

Introduction

Outer City

London's development is heading east. As it does so, it creates new and complex geographies of government, planning and investment – most visibly on the big scale of the 2012 Olympics site or the Thames Gateway. At the same time, it takes in older geographies and more local scales. In the 2008 Cities Programme Studio, we followed this eastward logic to a site in the 'outer city' – Barking and Dagenham – where the challenges of development, connection and inclusion are very pronounced.

This part of London sits somewhat uneasily between the centre and the outskirts, socially and economically as well as physically. In its demographic profile – the spatial distribution and concentration of such factors as age, income, employment, education, ethnicity and housing tenure – the area shows a mix of what can be seen as typically 'inner' and 'outer' London characteristics. At its western edge, near Barking Town Centre, the profile is younger, more ethnically mixed, with higher levels of formal education. As you move east, the age profile rises, the ethnic mix falls: certain central and eastern parts of Barking and Dagenham are 'whiter' than the average for the country as a whole, and their residents more likely to have been born in England. Bits of the borough have easy and fast transport access to the centre of London, other parts are carved up by arterial roads but not well-linked to nearby neighbourhoods and local centres. Barking and Dagenham is the site of numerous new housing developments, including the large-scale proposals for Barking Riverside, but housing more generally has become highly politicised within the borough – particularly access to council housing.

The work of the Studio addressed this 'fractured' geography of development and deprivation through research, analysis, and the development of propositions for change. In taking up these issues in urban contexts, the challenge is to steer between the twin dangers of boosterism and pathology, to find a register between the often empty language of 'place-making' and the fraught grammar of deprivation. Spatial integration, physical upgrading, economic improvement and social cohesion are taken equally seriously as ends of urban development.

The Cities Programme aims to study the relations between the physical and social aspects of cities. We see design as a mode of research and practice that shapes urban environments, responds to urban problems, and connects social and material forms in the city. In line with this ethos, the student teams in the 2008 Studio have advanced a range of schemes for urban interventions, working at different scales and in different fields. Some of these involve large interventions in urban infrastructure – at the level of transport networks that enhance linkages within and between sites in outer London. Others work at more local scales, addressing the quality and the connectivity of the everyday public realm (streets, sidewalks, parks) in which the most mundane and routine forms of social interaction take place; or arguing for an understanding of local urban environments as integrated ‘metabolisms’, in spite of the often fragmented governance of environmental resources, services and regulation. And others highlight the importance of good policy design in the larger process of designing cities, outlining ways of thinking about density that are more sensitive to the built typologies of specific urban areas, or for addressing the different development challenges posed by varying plot sizes within integrated spatial master-plans. All bring the ‘outer city’ to the centre of the frame.

Fran Tonkiss

Cities of Housing

Architectural visitors to this country, like Hermann Muthesius and Steen Einer Rasmussen, have commented on the English genius for building cities of housing. Early industrialisation, dispersed political power and a vibrant and independent private sector have all conspired to relegate grand urban plans to the realm of unrealisable fantasy. Yet, the English industrial city, a city of unprecedented scale and brutality, had many qualities that are still evident and still desirable in the contemporary city.

Hermann Muthesius was drawn to London at the end of the nineteenth century because its domestic architecture was the most advanced in the world. As he notes in his book *Das englische Haus*, England at this time was ‘the only advanced country in which the majority of the population still

live in houses'. The single family house, and in particular the urban terraced house, had developed into a complex and nuanced vessel for a new-middle class domestic lifestyle. Whereas previous houses were formal and designed for representation, the new house was designed to 'live in, not to look at'. It offered a wide range of living spaces, from a generous hall, to the parlour with its large bay window, the more formal dining room, and then the drawing room where the women would withdraw for after dinner tea, and the study where the men would talk business and drink something stronger. The informal social life suggested by this domestic haven was compensation for the lack of a more metropolitan public realm and the absence of a continental café society in the late Victorian and early Edwardian English city.

Das englische Haus was only fully translated into English in 2007, and its insistence on typology as being the means to bring the social and the material impetus of architecture together has been largely ignored in the architectural discourse of this country. Muthesius was a central figure in the development of the Deutscher Werkbund at the beginning of the twentieth century and in the development of modern architecture in Europe. His ideas underpinned the Wohnreform movement which was very influential at that time. The movement was interested in the idea that the garden and the dwelling could respond to all aspects of daily middle-class life so that everyday life would form the subject matter for a new architecture.

Although the housing that was produced in the inter-war period struggled to transpose the repertoire of living spaces found in a grand Norman Shaw house to the scale of a worker's cottage, it would be wrong to subscribe to the myth of the Existenzminimum, bourgeois-proof dwelling. Many of the projects of that time do achieve a dignity that comes out of careful planning and a poetic, if modest, construction. Berlin Britz and Frankfurt Römerstadt are two successful German projects from that time. To visit them today, with their lush seventy-year-old gardens, is to visit a kind of living paradise that is not so far from the claims that were originally made for the 'new architecture'. It is paradoxical that this radical idea about how an architecture could emerge out of everyday life, an ideal that came from English domestic architecture and that still underpins the best contemporary housing being built in the Netherlands, Germany

and Switzerland, is so utterly lacking in the vast output of the housing boom that has overtaken England in the last decade.

This year's Cities Programme studio was based in Barking, a part of outer London that has the same geographical relationship to the city centre as Berlin Britz and Frankfurt Römerstadt. In the Becontree Estate, which in its heyday in the 1920s housed over 100 000 people, the borough has an idealistic interwar housing project at a similar scale and with the same original social purpose as those German examples. Although the architecture of Becontree is more Parker and Unwin than Bruno Taut and Ernst May, its garden city plan and provision of a rigorous landscape structure to lend the quarter a positive and 'domestic' character are not so far from the continental examples. It is well connected to the rest of London by two stations on the District Line, a recipe, one would imagine, for the kind of middle-class gentrification that seems unstoppable within London world city. Instead, while Berlin Britz and Frankfurt Römerstadt have long ago been gentrified, Becontree's population has been depleted, and the remaining 'locals', who have aged and are intimidated by very recent and significant immigration, constitute the core vote for the British National Party councillors in the Barking and Dagenham local council.

But, there is an enormous amount of residential development taking place in Barking. Encouraged by the ambitious density targets in the London Plan, projects at Barking Town Centre and Barking Riverside are being planned and built at densities that in places exceed those of Mayfair in central London. These developments are developer led, and are in one way or another, subsidised by government incentives which draw development to specific areas. These developments are also characterised by a preponderance of one and two bedroom apartments, which in the absence of any internal space standards are the most profitable residential product, tailor made for a buy-to-let market that is not bothered about quality as long as demand for rental accommodation remains high. Why is this huge volume of construction happening here, in a borough that has no housing shortage and an availability of affordable housing? Why is government policy being directed towards new housing when there is social instability and a high rate of vacancy on the Becontree estate, which has no incentives or programmes to ameliorate what is a deteriorating situation? And finally, in

an outer London borough where densities have traditionally been low, why has the single family house with a garden been rejected as a viable housing typology for the future?

The combination of a politicised and ever-changing urban policy, and professionals infatuated with novelty and insensitive to existing and historic qualities has consigned England's cities to a cycle of repeated mistakes, where all but the wealthiest quarters appear to be in perpetual states of transition and dereliction. As Hermann Muthesius asks in *Das englische Haus*, why do the English leave town planning to be 'handed over to the lowest order of intelligence'? Why do they bother to experiment with blocks of flats which don't suit the national temperament and would, if multiplied, mean 'the demise of one of the best aspects of the English Heritage'?

Adam Caruso

'In-between' city

Coming into or leaving east London, the signs of city life seem in suspension in Barking and Dagenham, neither coalescing into recognisable urban forms and densities nor dissolving into the wide estuary landscape. The borough sits at a mid-point of sorts, between the recognisably urban and rural, in a state that Thomas Sieverts describes as the 'Zwischenstadt', the 'In-between' city.

The recent Mayoral elections revealed a political split in Greater London between inner and outer boroughs, reflecting the weight of public sector investment over recent years. Barking fits into this model of dissatisfaction growing in proportion to the distance from the centre – but this is expressed in other voting patterns and a different pitch of rage (Barking and Dagenham is the London stronghold of the British National Party). In other respects, which have been our focus in the studio this year, Barking and Dagenham is both highly representative of the conflicts of this world city, and very specific.

Cities change course slowly, and ideas on alternative urban practices are relatively slow to penetrate national, regional and local administrations. So it is no surprise to find a veritable junkyard of paradigms of city form, functionality and process coexisting within the borough's extensive boundaries. For all the cultural specificity of East London, our

global students have used the analytic and critical skills brought to London and honed on this course to unearth what they already understood from the cities they know well: that inequality and social change are spatially expressed. All the research clusters have scratched away at the topography of Barking and Dagenham, and the best work draws on direct observation carefully pieced into a speculative overview.

Barking is where the inner-outer borough faultline intersects with that mythical beast, the Thames Gateway, a stretch of riverside former industrial sites stretching 62 kilometres from the city centre. The Thames Gateway policy area appears to revive ideas of linear or radial development form, departing from Abercrombie's annular post-war model of ring roads and green belt encircling the city. It is ironic, then, that the Thames Gateway Crossing is a link in the post-war middle ring first proposed in the 1943 County of London Plan.

New light and heavy rail transport infrastructure will skirt the borough: Crossrail to the north (committed at the start of the academic year), and the Docklands Light Railway along the riverfront (still aspirational), while the Channel Tunnel Rail Link, opened in November, dips underground at precisely this point. Spatialisation of existing transport data undertaken in the studio exposes the patterns of movement these radial, centre-serving infrastructures establish and reinforce, with short, intense peaks of movement to and from the office areas of the city, with long periods of three-quarters empty trains in between.

The inefficiency in terms of capital investment, transport energy, and the emotional energy of commuters on congested services is palpable. There are alternatives, in Paris' Arc-Express, the outgoing Mayor's Overground ring, or interwoven radial strands, as in Woolwich, across the river. However, dissenting voices have been most audible on the London Plan's renewed preference for high-rise, and those questioning the rationale of transport and spatial development strategy have gained only a specialised audience.

The dilemma between serving the centre and relative self-sufficiency is illustrated in statistics on employment density. Hillingdon, the borough in which Heathrow airport is located, is the only outer London borough with as many jobs as residents. Barking and Dagenham has one of the lowest employment densities in Greater London, at 0.52. It is as if the

docks (and jobs) have migrated west, to London's real port, and deserted this area of deep water wharves (the reason for Ford's choice to locate their first European factory here in 1930), European rail connections and high levels of manual skill. Are there transport connections, educational programmes or development models which might change this pattern?

Speaking in 2002, Mayor Livingstone asserted that 'we must build in future at higher densities – not just to increase housing supply and make best use of urban land – but to secure the benefits from higher density, high quality vibrant urban development.' This push is played out at densities of up to 300 units/ hectare in Barking Town Centre and the vast and poorly connected Barking Riverside. In the town centre, it is arguable but unproven that these new residents will contribute to the town centre economy and community. A half-hour bus ride away from the town centre and the same journey time on the (future) Docklands Light Railway from Canary Wharf, it is hard to make such claims for Barking Riverside – surely this is a high density commuter suburb, with 35% affordable housing and little to do with Barking other than the name?

The 25,000 houses of the Becontree estate, the London County Council's grand interwar garden suburb, built at a relatively compact 50 units/hectare but currently occupied at an average of 2.4 residents per house, seldom appear in these calculations: is it because they fall outside the Development Corporations boundaries, or because effective management or piecemeal intensification of existing stock makes fewer headlines than large scale construction completions? Surely it is the residents of the Becontree who are amongst the supposed beneficiaries of all this regeneration? Instead, they appear to be most anxious about the effects of change, and resentful at where investment is targeted.

The natural landscape of floodplain, creek and heath remain as vestiges in the parks, brownfield sites, back gardens and allotments, yet it is in these green spaces that any sense of equilibrium between city and country is exposed as a cruel illusion. Toxins from the area's contribution to the city region's manufacturing, transportation, power generation and waste treatment are widespread across the borough, a legacy for the area's past, current and future residents that deserves remedy at a regional level, rather than being left as a problem for the local authority or individual site developers.

A spectrum of development models are being applied across the borough to deliver new construction and regeneration. From the social landlord-led redevelopment of problematic high-rise estates, through the public-private partnership at Barking Riverside, and the public sector's role in land assembly for private development, to private developments, all of them face the same challenges of high site preparation costs, relatively low values, and uncertainty about the durability of the urban model being followed. These models are not eternal truths but contingent hypotheses, and the relative prospects of each of these have altered significantly over the course of the academic year – from cautious optimism to growing downturn. How are these development models performing in relation to each other, in the shorter and longer term, and are there alternative strategies for the public sector in the current period of market caution?

These partial but overlapping views on the area give a vivid snapshot of the struggles and conflicts inherent to the current paradigm of private sector, housing-led redevelopment of brownfield sites. These studies combine low level observation (from a substantial amount of time spent observing and interviewing in situ) and high level analysis (from collecting, comparing and interpreting data and spatial patterns), sketching out the local dimension of broader urban strategies.

This transaction between our global student body and the specifics of London is mutually beneficial. Working from close study to wider strategy is an exemplary learning exercise, a journey into a surprising corner of this global city supported by a team of tutors. Our students from Delhi to Mexico City have little difficulty recognising the relevance of London's 'In-between' areas for their future practice. But as always with the Thames Estuary, the traffic is not all one way: from unfamiliar angles, much of the work contributes in a thoughtful and lively way to debates around the Thames Gateway and the London Plan on our city's future.

William Mann and Stephen Witherford