

REDRAWING THE MENTAL MAP: OUR KEY INTERVENTIONS

Our key interventions elaborate the goals described above, using food as a common denominator to pursue the creation of both 'hard' and 'soft' networks, with a focus on the creation of the St. Clements 'Farm, Community Kitchen and Food Hub.'

Key Intervention 1:

Create Hard and Soft Networks / Urban Orchard

The first key intervention is projects that work towards the creation of a new 'mental map' of the Mile End neighbourhood, increasing awareness and overlap between under-used physical assets—Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park, Mile End Park and abundant green space; recreational facilities and opportunities; and the powerful institutional density the neighbourhood offers.

Hard Network

The Tower Hamlets Council Core Strategy outlines broad goals for the area, including promoting a 'town centre' surrounding the Mile End Tube station and green bridge, and the creation of a 'green grid' (LBTH, 2009). To expand this 'green grid' for reinforcing the physical connections to and between the existing institutions and green spaces, we propose strategic planting of orchard trees with light physical interventions at key sites and pathways under the 'Mile End Urban Orchard' project. The idea is rooted in the agricultural history of the site, providing an opportunity to connect residents to its history in a manner that will also provide a sensual experience and distinct visual clues.

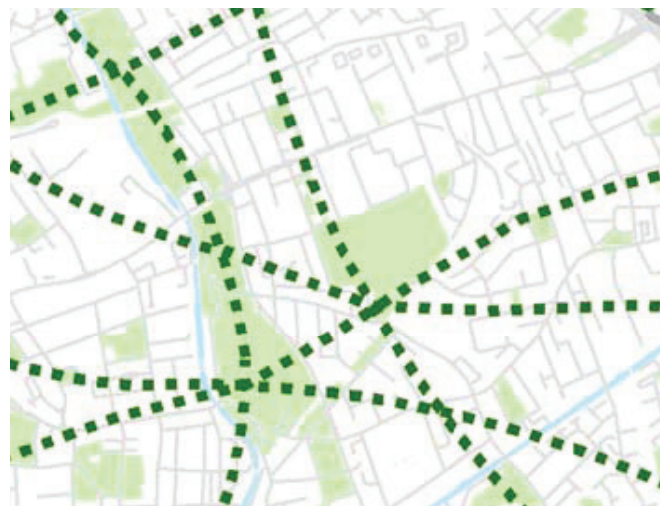
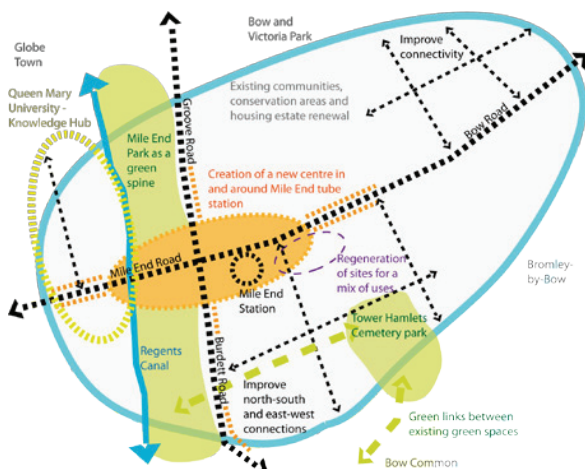
Orchard crossings along Mile End Road are proposed at Queen Mary University, the Tube stations and the St. Clements site, and could also expand to the institutional forecourts that are largely barren or disused. This stretch of road currently exists as a hole in the High Street 2012 and council-wide strategy; its absence from these strategies becomes a positive—the stretch of road can be a pause along a more commercially active route.

Intervening at regular intervals will provide a rhythm to its currently long and unpunctuated character, and help to create a sense of place and provide identity.

Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park is a unique space in the area—heavily wooded and overgrown, it is a different experience from the manicured royal parks for which London is famous. Mile End Park to the east is a more recent addition, with abundant open space, newly created event and recreational amenities (an Eco Pavilion and Arts Pavilion to the north, and a Leisure Centre and surrounding sports facilities to the south), and meticulously maintained, unused lawns. While the Leisure Centre and sports facilities are well used, the green spaces in both the cemetery and park are mostly empty; interviews with residents and institutions suggest that people are drawn north to Victoria Park, in spite of the distance and the barrier of a railroad track.

Interventions along Hamlets Way, which runs parallel to Mile End Road below our site, offer an opportunity to create a locally scaled east-west connection, linking the existing pedestrianised path across the top of the cemetery to the Queen Mary University through a path and a bridge across Mile End Park and the canal. An orchard crossing at the intersection of Hamlets Way and Burdett Road, along with a simplified crossing, could strengthen this connection and draw visitors between the two. Making the connections visible from a few blocks away could be powerful; currently the cemetery is visible but unremarkable from Mile End Park.

North-south connections through the St. Clements site and at the Tube stations are central to this strategy, as they begin to address the separated communities and north-south divide identified during initial analysis. Orchard plantings at the Tube stations and key nodes could reinforce these paths, and the overall network.



Soft Networks

The Urban Orchard strategy and 'green grid' expansion represent fixed interventions; this strategy is partnered with a 'soft' network strategy centred around connecting organisations and creating the internal and external 'bridges' that might strengthen community capabilities.











The Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery, a not-for-profit organisation, runs numerous educational and recreational opportunities centring around the botanical and agricultural

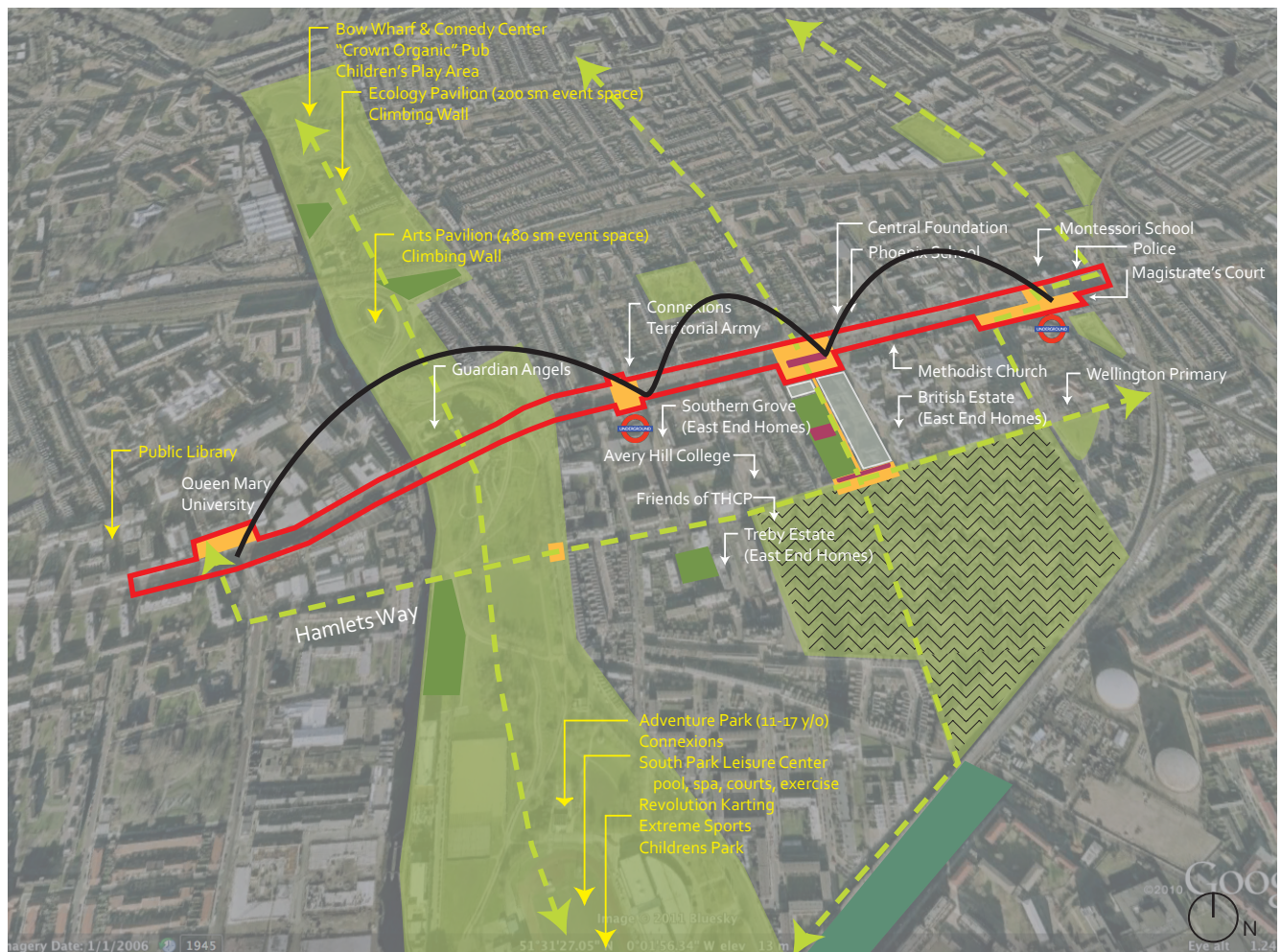
aspects of the site. This organisation offers an opportunity to increase its presence and is central to this proposed network, as one of the many existing community stakeholders that will form the basis of a growing network of actors. Creating an identity and focus for the neighbourhood is also an opportunity to create and strengthen external bridges with community and interest-focused organisations.

Left: Tower Hamlets' Mile End neighbourhood plan proposes a fragmented connecting grid (2010); the council's 'green grid' strategy is shown to the right (2009)

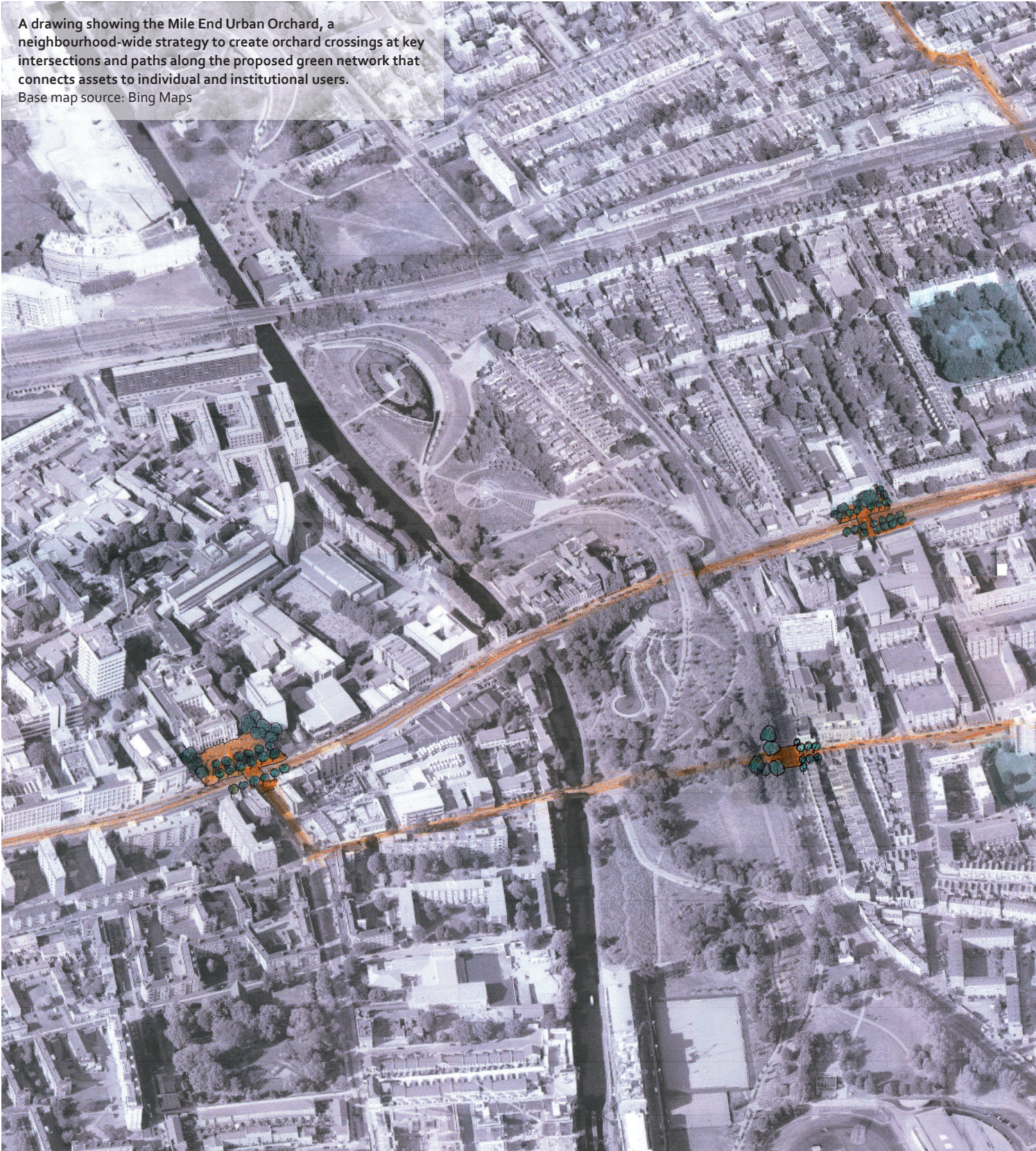
Source: www.towerhamlets.gov.uk

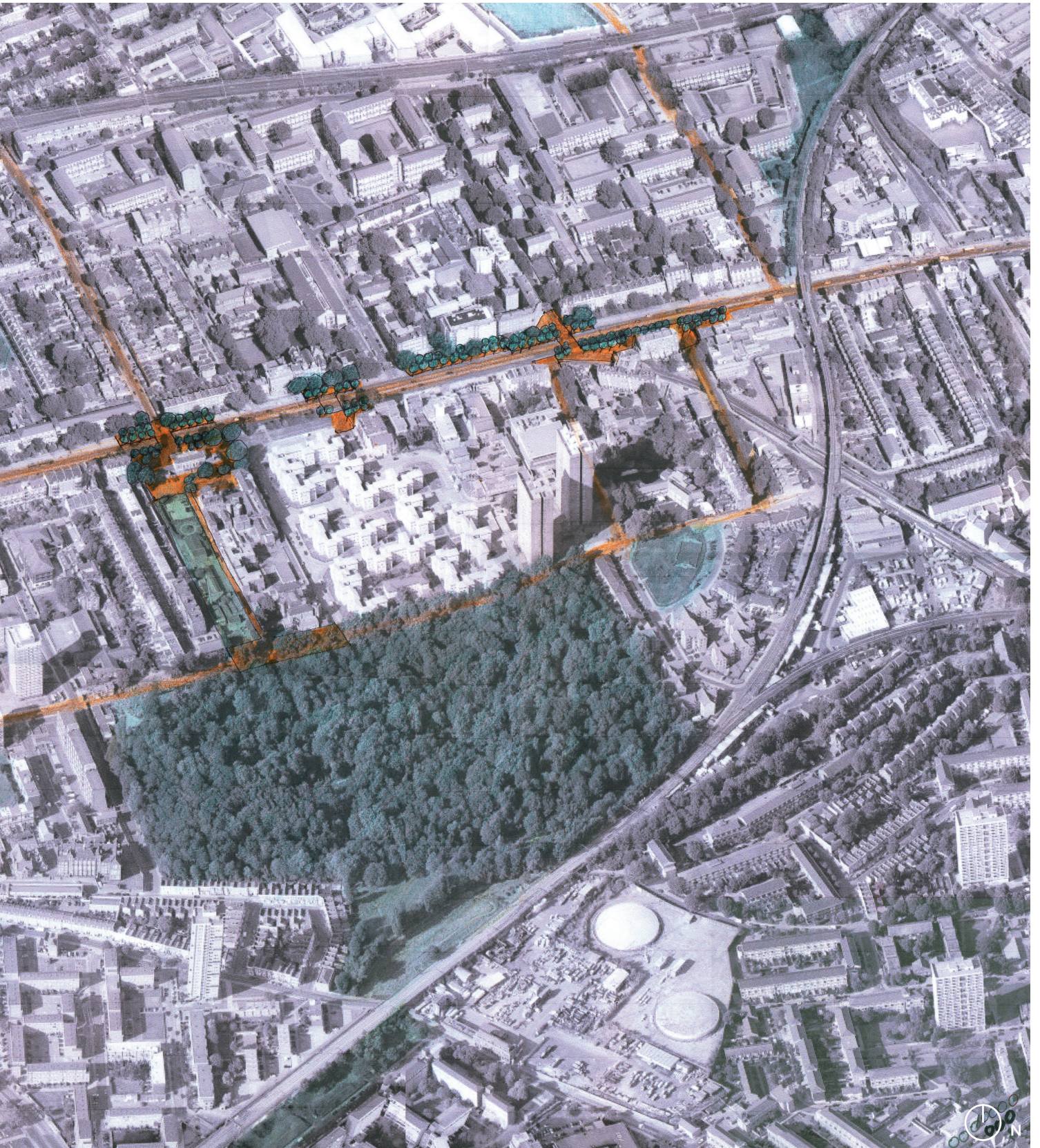
Below: Map of institutional (white) and recreational (yellow) assets in the area, alongside the proposed neighbourhood-level interventions focused on the green network, orchard crossings, and St. Clements opportunity site. The new 'mental map' seeks to provide an identity to the area as well as add a rhythm to the street (black).

- | | |
|---|---|
|  Site Boundary |  Community & Mgmt Space |
|  Underground Station |  Outdoor Public Space |
|  Productive 'Farm' Land |  Residential Development |
|  Individual & Group Allotments |  Passive Agriculture |
|  Park Space |  Green Network |



A drawing showing the Mile End Urban Orchard, a neighbourhood-wide strategy to create orchard crossings at key intersections and paths along the proposed green network that connects assets to individual and institutional users. Base map source: Bing Maps





Key Intervention 2:

A 'Food Hub' on the High Street: St. Clements Farm & Community Kitchen

St. Clements is an opportunity to both spatially and programmatically address concerns found in the analysis, addressing both the social and spatial fragmentation in one site that can serve as a pilot project. Its high street location is the first site for proposed implementation of the Urban Orchard strategy, including both orchard tree planting and a simplified street crossing. We propose removing the majority of the St. Clements wall, maintaining the posts (consistent with Tower Hamlets strategies) in order to create an extended public space that spans north-south across the street and also around the historic building that faces the street. It can begin to punctuate the street and slow its rhythm, provide a catalyst for other changes in the street realm and institutional forecourts, and act as a point from which to create and co-ordinate a distributed farm network.

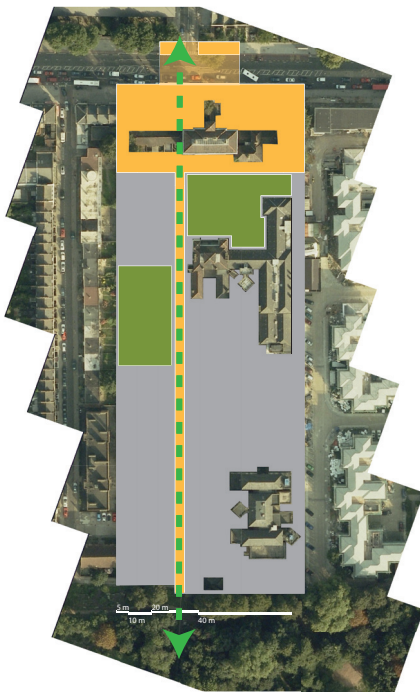
A Different Kind of Density

The St. Clements intervention attempts to pursue a more robust definition of density—going beyond housing to consider density of uses, activities, meanings, and opportunities. We consider the concept of a 'process' density alongside physical density and diversity of spaces; the focus is on overlapping people and stakeholder groups through both considering activities that can act as a common denominator—cooking, eating, general inhabitation of public space—and through activities that can sit side-by-side such as group-assigned gardening plots, community cooking and classes, and educational opportunities for schoolchildren and adults. Flexibility of space type and use is important, and the 'incubator' capacity of the spaces was a particular focus.

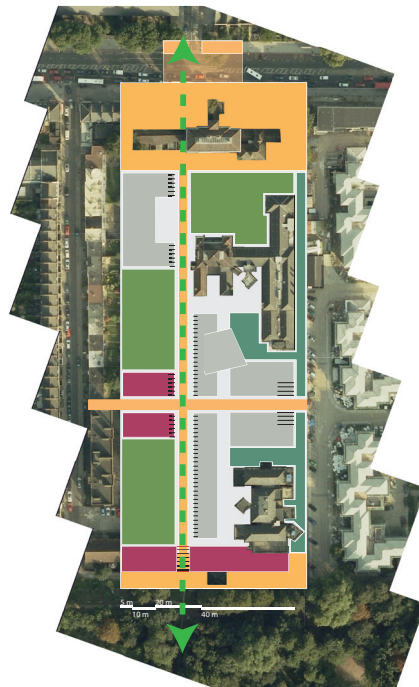
Top Right: Proposed plans for the St. Clements site. Phase 1 (intended to coincide with the Olympics and High Street 2012 interventions) focuses on creating the public orchard crossing, community kitchen and market facilities; using already open land on the site for productive uses, and creating a vital connection through the site to the cemetery park below. Key to the plan is its economic and social viability in both the initial and final phase, and flexibility to accommodate feedback as the project progresses. Final plans show the full proposed building and land use for the site, with a stress on public access and flexible building frontage along the central avenue.

Below & Bottom Right: View looking west of proposed St. Clements 'Orchard Crossing' maintaining the current four-lanes of traffic while simplifying the cross walk and providing a street presence that extends north-south across the street and around the St. Clements market and community kitchen building.

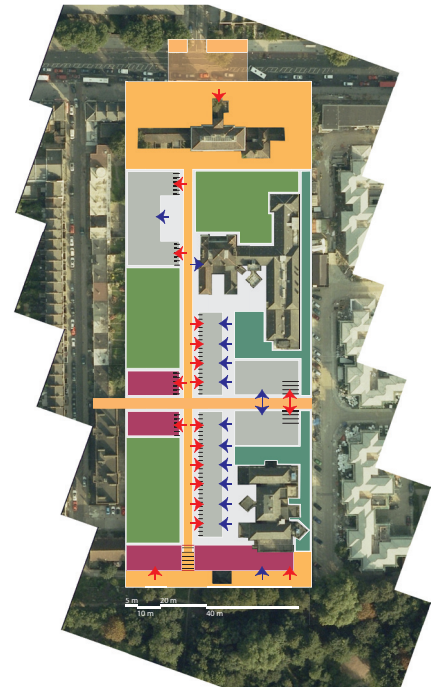











Initial Phase – Public Access



Final Phase – Public Access



Final Phase – 'Fronts' and 'Backs'

- | | |
|---|--|
|  Outdoor Public Space |  Hardscaping |
|  Residential Development |  Community & Management Space |
|  Productive 'Farm' Land |  Flexible Use Frontage |
|  Individual & Group Allotments |  Residential/Private Frontage |



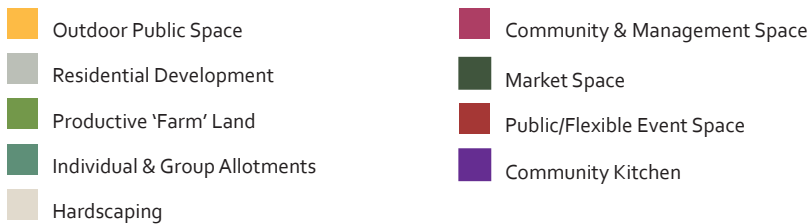
The Community Kitchen: Showing AND Growing

Beyond its productive purpose, St. Clements Farm can act as a demonstration project for the process of growing, producing, distributing and preparing food. While our research suggests that a distributed urban agriculture project of this scale has commercial viability, the importance of the scheme lays in its ability to support a healthy eating agenda – providing opportunities to engage local schoolchildren in the full food cycle – as well as opportunities for job training and creation. Our research revealed an existing catering agglomeration that could be a support or partner to these projects, and visits to other food projects around London suggested opportunities for job training and incubator capacity through food strategies.

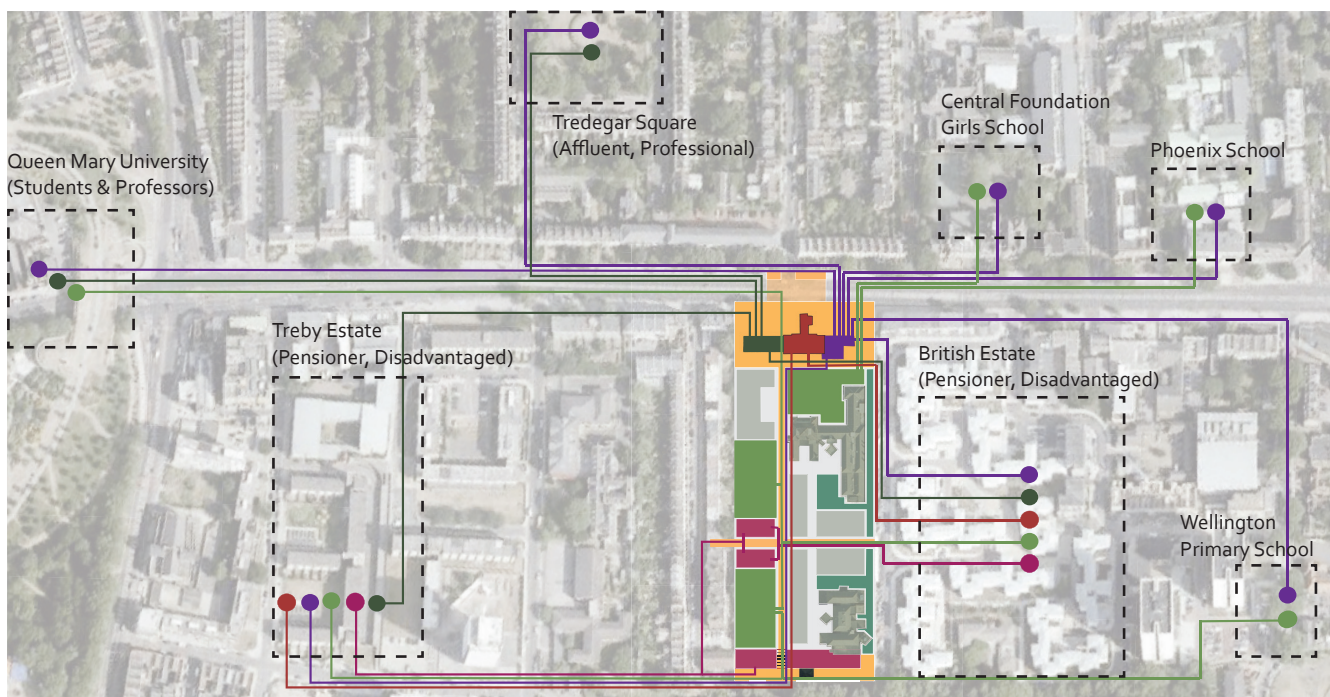
The site's educational opportunities go beyond showing – experimentation with agricultural methods and the benefits of agriculture for therapeutic and rehabilitation purposes (Mostafavi, 2011) are areas of interest. The local Community Land Trust sees St. Clements as an opportunity to experiment with a new model of community development; the farm is also an opportunity for community education and engagement.

City (Before) Farm

Farm and food strategies form the central means to our interventions, but it is important that the end goal remains focused on the city. Making urban relationships primary and leveraging them remains the main focus of these strategies. For the farm to be successful and realise its potential, connections to other markets in the area (Queen Mary's farmers market and the Whitechapel Market to the west) offers an opportunity to create external 'bridges' to uniquely urban assets, as do possible partnerships with regional organisations focused around health and food. The absence of such networks is the reason that many of the current urban agriculture projects our group investigated have not achieved long-term viability.



Below: A 'circuit' diagram shows a selection of institutional stakeholders to identify overlaps in use



MAKING IT HAPPEN

In 2005, St. Clements Hospital closed. The site has since been sold by the NHS to English Partnerships, which subsequently become the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA), the government's housing and regeneration agency. HCA is planning to sell the site for development; among other private investors, The East London Community Land Trust (ELCLT) is bidding as part of the competitive tender process. The aim of the ELCLT is to remove the land from the market and put it in care of the trust in perpetuity, in order to build quality family homes for the community (Citizens UK, 2011).

Building on the ELCLT initiative, we propose:

- Establishing a non-profit farm association to manage the food assets and programmes, market and distributed farm
- Partnering with the ELCLT as development entity and long-term land-holder
- Leveraging developer funds in the form of Section 106 or other local benefit extraction to underwrite construction of the farm and market buildings
- Establishing a grounds maintenance/farming relationship with the ELCLT to capture funds normally spent on maintenance
- Allocating allotments first to St. Clements residents, with additional allotments to local resident groups



Follow the Money

Operational income will come from the productive and varied use of the agricultural plots and kitchen buildings (catering on weekdays, event and community use on weeknights and weekends). Our emphasis is on self-generated income and the economic feasibility of the project at all phases. Unlike other city farms, feasibility must not depend only on typical grants and community funding (e.g. Tower Hamlets Park funds, Olympic mitigation, general food/farm grants, lottery funding which are increasingly uncertain). The main independent sources of revenue will be from market, farm and garden centre products; local school catering contracts; skills classes; fee and Small Plot Intensive farming (Spin Farming, n.d.), and fees for open space maintenance. The variety of income sources will tap into the range of incomes in the neighbourhood, providing 'retail' products, classes and services that wealthier residents will pay for, in effect helping to pay for the education programmes that highlight the provision of basic healthy food.

Self-Generating Income Sources for St. Clements Farm

- District-wide allotments and lease-to-grow scheme for under-utilised estate land
- Distributed farming for profit – (SPIN)
- Corporate sponsorship and events / (Canary Wharf banks, Tesco)
- School catering
- Health programme funding from NHS
- Social services and job training funds
- Allotment fees
- Market profits
- Food walks
- Restaurant/chef fees
- Preparation, packaged food, catering
- Cooking classes
- Incubator space for rent
- Ground maintenance fees (on-site and nearby estates)
- Gardening classes



CONCLUSION

The High Street 2012 policy framework and interventions have a bias toward optics; their focus is to make a corridor that looks and feels more attractive to Olympic visitors, rather than to address the embedded tension between 'vibrancy' and local need. Community engagement is not the same as community development, and actions like 'improve and celebrate,' create a 'thriving destination during and after the games,' 'transform the road corridor and public spaces,' 'de-clutter' and facilitate a 'visitor economy' (London Development Agency, 2009) say more about corridor than community. By intent or by accident, High Street 2012 wasn't designed to deal with living and working realities on the ground, and the particular challenges of our site.

Having chosen a site that is in its current condition more 'road' than 'street,' our ambitions are both more basic and more complex – to create a street by making a place out of a blank and unaccommodating corridor – and to create a platform that can address basic needs and stitch together the area's physical and social existing assets. The network-hub food strategy centred at St. Clements is our central proposition to address issues of spatial and social fragmentation. It seeks to provide a variety of places of exchange, drawing on both the common denominator of basic needs and the broader concept

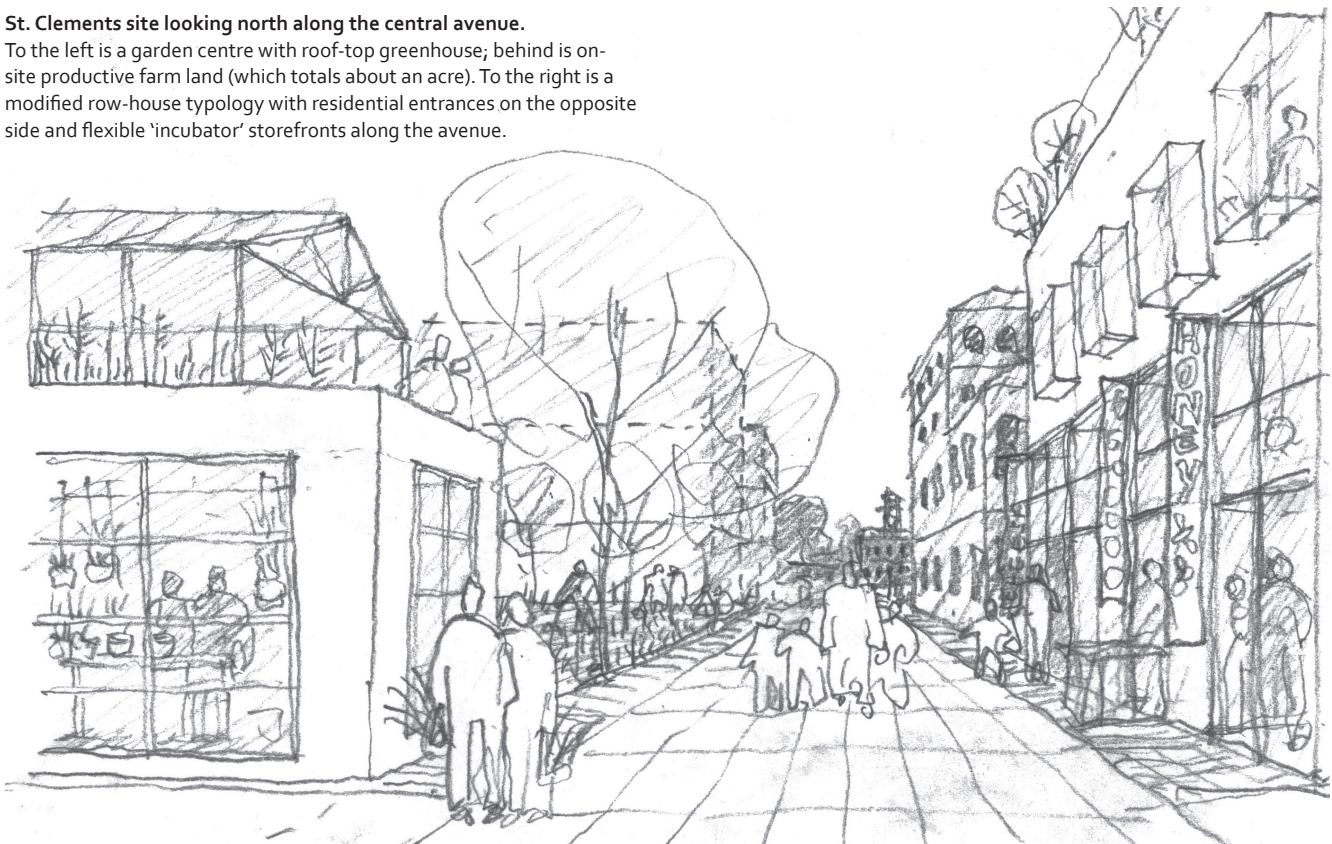
of 'capabilities' to support a need for building social capital and providing opportunities for education, informal networking and social enhancement.

St. Clements sits as a node in the proposed urban orchard network, connecting and promoting a wider variety of users for the existing recreational, educational and institutional assets of the neighbourhood. The effort to 'redraw the mental map' through an urban orchard and food hub strategy seeks to make existing assets visible by connecting them to the street physically and allowing them to work harder, while providing a central focus to catalyse their growth and usefulness.

Our project re-interprets recent discourses around both high streets and the Big Society. Our street-facing food 'hub' and community kitchen aims to mediate the tensions between 'corridor' and 'identity' embedded in the High Street policy documents and plug the physical hole in the Vision 2012 interventions. This strategy seeks a more robust level of community engagement through a catalyst project and social goals; and seeks to move beyond a corridor or housing agenda to promote different kinds of density that include productive mingling and incubator capacity.

St. Clements site looking north along the central avenue.

To the left is a garden centre with roof-top greenhouse; behind is on-site productive farm land (which totals about an acre). To the right is a modified row-house typology with residential entrances on the opposite side and flexible 'incubator' storefronts along the avenue.



This is not to say that the Olympics and High Street 2012 agenda have not fueled the potential of our site—they are part of what has produced the amazing confluence of need, opportunity and political context that can make this happen. We have attempted to leverage policy and change (the High Street agenda, housing and density pressures, the Olympic Legacy), and spatial realities (transportation nodes, Mile End Park, a large institutional footprint) and turn them into assets for the community's benefit. Focusing on that end, central to the idea is viability in both its initial and final phases, and its ability to pursue a fully self-supporting revenue base in the midst of fiscal austerity.

Pragmatism and political opportunity were central to our thinking. The St. Clements site is going to be developed; the capital investment we propose is incremental to what will be spent by the developer. We think there is a strong case for it to be enabled by localism and/or Section 106/local benefit funds if the right levels of government can be engaged. Boris Johnson will be looking for highly leveraged investments to engage communities. In his recent 'Team London' announcement, the Mayor has revealed his approach to the 'Big Society' ideal, which is to engage Londoners involved in delivering services to

improve the capital, or 'put the village back into the city,' and cites the case for a return of the philanthropy of the Victorian era (Mayor of London, n.d.; Mulholland, 2009). On an operating basis, a farm and food operation should be beneficial to the developer – the public space will be maintained in a productive way (in every sense) and will generate income rather than becoming another open space/public realm project that requires constant physical maintenance and goes un-programmed through lack of ongoing funding.

Perhaps we have arrived at the moment this anonymous piece of London has been waiting for: bids are being prepared for St. Clements and the HCA is about to make a decision about its future. If the opportunity can be seized, the St. Clements 'Farm, Community Kitchen and Food Hub' could be a replicable model for other efforts – not in its details given the unique and specific opportunity that the site offers, but in its approach to both social need and density pressures. The need for places of exchange is not unique; food and health are both local common denominators and national/international priorities, and as people continue to migrate to cities, finding ways to densify 'productively' is paramount.

Concept Sketch, St. Clements site looking east behind the market and community kitchen building. Temporary planting plots sit on the plaza with the open market building to the left; the avenue that leads to the garden centre, farm land and cemetery park is to the right.



FOOD RESOURCES

UK/London Support, Partner and Funding Opportunities

Big Lottery Fund
Bioregional/BedZed
Carbon reduction funding
Community Composting Network
Connexions
CSA tools
FareShare
Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens
Growing Communities (Hackney Greens)
Jamie Oliver Foundation
Heritage Funds
Land.net
Leaside Regeneration
Local Food
Lottery funds – 'Local Green'
Making Local Food Work
NESTA
One Planet Living
Permaculture Association
Prince's Foundation
Roots and Shoots
Soils Association
Surestart
Sustain
Tasting the Future / One Planet Food
The London Orchard Project
Thrive

UK/London Food 'Hub' Models

BedZed / Bioregional / Sutton Farms / Herne Hill
Hackney etc / Growing Communities / Hackney Greens
Hornbeam Farms / Organic Lea
Local Greens
Lambeth / Bonnington Café / Vauxhall Farm
Spitalfields / Coriander Club

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