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But after all, the special attraction of the journey lies not in our being able to alight at places on the way and to stop altogether as soon as we grow tired, but in its making the difference between departure and arrival not as imperceptible but as intense as possible, so that we are conscious of it in its totality, intact, as it existed in our mind when imagination bore us from the place in which we were living right to the very heart of a place we longed to see...

In a single sweep which seemed miraculous to us not so much because it covered a certain distance as because it united two distinct individualities of the world, took us from one name to another name; and this difference is accentuated by the mysterious operation that is performed in those peculiar places, railway stations, which do not constitute, so to speak, a part of the surrounding town but contain the essence of its personality just as upon their sign-boards they bear its painted name.

Marcel Proust,
In Search of Lost Time
1913-1927

(translation C. K. Scott Moncrieff)

INTRODUCTION

What is it to invoke the idea of the local city? This question acts as the point of departure for the investigation of, and eventual intervention proposal for, the area of London known as Hackney Central.

A deep initial scepticism of conventional usage of ‘local’ informed much of the initial research for the project—and indeed this sense was bolstered by the range of users and multiplicity of influences uncovered in Hackney Central. Massey (2009: 202) asks, given the global network of connections that inform many of today’s contemporary city spaces, “[...]can we retain any sense of a local place and its particularity? An [idealised] notion of an era when places were [supposedly]inhabited by coherent and homogeneous communities is set against the current fragmentation and disruption. The counter-position is anyway dubious, of course; ‘place’ and ‘community’ have only rarely been coterminous”. In response to this apprehension of the term, this project presents an alternative conception of “the local city”—one that embraces a complexity of actors, influences and desires. The local should not rely on a nostalgic notion of bounded community, but rather can be anchored in place. The project proposes a space for a form of ‘the local city’ to take hold. The project is one that embraces the specificity of a site and its surrounding area, one that is prescriptive in space but not necessarily in use. A platform to be localised.

Hackney Hill is a response to a perceived need for a strong, programmable and adaptive public space in Hackney Central. It also stands as a response to the current development proposal for the Hackney Central station site. The project anchors itself in the concept arrival and explores how the experiences of arrival and departure in the city are decidedly undervalued in present day London. The project seeks to move the experience of arrival in Hackney Central beyond the generic to the specific. Can we create a space that is both unique in its celebration of arrival, and in its Hackney-ness?

ARRIVAL IN THE CITY

What is it to ‘arrive’ in the city? For many, the daily experience of the city involves numerous acts of arrival and departure. Whether through formalised work or school routines or through sporadic and one-time trips, the process of moving through the city is everywhere punctuated by moments of arrival and departure. London—with its myriad of rail, motorised and non-motorised transit systems—provides an excellent platform from which to consider the notion of arrival.

The act of arrival presents a potentially powerful form of engagement with the city. Arrival can extend from a mere act of entering to one of connecting; of orientation and of identification. It is the act that initially informs a relationship with a piece of city and shapes how people move through it, both in one-off and repeat encounters. Similarly, departure provides the final moment of encounter with a place, and can inform how a place becomes embedded in the mind of the traveller. Processes and spaces of arrival and departure have the capacity to send out powerful signals about the pieces of city they lead to and from. The potential to meaningfully inform an individual’s interactions with a piece of city through these moments should not be disregarded.

Moments of arrival and departure have, however, become reduced to measures of efficiency. Mundane discourses around travel times, transit flows and price efficiency have come to dominate how arrival and departure are conceived

of—and indeed this becomes reflected in the urban spaces that these actions inhabit. Old grand railway stations speak to how arrival and departure were once conscious moments of urban experience, accordingly celebrated by specific spaces in the city. Clay (1991: 18) recognises the circumstance that moments of travel once elicited: “once upon a time, an arrival meant fanfare, pomp, the giving of gifts”. Presently, however moments of arrival offer “no ceremony, no welcome, no zone-of-arrival” (ibid.). Through this critique we are introduced to a vital concept: that of the *arrival zone*.

In his consideration of interstate travel in the U.S. Clay notes: “you won’t find arrival zones on any map...most travellers approach cities by air or highway with little sense of arrival and minimum fanfare” (ibid.). Arrival zones anchor processes of arrival (and departure) spatially and provide spaces in the city where—if so conceived—these movements can be valued and celebrated. Arrival zones are “obvious points-of-arrival at which, for the first time, you spot your destination” and, accordingly, should be considered “integral extensions of both city and highway” (ibid.). Despite the capacity for arrival zones to provide breathing moments and buffering spaces between the chaos of the city and the movement of transit, they have been woefully underestimated and undervalued.



△ 01 Hackney Central Ward



△ 02 Hackney Central's ad hoc area and Hackney Central's boundaries

ARRIVAL IN HACKNEY

Travel in London as facilitated through the Underground/Overground network gives automatic rise to arrival zones in the form of stations. A consideration of the Hackney Central station and the unused site adjacent to it serves as our key method of investigation the 'local city'.

The Amhurst Road site sits just below and adjacent to the Hackney Central station, and is key to experience of arrival and departure from the area. The plot has stood vacant since 2003 following a fire that led to the demolition of the existing structures. At present, the site is earmarked for the Crossrail 2 Hackney station, giving any development on the site a 25-30 years temporal constraint.

Together, the Hackney Central station and this adjacent site represent the dual and complementary flows of connectivity from Hackney Central to wider London and vice versa, as well as the demarcation of Hackney Central as a particular place within that larger web of connectivity. The quality and structure of this space can influence the nature of these important functional understandings of Hackney as interconnected with a wider world and as a unique and distinct place within that world.

Underground/Overground stations, and their immediate surroundings, often provide a first point of exposure, or a strong point of reference for both visitors and locals. We categorise these intrinsic zones of arrival as Front Doors: facilitating defined, sensuous experiences of arrival; or Back Yards: fostering abrupt, forgettable confrontations with arrival. Or, as indeed is the case for many stations, the experience of arrival can fall somewhere within the Front Door/Back Yard extremes.

Front Doors are well integrated with their surrounding urban fabric and provide clear signage and legible pathways onward into the area. They offer a sense of arrival—entering onto the hustle of city life with good visibility aspects, and providing an immediate sense of the spaces they lead out into. Back Yards are abrupt opening to neglected, rejected spaces, lack proper legibility and functionality and fail to give the traveller any sense of welcoming or inviting activity.



▽ 03 Highbury & Islington's back door

04 Covent Garden's front door

05 Hackney Central's side door

Hackney Central presents an interesting case in the Front Door/Back Yard spectrum as it demonstrates characteristics of both typologies. As a front door, it benefits from a natural elevation, offering views of Hackney Central landmarks. Simultaneously, the station entrance/exit is marked with barbed wire and fencing, brutalising the sense of arrival and evoking the sense of a backyard.

Hackney Central presents itself as a *side door*: an arrival point that leads the traveller through a breakaway space before plunging out onto the main thoroughfare of the area. The station is set back one block from the bustling streetfront, yet is not isolated from the high street—indeed

leading straight on to it. The ‘buffering space’ element of this ‘side door’ status allows for exciting potential to develop a distinctive arrival experience on the site.

At the site of this side door, we also encounter an extension of what Simmel calls “one of the greatest human achievements” (1994: 6), i.e. building a path between two places. The will to connect becomes for Simmel “a shaping of things” (ibid.), visually impressing the path into the surface of the earth between places that are objectively connected. We see this path-building at two scales at the Hackney Central station: at the macro (whereby transport is used to connect various parts of the city) and at the



- △ 06 Alleyway entrance to Hackney Central and parking
- 07 Negative aspects of arrival in Hackney Central

PORTRAIT OF HACKNEY

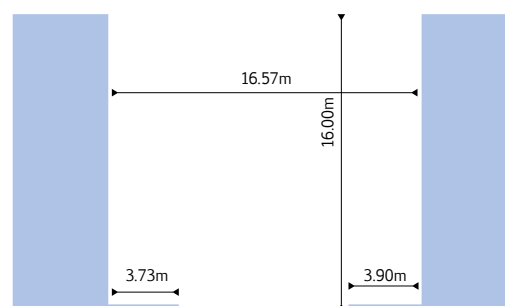
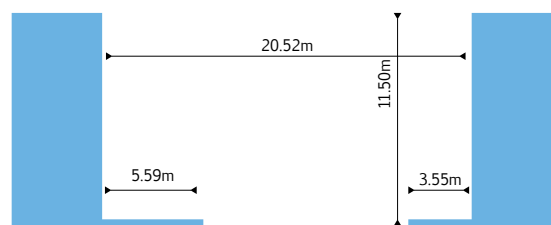
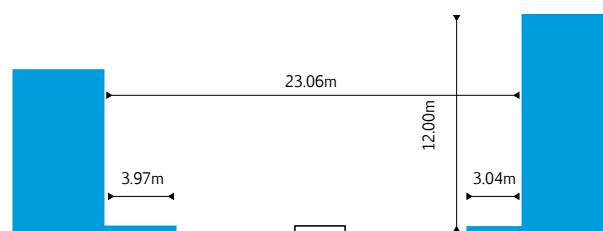
Administratively ‘Hackney Central’ is a ward with clear boundaries. For Hackney residents, Hackney Central may be a place: its busy high street (Mare Street), its new cinema, Hackney Town Hall and its service centre, and a renowned theatre (The Hackney Empire) all present disseminated spots of interest within the catchment area. For visitors from the rest of London and further afield, Hackney Central is a name on a map, circled orange. “*Hackney Central*” appeared on Transport for London’s map in 2007 following the inauguration of the Overground.

A familiar *name* then—even for non-residents—but a familiar *place*? As one arrives in Hackney Central, what kind of place do you arrive to?

Hackney Central as the symbolic and mechanical beating heart of the Borough

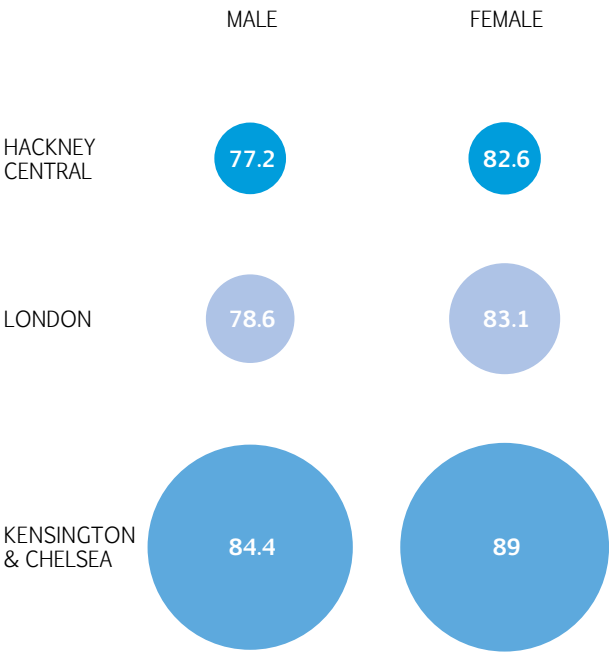
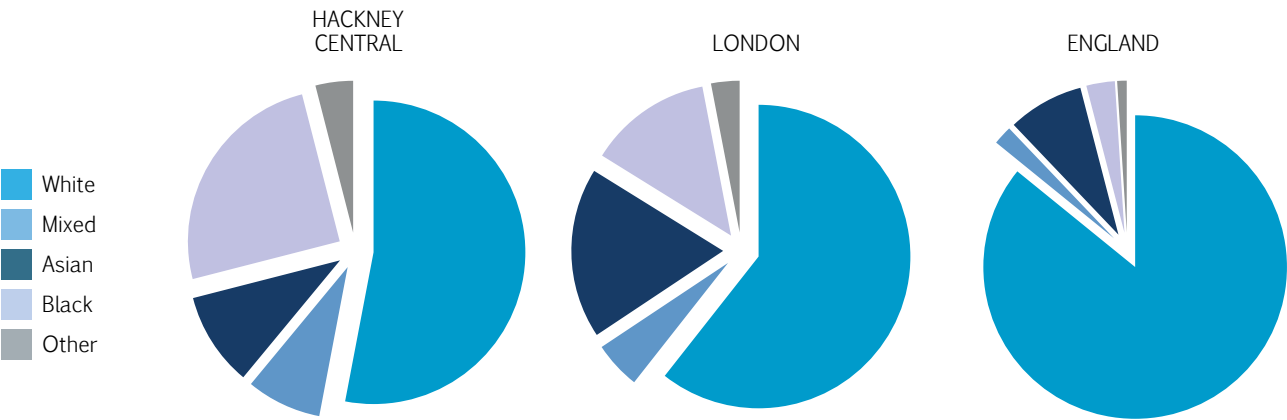
Given our interest in Hackney Central as place of departure and arrival, what can be learnt from Hackney as a ‘transport hub’? In mechanical terms, the area links Hackney to the rest of London through its transport network. Its National Rail station—now part of the Overground Network—has always served as a vein of exchange into the Borough. There are now upwards of 8,000 daily overground trips from/to Hackney Central on weekdays. The area also boasts a large bus depot and sixteen bus routes. Hackney Central is served by the A107—linking North and South Hackney as well as connecting the Borough straight to Whitechapel, the City and South London. Of those employed in the area, 58% travel between 2 km and 10 km, and the rest more than 10 km. 28% travel using the bus network, while 18% travel using the Underground/Overground network. When it comes to transport hubs, Hackney Central is a busy one.

Given this beating heart of the Borough, what can we say about the blood it pumps? In terms of population and ethnicity, Hackney Central is one of the most diverse areas in one of the most diverse cities in Europe. Looking at inhabitant occupations, countries of birth, the languages spoken, etc. we are able to draw a portrait of Hackney and Hackney Central all in of its multiplicities. Simultaneously, Hackney is one of the most economically deprived



△ 09 Street sections in and ratio road : pedestrian areas (pavement)

- a **Hackney Central High Street (Mare Street)**
ratio road : pedestrian areas is 233 : 100
- b **Brixton High Street**
ratio road : pedestrian areas is 124 : 100
- c **Marylebone High Street**
ratio road : pedestrian areas is 117 : 100



10 A socio-demographic portrait of Hackney Central

- △ a Ethnicity in Hackney Central, London and England
- ▧ b Age pyramid in Hackney Central and London
- ▽ c Life expectancy in years for males and females in Hackney Central, London and Kensington & Chelsea

boroughs in England and Wales. 39% of Hackney Central's population is not in employment (this includes students, retired, job seekers and homemakers).

Aside from a place of thoroughfare, what does the Hackney Central area offer in terms of a destination for commuters and visitors of all kinds? At the frontier between the mechanical and the symbolic, Hackney Central is home to a range of retail, vital civic services as well as to cultural institutions, whose fame transcends Hackney's boundaries. Economic power, cultural power and political power are all seated in the Hackney Central area.

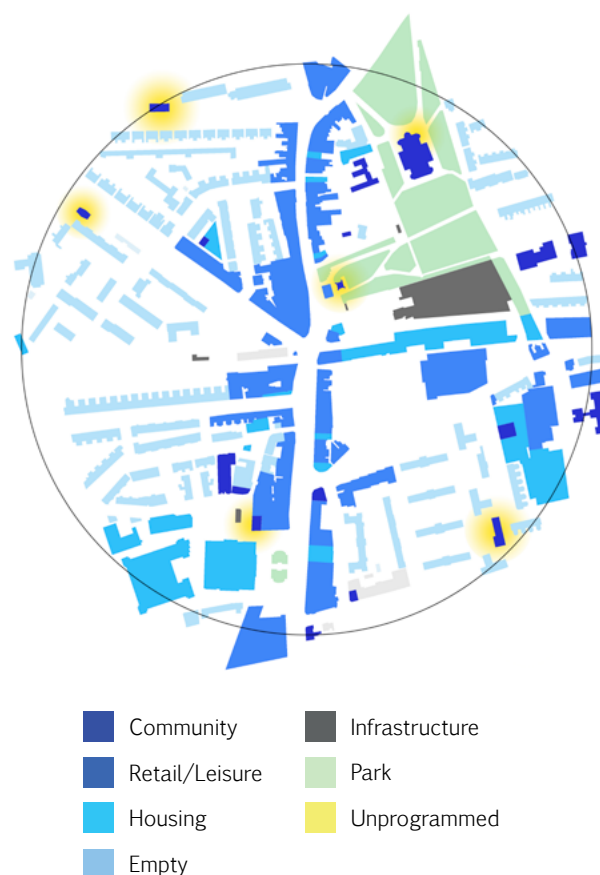
Arterial hypertension and rheumatic fever: the heart deficiencies

We were particularly interested in lingering and meandering spaces as an indicator of the destination quality. Gehl and Gemzøe (1996: 59). tells us that "One way to judge the quality in a city is not to look at how many people are walking, but to observe whether they are spending time in the city, standing about, looking at something, or sitting just enjoying the city, the scenery and the other people." We developed a terminology of *programmed lingering places*, spots (often indoors) in which people can spend time in a secure environment, either alone or in groups. These places can be identified in two main categories: commercial and non-commercial. For example the Hackney Central Library is a non-commercial lingering place as it does not require payment and does not discriminate among its users. The Bohemia Cafe, on the other hand, is a commercial lingering place, as the activity undertaken there (meeting up with someone, working on a laptop, people-watching) often is primary, rather than the consumption of the product itself.

When compared to other high streets, namely Brixton High Street (socio-economically comparable) and Marylebone High Street (a symbol of traditional high street success), Hackney Central possesses 2.6 programmed lingering places per hectare, against 4.15 spaces/hectare in Marylebone and 6.45/hectare in Brixton. This means, Hackney Central lacks spaces of meeting and socialisation. Taken in its broadest meaning, Hackney lacks *public spaces*,

places meant to welcome public—may that be through a commercial or non-commercial relationship between patrons and hosts. It lacks of *public* houses, of "locals".

In considering the spatiality of this beating heart and its flows, we are presented with street design unsupportive of the pedestrian experience. In keeping with earlier comparisons, we find that Hackney Central possesses over-sized roads which privilege motorised vehicles; and low-rise buildings out of scale with these wide roads, failing to create an urban 'cosiness'. This contrasts with the successful narrow pedestrian zones and well-scaled streets of Brixton and Marylebone.



△ 11 Different activities within a 500m radius from Hackney Central

DESIGNING HACKNEY HILL

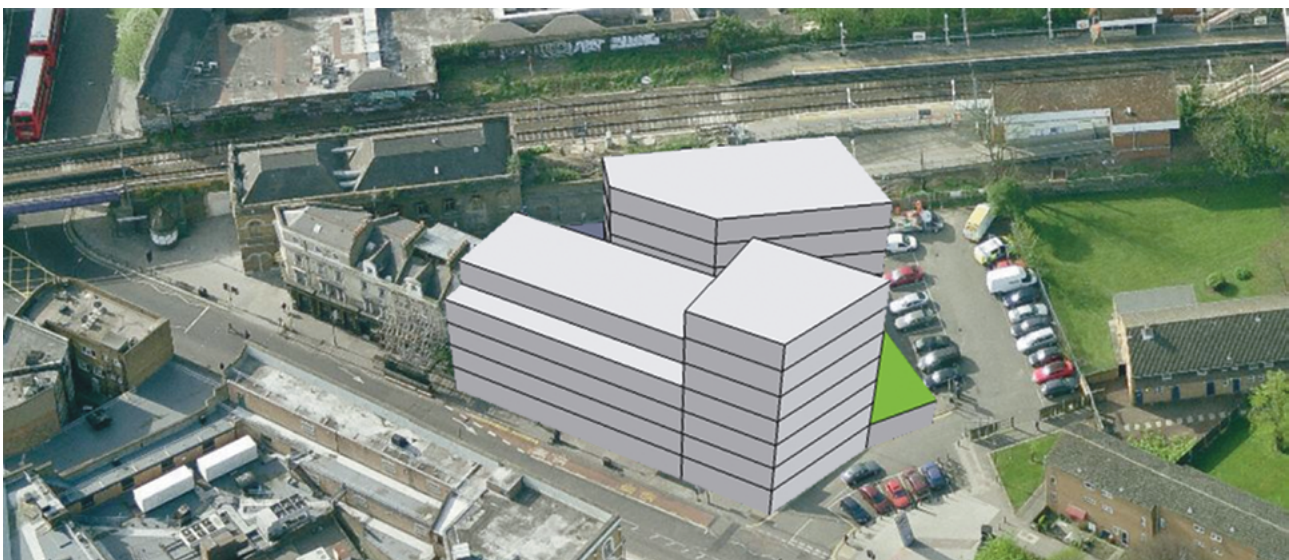
Moreover, a building use survey covering a half kilometre radius centred at the Mare Street-Amhurst Road intersection shows a scarcity of adaptable and flexible ‘community spaces’, those that local community groups, organisations and institutions are able to use on a temporary and rotating basis to showcase various activities and events. A space in St John-at-Hackney Church, a room at the back of the Hackney Empire (neither of which are particularly visible), and three seemingly underused housing council community centres, appeared to be the only options. Not even the large Hackney Central Library provides such a space.

From these intrinsic qualities, deficiencies and demographics, we look to create a space that celebrates arrival and stands as a new kind of landmark, both for Hackney Central residents and visitors alike. A space that acts as both a bridge and a door, giving physical shape to people’s will to connection as well as carving out a loosely bordered space within Hackney Central’s *cityness*.

In response to the clear arrival zone, the evident node of activity and the side door features of the Hackney Central station, we seek to design an intervention that celebrates and supports experiences of arrival and departure—enhancing Hackney Central’s existing arrival zone into one that reaches beyond an efficiency of flows. We seek to design a landmark ‘breathing space’ that is at once public, adaptive, local and temporary, as well as being financially feasible and self-sustaining.

Here we depart from Lynch (1960: 48), in seeking to create a landmark that is not “a type of reference point which observers do not enter—an external elements signalled out”, but rather a type of landmark that can be both cited and experienced, a point of reference through which processes of arrival and departure move. In his consideration of “nodes”, Lynch goes on to define a particular type: “concentration nodes”. These are spaces which are the “focus and epitome of a district over which their influence radiates and of which they stand as a symbol.”

This definition presents Hackney Central with an aspiration. Is it possible to merge Lynch’s notions of “node” and “landmark” in order to create an urban space that celebrates and facilitates arrival and departure, while simultaneously making strong claims and connections to the urban area in which it sits?



△ 12 The Travelodge proposition

The development will be six stories at its highest level and will eliminate current existing views, both down to street level from the station, as well as those elevated views of Hackney Central’s historical landmarks.

Proposed Travelodge scheme

Despite these aspirations for our site, we are confronted with the reality of the current development proposal: the Travelodge scheme.

In 2011 the council approved the £20 million redevelopment, making provision for a mixed-use building scheme that includes a 80-room hotel and 50-room student accommodation, as well ground-floor retail space covering a large portion of the site. We estimate an average return of just over £6 million a year. This includes revenues from retail (Hackney Council, 2011), student accommodation (Independent Student Living, 2013), and the Travelodge hotel (Travelodge, 2013). This estimate means that the investment would cover its initial costs within the first 3-4 years.

This proposal prevents any alternative uses of the site. While the idea of the hotel—a place of temporary arrival and exploration—undoubtedly speaks to notion of arrival, it does so in a very prohibitive sense. For the daily commuters and local residents, the Travelodge proposal fails to conceive of any arrival experience, rather shutting the site to passengers embarking off the Overground train. The Travelodge proposal dismisses any notions of Hackney as setting. This undoubtedly stunts the sense of arrival into Hackney Central.

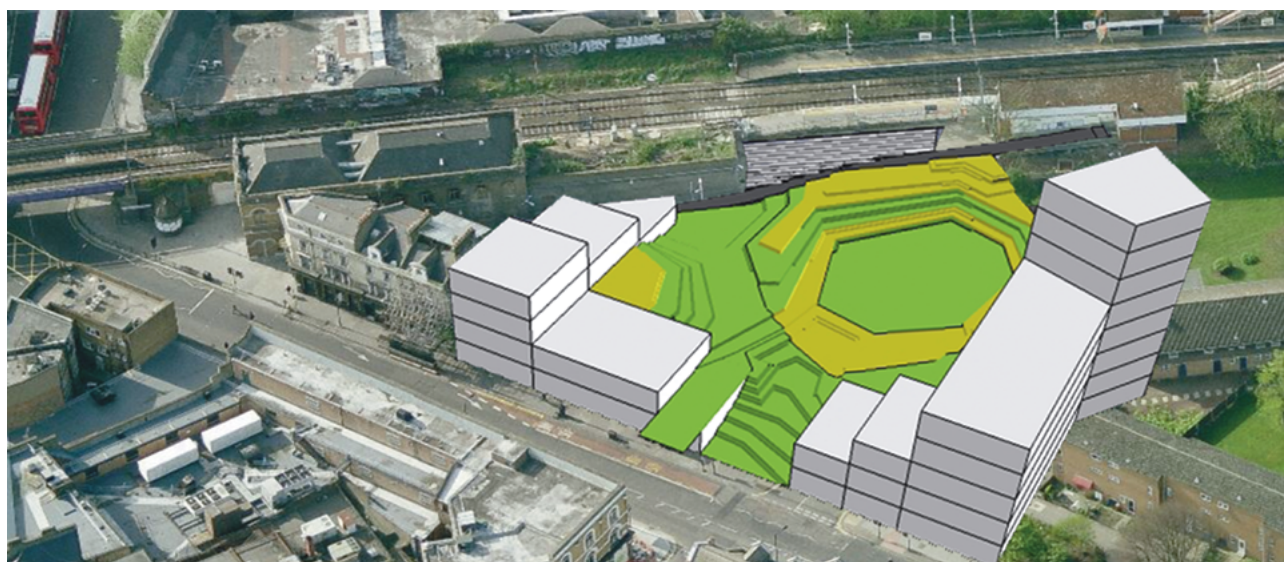
The counter proposition: Hackney Hill

This prohibitive, conservative proposal provides further impetus to the search for an alternative intervention for the Hackney Central site.

In order to guide our intervention away from such narrow thinking, we choose for our intervention to be informed by a more holistic set of values, ones that aim for more than fiscal values alone:

1. *Fiscal* (income generating, self-sustaining, feasible fixed investment costs)
2. *Social* (lingering spaces, seating and waiting spaces, opportunities for coincidental meetings)
3. *Cultural* (programmable spaces, links to existing institutions)
4. *Legibility* ('peepability'—the potential of interaction with the street, e.g. a café with a terrace has a very high 'peepability'—signage, clarity of paths)
5. *Mutability* (flexibility over time and space, varying spatial arrangements/sizes)

By weaving multiple interlocking layers of transport, economic, social and cultural spaces across a single site our project aims to accommodate and serve both active and passive users of the space creating an active, welcoming and celebratory node for Hackney Central.



△13 Hackney Hill Proposition

A level surface at the center of the park is surrounded by slopes of a maximum grade of 15% which lead up to the elevated station and down to the street at ground level. Lateral sloping to the upper levels of the buildings along the perimeter block yield south facing sun exposure throughout the day.

Building the Hill

Hackney Hill is comprised of two basic structural elements: a series of multi-level buildings, and a public park. The buildings line the outer/northern edge of the site parallel to the street. A modest break in the perimeter block becomes ground-level access to a large public park which opens onto the space beyond the perimeter buildings and slopes upwards gradually to meet the existing access walkway to the trains and the elevated station along the opposite/south side of the site.

The built structures include a hotel complex at the western edge of the site and buildings along the eastern side housing retail, office, community space and flexible spaces to meet additional retail, office or community demand. The elevation of the park itself allows its entire underside to be incorporated into the ground level of the perimeter block buildings allowing a large retail establishment and service and maintenance spaces for the hotel and retail. Vehicular access to a flexible service and parking area under the tallest portion of the park is possible through the far western side of the hotel. Total building area is 6,794 m2 allocated to hotel, retail, community, flexible and services spaces as indicated in the table below. Compared to the Travelodge Proposal, Hackney Hill contains half the hotel space, equal retail and service, and more community, flexible, and public park space.

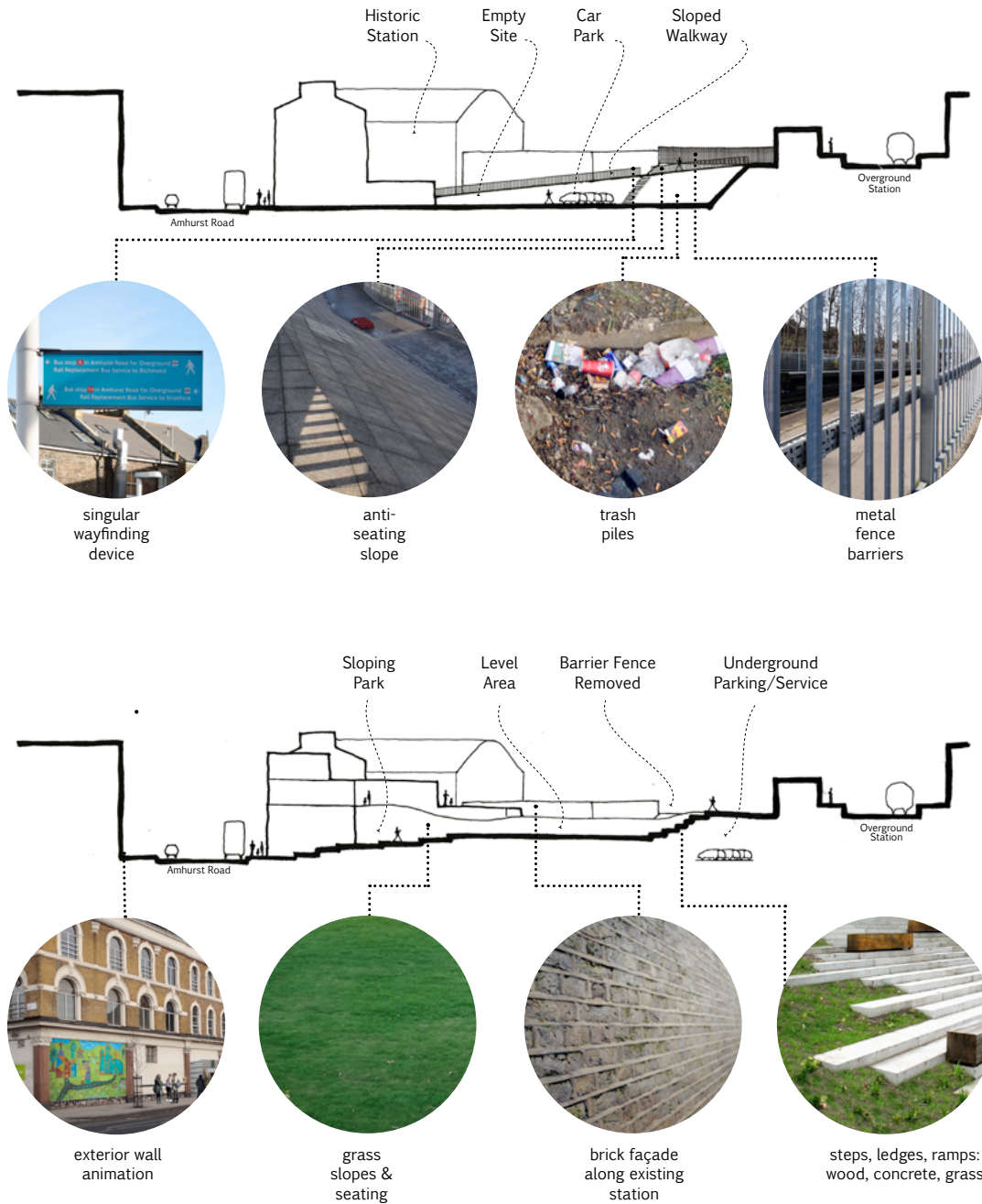
Projected space size: m ²	Travelodge	Hackney Hill
Total site	1380	2200
Hotel	2006	2309
Retail	648	1045
Student	1975	0
Community	0	396
Mutable (as needed)	0	460
Service	343	384
Total Indoor Built Space	6352	6794
Public Park	0	1610

Hackney Hill as an Arrival Zone

Hackney Hill as a space of arrival and departure serves as the conceptual and spatial foundation for the design of the project. As a space of transition, the site serves the adults, youth, disabled and elderly who arrive in Hackney Central either as commuters, local residents, students, and relatives arriving and departing on a frequent basis, or as newcomers (in 2011 in our site of investigation alone, 134 immigrants settled into their first homes in England [ONS, 2011]), tourists, or first-time patrons of local shops and cultural establishments.

In evaluating and rethinking the transition space that is Hackney Central, we seek to create a place and experience which embodies pride of place and self. This space should communicate a celebration of and respect for Hackney Central—a message potentially as powerful to existing community members as to new arrivals. We sought to identify the particular facets of arrival and place that over the past decade had come to characterise Hackney Central and then curate these elements in a visible space of arrival that feeds into the intensity of activity in Hackney Central via the side door of the station. The sense of openness and space which visitors experience from the perch of the station’s exit was seen as a unique quality of arriving in Hackney Central, as were the views from the station of two Hackney Central symbols, St Augustine’s Tower and the spire of St John-at-Hackney Church. The open space and views are particularly salient on arrival as they offer an orienting view and breathing space as buffer between the act of connecting via a speeding, often crowded Overground train and arrival into the hectic bustle of a busy high street.

The existing walkway down from the station, funnelling pedestrians through a narrow alleyway before releasing them out onto the primary three-way intersection remains as not only a unique feature of the arrival experience, but also as the most direct route to Hackney Central. The alleyway remains a central component of the design. Its continued use plays the same role for commuters and regulars, allowing a quick and efficient exit from the station; however, in the new scheme the walkway also plays a more important role for first-time arrivals. With the new



△ 15 Details of current arrival

△ The existing station entry on Amhurst Road privileges the vehicle through the car park. A large, obscure sculptural signage designates the station's primary entrance. However, pedestrians navigate a space that feels more like a back service entrance, walking past public recycling bins and finally along a row of parked cars and up a set of grim stairs as if leaving the sanctuary of the private car to continue on with the less desirable but necessary mode of transport.

△ 16 Details of Hackney Hill arrival

△ The sloping hill, whether viewed upon leaving the station or passing the break in the perimeter block along Amhurst Road, offers an invitation for relaxation or leisure to be redeemed immediately or saved for a later time.

public park presenting a more leisurely path away from the station, the narrow walkway with its clarity of direction and dense linearity of movement signals to newcomers that it is the most likely path directly to the central high street where they are better equipped to orient themselves.

Considering the act of departure, the same tactics that clarify the site as a space of arrival also serve to improve the space as one of departure. The station, the symbol of departure, sits at the top of the site in full view from the street and park. Accompanying the steady flows of people into the narrow alleyway from a central intersection gives the sense of embarking on a shared journey, and the proposed station entry on Amhurst Road now favours the pedestrian over the vehicle. Approaching the level of the platform, the improved visibility and clarity of access routes and the experience of traversing them as a pedestrian celebrates reaching out beyond Hackney to the wider world whether for work, school, recreation, travel or inspiration.

Hackney Hill as a Destination

Designing our site solely for the purpose of transition would not encompass or serve a broader population who are not regularly in transit, nor provide a useful space to travellers once they have completed the act of arrival. To accommodate and support non-transit activities we propose our space as a destination, as one to linger and spend time within. Hackney Hill would create a genuine *public space* for Hackney Central, “its own ‘living room’ where people could meet and talk and children could play” (Gehl and Gemzøe, 2001: 28).

The site’s proximity to the bustling retail corridor of Narrow Way and Mare Street presents a catchment area for a potentially lively use group. An early stage interview with Herbert’s Fish street kiosk confirmed this daytime intensity. The kiosk’s business is not dependent on commuter flows, operating between 8am-3pm, as daytime business is sufficiently lucrative. There are also approximately 6,000 residents within walking distance (distance radius) of the Hackney Hill site (ONS, 2011). Of those 6,000, students, pensioners, job seekers and housemakers and

their young children (totalling 39%) potentially stay in Hackney Central during the daytime, walking, strolling, shopping, meeting and drinking. The public outdoor space provides non-commercial meeting places and lingering opportunities.

Access from the sloped park to multi-level shops, other independent retail or activity based establishments, and outdoor patios create lively scenes from the station and park. The hotel serves as a temporary base of activity for visitors, providing an active lobby, seating and internet lounge, and food establishment. Ground-level access along Amhurst Road to shops, cafés and retail establishments



△ 14 Hackney Central and key institutions

Key institutions constitute potential curating partners for Hackney Hill

promotes an active streetfront in the vicinity of the park. As a destination site, Hackney Hill aspires to become an attraction to residents and visitors through its programming. The large level area that centres the design, coupled with its arena-style seating, provides an ideal setting for events—whether cultural, retail-driven or civic activities. A large portion of the built area is also proposed for use as a flexible community space in response to the dearth of this type of use in Hackney Central. This space could serve as the permanent home of one or more community organisations in addition to providing space for temporary and changing uses by other groups and institutions.

The opportunity to curate Hackney Hill would ideally be seized by existing local institutions in relative proximity to the site. The new Hackney Picture House, the Hackney Library and Museum and the famous Hackney Empire all present cultural partners who could extend their programming out into the city through Hackney Hill. The opportunity for a flexible and well-connected public space, with the additional benefits of high exposure, should work well to support these partnerships. Furthermore, curatorial opportunities extend to Hackney's civic hub—with the

Hackney Town Hall and Service Centre located just along Mare Street—as well as to existing community groups and spaces, such as the newly proposed Pembury community centre, and also to groups outside of the immediate periphery of the site. In terms of curating, Hackney Hill provides a well-designed platform which allows for a range of programming. These partnerships will do much to integrate Hackney Hill with its wider context as well as bringing a variety of different audiences to the space.

Edge Activations

In a further effort to connect the intervention proposal to the surrounding area and to avoid designing a sporadic architecture event, focus turned to the site's edges. Edges are often one of the most problematic areas in every urban design intervention, but also the most vital as they constitute the connecting element between the existing urban grain and the new piece of landscape. Activating the edges of Hackney Hill is fundamental to integrate the intervention with existing spaces and to strengthen the aim of the proposals.



Edge activation

△ 17 Marks and Spencer Wall

This large expanse of blank wall sits directly opposite the Hill along Amhurst Road. The dead-end wall, devoid of any doors or windows, suppresses any kind of activity and life on that section of the street. The use of murals, temporary stalls or even a makeshift bar shelf along the wall would encourage an extension of activity from the Hill site, and encourage a dialogue between the 2 sides of the (now semi-pedestrianised) street space.

▽ 18 Alleyway

This distinctive feature of this station serves to lead the majority of travellers into and out of the site—yet it remains undervalued and taken for granted.

△ 19 Station fencing and slope

The fencing which separates the train platform from the site is an unnecessarily harsh feature which can be animated to soften the barrier, or indeed removed. Similarly, the slope that exists from this fence down onto the primary walkway feeding the station is brutalist and uninviting in its severity. This slope could be altered to accommodate steps, facilitate waiting areas and create great viewing platforms over Hackney Hill.

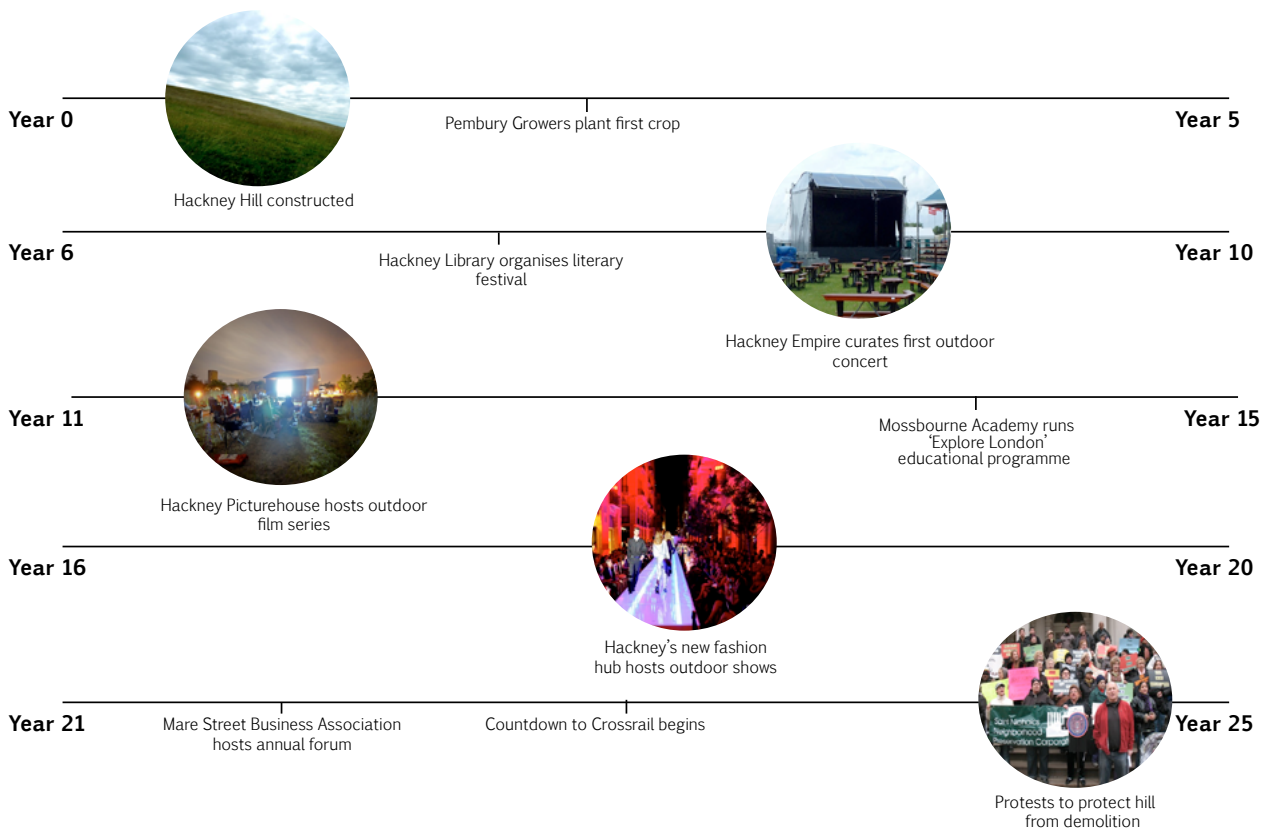
▽ 20 Amhurst Road/Hackney Central Intersection

Implementing shared spaces—an innovative solution to regulate flows of pedestrians and motorised vehicles (see Department for Transport, 2011) would enhance navigation and safety.

Hackney Hill Across Time

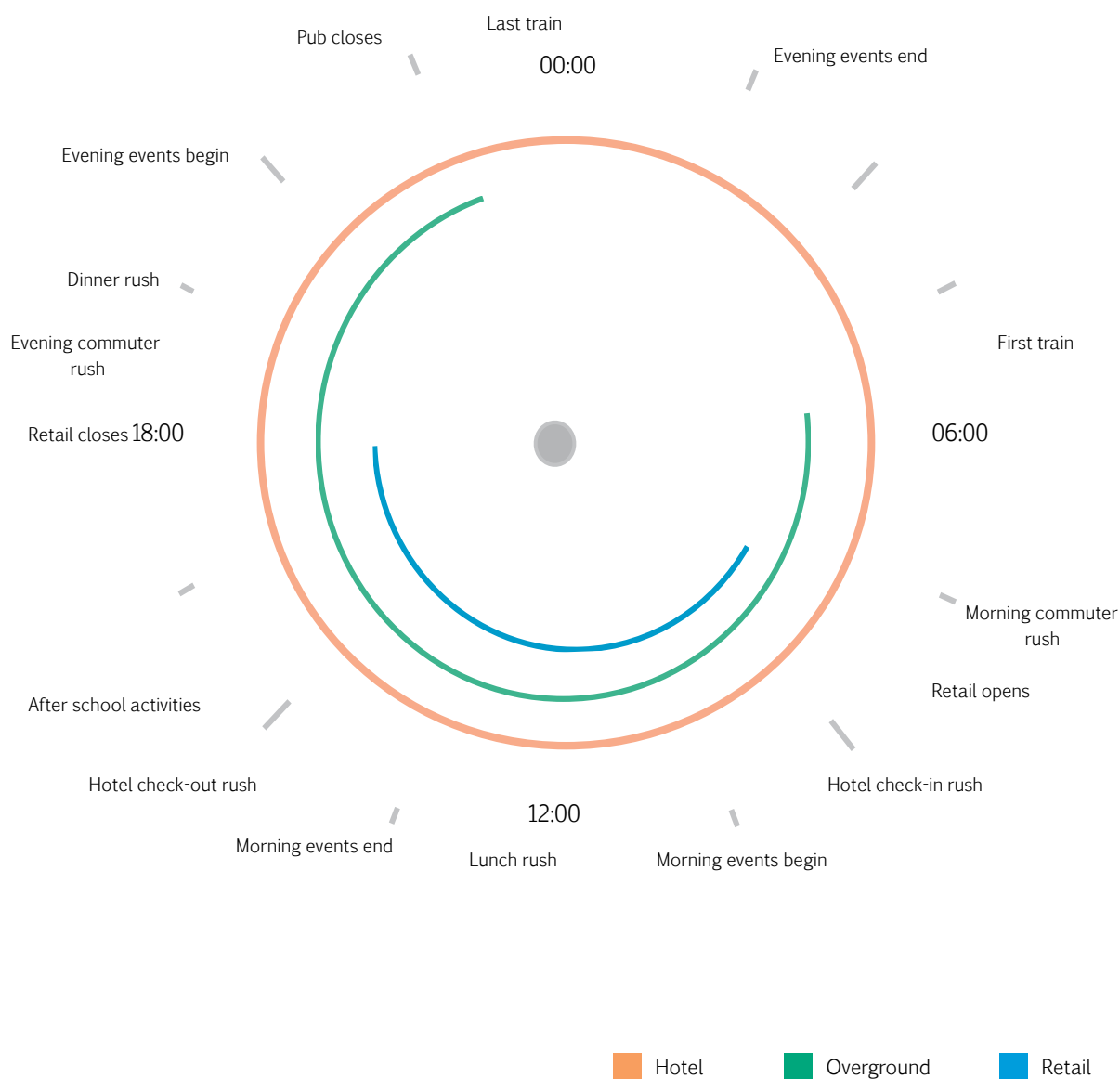
It is crucial to consider how Hackney Hill will change across these various scales of time. The users of the space are multiple and change depending on the time of day, the season and the life cycle of the site. Attempts to imagine what will happen to the site across the span of one day, across four seasons, and across the next few decades is a good exercise to inform the design of a more resilient and flexible space. The 25-30 year lifespan of the site presents a unique opportunity to conceive of different uses across the lifecycle of an urban intervention.

There exists a symbiotic link between time and the types of activities that the site can play host to during its lifespan. Here we can recall Sennett's notion of the 'open city'. "An open system", he writes (2006: 1-3), "is a system in unstable evolution [...]. The dialogue consists in asking in what ways and how well a particular building project allows people to 'adopt' buildings in the sense of using them as vehicles for social expression. [...] Often the building or open space easiest for people to adopt are small-scale, local in character." Hackney Hill aims to be such a system, delivering a space that behaves like a chameleon—boasting the ability to change with the borough through time, especially through its strong connections with local institutions.



△ 21 Hackney Hill's timeline

The Hill's 25-30 year life span in the face of Crossrail 2 encourages imaginings of how the Hill can be adopted and adapted through time by residents, visitors and institutions.



△ 22 The daily functioning of Hackney Hill

Hackney Hill is characterised by the “normal” activities of its users. The hotel fluxes of people arriving and departing, the shops openings and closing, the bars restaurants and cafes with their bustling life, commuters exiting/entering the station according to the cycle of peak and low flow hours, local residents engaged with their daily duties.

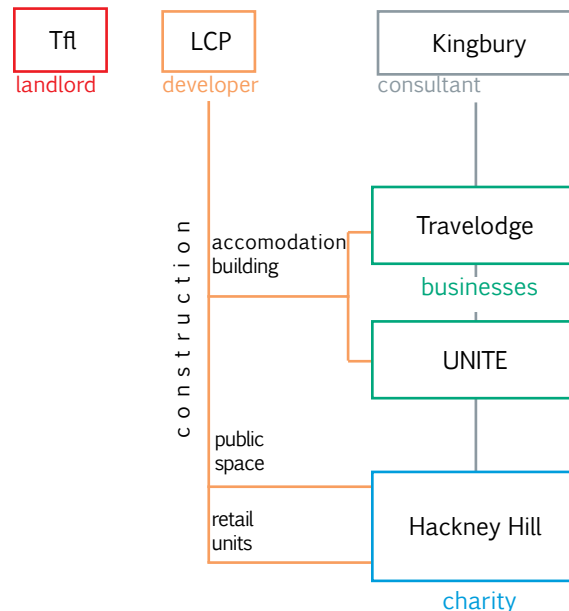
Managing Hackney Hill

The Hackney Hill proposal falls within a difficult economic climate for local authorities in England and Wales. National government's "austerity" policies have hit hardest some of the most deprived councils in the country—Hackney itself having to face the biggest cuts on a national level at an average cut of £266 per head (Ramesh, 2012). Given this economic reality, it becomes prudent to propose a comprehensive business plan for Hackney Hill, assuring as much autonomy and security as possible.

Hackney Central residents and Hackney Council only benefit marginally from the original Travelodge proposition. Only around 15 jobs for local workers are set to be created, and the tax circuit in England and Wales does not advantage local authorities, i.e. while the Council might expect small returns through council taxes and licences (around £10,000 per year for the whole complex), the main contributions—the business rates—though collected by the councils are reversed to a national pool managed by the National Government. This means incomes generated by the original project do not necessarily benefit Hackney Council.

The proposed intervention maintains the commercial scheme of leasing, contracting, building and managing, as is the case for the Travelodge proposal. This involves *Tfl* and *Hackney Council* leasing their sites to the developer *LPC Living*. The latter contracts *Kingsbury Consultants* to find the hospitality companies to manage the hotel and the student accommodation. Employing the UK's Section 106 agreement (still pending replacement by the new Community Infrastructure Levy in Hackney), the developer would be required to build both public space and retail units that make up the total Hackney Hill project. Both the Hill itself and, at minimum, one of the retail units, is given to the Hackney Hill Charity to manage.

The cost of managing the Hill itself is met through (a) the retail unit, and (b) through using the Hill as a venue that can be rented for events. These events can be organised by private stakeholders (e.g. given Hackney's strong arts community and apparent rise as a "fashion hub" [Wainwright, 2013], new retail organisations could host Hackney Fashion Week) or by local partners (e.g. the Hack-

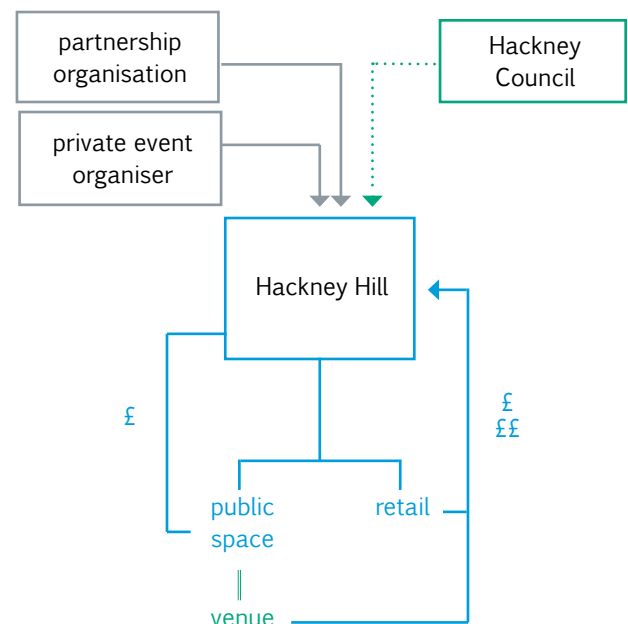


ney Empire hosting outdoor pantomimes or the Hackney Picture House hosting outdoor film screenings). This business model ensures a strong degree of prosperity and security for the Hill itself, as well as to the whole development. Ideally, Hackney Hill will generate profits enabling the charity to directly organise its own events—with local youths or gardening groups for instance.

Designing Hackney Hill to accommodate and serve in its most basic form both those in transit and those who are not, as a transitory space and destination respectively, ensures that it becomes meaningful for a multitude of users. By selecting the singular and unique features of the existing site to become the important identifying components of the new space, Hackney Hill both represents the existing space, while leaving flexibility for further interpretation as it evolves. Thus, Hackney Hill has the potential to become an ideal public space:

- (1) [...] flexible in the use of space, understand[ing] the grain of people's everyday lives;
- (2) [...] creat[ing] the setting for 'trusted' spaces, where people feel secure to take part in unfamiliar interactions;
- (3) foster[ing] positive interactions [without] promot[ing] them: tak[ing] an indirect approach to changing behaviour;
- (4) embrac[ing] creativity and innovation in finding new and imaginative uses for spaces that will transform interactions between people.

(Beunderman & Lownsbrough, 2007: 35)



CONCLUSION

In *The Practice of Everyday Life* Michel de Certeau (1984: 115) tells us that “In modern Athens, the vehicles of mass transportation are called *metaphorai*. To go to work or come home, one takes a ‘metaphor’—a bus or a train.” Travelling is an abstraction, a metaphor, whether that be the once-in-a-lifetime journey one has been dreaming of, or your everyday commuting from home to work. “Every story is a travel story—a spatial practice. For this reason, spatial practice concern everyday tactics.” (ibid.: 116).

As such, this project has argued that it is essential to create and support meaningful spaces of arrival and departure. These spaces support the interweaving of one travel story into another—from the wider world to London, from London’s network to Hackney Central and from Hackney Central station to the street. The Hackney Hill project seizes manifold opportunities to rethink an unused piece of land in Hackney Central. Thus the “travel story” of arriving in Hackney Central should be safely metamorphosed in the spatial and social practice of Hackney Central.

This project is not a simple arrival zone, a runway. It’s a run(a)way *public space*, which embodies your local café, your pub(lic house), your library, your cinema, your park. It’s where you meet your mates, where you people-watch, where you eat your lunch at noon and drink your beer at night. Hackney Hill is your place of dialogue.

Hackney Hill presents a convergence of Lynch’s ‘node’ and ‘landmark’ concepts. The multi-layered project, recalling so many of the aspects of what makes our cities (a ‘traditional’ park, a public space, a transport hub, a hotel; private companies, public sectors actors, civil society actors, individuals), but through a localised and localisable space—is for us the best expression of the “local city”. Hackney Hill aims to be a trusted place of encounters; the spatial practice of democracy in Hackney Central.

Escaping conservative anthropological visions of ‘the communities’ inhabiting England and Wales, we argue that Hackney Hill can stand as a new kind of urban intervention, rooted in the acknowledgement of the potential richness of the arrival experience. There exist throughout London,

and indeed in so many cities, many neglected or undervalued sites of arrival and departure which this project seeks to stand as a model for—not necessarily in its spatiality, but in the values and guiding principles that inform it.

Hackney Central Station as a site exhibits perfectly the intrinsic potential of the mystique of arrival. The Hackney Hill proposal seeks to explore this potential and amplify the urban experience of arrival and departure as one that city spaces should celebrate and value. Hackney Hill stands as a new kind of landmark space—reflective of the multitude of needs, desires and influences in Hackney Central—as well as to those which lie beyond in the wider city. Proust acknowledges this power of the processes and spaces of arrival:

Imagination bore us from the place in which we were living right to the very heart of a place we longed to see [...] and this difference is accentuated by the mysterious operation that is performed in those peculiar places, railway stations, which do not constitute, so to speak, a part of the surrounding town but contain the essence of its personality just as upon their sign-boards they bear its painted name.

Here sits Hackney Hill: as Hackney Central’s beating heart.

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