



Ministers must now guarantee a lasting legacy

Article by Baroness Jo Valentine, a version of which appeared in the Evening Standard, 22 April 2008

When London bid for the 2012 Games it sought to secure a wide range of legacy benefits including transforming the landscape and opportunities for a substantial part of East London.

According to reports from New Economics Foundation (NEF) and the Parliamentary Public Accounts Committee (PAC) this week, the Government hasn't thought that through sufficiently either.

The PAC declares that even with a revised budget of £9.3 billion (more than twice the original estimate), the Government "did not specify precisely what will be delivered for this money, including the legacy benefits". The NEF says that without "cast-iron guarantees" in 2012 plans, "the Games will fail to leave the promised positive local legacy for the poorest residents of east London".

It was the legacy, especially the impact on five of the most deprived local authorities in the UK, which persuaded the International Olympics Committee to pass the torch to London. There are many forms of legacy, but the Games will have succeeded if they transform the East End and the lives of Eastenders. This is the best opportunity to ignite the fortunes of east London in living memory.

London is growing east, with an additional population the size of Leeds arriving around the Thames and Lower Lea within 20 years. The Olympics provide a catalyst to regenerate in ways which accommodate this growth, not via a lowest common denominator solution. The Games can raise the bar for planners and developers and engage and energise the communities who live there.

The Mayor must provide political leadership and work with business, to promote a clear vision of what the East End can become and to identify the resources which will make it possible.

The Olympic Park is a stone's throw from the City and Canary Wharf, two hours from Paris via Stratford International and a DLR-ride from the rest of Europe via City Airport. Why wouldn't this

be first choice for a French company to base itself in the UK or an Asian investor to choose for his European HQ?

The vision also might build on the East End's potential as an international tourist destination. East London already has ExCeL and the dramatically revitalised O₂. It will soon have the Biota aquarium at Silvertown and the Olympic pool, stadium and velodrome. The vision must offer routes into work, better housing and a quality of life which can reawaken the aspirations of East Londoners and attract new Londoners. Wind turbines, waterside pubs, mosques, churches, pavement cafes or cricket fields would help to create a new London quarter.

Government must acknowledge the substantial need for infrastructure beyond the immediate Olympic Park. Developers are ready to build homes, offices, shops and factories. But they need Government to commit to providing roads, bridges, schools and health centres, or the East End will remain a place where people are reluctant to live and therefore developers are reluctant to invest. We cannot sentence another generation of East Londoners to poor-quality housing or to a barren landscape dotted with Olympic white elephants.

Thanks to the controversy over the Olympic budget, the Government has developed a miserly obsession with spending as little as possible. But a long lasting Olympic legacy depends on Government not extracting every penny it can from the Olympic site after the Games. Spending a little **more** and a little more **wisely** on the necessary underpinnings may be the cheapest way of securing long-lasting East End transformation.

I encourage the Mayor, Olympics Minister Tessa Jowell and Gordon Brown to be brave. All of London and the whole UK will reap the benefit.

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