered over. Mercury, cyanide and lead contamination are common.
- Environmental quality is low. East London is the only area of London where surface pylons transmitted electricity overhead (Figure 12); in all other areas of London, cables took it underground. In 2007 their removal began as a part of the new infrastructure for an energy grid in east London.
- Waste dumping and fly tipping has been ignored or tolerated.
- Industrial decline has led to a proliferation of derelict sites (Figure 13).



Figure 12: Overhead power cables near Clays Lane – now being dismantled. Copyright Bob Digby.



Figure 13: Derelict land in the Lea valley, summer 2005. Copyright Trevor Llewellyn.

The Lea Valley Project will revitalise the area to extend the Olympic Park northeastwards from the lower Lea Valley along the waterways out towards the edge of London. A separately funded project is already taking place to clean up the water of the Lea River and its separate canals. In the change, some channels will be cleared, cleaned, and altered, and wildlife species such as newts are being moved away

from clearance sites in order to preserve biodiversity in the valley. The result should be a park which will provide a route way into east London along a 12km stretch of waterside leisure space, and which will allow biodiversity development.

Where Sydney aimed to produce strong conditions on the use of environmentally friendly building materials, the ODA in London have set even higher targets to improve upon this. Cleared building rubble and debris will be reused and recycled; their ambitious target is to reuse 90% of materials. In terms of consumable goods during the events themselves, a pilot project was based around Excel in east London in 2007 to use recyclable food packaging and to reduce litter as a trial before 2012.

Social Impacts

Social issues remain largely ignored in respect of the impact of the Olympics. Helen Jefferson Lenskyj (2002) refers to several issues on which the Sydney Olympics impacted severely – ranging from rent increases in social housing to increased police raids, and the diversion of funding from education and health into Olympics-related projects. Clearly, this is one area where London's Olympics faces a considerable challenge.

The 2012 Olympics will be taking place in five boroughs of east London; one, Newham, is – according to the 2001 UK census – the poorest and most deprived area of the UK. As the census data for Canning Town South (Figure 8) show, regeneration projects to date have barely trickled down any benefits to local communities. How far will the 2012 Olympics impact on areas such as this?

Newham has the most diverse population of all areas of the city, a factor which helped to win the bid for London. But it is the youngest borough; 41% of the population are under the age of 24, and with the highest percentage of one-parent families in the UK, many are unable to work. This gives Newham's population the UK's highest dependency ratio. Typically, its wage earners average one fifth of the annual salary of the population of west London in boroughs such as Richmond-on-Thames. Statistically, young people in east London, compared to others in the city, are most likely to have –

- worse health
- poorer housing
- lower education qualifications
- been a victim of crime.

Poverty impacts upon health; for every tube stop on the Jubilee line between Westminster in central London and Stratford, an adult male loses 1 year of life expectancy – 9 stops and 9 years. One in four houses is overcrowded, and housing policies in recent decades have not provided for the needs of larger families. Housing for key workers, including nurses and teachers is unaffordable, even though east London has the cheapest housing in Greater London. There is a severe need for affordable housing of several types and sizes – and for a definition of what is 'affordable' that is based on earning capacity and not on existing average house prices.

Clays Lane

As the following example shows, there is a great need for social housing for London's disadvantaged population. The Olympics village is to be built along Clays Lane in Stratford to the north east of the main Olympic Park (Figure 14). Until July 2007, the site consisted of three types of housing –

- Halls of residence for the University of East London. The university settled compensation with the ODA to relocate.
- Clays Lane Housing Co-operative – a housing development built in the late 1970s for single and homeless people. Originally a co-operative, it consisted of shared accommodation to provide support for those least able to afford or cope with single living. Based in shared flats of varying sizes, the 450 residents had heavily subsidised rents, which in early 2007 were under £70 per week per person, including all energy costs and local taxes. The occupants were relocated during 2007 into Council and Housing Association housing throughout east London, thereby breaking up a

community. Compensation payments – about £8500 per person – would not have lasted long in a borough where average rentals outside the co-operative were in the region of £150-£175 per week.

- A travellers' site. Newham Borough – with a reputation of pro-traveller policies – has had to find a new site for the 150 travellers who had to be moved.

The plan is to re-model the Olympic Village after 2012 into affordable housing for 3000 people. However, it does show that houses have had to be lost in the process. London's plan to create a pool of social housing reflects similar plans in Sydney. However, the costs of regeneration and a massive environmental clean-up in Sydney were so great that the Olympic Village was sold off for housing at full market rates. It would be fair to ask whether similar financial pressures will occur in London.



Figure 14: Clays Lane community housing. Demolition of this site commenced in April 2007. Copyright Bob Digby.

In total, the ODA plan to build at least 9000 houses around the Olympic Park after 2012. Only if replicated throughout the whole of east London, through the Thames Gateway region and into the South East Economic Region will London's housing shortages become less problematic. Perhaps it would not be fair to judge the success of the 2012 Olympics on this criterion; the problem is endemic across the south-east region.

Looking forward

When the IOC visited London in the summer of 2007, they were very pleased with progress to date. Building of the stadia and infrastructure should begin in 2008, be largely complete by early 2011, and leave over a year in which to rehearse events in preparation for mass people movement in the lead-up to the Olympics. In this respect, London is a few weeks ahead of Sydney at a similar stage to the 2000 Olympics and progress is well on schedule. Some media critique is bound to emerge as costs fluctuate, in the same way as it emerged in Sydney. But whilst economic concerns may occupy the media, environmental change will help to provide a lasting legacy. Less easily assessed are social concerns and whether those who have yet to receive a slice of national cake in areas such as Clays Lane and Canning Town South will feel any beneficial impacts of 2012.