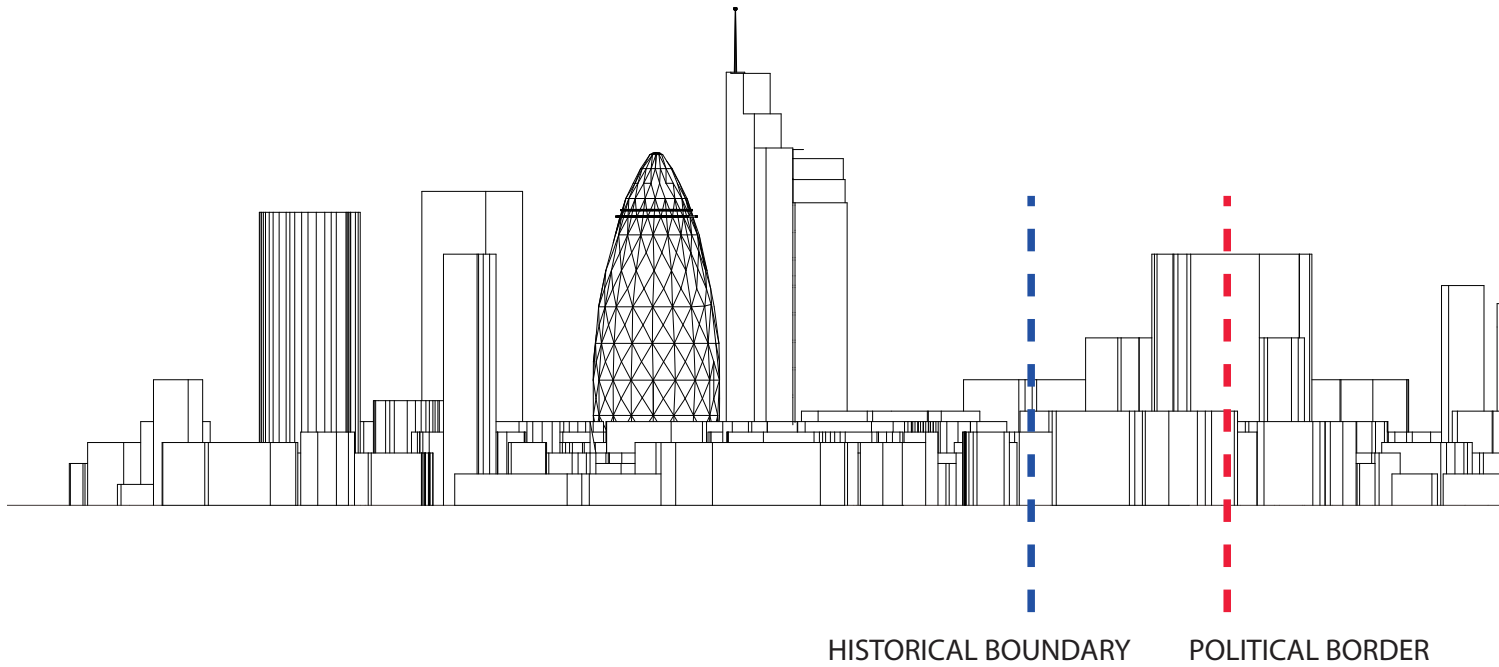


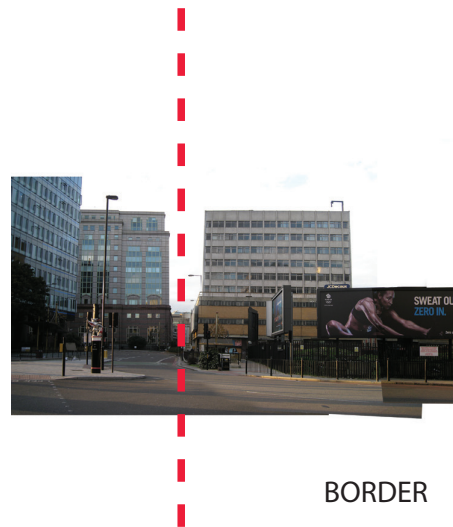
Joo Hyun Jung
Charlie Peel
Tena Petrovic

Aldgate
**GATEWAYS
TO THE STREET**

ALDGATE: GATEWAYS & BOUNDARIES



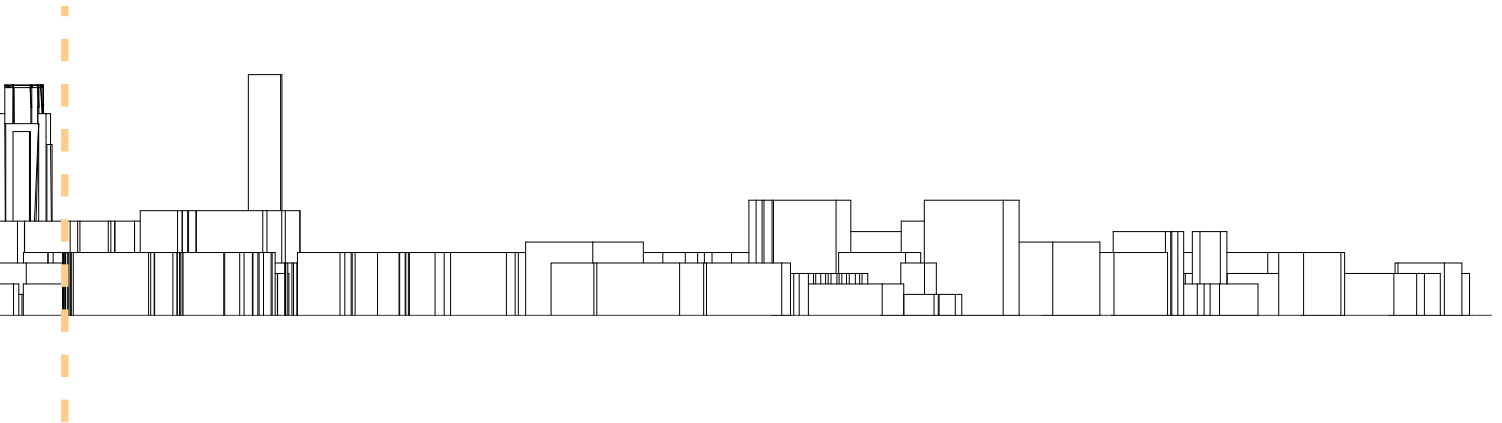
CITY OF LONDON



BORDER

Elevation looking north

The skyline drops gradually from the skyscrapers of the City's 'Eastern Cluster' into the low-rise skyline of Tower Hamlets



PHYSICAL BOUNDARY



TOWER HAMLETS

ANALYSING ALDGATE

We encountered Aldgate at the start of a four-mile walk along the high street, ending at Stratford. There was little apparent charm on this stretch of one of London's historic arteries serving the east. The site is now the anchor to this roman road, connecting it to the financial heart of the City of London. We noticed the disproportionate presence of development sites: both derelict buildings and empty plots. There seemed to be some resonance with Stratford at the other end of 'High Street 2012', clearly 'under construction'. On further exploration there was a stark contrast to what we found. At Stratford, the development along the high street was surrounded by a literal void in the urban fabric. At Aldgate we found the opposite: a rich variety and density of different worlds.

We conducted our investigation under three lenses: historical, political, and physical. The historic analysis revealed the presence of the London Wall, the origins of the Aldgate, and the resulting urban grain. The political lens framed the border between Tower Hamlets (TH) and the City of London (CoL) as a social, economic, planning and policy divide. The physical analysis assessed the problems and potentials in this site; most notable was the lack of a coherent or successful public realm. These observations pointed to a site characterised by fragmentation, intensity, and passage.

These three characters produced the conditions of this *gateway* site. Aldgate is important as a site between different worlds: a threshold. These worlds exist at different scales: at the metropolitan (between 'east' and 'west') and at the local (between primary and secondary routes). This concept was then mobilised into a tool for planning. It could be employed at various physical scales as well as at different temporal scales.

This worked to 'unlock Aldgate' and give this important site what it deserves – a vision that two neighboring planning authorities can share, as well as demonstrating the value of a coherent public realm feeding off the high street. The challenge was how to secure and activate the ground-plane in a site of highly speculative development. Our project readdresses the high street by selecting key sites that act as gateways between this world of fast flow and the slower, residual territories behind.

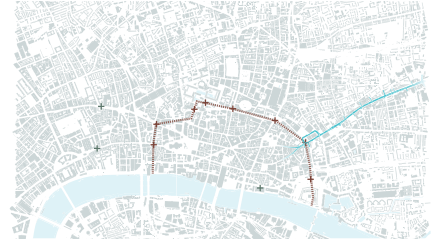
There are three boundaries that intersect the high street from north to south. They are in turn: historic, political and physical. We used these to frame a detailed exploration into the complexities of the site.

Aerial photograph of Aldgate. Source: Bing Maps

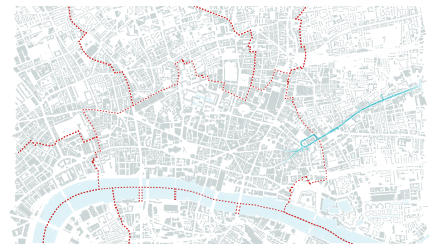


Aldgate is located on the border of the City of London (CoFL) and the London Borough of Tower Hamlets (LBTH). The demarcation line that divides the two authorities has not been constant – most recently it was changed in 1994, enlarging the City's territory towards the east, and incorporating some former Tower Hamlets land. Richard Sennett (2008) differentiates between borders and boundaries, defining borders as permeable 'exchange zones' and boundaries as clear limits. In this sense, Aldgate is characterised by two boundaries and a border.

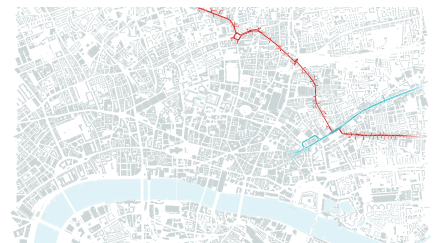
The historic boundary between the City of London and the east was strongly marked by the London Wall, which ran alongside today's Houndsditch and Minories. The current dividing line between CoFL and LBTH is a political border that stretches along Middlesex and Mansell streets. There is a third boundary at the most eastern part of Aldgate. This is a physical boundary, formed by the intersection of Commercial Street and Commercial Road.



Historical boundary: The London Wall. Ordinance Survey maps consulted at the Museum of London, Roman department



Political boundary: City of London and neighbouring boroughs. Neighbouring boroughs, clockwise from left: Westminster, Camden, Islington, Hackney, Tower Hamlets, Southwark, Lambeth



Physical Boundary: Circulation road
Commercial Road and Commercial Street



The three boundaries in Aldgate. This drawing shows the boundaries that cut through Aldgate. The historic wall to the west and Commercial Road to the east flank Aldgate. The political boundary is less evident in the physical fabric on the site, however it cuts straight through the middle.

HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

Aldgate is very much determined by its history. Its name, character and geographical position all derive from London's ancient past.

London Wall

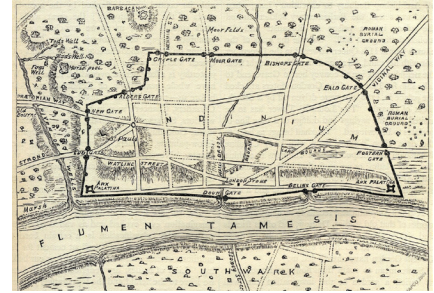
The London Wall, built by the Romans around AD 200, encircled Londinium. The Wall was perforated by entry points, gates to the historic city of London. Through these gates ran the roads that connected the Roman outposts.

Gate

The eastern-most gate was Aldgate, and the road led to Colchester. The etymology of the name remains somewhat uncertain, as different sources tell different stories; according to historian John Stow its name was derived from 'Old Gate', whereas some argue that the name is due to the fact that Aldgate was free to all, thereby 'All gate'. Although its physical structure has changed drastically over time, its character as a gateway has remained. The gates were rebuilt many times until 1761, when they were pulled down.

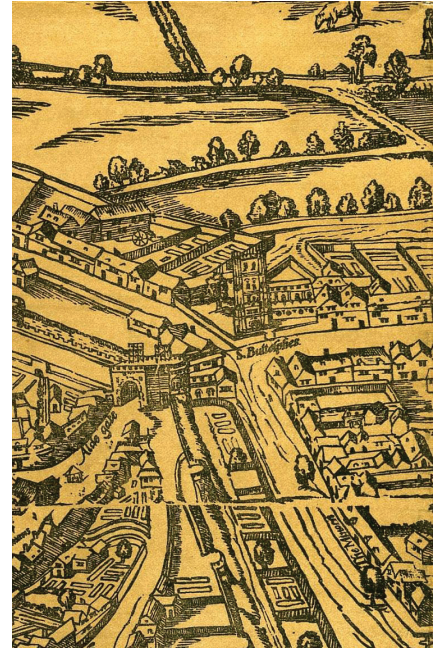
Roman London AD190. Source: Cassell and Company, Limited. London (1897)

This early map shows London as a walled city, perforated by gates.



Medieval London. Source: Agas (c1560)

This detail of the Agas map shows the change in land-use either side of the wall. Inside the wall the streets are dense and the foundations of the urban grain are laid. Outside the wall there is still vast open, rural space. St Boltoph's church is located at this prominent site near the gate.



Medieval London. Source: Agas (c1560)

Inner London has become densely populated and bound by the wall

LONDON IN THE TIME OF THE TUDORS. A REPRODUCTION, REDUCED, OF THE MAP BY RALPH AGAS, CIRCA 1550.



PHYSICAL ANALYSIS

Aldgate has been an important gateway to the City of London for centuries. However, it now is dominated by heavy traffic. Its function as a gateway has been undermined by poor quality development and disconnected public spaces, making the street environment unpleasant for pedestrians.

Circulation

Of the three different boundaries that intersect our site, the physical boundary is marked by the heavy flow of traffic. Commercial Road intersects with Whitechapel High Street, forming a busy intersection. It is a vital inter-regional link which carries substantial traffic volumes, and can be read as a circulation boundary to pedestrians.

Connectivity

Aldgate has great accessibility with its location close to London's financial district, and at the centre of a major public transport hub. Various groups of people including students, office workers and residents traverse Aldgate routinely, though traffic makes walking and cycling through the area inconvenient.

Public Realm

Two key issues for our site are a lack of public realm and lack of sunlight. There are only two small neighbouring parks: Altab Ali Park and Braham Park. Altab Ali park is the most significant local open, green space. Aldgate also has a limited number of spaces for children's play.

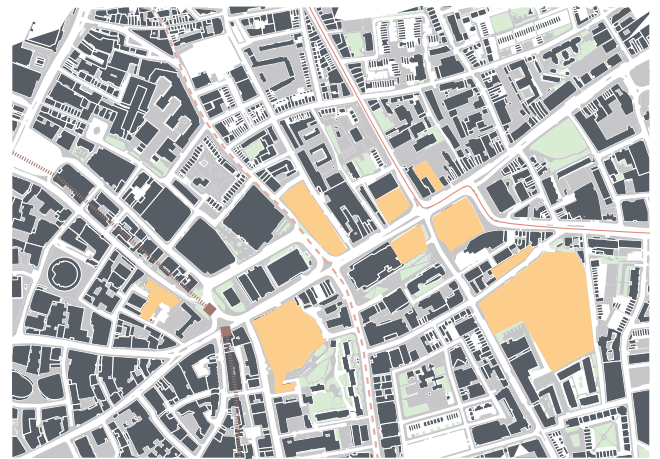
Alleyways

Aldgate has a series of intimate alleyways on both the City of London and Tower Hamlets sides. As service corridors between the front and rear of buildings, alleyways are an evocative element of the urban environment. Alleyways draw people to take shortcuts. The main users of alleyways in the City of London are office workers, in contrast with those off Whitechapel High Street, used mainly by local residents. Measures to strengthen the connection between the City of London and Tower Hamlets street environments should consider the function of alleyways as diverse city networks.



Land-use map

This map shows the predominant territories between east and west: office workers (blue) and residents (red)



Development sites

All the plots in yellow are currently in development, but on hold



Pedestrian routes

There are overlapping routes between different users of the space: residents (red), office workers (blue), students (purple) and visitors (green). They also link the public transport nodes: Tube stations (black circles) and bus stops (red circles).

SITE ANALYSIS: SUMMARY

To conclude, analysis of the site falls into three categories: intensity, fragmentation and passage.

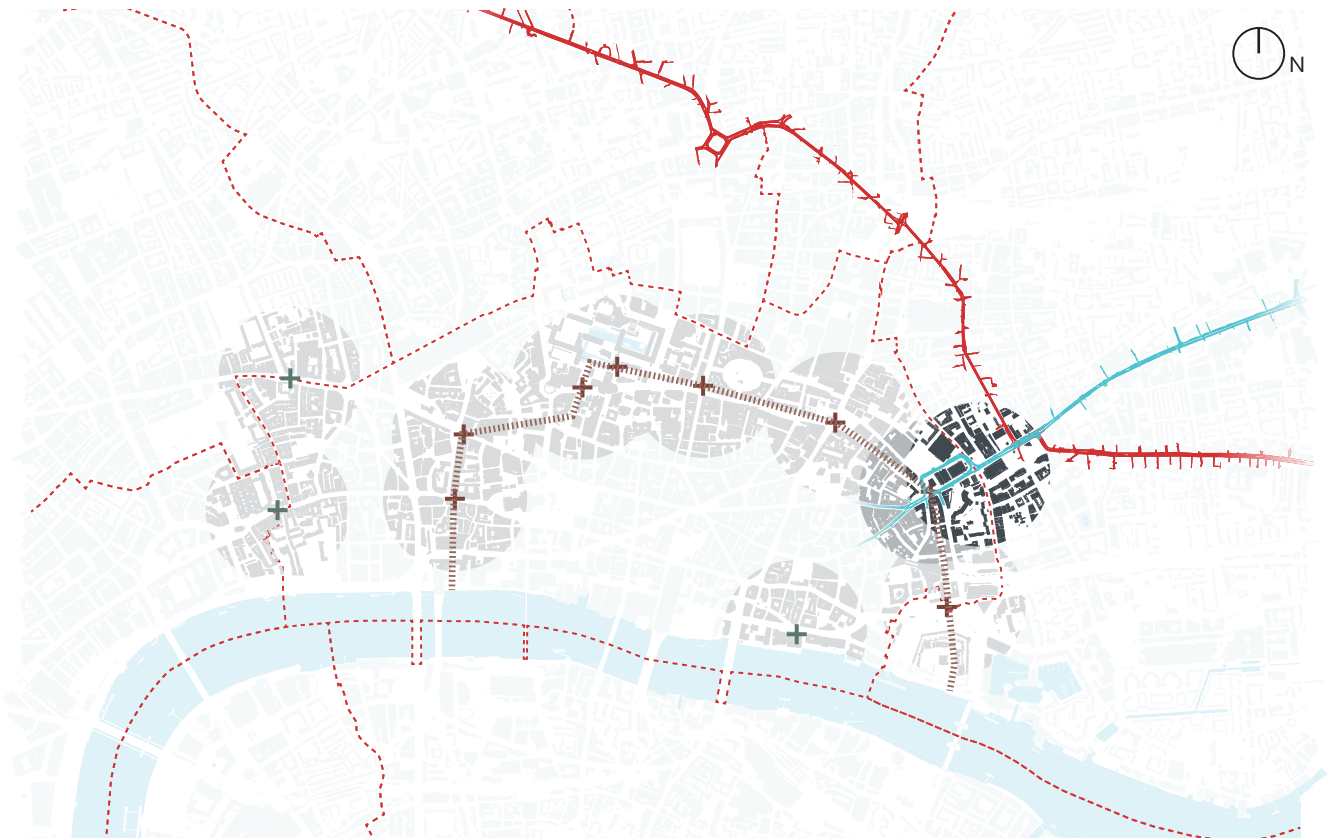
Aldgate is characterised by a considerable density of different users – residents, City workers and students. However, most use the space more as a transit route than as a destination. There is a noticeable lack of public and open spaces. Numerous institutions, mainly educational, are also grouped on the site, contributing to the diversity of uses.

Aldgate is fragmented at various levels. These include the administrative divide between two boroughs (CofL and LBTH), different grains along the high street (finer along the north side, and larger along the south side), different uses (with concentrated areas of offices and residential), and different building heights. Overall the area lacks a unified, integrated feel.

Finally, we identified differentiated movement patterns of fast flow, slow flow and pausing spaces. Fast flows are to be found along the high street as well as Commercial Street/Commercial Road; slow flows mainly occur behind the high street, while pausing spaces are scattered throughout the site. Different user groups have appropriated different circulation routes, each of them (workers, residents, students, visitors) having their own characteristic and most convenient route that leads towards their desired destination. Residual spaces, comprised of alleyways and gates, are a distinctive feature of Aldgate. They are largely hidden from outside view, almost intimate in their nature, and provide opportunities for pause.

Key diagram

This drawing summarises our analysis of Aldgate in the metropolitan context. The three borders can be seen intersecting the high street (blue). The historic gates have a 250m territory mapped, meanwhile the Aldgate territory has shifted east and is centered where the political boundary meets the high street. (Clockwise from left to right: Temple Bar, Holborn Gate, Ludgate, Newgate, Aldersgate, Cripplegate, Moorgate, Bishopsgate, Aldgate, Posterngate, Billingsgate)



GATEWAYS: FROM CONDITION TO CONCEPT TO TOOL

How can a 'gateway' condition be conceptualised and mobilised as a tool for planning?

Condition

This gateway site is important in mediating between two distinct worlds. One is the commercial core of a leading global city. The City of London Corporation has a developmental priority to ensure its financial turnover is maintained, and that it remains competitive within the global cities market. To the east is Tower Hamlets, persistently referred to as the most deprived borough in London, as evidenced by multiple deprivation indices (CLG 2007).

Concept

Having found the pre-condition of existing and historical 'gates' and 'ways' in Aldgate, we turned to the dictionary to see how these objects overlapped. A gateway was: 'an opening'; 'a place considered as giving access to another place'; 'a means of achieving a state or condition'; and 'a device used to connect two different networks'. Rather than just a romantic nostalgia for the *Auldgate*, this was an opportunity to re-conceptualise the site as a gateway, not just a boundary.

Georg Simmel's essay 'Bridge and Door' (1909) is a starting point for conceptualising the notion of a gateway. Simmel argued that the door acted as a psychological tool to connect and celebrate the differences to be found either side. In other words, the presence of the door draws one's attention to the difference in worlds either side. We saw how this could apply to gateways, and more specifically Aldgate: the identities to the immediate east and west of the site would benefit from maintaining this separation. What we observed was the 'City' slowly encroaching on a different urban environment.

Tool

We chose to focus on curtailing the tendency of the financial district, with its highly speculative property market, to sprawl piecemeal into an environment that has a much greater potential. Using this conceptual framework we have attempted to show the ways in which it could be used as a tool for planning in these specific sites in London.

gate ► **noun** 1 a hinged barrier used to close an opening in a wall, fence, or hedge.
 2 a gateway: she went out through the gate. ■ an exit from an airport building to an aircraft: a departure gate. ■ (in names) a mountain pass or other natural passage: the Golden Gate.
 3 the number of people who pay to enter a sports ground for an event: an average home gate of more than 12,000.
 4 the money taken for admission.
 5 a device resembling a gate in structure or function, in particular:
 6 a hinged or sliding barrier for controlling the flow of water: a sluice gate. ■ an arrangement of slots into which the gear lever of a motor vehicle moves to engage each gear. ■ a device for holding each frame of a film in position behind the lens of a camera or projector.
 7 an electric circuit with an output which depends on the combination of several inputs: a logic gate.
 8 the part of a field-effect transistor to which a signal is applied to control the resistance of the conductive channel of the device.
 ► **verb** (with obj.) Bnt. confine (a pupil or student) to school or college: he was gated for the rest of term.
 - **PHRASES** **get (or be given) the gate** N. Amer. informal be dismissed from a job.
 - **ORIGIN** Old English *gæt*, *gāt*, plural *gatu*, of Germanic origin; related to Dutch *gat* 'gap, hole, breach'.
gate ► **noun** Bnt. (in place names) a street: Kirkgate.
 - **ORIGIN** Middle English (also meaning 'way' in general); from Old Norse *gata*; related to German *Gasse* 'street, lane'.
-gate ► **combining form** in nouns denoting an actual or alleged scandal, especially one involving a cover-up: Irangate.

way /weɪ/ ► **noun** 1 a method, style, or manner of doing something: an optional or alternative form of action: I hated their way of cooking potatoes | there are two ways of approaching this problem.
 2 (one's way) one's characteristic or habitual manner of behaviour or expression: it was not his way to wait passively for things to happen. ■ (ways) the customary behaviour or practices of a group: my years of acclimatization to British ways. ■ the typical manner in which something happens or in which someone or something behaves: he was showing off, as is the way with adolescent boys. ■ a particular aspect of something; a respect: I have changed in every way. ■ (with adj) a specified condition or state: the family was in a poor way.
 3 a road, track, or path for travelling along: (in place names) No. 3, Church Way.
 4 a course of travel or route taken in order to reach a place: can you tell me the way to Leicester Square? ■ a specified direction of travel or movement: we just missed another car coming the other way. ■ a means of entry or exit from somewhere, such as a door or gate: I nipped out the back way. ■ (also N. Amer. informal) ways a distance travelled or to be travelled: the distance from one place to another: they still had a long way ahead of them | figurative the area's wine industry still has some way to go to full maturity. ■ a period between one point in time and another: September was a long way off. ■ travel or motion along a particular route: the route along which someone or something would travel | if unobstructed, Christine tried to follow but Martin blocked her way | that table's in the way | get out of my way!
 5 (one's way) used with a verb and adverbial phrase to intensify the force of an action or to denote movement or progress: I shouldered my way to the bar. ■ (with modifier or possessive) informal a particular area or locality: the family's main estate over Maidenhead way.
 6 (ways) parts into which something divides or is divided: the national vote split three ways.
 7 formal or Scottish a person's occupation or line of business.
 8 (mass noun) forward motion or momentum of a ship or boat through water: the dinghy lost way and drifted towards the shore.
 9 (ways) a sloping structure down which a new ship is launched.

gateway ► **noun** 1 an opening that can be closed by a gate: we turned into a gateway leading to a cottage.
 2 a frame or arch built around or over a gate: a big house with a wrought-iron gateway. ■ a place regarded as giving access to another place: Mombasa, the gateway to East Africa. ■ a means of achieving a state or condition: to me a home in the country was a gateway to happiness.
 3 Computing a device used to connect two different networks, especially a connection to the Internet.
gateway drug ► **noun** a drug which supposedly leads the user on to more addictive or dangerous drugs.

Dictionary definitions. Source: Oxford Dictionary of English.

Concept diagram

The two scales of gateway are shown here. The 250m radius plots the larger scale of gateway, while the red plots form the local gateways



FRAGMENTATION

Boundaries and Borders

The site has been characterised by the three dividing lines that intersect the high street. This has broken the site into a north and south territory, as well as leaving a zone in the centre that struggles to relate to the City of London, and likewise, struggles to relate to Tower Hamlets.

Policy

The lack of a strong, overarching vision for this site results in a discontinuous public realm. Various stakeholders have shown interest in the area; numerous policy documents have expressed differing regulatory views. Competing interests on the part of the two boroughs have had a negative impact upon Aldgate. It is here that the 'no-man's land' character comes to the fore. Tower Hamlets looks to Aldgate as an opportunity for borough-wide economic growth, with several commercial office developments planned. Meanwhile, the City of London Corporation see the site as the 'east-end' of their jurisdiction.

INTENSITY

Traffic

With the high street acting as a highway through the core of Aldgate, the number of vehicles passing through the area threatens to overrun its current road capacities. Advertising spaces along the high street, especially billboards, are among the most lucrative in the whole of London, guaranteeing revenues for advertisers, and consequently the boroughs – all thanks to the intense flow of traffic. Six- and four-lane traffic is responsible for pollution and noise levels that are higher in the areas adjacent to the high street than elsewhere on the site.

PASSAGE

Fast flows

Aldgate's fast flow routes host transitory modes of travel – primarily motorised vehicles, but also commuters. With five Tube stations along the high street, commuters are constantly coming and going, contributing to the temporary character typical of highways. Pedestrians wanting to bridge the City – East End route will also choose this fast flow route as the quickest and most convenient.

Slow flows

Slow flow can be experienced in numerous places. Aldgate abounds with alleys, passages and one-layer-back streets that are ideal for a modern flâneur. Hidden from view as well as slowed down in speed, they enable pedestrians to immerse themselves in the area. Alleys act as secondary routes that pull people away from main streets and into neighbourhood spaces.

Pause

The potential for pausing spaces in Aldgate is constrained by a lack of sunlight during much of the year. Proposed developments will compound this problem if not addressed through policy interventions. In order to keep current light conditions through our site, we propose that a 'right to light' should inform public space policy. Developments with a high risk of obstructing access to sunlight at the ground plane should conform to an 'envelope' layout. If it is impossible to protect access to sunlight in the context of any given development, the developer should be required to secure an equivalent amount of light in the vicinity or allow public rooftop access.

Aldgate site shown with current proposed developments. Sun angle on June 21st, 12pm.

With multiple proposed developments in Aldgate, many currently on hold, it is uncertain how the area will look like in the future. We have sought to visualise how planned developments will impact access to sunlight at the ground plane. This exercise was done in a suggestive way, but is based upon all available data on the proposed developments. Our Ecotect analysis shows that the impact of new developments is likely to be substantial. For example, on June 21st the shadow cast by new buildings will be significant – two of the developments along the south side of the high street completely overshadow public space along the street.



INTERVENTION: SHORT-TERM, TEMPORARY USE

Aldgate is at its most intense along the congested high street. One layer back there are more secluded worlds. Retaining the identity and functions of these very different spaces is a challenge as piecemeal development takes place over time. The inefficient utilisation of these spaces clogs the streets unnecessarily. Large amounts of people experience traffic congestion and overcrowding, while the residual space has been neglected.

Our short-term intervention is designed to capitalise on the 2012 Olympic momentum. Our intervention would bring synergy to the site and address its current problems. Simple design could relieve congestion and increase the practical uses of the site.

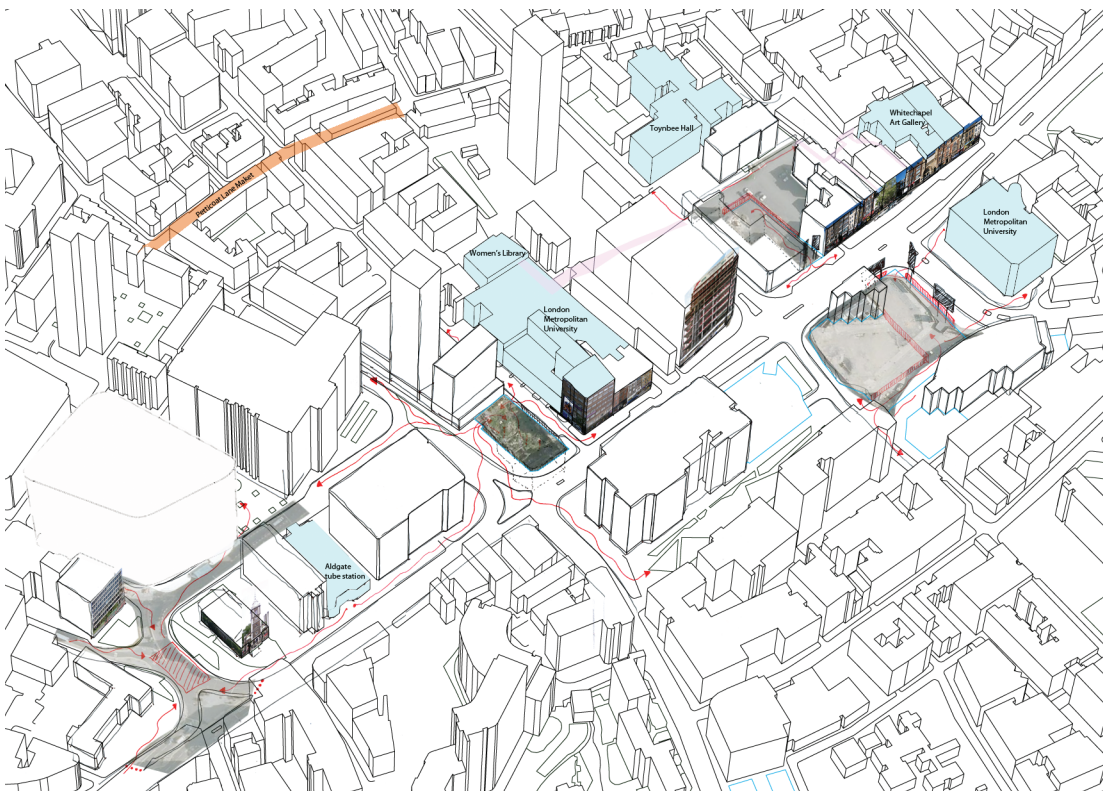
Using our overall conceptual framework, we applied the notion of 'Gateways' at a much smaller scale. We chose four different gateway sites, mediating between the fast and slow worlds we found. They are all currently derelict open spaces for which we propose temporary uses. These sites all feed off the high street, and lead onto and connect into the network of residual spaces one layer back. They were also selected for their increased sunlight hours, especially in the winter months.

1. Gyratory at St Botolph's

The City of London is considering the removal of the adjacent gyratory at St Botolph's, which will reallocate more space to pedestrians. Due to the cost of the scheme (£13-15m) it cannot take place while the Corporation is unable to levy the funding from stalled developments. Taking precedent from the Jan Gehl pedestrianisation of Manhattan streets ('Summer Streets' 2008), a temporary programme could be used on the gyratory site. This could initially operate for one lunch-time a week for several of the summer months and could be extended during the Olympic Games. This is a deliverable solution with several positive outcomes. As a pilot project it could demonstrate the value of the public realm, both to policy makers in the City of London and to potential developers.

2. Derelict space on Middlesex Street

This space is on three tiers, sunken below the high street. It is a prime site for billboards which dominate the edges of the site. It is currently abandoned with garbage and overgrowth inside. The space is not only bright and easily accessible, but its distinctive topography – sunken about 1.5 storeys below the level of the high street – lends a sense of enclosure and shields the space from street noise. On both counts, it has potential to host cultural events such as cinema screenings and music performances.



Four gateway sites: The four sites mediate between the high street and the secondary routes.

3. Derelict space on Whitechapel High Street

There is derelict space adjacent to the car park facing the Whitechapel High Street. We plan to provide seating here for the public. The location of this seating is programmed by sun studies that show the earliest direct sunlight reaches the ground at its north and east edges. This space could take on a second complementary programme, including a variety of pop-up uses. The site also connects well to nearby cultural assets such as the Women's Library, Tonybee Hall, the Whitechapel Gallery and London Metropolitan University, and to the network of secondary and tertiary routes beyond the high street.

4 Aldgate Place development site

The Aldgate Place development plan is currently on hold due to the economic downturn. Currently a visual blight and a marker of economic stasis, and given its location and size, the site's animation offers opportunities to enliven the high street. Its transitory state should be leveraged for meanwhile uses targeting a diverse surrounding population.

Programme

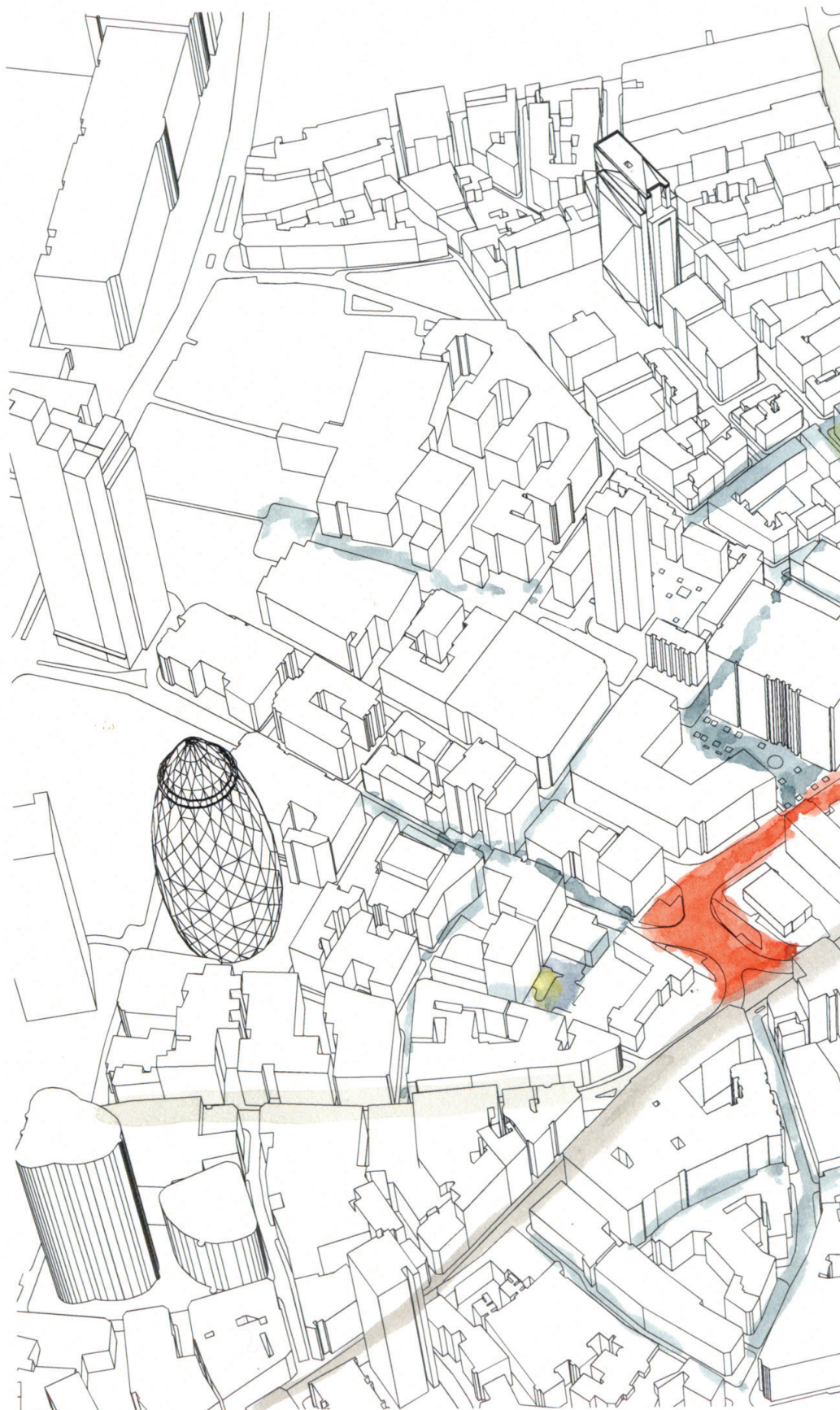
We have focused on temporarily claiming public space with very light-touch and low-cost solutions. The area has suffered from disparate development policies and a focus on private interests; it has a number of construction sites that are temporarily on hold. We selected four residual spaces in an effort to address problems of fragmentation and animate the the public realm. Our strategy capitalises on the area's intensity and makes imaginative use of currently under-utilised spaces. Temporary uses are more likely to gain buy-in from planners and developers. They will also change the spatial and physical qualities of the Aldgate area and encourage a change in patterns of behaviour along the high street. Creating spaces of pause is a key element in successful mediation between the fast flowing high street and the slower residual spaces behind.

As a site of intensified value, Aldgate is especially vulnerable to speculative development plans. Given that many proposed developments will not be built in the short- to medium-term, the question becomes: what can the planning system do in the meantime?

Four gateway sites

Locating the direct sunlight and positioning the programme for the space.





Four temporary-use spaces in Aldgate

This drawing shows the wider implications of the four sites of intervention in red. It visualises the relationship between the fast flowing high street and the quieter passages one layer back (grey), also highlighting connections to local and institutional assets (yellow).



LONDON'S GATEWAYS

Recognition is the first step to intervention. London is a city with a rich and textured history and an exciting but uncertain future. As the pace of world change fluctuates, and along with it the fragmented nature of Aldgate's built environment, now is the time for contextual spatial and social interventions.

Aldgate is positioned as a spatial and temporal gateway between London's east and west, past and future. Key 'gateway' sites identified in our initial analysis represent opportunities to intervene in, mediate and influence the changes that will define their relationship to the City of London. They are sufficiently important zones in London's fabric and should command a broader policy framework in which certain rules of planning can be enhanced or relaxed. This is critical to developing these border conditions while attending to the problems of fragmentation, intensity and flow, and celebrating their potential.

Aldgate, a physical and ephemeral gateway between the City of London and the Borough of Tower Hamlets, sits at an area of stark contrasts and stands as a microcosm of larger forces of change and division. This project seeks to address this area of contrast and non-identity through interventions that secure and activate the ground-plane. At a site and time of highly speculative investment, creating a vision for the area is as important as any single intervention: it is this vision that can create a common ground for bordering planning authorities and demonstrate the value of a coherent public realm.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ackroyd, P. (2001) *London: The Biography*. London: Vintage.

City of London; Department of Planning and Transportation (2010) *Core Strategy. Development Plan Document: Delivering a world class city*.

CLG (2007) *Neighbourhoods and Communities*. www.statistics.gov.uk/hub/people-places/communities/neighbourhoods-and-communities [Last accessed: 31 November 2010].

Historic-uk.com, *London City Wall Walk* www.historic-uk.com/DestinationsUK/secret-london/londons-city-wall-walk-part-two.htm [Accessed 23 March 2011]

London Borough of Tower Hamlets (2007) *Aldgate Masterplan*.

Sennett, R. (2008) 'The Public Realm.' www.richardsennett.com [Accessed 20 March 2011].

Simmel, G. (1909/1997) 'Bridge and Door', in N. Leach (ed.) *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*. London: Routledge. pp. 66–69.