The Isle of Dogs: Four development waves, five planning models, twelve plans, thirty-five years, and a renaissance . . . of sorts

Matthew Carmona*

*Tel.: +44 20 7679 4876.
E-mail address: m.carmona@ucl.ac.uk.

Abstract

The story of the redevelopment of the Isle of Dogs in London’s Docklands is one that has only partially been told. Most professional and academic interest in the area ceased following the property crash of the early 1990s, when the demise of Olympia & York, developers of Canary Wharf, seemed to bear out many contemporary critiques. Yet the market bounced back, and so did Canary Wharf, with increasingly profound impacts on the rest of the Island. This paper takes an explicitly historical approach using contemporaneous professional critiques and more reflective academic accounts of the planning and development of the Isle of Dogs to examine whether we can now conclude that an urban renaissance has taken place in this part of London. An extensive review of the literature is supplemented with analysis of physical change on the ground and by analysis of the range of relevant plans and policy documents that have been produced to guide development over the 35-year period since the regeneration began. The paper asks: What forms of planning have we seen on the Island; what role has design played in these; what outcomes have resulted from these processes; and, as a result, have we yet seen an urban renaissance?

© 2009 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Isle of Dogs; Urban design; Planning; Urban renaissance
1. Introduction

1.1. The whole story

The tale of London’s Docklands from the 1970s to the property crash of the early 1990s—a tale of decline, inertia, massive seemingly unplanned investment, followed by market failure—is one that has been told and retold in numerous essays, dissertations and learned papers, worldwide. Yet, despite the surfeit of work tracking the period up to the early 1990s, surprisingly little has been written about the area since, and particularly about how it has fared following the property crash of the early 1990s, or indeed in the UK’s post-1997 New Labour policy context. It seems that after the crash, many simply lost interest in the area, writing it off alongside the liquidated remnants of Olympia & York (the developers of Canary Wharf) as another planning disaster and the inevitable end to an impossible dream.

Of course this is not the whole story. As the economy picked up, so did Canary Wharf, which has since bounced back with a vengeance. Today, the Isle of Dogs even has a particular and special status in the London Plan as an opportunity area that (alongside the City of London) is seen as having a vital contribution to enhancing London’s world city role (Mayor of London, 2004: Policy 5C.1). Thus, the first adopted London Plan contained proposals that the Isle of Dogs alone should house 150,000 new jobs and 3,500 new homes by 2016, making in the process by far the largest contribution to the planned growth of the capital of any location in London, and contributing in no small part to the delivery of the plan’s overall growth strategy for London. In a very real sense, 15 years after the crash, it can be argued that the impossible dreams are being realised.
1.2. Key questions and approaches

Clearly, much development has occurred and continues to occur following the property crash of the early 1990s (and even the credit crunch today), as a count of the cranes that continue to dot the Docklands skyline will reveal (Fig. 1). But, in the post-97 language of regeneration, can what has happened be described as an urban renaissance? To get a better understanding of this, the paper will need to address the following key questions:

1. What forms of planning have we seen?
2. What role has design played in this?
3. What outcomes have resulted from these processes?
4. Have we seen an urban renaissance?

By choosing the Isle of Dogs as the focus of this paper, no claim is made that the analysis applies to the much larger Docklands area that formed the wider canvas for the work of London Docklands Development Corporation (LDDC), and which continues to offer significant opportunities for London’s development. Inevitably, since the arrival of Canary Wharf, the Isle of Dogs has represented a very particular context, with its own unique status: an Enterprise Zone in the 1980s and a Strategic Economic Area today (DCLG, 2007). In a very real sense the area reflects the essence of the Docklands story, but it is also quite unique, with its own particular drivers and processes of change; not least in the range of approaches to planning that have been used to secure its regeneration.

To understand how approaches to the planning of the Isle of Dogs have changed over time, it is useful to think in terms of a sequence of development stages, each characterised by a wave of development, that over the last 30 years or so have made their mark on the Island. The paper therefore takes an explicitly historical approach, using contemporaneous professional critiques and more reflective academic accounts of the planning and development of the Isle of Dogs. It presents a ‘prelude’ (pre-LDDC) and four subsequent waves of development, which marked the transformation of the Island over the quarter of a century since the LDDC was established.

The review of the literature is supplemented with analysis of the range of relevant plans and policy documents that have been produced to guide development over the period, and by analysis of physical change on the ground. Each period is explored with reference to the key planning documents produced to guide development, which, in turn, characterise particular styles of planning.

1.3. Styles of planning

To understand how the nature of the planning process has changed in the Isle of Dogs, it is useful to refer to Brindley, Rydin, and Stoker’s (1996) six styles of planning, which can be utilised for this purpose. Their typology is determined by the prevailing attitude to market processes and the relative prosperity of the locality. ‘Regulative planning’ has largely reflected the dominant approach to planning in the UK inherent in the 1947 Planning Act—in other words the view that through regulation of the right to develop, development activity could be positively directed to meet prescribed ends. This type of planning depends almost entirely on a buoyant economy for planning to meet its ends, without which little development will occur.

‘Trend planning’ crudely represents the antithesis of regulative planning and was to some degree advocated by the Thatcher governments of the 1980s. It represents a ‘hands-off’ process, with planning seen in the main as a means to better facilitate the actions of the market.

‘Popular planning’ conversely is directed towards the satisfaction of local community objectives through public participation and direct involvement in the planning process. It combines direct state intervention with an active popular base, and has rarely occurred in its true form in the UK.

The major characteristic of ‘leverage planning’ is the use of public sector finance to stimulate investment in otherwise weak markets, as was done in the 1980s, for example, through the work of the Urban Development Corporations. Leverage planning is nearly always favoured today over ‘public-investment planning’,
which, as the name suggests, relies on direct public investment in areas where urban problems are intense and private-sector investment is unlikely. Finally, ‘private-management planning’ relies almost completely on the private sector to turn places around (although usually with big subsidies). It hands over large areas (for example former public housing estates) to private-sector management and control (Brindley et al., 1996: 12–25).

Although scope continues to exist for the operation of all these planning styles within England, it is regulative planning (and to a lesser extent leverage planning) that has dominated the statutory process. The lack of direct public sector investment in urban areas (not least in the housing stock), nevertheless continues to be a significant point of criticism amongst commentators, and a reason that the Urban Task Force (2000) argued that broad public ‘planning’ objectives often remain unmet. However, as the discussion will show, in different ways and at different times and for good or ill, the Isle of Dogs has been the subject of all these styles of planning.

At the heart of the typology is the relationship between types of planning that, on the one hand, can be viewed along a continuum from market-led to state-led, but, on the other hand, also along a second and related continuum from plan-based to opportunity-based modes of planning (Fig. 2). To fully understand the diversity of planning models utilised in this one small part of London, and their relative success, it is also helpful to categorise the Island’s recent planning history in terms of their positions in one of the four quadrants described by these axes. This will be done as each episode is discussed in the sections below.


2.1. London Docklands Study Team

The period immediately pre-dating the designation of the LDDC by the first Conservative government of the Thatcher years is largely remembered as a period of inaction and failure to get to grips with the decline of London’s once thriving Docklands areas. Yet the period is worth a brief discussion here as one of the final hurrahs of public-investment planning—in this instance without the actual public investment to make it happen. It could also be characterised as a flawed attempt at popular planning, by engaging community representatives directly in the planning process, whilst only subjecting the final proposals to a tokenistic form of wider public consultation.

Neither planning approach has been attempted since in the Docklands, but in the mid-1970s for a short time they represented a response to a wave of protest that had met the publication of a consultants’ report commissioned by the Ted Heath Conservative government of the early 1970s (Travers Morgan, 1973). The report had been commissioned in 1971 by Peter Walker, the then Secretary of State for the Environment, who, as a foretaste of what was to come, had taken the initiative out of the hands of local government, preferring instead centralised coordination based on private expertise (the London Docklands Study Team: engineers Travers Morgan advised by planners Robert Matthew Johnson-Marshall and Partners), and commenting in the process that ‘all the essential ingredients are present for something big to happen here’ (quoted in Marris, 1982: 50).

In fact, the consultants produced 18 possible options for the area, with grandiose titles such as ‘Europa’ and ‘Venice’, and ideas ranging from consolidating the traditional East End, to a new town, to a safari park, in order to fill the space. And, in a further indication of what was to come, an extension of the City’s office functions (although on a limited scale) to the Isle of Dogs was favoured by the consultants, in a plan that omitted the water basin, zoned the land uses, maintained a large segment of industry to the southwestern quadrant of the peninsula, and placed the Isle of Dogs at the centre of plans to regenerate the whole Docklands area (Ledgerwood, 1985: 80–81—Fig. 3; Page, 1985). This was, therefore, the first of the sequence of plans for the Isle of Dogs on which this paper focuses, providing the first of a range of visions that (with greater or lesser success) attempted to chart a future for the area.

Fig. 2. Modes of planning.
The plans were immediately met by a storm of protest, the basis of which was a perception that the proposals were designed to meet national and private needs, rather than local and public ones (the essence of the debate that followed for at least the next 30 years). Indeed, it was exactly at this time that many of the planning-oriented action groups came into existence, which later shaped so much of the opposition to the manner of the area’s eventual regeneration (see below). The outcome of the London Docklands Study Team was, therefore, rather different to that hoped for by the then government, which had taken exceptional action by intervening in the local planning process. Ledgerwood (1985) suggests three reasons for this: a change in political mood, with the now Labour-controlled Greater London Council (GLC) and local councils concerned that any radical change would alter the community and political character of the area; the failure to engage local interest and representatives, by removing the process from local control; and a downturn in the climate of property development that overtook the world’s industrial countries from the mid-1970s onwards.

As it turned out, the desire for quick and effective action by narrowing the field of participation only acted to delay matters, as the command and control style acted to mobilise resistance and intensify conflict (Ledgerwood, 1985: 6–7). In contrast to the Thatcher government that followed six years later, this Conservative administration was unwilling to force through its proposals against the wishes of the newly elected GLC and the exclusively Labour-controlled District Councils.

2.2. Docklands Joint Committee

Instead, in an attempt to re-capture the initiative, responsibility after 1974 was returned to the local level through the auspices of the Docklands Joint Committee (DJC). This was established as a public body formed with membership from the GLC, five London boroughs, and the Docklands Forum and Joint Docklands Action Group, both representing a range of local people, groups, communities, and other interested parties. This period provided a valuable, but short-lived, contrast to the private investment-led model that had been favoured by the London Docklands Study Team, and which was later to come back with a vengeance. In the meantime, the DJC had an explicit social focus that placed the provision of new social housing (80% of the total), social and environmental infrastructure, and industrial employment as its top priorities (Nicholson, 1989).

The DJC quickly got to work on producing the London Docklands Strategic Plan (LDSP DJC, 1976), which,
like its predecessor, encompassed the whole of the docklands area and included a strong two-dimensional physical vision for the Isle of Dogs (Fig. 4). The plan encompassed filling in the dock basins to create a green landscape network across the island; major new infrastructure, including a tube line reminiscent of the Jubilee line extension that was eventually built, and roads connecting both sides of the Thames; extensive designations of new (primarily social) housing (shown in brown); and designated district centres, one at the heart of the Island (a location adopted in subsequent plans and where an ASDA store was later built) and one to the north, not far from where Canary Wharf came to be built.

Fig. 4. London Docklands strategic plan, proposals for the Isle of Dogs (1976).
The proposals envisaged an Isle of Dogs much better connected to its neighbouring boroughs, removing in the process the isolating impact of the river. By reinforcing existing housing areas with the proposed new housing zones, and using the green network to both link and separate these, the plan effectively envisaged a series of new communities, something that the Island had never really possessed because of the isolating nature of the docks. At the same time, these were to be largely mono-tenure working class communities, with little sense that a more mixed community might one day emerge. Moreover, the plan envisaged little value-giving development that might help to justify the massive infrastructure investment that would be needed to achieve the plan's goals.

Although providing a clear physical vision, the status of the plan was that of a structure plan, and therefore the designations remained loose and flexible. The key elements represented options only, rather than definitive proposals, and the plan was designed to reflect consensus (GLC, 1983), so reducing tensions between the various public sector partners of the DJC. For their part, local borough politicians were able to feel guided rather than tied down, and, as might be expected from such a plan, it was ignored by one and all (Ledgerwood, 1985: 115–120).

2.3. But no change on the ground

During this period, little or no interest was apparent in the Isle of Dogs, and the limited number of developments that did occur elsewhere, including the demolition of a range of listed buildings to make way for News International in Wapping, occurred on an ad-hoc basis, with boroughs proving more than willing to accept any development rather than none, and with little or no concern for the plan (Falk, 1981: 78). As such, the DJC unwittingly set the pattern for the plans that were to come, plans which have repeatedly been ignored or overtaken by events.

To make matters worse, reflecting the perilous economic condition of the country at the time, public funds were increasingly in short supply, and the DJC made no attempt to engage with private investment interests about their needs and priorities. Rapidly expanding sectors, such as financial services and tourism, were largely ignored because of their perceived incompatibility with the East End world, and with the ‘Old Labour’ political paradigm that underpinned the plan. All this was further undermined by the dispersal of power across a range of different public sector agencies and landowners, each with contrasting interests and little real incentive to work together (Nicholson, 1989). Therefore, although the DJC played an important role in land assembly, they achieved little else and were swimming against a quickly turning tide that would increasingly marginalise social provision by the state, and in which industrial development and explicit attempts to limit the role of private speculation were no longer seen as a viable option to drive investment (Neave, 1988).

Examination of a figure-ground plan representing the physical urban form of the area shows a landscape largely untouched following the building of the docks (Fig. 5). The critical characteristics of this landscape included: the large swaths of water surrounded by lines of dock buildings and high dock walls; the deep-plan warehouses around the edge of the Island; the scattered docker communities between these and the docks (mostly re-built in the post-war period); and the total disconnection of the area to public transport. This picture remained largely intact in 1979.

Yet, despite the absence of concrete achievement, the lessons from this phase in the Docklands story were invaluable in charting a more effective (if contentious) path forward. They included such fundamentals as:

- The public sector alone could no longer take sole responsibility for delivery. Public-investment planning in that sense (in England) died in the 1970s.
- The fallback, conventional land-use planning, will only be viable if plans have teeth and benefit from consensus amongst those with power over their implementation.
- In a weak market, conventional land-use planning will be unable to fill the gap. Development cannot be directed if no development is proposed.
- Visions need resources and appropriate political commitment and expertise to tap those resources from wherever they come.
- The public interest amounts to more than the interests of the local community, as regeneration on this scale inevitably requires resources that go far beyond the capacity of that community to pay for them.

2.4. State-led/plan-based

Although all valuable lessons for the future, the failure of the DJC was in part a failure to understand that the times were changing, and that local government would no longer have the same powerful role that it had in the past. As such, the proposals were to be plan-based and state-led (Fig. 6), reflecting the social model of the time and the sense that planning should be done in the
public interest, an interest that did not necessarily include the market. The period that followed was one in which the values of consensus and consultation were to be replaced with that of ‘conviction’. In that sense, conviction referred to a perceived necessity to engage in direct conflict with ideas and groups who were perceived to be placing their interests ahead of the national interest (Ledgerwood, 1985: 157). Conviction politics in the Docklands meant that action would be greatly accelerated, ushering in the first significant wave of new development since the dock’s post-war decline.

3. The first wave—1981–1985

3.1. The London Docklands Development Corporation

At the forefront of this accelerated model was to be the single-minded LDDC and the Isle of Dogs Enterprise Zone, the latter covering much of the former inland dock areas. The early history of the LDDC is extensively discussed elsewhere (see for example DCC,
1988; Brownill, 1990; Oc & Tiesdell, 1991), as are the arguments for and against the Enterprise Zone. From a design perspective, it was clear from the start that the overarching goal was to attract private development at all costs, that a new form of leverage planning would be required as a primary means to achieve these ends—either through direct investment in infrastructure, or subsidies via cheap land or tax breaks. Consequently, all other factors, including how this development would be designed, and what sort of place the Island would be, were to be secondary considerations.

In 1981, Reg Ward, the first Chief Executive of the LDDC proclaimed: ‘We don’t intend to spend our time preparing planning studies. The area has suffered enough planning over the past 10 years and local people are looking for something to happen’ (quoted in Unattributed, 1982). Much later, in 1987, he qualified this view by reflecting on the resultant deregulation of the planning system as ‘a very strong personal stance: I believe our planning system inhibits thinking and limits opportunities rather than creating them. It is also detached from the activities of the market place’ (Ward, 1987). The approach inspired the then leader of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets1 to write: ‘This is the closest to total dictatorship any British government has ever come’.

Despite the rhetoric, decisions about the form of future development were in fact being made from the very start of the LDDC’s tenure. As Chief Architect and Planner for the LDDC, Ted Hollamby (1990: 8) later argued, ‘The great problem for the LDDC was how to obtain quick results, yet set high standards in planning and design’. Thus, in the six months before the Corporation officially came into being, preliminary work focused on a set of basic policies. First, the docks were not to be filled in; second, the isolation of the areas was to be tackled with new vehicular and light rail transport routes planned into the area; third, a major programme of repair and restoration to the area’s historic buildings and landscapes was announced; fourth, new service infrastructure was planned; and finally, a major housing programme of 2,000 private homes a year was envisaged, the latter largely to raise the percentage of home ownership in the Docklands and establish a more balanced social mix. As a result, certain basic questions had to be asked about ‘What sort of place was Docklands to be? . . . an industrial area? . . . a pleasure ground for London . . . or a residential suburb for workers’ housing? Also, where would the workers work, and what would they do?’. The choice was made that London’s ‘backyard had to become a front yard’ and that this required ‘high technology, service industries, housing and environment of a calibre to attract choosy newcomers’ (Hollamby, 1990: 10–11).

In essence, the choices being made, from retaining the docks, through focusing on private housing, to prioritising service industries and newcomers, were all the polar opposites of the priorities established in the LDSP, although these decisions were not actually established in any sort of spatial plan (beyond the LDDC’s annual—often unpublished—corporate plans). Nor indeed were they subjected to any form of public scrutiny. Strictly speaking, the boroughs and the GLC retained statutory plan-making powers, partly justifying the absence of an LDDC plan; but these powers meant little when the GLC was quickly abolished, and control over implementation had anyway already been stripped from both it and the boroughs.

3.2. The Tower Hamlets’ plans

Tower Hamlets prepared two plans during the tenure of the LDDC. The first—‘A plan for the 1980s’—adopted in 1981 just before the LDDC came into existence, was explicitly intended to guide the thinking of the proposed Urban Development Corporation (UDC) (LBTH, 1981). The plan suggested a mixture of new housing and large areas set aside for new industry. It retained the three major docks, located the district centre on the same site as in the later LDDC Development and Design Guide (see below), included new landscaping proposals, suggested that new housing should be low rise, and that the riverside should have continuous public access. These were all positive and new ideas, but the emphasis on public rather than private-led development and on traditional industry, as well as a total absence of any physical or place-based vision (the plan was little more than a zoning plan with existing derelict areas coloured in for industry or housing—Fig. 7) meant that the plan had almost no impact. This was despite an uncharacteristic (and as it turned out completely ignored) memorandum from government to the LDDC calling on them to use their planning powers principally within the framework provided by the local authority development plans (DoE, 1981).

The second Tower Hamlets plan of the period, the 1986 Adopted Borough Plan, effectively capitulated to the LDDC, recognising that their lack of development control powers, and the lack of support from central government to protect their plan-making powers, left

1 Hereafter referred to as Tower Hamlets.
the latter effectively meaningless (LBTH, 1986). In this plan, therefore, the borough simply painted large areas of its proposals map pink, with no proposals for how these swathes of the Island should be used. As a result, and more by necessity than design, the resulting plan lacked any vision for the area, effectively abdicating responsibility for the Isle of Dogs during the plan’s life (Fig. 8).

3.3. The Isle of Dogs Development and Design Guide

For their part, the LDDC took advantage of the ambiguity in the 1981 memorandum, which also called on them to make their own planning views known by issuing policy statements, planning briefs or plans for all or part of their area (DoE, 1981). Therefore, in what might be seen as directly undermining the contrary advice that the LDDC should have regard to the borough plans, a series of marketing-led frameworks was produced for the different areas under LDDC control. In the case of the Isle of Dogs, with its special status as an Enterprise Zone, the Isle of Dogs Development and Design Guide (LDDC, 1981) was produced.

The Development and Design Guide, like the other frameworks, was seen as a marketing tool as much as guidance, designed to whet the appetite of private developers rather than to tie them down (Hebbert, 1992: 126). The strategy fitted in well with a further LDDC
objective, to attract a series of catalytic developments across the area that would (it was hoped) suggest a structure for subsequent development. As Reg Ward argued, ‘This is making a virtue of having no grand strategy at this stage. Technically it might be described as a concept of micro-organic development’ (quoted in Unattributed, 1982). As such, it conflated a basic leverage planning paradigm (£400 million of public money in the first seven years—DCC, 1988) with a trend planning philosophy, in which the market rather than the state would determine the form of development, with the LDDC cast in the role of the oil that smoothes the wheels of the process.

The Development and Design Guide (LDDC, 1981) was one of the first documents to be commissioned by the LDDC with a team led by Edward Hollamby as Chief Architect and Planner for the LDDC, and Gordon Cullen and David Gosling as consultants. The intention was to produce a visual survey of the Island as a means to understand its character, and to suggest conceptual urban design proposals and alternative options in a form that would allow a flexible response to individual

Fig. 8. Adopted borough plan (1986).
development initiatives (Gosling, 1988a). The resulting guide contained three sections, reflecting the fact that ‘the three main authors saw eye to eye on very little’ (Buchanan, 1989: 42): Cullen’s visual appraisal, an approved development framework by Hollamby, and a series of conceptual studies from Gosling.

The flexible approach was forcefully defended by Reg Ward (1987), when he argued:

There is little point in predicting urban designs, land use allocations, particular activities and so on and then waiting for twenty years for actual development because nobody wants to do it. The fact perhaps to recognise is that in adopting particular urban designs or plans, you are presenting one view of things. At the LDDC we have gone for an organic approach. . . . We need to be able to respond to the totally unexpected . . . the alternative solution . . . the changing environment.

For him, the only design inspiration came from the place itself and the constant changes to it in the face of new development. So although there was no clear view about where Docklands might end up, courage was needed to allow the process to run its course.

By contrast, the Architectural Review described the guide as: ‘preposterously aesthetic, more or less completely ignoring concerns with function and the relation of land use and infrastructure’ (Buchanan, 1989: 42). In promoting the approach, Cullen (1981) had argued that: ‘most people live at eye level and there is a vocabulary of eye level planning which will move into and colonise the framework of topography, communications and zoning as a wren makes a nest in a kettle’. The result was a beautifully drawn townscape structure of defined identities and networks that was difficult to interpret and impossible to use (Fig. 9). This was accompanied by a development framework that offered little guidance beyond reflecting the key planning decisions that had already been made (keeping the dock basis, road construction and the alignment of the light rail system), and some very broad guidance on landscaping, key views, and key projects, all summarised in an undoubtedly urban, but low-rise plan (Fig. 10).

In fact, by substituting an aesthetic vision for an urban design one, the guide turned out to be infinitely flexible, as it was also effectively ignored. As a result, this early opportunity to develop a coherent urban design strategy only contributed to further reduce the credibility of design and planning in the minds of those in charge (Gorst, 1982). Thus, Wilford (1984: 12–13) commented:

Hard nosed developers are unlikely to respect a guide or pay attention to a ‘study’ unless compelled to do so . . . The Corporation should either have a policy which it sincerely believes in and administers with vigour or abandon all pretence. A policy which is infinitely flexible is a travesty and the guide is unlikely to have little use or significance beyond a public relations exercise.

This of course was exactly what the LDDC board were after.

However, in support of Gosling’s contributions to the guide, Wilford (1984: 14–15) argued that, given the inevitable constraints of attempting any type of control within an Enterprise Zone, the Corporation should have stuck to establishing a plan for the elements over which it had direct control—the public realm. Instead, he concluded, the approved framework was ‘based on caution, modesty, and the least possible imposition—an approach which Colin Rowe has termed —the theory of maximum non-intervention’; and the very essence of a trend-based planning.

3.4. Early implementation

In commercial terms, if not in design ones, the first few years of the LDDC’s tenure were highly successful. By 1987, 400 companies had followed the marketing hype and taken advantage of the tax perks to move to the Docklands. By this time, the LDDC had ushered in a first wave of development that brought with it land value hikes from almost nothing to £1.5 million an acre, and the largest private housing and office building programme in the UK.

Despite this, the results were already being criticised, with the LDDC accused of being ‘concerned primarily to attract development and it seems that they didn’t care what it looked like, where it was sited, how it was arranged’ or who would benefit: ‘indeed they couldn’t afford to care. The choice as they saw it was simple: either no plan or no development’ (Davies, 1987: 32). Instead, the LDDC had spent time analysing why high-tech companies are drawn to the countryside, and initially sought to create a similar landscaped environment on the Isle of Dogs. As a result, the Island was paved in brick, and heavily landscaped around the refurbished dock basins (Fig. 11). The details of the public realm—the seats, lighting, paving, etc.—were deliberately chosen to contrast, as far as possible, with the ex-industrial character of the area they inherited (Edwards, 1992: 28). Generally, the work was undertaken to a high standard, with a commitment made to...
use the best materials that could be afforded, but despite this, the result was often discordant with its context, and demonstrated, despite Cullen’s evocative sketches, a rejection of the character-giving elements of the area more akin to the 1960s than to the conservation- (if not design-) sensitive 1980s.

As the critics saw it, the early results were architecturally unremarkable, suburban in nature, and without a coherent public realm. The developments were largely private, often introspective in order to deliberately shut out the existing communities, and were more often than not built on industrial land or land previously banked for social housing, in so doing completely derogating any responsibility for the multiple and endemic social problems that characterised the area. Typically they took the form of single or two-storey sheds arranged around parking courts (Fig. 12). So, Davies (1987: 34) comments:

The casual visitor feels that at any moment his presence might be challenged … There is no connection, physical or visual, across the boundaries
of these little worlds; no focus, no hierarchy, no pub, no cafes, no shops and certainly no schools.

They sat side by side with sporadic larger-scale developments that suggested a more urban future for the Island, such as the much maligned South Quay Plaza (completed in 1985 and bombed by the IRA in 1996) and, slightly later, the foreboding Harbour Exchange, clad totally in black glass (Fig. 13); the innovative Cascades housing scheme; and the grossly inaccessible London Arena. Thus, Edwards (1992: 64) argues that the Isle of Dogs was redeveloped on the basis of fragments:

The various major projects at Canary Wharf, Heron Quays, South Quay and Harbour Exchange have become like well structured islands in a sea of permissiveness. The resulting environment in the early nineties had what the book Collage City
[Rowe & Koetter, 1978] calls a ‘predicament of texture’. The urban joins are by no means smooth, each of the large developments appears as an island without the benefit of a connecting causeway.

(See the area south of the emerging Canary Wharf in Fig. 21).

In this landscape, the major public spaces were the roads themselves, which generally served as the back entrances to many buildings (the fronts facing the dock basins) (Fig. 14). As such, little sense of enclosure existed and the roads became service channels rather than coherent urban streets. In this period, car parks were the major environmental feature of much of the Isle of Dogs, and provided the foreground to the architecture. In such a context, trees and soft planting were mainly used as a means to soften the impact of the parking and to direct users to the building entrances, although some attempt was also made to establish the major routes in the Island as boulevards, replete with axial tree planting. However, the scale of the buildings (dwarfing the landscaping) and the failure to establish any coherent urban edge on to the streets, contributed to undermine any sense of urbanity (Edwards, 1992: 52).

Although the dock edges in the main received a more considered and unifying treatment, a major omission of
the early years of development was the failure to establish a continuous river path around the Island. Today the river path continually ducks around pieces of privatised riverfront, and with it another potentially unifying structural feature of the Isle of Dogs has been greatly undermined (Streetsweeper, 2004). Adding to the problems was a failure to predict how the area would take off in the second half of the decade, leading to a total under-sizing of the public transport infrastructure that would be needed to serve the area (Brownill, 1990: 133–134; Davies, 1987: 34; Docklands Forum, 1989).

The failure of the Development and Design Guide was therefore twofold: first, a failure in its scope, presentation and ambition to address the range of issues facing the Isle of Dogs; and second, the failure to utilise what little guidance it offered on how to create a coherent place. As history has shown, even the major proposal that was enshrined in the guide as accepted by the LDDC—the retention of the Dock Basins—only proved partially successful, as large areas of the docks have increasingly been reclaimed for development, leaving only the southern Millwall Docks substantially in their original and very imposing form (Fig. 15).

3.5. State-led/opportunity-based

In common with the period prior to the arrival of the LDDC, but through very different means, the period of the first wave can be characterised as an attempt by the state—through the preparation of marketing guides, hype, direct public realm and infrastructure investment, and fiscal incentives—to drive the development agenda. In contrast, however, at least on the part of the LDDC, no real belief existed in the plans that were being prepared during this period, which, as a result, were largely sidelined as ad-hoc development opportunities came along. The period can therefore be characterised as state-led but opportunity-based (Fig. 16).


4.1. Canary Wharf arrives

Despite the criticism, Hollamby (1990: 12) later argued that the Isle of Dogs Development and Design Guide was:

a brave attempt to guide development in the Enterprise Zone, which achieved a fair amount of success, until it was overtaken and rendered obsolete by Canary Wharf and all that the second generation of development unleashed.

It is during this phase of the Island’s development that the document’s fate was effectively sealed, and during which the iconic, but controversial Canary Wharf development emerged, a development that
inspires both delight and derision in equal measure, and a little farce thrown in for good measure:

The buildings [at Canary Wharf] are the highest quality in the world. They are pioneering standards for such buildings in a world-wide sense (Jeff McCarthy, managing Director of SOM quoted in Fairs, 1999).

The Canary Wharf area with its underground shopping malls and generic skyscrapers [is] a lot of American crap, well-built, but still crap (anonymous London architect quoted in Walters, 2007: 47).

The sexual symbolism of the architecture is clear, with the phallus of the Canary Wharf tower strategically positioned between the labia of the north and south colonnades. All the buildings too seem to be clad in appropriately evocative colours, the tower in a greyish stainless steel and the colonnades in warmer fleshy colours. And, finally, entry to the Wharf is made by an underpass, the Limehouse Link tunnel extending into the underground car park, a vagina that gives the final confirmation to the coital characteristics of the whole project (Nuttall, 2002: 36 & 47–48).

Whatever the interpretation, today the Isle of Dogs has become synonymous with Canary Wharf, which began on site in 1986 with the first phase completed in 1991. As Brownill (1990: 62) commented at the time:

Everything about Canary Wharf is massive, the height of the Towers at 850 ft, the size of Westferry Circus, larger than Trafalgar Square, the office space provided at one seventh that of the City of London’s 1990 total, and the amount of public subsidy.

But from the early days architectural critiques of the scheme were not kind. Speaking about the Isle of Dogs, and Canary Wharf in its midst, Buchanan (1988: 14) argued:

The result lacks urbanity; it is fragmentedly suburban, the road grid simply dividing parcels of land. It is also an architectural zoo, with a different beast in each plot, into which the grossly misnamed Canary Wharf has arrived as a whopping carnivore, encouraging half-built developments around it to be cannibalised, half grown and before completion, by its voracious siblings (Fig. 17).

The stimulus for Canary Wharf had come from the deregulation of the Stock Exchange in 1986, resulting in a dramatic increase in demand for office space (Brennan, 1985). The developers and LDDC argued that this demand could not be accommodated within the traditional confines of the City of London, and therefore a new financial centre was required. The project was put to the LDDC in September 1985 and received permission in October of the same year—a speed of decision-making that could not be matched elsewhere, but which also illustrated a lack of concern for how the scheme might actually be realised and for its physical impact.

From the start, the emphasis was almost exclusively on the need for commercial office space, as the promotional literature made clear (Olympia & York, 1989). The result was a call for a public inquiry from the Docklands Forum, who highlighted the lack of a strategic plan into which the scheme would fit (the GLC having been abolished in 1986, and the Tower Hamlets Adopted Borough Plan of the same year effectively omitting the Isle of Dogs from its purview). Concern revolved around inadequate measures to address the employment needs of the local people, a lack of consideration for the huge housing demand that would result from the scheme, the massive underprovision of transport infrastructure in the area, and lack of consideration for design (Robson, 1990).

The original scheme master, planned by Chicago-based architects SOM, included 10 million ft² of development (primarily offices) on 71 acres of the Isle of Dogs, with three 60-storey towers, all promoted by a consortium of American banks led by G. Ware Travelstead. The scheme was to benefit from £470...
million capital allowances against tax, a rates holiday to 1992, 20 acres of land transfer from the LDCC, and massive infrastructure pump priming. The 55 acres in the Enterprise Zone required no planning permission at all or public inquiry, or indeed any public discussions, so, according to MP Nigel Spearing, the whole scheme was approved with less scrutiny than ‘a planning application for an illuminated sign on a fish and chip shop in the East India Dock Road’ (DCC, 1988: 8).

Regardless of the incentives and concessions, the scheme remained marginal, and when two banks pulled out, the Canadian property giant Olympia and York stepped in and took the scheme over. A Master Building agreement was signed in July 1987, although not before additional changes to the SOM master plan had raised the office space (alone) to 10 million ft², in exchange for changes to the design that replaced the three towers with one at the north-south DLR axis, and two shorter ones to the east. In part, this reflected analysis by the LDCC’s own consultants, including Gordon Cullen, who had questioned the impact of the towers on the Greenwich axis. The alternative proposal was subsequently worked up by a team including David Gosling, in which the final, more formal layout of the development was envisaged (Gosling, 1988b: 125–126) (Fig. 18). For Brownill (1990: 55–56), however, agreement to the proposals instantly left the surrounding infrastructure in a hopelessly inadequate state, a situation that was still the case in the early 1990s, even as the first phases began to come on stream.

Although local opposition to the scheme was at first muted, it soon hardened, with the Docklands Forum lobbying hard for a range of social clauses to be attached to the Master Building Agreement, including for 40% local employment, training schemes, childcare facilities, and local trading. Despite this, no such clauses were included, with a separate parallel £30 million Social Accord signed instead between Tower Hamlets Council and the LDCC, an agreement derided as woefully inadequate by the Docklands Forum (1987), and as a diversionary tactic to forestall opposition. In fact, when the financial squeeze came (see below), even this social programme came under threat, with the LDCC seemingly prepared to jettison the accord in order to avoid cuts to its transport programme. With this, the dangers of linking community provision to the performance of the market were exposed (Oc & Tiesdell, 1991: 325).

4.2. Canary Wharf master plan and coding

If the scheme for Canary Wharf marked a continuation of the lack of interest the LDCC had shown for social and community concerns, it marked a major departure for design. For the first time, design was seen not as a barrier to innovation and a cost on investment, but instead as a means to establish a new and marketable sense of place, and as a means to safeguard what, by any standards, was to be a massive private-sector investment in a marginal location, characterised until then by its ad-hoc suburban character.

SOM (1987a: 5) characterised this as follows:

The Canary Wharf master plan was conceived as a rudimentary analogue to the site’s former life: buildings will be arrayed at dockside where great
ships once berthed; cars will be housed in the centre of the Wharf where export goods were once warehoused; and access will be provided on loop roads which follow routes similar to those that once served the ships and warehouses. The ordering discipline indigenous to the site should prove as serviceable to the present enterprise as to its predecessor.

In fact, the master plan consisted of 26 separate sites, the majority of which were located along the perimeter of the Wharf or framing the boulevard and circus at the western end of the scheme. In the middle stood the 50-storey tower of Cesar Pelli (One Canada Square) dominating the ensemble, an enclosed shopping centre and DLR station, and a series of formally planned open spaces giving access to the water basins. Beneath the ensemble was a multi-layered platform extending the full length of the Wharf and giving access to a service spine for the whole development, including parking (Olympia & York, 1989).

The master plan was clearly urban in its vision, offering a significant new public realm and a mix of uses: shopping, entertainment and some limited housing, within the bulk of commercial office space. In this respect it marked a significant departure from the dominant commercial model of the time, that of the suburban landscaped office park, and instead a new ‘downtown’ was effectively proposed and built (Hebert, 2000). It was, however, equally clearly a private-sector vision for a development that would mark a stark contrast with its surrounding context, physically, socially and economically.

In doing this, Davies (1987: 34) argued that it actually offered more of the same as the first wave of development:

for all its gigantic scale, it shares the same faults as its diminutive neighbours. Its inhabitants will be a handful of penthouse dwellers, its offices and dealing rooms will be occupied by a privileged commuting class and its amenities will consist of sanitised shopping malls.

Crilley (1991) concluded that the development would be elitist, security controlled and isolated from the problems besetting the communities all around it. For others, the mock classicism of the buildings and formal sequence of public spaces represented a travesty of their Georgian counterparts in West London, from which inspiration was drawn:

The public spaces may look very good on plan, yet seen in section they are far too high and create space that will, compared with their models in Bloomsbury and Mayfair, be dark and mean, [whilst:] Enormous hulks of modern corporate office space are to be dressed up in precast pomo classicism with vestigial pasteboard cutout pediments, overscaled entrances, and twiddly little details in a desperate and pathetic effort to put flesh on a grinning skeleton (Davey, 1988: 22).

If the arrival of Canary Wharf was heralded as a triumphant success for the LDDC’s approach to regeneration, the plans immediately revealed the inadequacies of the LDDC’s decision-making processes. Thus, no plan, vision or strategy existed against which to evaluated the proposals, whether to endorse, reject or ask for revisions. The Isle of Dogs Development and Design Guide in particular offered few clues, as judgements about whether a Gordon Cullen sketch was better or worse than an SOM one were impossible to make (Buchanan, 1989: 39), and at this point the guide was effectively abandoned.

However, instead of welcoming the policy vacuum that followed, and in direct contradiction to the LDDC’s previous belief that constraints would drive away developers, the North American developers of Canary Wharf immediately set about establishing their own very detailed set of urban design guidelines (SOM, 1987b) (Fig. 19). Thus, each parcel had a code, and within this Olympia and York had the freedom to develop as they wished, without the need for further consents. Effectively this amounted to the developers taking on a type of pseudo-regulatory function, with only the need to report significant variations from their own guidance to the LDDC. Quite deliberately, this was at the expense of their architects’ freedom to innovate.

These forms of design coding, eventually encompassing everything from street furniture to uses and building envelope, quickly became the norm in the Docklands. They established that ambitious developers shun a free-market free-for-all, as no means to guarantee that their investment would be part of an attractive and viable environment, and that sub-standard development would not be built next door. As such, the master plan and Design Guidelines were used as important tools to set and control standards, although neither were open to public scrutiny and, as such, typified a type of private-management planning; a model which harked back to that used by the builders of the great Georgian estates in London, where the long-term interests of the original developers in the new estates guaranteed their determination to deliver design quality. In this case, Olympia and York, as developer,
project manager and subsequent owner, had a long-term interest in the ability of the project to attract tenants.

4.3. The wider context

Learning from the private sector, this new emphasis on design was belatedly adopted by the LDDC, for example to produce detailed (and subsequently abandoned) design guidelines for Heron Quays. Typically, however, it encompassed the use of looser urban design frameworks across the LDDC area, including in the Royal Docks and in Greenland Dock, and a series of commissioned frameworks proposing the redevelopment of the first wave of industrial units around the Millwall Dock, less than 10 years after their completion (Carmona, 1991: 89–98). For Edwards (1992: 45) British planning elsewhere had largely become negative and bureaucratic by this time, with the scope for vision...
eroded. Thus in Docklands the loose development framework and detailed private master plan effectively filled the void left by the retreat of traditional planning from orthodox urban design. Generally, these plans and frameworks dealt with small areas of Docklands, and were produced by developers or commissioned from a new breed of urban design consultants, with an emphasis on the site rather than on the bigger picture.

Alongside Olympia & York’s concern to maintain a prestige development by retaining a tight control on design quality, a greater interest in design had also been signalled by a change of leadership in the LDDC, when in 1987 architect Michael Honey took over from former tax inspector Reg Ward. Honey was only Chief Executive for two years, but brought with him a recognition that design was a problem, and that bridges needed to be built with the local community. For example, the LDDC set up a short-lived Community Services Department as a means to more purposefully direct the trickle-down benefits (Oc & Tiesdell, 1991: 322); an equally short-lived urban design team (dismantled in 1991); and, learning from the Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, a design review panel (Middleton, 1991: 64). This new emphasis was passed on to his successor, the former civil servant Eric Sorensen, who took up (and won) the battle to secure more public sector investment into the area, at a time when receipts from land sales were dramatically falling. Increasingly the LDDC’s own budget became hopelessly inadequate to meet the infrastructure demands of the massive second wave development, and a realisation dawned that the Isle of Dogs was fast becoming an island of massive overdevelopment, in a largely inaccessible east London (Edwards, 1992: 9).

Thus, if judged by the speed and quantity of private-sector development alone, the model was certainly a success. Indeed, by 1991, when the first phase of Canary Wharf was completed, the estate had been largely built out from Westferry Circus in the west to One Canada Square in the centre of the master plan (Fig. 20). But in design terms, judgements remained harsh:

The traditional view of a city has been violated here: there are no civic spaces, no public buildings and few parks, and an uncomfortable relationship exists between transportation and new development. . . . The civic dimension in city making has been ignored by the thrust of free market aesthetics. For all the design pluralism and undoubted energy of the area, London Docklands provides a valuable pointer to the type of city created through the deregulation of the environment (Edwards, 1992: xi).

Even developers, who were full of plaudits for the LDDC about the permissive approach adopted to their own schemes, looked back with dismay as neighbouring sites were developed with little reference to the form and qualities of previously agreed schemes (Preston, 1998).

Analysis of the figure-ground plan for the time illustrates the scale of the transformation that was occurring on the Island, but also, graphically, the isolation of the emerging Canary Wharf development in a sea of vacant plots, the absence of relationship to the swathe of ad-hoc and fragmented wave one developments that had by now largely filled the centre of the Island, and detachment of any of this development from the established communities to the north of the Island or around its periphery (Fig. 21).

Speaking about the Isle of Dogs in its entirety, Buchanan (1989: 39) argued ‘the Laissez-faire non-planning policies of the LDDC’s early years are turning out just as their critics predicted. . . . the area so far is an urban and architectural disaster’. For his part, however, Edwards (1992: xi) did not write off the Isle of Dogs at the end of the second wave of development, but argued instead that, 10 years after the LDDC came into existence, the London Docklands urban experiment had effectively created a new city within the former wasteland of east London. Thus, £1 billion of public funds had levered in £9 billion of private investment (a ratio of 1:9), led to 15% of London’s office space being built in the Docklands, 100,000 jobs moving to the area, major commitments for new public transport infrastructure, and a shift from just 4% owner occupation to nearly 50% (Edwards, 1992: 23–28).

Some of these figures can be challenged. The DCC (1988: 33–34), for example, claimed the leverage ratio at the time was more like 1:3.5, after all the tax incentives and infrastructure costs had been factored in.
Moreover, other statistics (in the early 1990s) were not favourable at all and included 50% commercial vacancy rates, only 10% of jobs going to local people, and roads investment exceeding that of housing and environment combined (Edwards, 1992: 65). The latter, stoked by the early antipathy of the LDDC to the local community and the perceived influx of affluent newcomers, did much to fan the flames of resentment amongst the local community, who largely felt that the regeneration was not for them (Foster, 1992: 177).

During this period, critiques of the failure of the programme to address the social questions of the area remained intense. The paradigm was clearly one of a top-down imposed approach, from which it was hoped that benefits would gradually trickle down to those at the bottom (Robson, 1990: 10). It represented the opposite end of the spectrum to the approach that had been adopted, pre-LDDC, with little evidence by the end of the second wave that any noticeable trickle-down was actually taking place.

Thus, by the end of the second wave, huge physical regeneration had occurred in the Isle of Dogs, yet, because of the continued decline and relocation of existing industries, local unemployment had gone on
increasing (Church, 1988). Moreover, even the physical regeneration was limited, as Foster (1992: 179) argued at the time: ‘There are still crumbing council estates. Although some have recently been refurbished; the local shops are run down and many residents are still waiting for the promises of the Docklands dream’. As Edwards (1993: 18) described it: ‘The landscapes of advantage and disadvantage are often only a security wall apart.’

4.4. The Canary crashes

In commercial terms, success was equally questionable. The completion of Phase One of Canary Wharf was followed soon after in May 1992 by the bankruptcy of Olympia & York, victim to the world property market collapse of the early 1990s, and by the undoubted difficulties that the company faced in letting space in their new landmark development at a rate that would satisfy their investors. For some, the writing was already on the wall in the late 1980s, as the London property market showed signs of deterioration. Merrifield (1993: 1250) rationalises the collapse as the inevitable consequence of a reckless orgy of overbuilding commercial space as a means to offload the over-accumulation of international capital in the 1980s. For him, new urban spaces such as Canary Wharf represented just another option in an investment portfolio of bankers who scour the world for opportunities that will deliver the best return. In such an analysis, Canary Wharf was simply a financial asset, and one built on very shaky foundations that painfully demonstrated that only so much new space could be successfully absorbed into any local market at one time.

For Gordon (2001), the failure of Canary Wharf resulted from the conflation of six factors:

- Competition from the City of London, which had abandoned some of its conservation principles to sanction a major expansion in its commercial building stock.
- Transport connections, which were late and initially unpredictable.
- Difficulties in attracting British tenants, because of their attachment to the City of London and their initial negative reaction to the overly American styling of the development.
- Olympia & York’s overly complicated and ultimately vulnerable financial structure.
- The developer’s over-confidence.

These factors combined to ensure that the strategy adopted by Olympia & York represented a huge gamble, which ultimately did not come off, particularly when the company’s American investments were also performing badly (Hamnett, 2003: 239). For many, the cracks in deregulated planning were beginning to show, but for Gordon (2001: 149) the failure was not primarily a problem with planning, rather of real estate development. Adams (1994: 64) agrees, arguing that the sheer cost of servicing the debt necessary to build Canary Wharf (£40,000 per hour), the fact that so much competing development was coming onto the market at a time of recession, and the over-inflated assumptions made when the project commenced about rental levels that would be achieved, all contributed to its downfall. For others, these real estate factors were undoubtedly critical, but were made more critical by the context in which the development was being realised: of grossly undersized infrastructure serving Canary Wharf and the difficulties the location represented for commuters; the resulting size of the inducements needing to be offered by Olympia & York to attract customers; the uncertainty about the future local political context of the Docklands, post-LDDC (Turkie, 1990); the lack of quality in, and connection to, the surrounding environment; and the lack of a mature housing market in this part of London.

These factors all contributed to a bleak outlook for investors that came home to roost as the market turned down. Each could be directly traced back to the lack of a strategic approach to planning and design in the Isle of Dogs, exacerbated by the over-ambitious development programme. But, on the positive side, regeneration had begun with a vengeance in a part of London that just a decade before was effectively off the map, the isolation of the area from the rest of London was beginning to be broken (the huge public cost perhaps making up for the total lack of investment in the area for decades previously—Hebbert, 1992: 131), and even design quality and community needs were belatedly on the agenda. Thus, critics who rushed to judgement in the early 1990s by writing off the Isle of Dogs were later proved to be incorrect, mistaking a dip in the property cycle, with its inevitable casualties, for an abject failure of regeneration. Fainstein (1994: 190), for example, rashly dismissed the LDDC as responsible for ‘the world’s largest ghost town’, containing the white elephant of Canary Wharf. Fainstein corrected her assessment in the 2001 edition of her City Builders book, when, as Docklands bounced back, her earlier predictions, like many others, all too quickly proved to be wrong.

Exactly why so many commentators were so profoundly wrong can only be surmised. Most likely it...
was a symptom of impaired judgement brought on by a form of collective euphoria, especially amongst academics, in whose ranks distaste for thatcherite planning was rife. The error undoubtedly helps to explain the deathly silence from commentators on the Isle of Dogs after the rash of condemnatory writing of the early 1990s.

4.5. Market-led/plan-based

The period demonstrated the limitations of the planning approach adopted for the Island, which increasingly had come to rely on a privatisation of the planning process through a form of private-management planning. However, as the market turned down, so did the land receipts, leading the LDDC back cap-in-hand to government for a cash injection, and leaving Olympia & York in the gutter. At the same time, the market itself had shown the importance of the certainty (up to a point) that goes hand-in-hand with a robust plan, and finding no such plan in place, had sought to put one in place itself; at least for the large swathes of the Isle of Dogs that it directly controlled. The period can therefore be characterised as one of plan-based, market-led development (Fig. 22); a new departure in the UK (at least on this scale). And, despite the commercial failure that followed, in design terms this came to represent a model for the public and private sector alike that has since been extensively emulated, rejecting ad-hocism in favour of vision-based planning.

5. The third wave—1991–2002

5.1. The Canary rises again

Quoting Zukin (1992), Merrifield (1993: 126) describes Canary Wharf as a supreme embodiment of a ‘landscape of power’, commissioned and designed by the same worldly superstars—architects, developers and financial institutions—who are responsible for similar developments around the globe. The implications for the public sector are a need to expend huge public resources to attract these global players, whilst for the private sector, the complex interweaving of the fortunes of such investments makes them imminently fragile to a market downturn, with enormous knock-on effects. This was certainly the case in the Docklands.

In fact, it took until 1997 for the development to get back on its feet under new owners Canary Wharf Group (an international consortium backed by the former owners of Olympia & York). During this period, the property market had gradually recovered, and infrastructure began to catch up with the development through the planning and opening of the Jubilee Line Extension in 1999. At that time, Rogers (1997: 109) concluded that Canary Wharf was an ‘unsustainable development without real civic quality or lasting communal benefit. . . . an extremely expensive fiasco for the taxpayers, who subsidised big business but had no say in how the money was spent’. For him, Londoners acquired a chaos of commercial buildings, made possible by massive tax relief and the direct funding of infrastructure. But, once the crash came, this form of development was far more susceptible to failure than a more balanced mix of uses and public and private facilities would have been. His conclusion was that this was clearly not a route to urban renaissance that should be emulated, although 10 years later his involvement in three major additions to the Canary Wharf estate—Riverside South, North Quay and Wood Wharf (see Section 6)—suggests that his views have tempered.

Despite the criticism, Canary Wharf was critical in marking a turn in the LDDC’s approach to planning and design. After initial amazement it brought considerable credibility to the LDDC, who quickly learnt from the American experience about the virtues of very specific design guidelines to shape the public realm positively. In this respect, although open to critique as an alien and imposed Beaux Arts model, from that point on the LDDC either prepared for itself, or required to be prepared, detailed urban design schemes for prospective development (such as Heron Quays adjacent to Canary Wharf) (Buchanan, 1989: 38). Brownill (1990: 17) commented about this phenomenon that: ‘Docklands indeed became the spatial expression of the enterprise culture but, ironically, enterprise was not wholly in favour.’

The third wave of Isle of Dogs development (post-crash) was therefore marked by the gradual, if
remarkable, recovery in the fortunes of Canary Wharf, and by the building of Phase Two of the development from 1997 to 2002. During this period, the Canary Wharf estate was largely left to get on with developing their estate, thus perpetuating the private-management planning approach, whereas the remainder of the Island was subject to hands-off trend planning, initially by the LDDC and subsequently by Tower Hamlets (see below). The period also saw a continuation of the marketing-led approaches of the LDDC, despite the obvious limitations of the strategy during the early 1990s at the time of a recession; as testified by the acres of un-let space, vacant land and empty properties (Brownill, 1994).

Nevertheless, the revival of Canary Wharf was spearheaded by rising demand for deep floor-plate, grade A office accommodation (not being provided in sufficient quantity elsewhere, particularly in the City of London, given its conservation constraints), the start of the delayed work on the Jubilee Line, to which Canary Wharf Group now contributed substantially, and the move in 1998 of the Financial Services Authority to the area, signalling a new confidence in the location. For Gordon (2001: 158), Canary Wharf rose again for the reverse of all the reasons it had collapsed in 1992. All this seemed remarkable, given the major locational shortcoming that the area had seemed to face: including a perception of ongoing poor access by public and private transport, inadequate supporting amenities and services for employees, and recruitment difficulties for firms choosing to locate there (Daniels & Bobe, 1993: 543). It was overcome, at least in part, by the strong emphasis Canary Wharf placed on marketing the quality of its buildings and their services, particularly their IT facilities. The strongly rising market of the mid-1990s, a shortage of quality space, and the consequential rapid rise in rents also played a decisive part (Hamnett, 2003: 239).

The importance of design as the basis for a ‘successful development in a doubtful location’ (Daniel & Bobe, 1993: 544) had nevertheless been a lesson learnt by Olympia & York, through its involvement in the development of Battery Park City in New York. Others included the potential to consolidate businesses in one location, and the considerable cost savings for businesses locating there over rents paid in an established central business district such as the City. The Canary Wharf Group now benefited from these advantages, and the new phase included the development of the remaining Heron Quays sites, and the construction of towers for Citigroup and HSBC. The working population rose concurrently with these developments, from 15,000 in 1999 to 63,000 by 2004, marking a significant shift in the balance of financial services in London, helping also to enable London’s growth as one of the world’s two pre-eminent locations for these services (the other being New York).

5.2. The urban design matures

A major part of this third wave of development was the expansion of the Canary Wharf estate to neighbouring Heron Quays (Fig. 23). Originally Olympia & York had acquired the eastern half of Heron Quays (to the south of Canary Wharf) as a means to establish a greater diversity of land uses in the area, in particular to build housing and a hotel. This quickly morphed into proposals consisting almost entirely of more commercial office space, whilst a residential/hotel complex was built instead to the north of Canary Wharf adjacent to West India Quay station, another to the south on the site of the bombed South Quay Plaza, whilst a Four Seasons hotel was built at Westferry Circus (all by other developers). Collectively, these schemes, immediately around and adjacent to the Canary Wharf estate, began to inject a necessary mix of uses into the area, with knock-on benefits for the vitality of Canary Wharf itself.

However, the major part of this phase, as re-master-planned by Koetter Kim Architects in order to take advantage of the post-crash market conditions, included three office towers and other lower deep-plan blocks, many surrounding a new park—Jubilee Park. This, the largest open space in the complex, sat immediately above the new Jubilee Line station opened in 1999, sitting in turn in what had been part of the West India Dock basin. The filling in of the dock basins had been a gradual process, with, by the end of the second phase of
Canary Wharf’s development, perhaps half of the combined area of the original West India Dock complex filled in. In doing so, the scheme had rejected one of the few design principles that the early LDDC had regarded as sacrosanct, preservation of the dock basins, and which had been heralded as such an important and unique element of the Island in Gordon Cullen’s proposals. In fact the gradual chipping away at the water space had been achieved with barely a murmur of complaint.

The result is a development that largely turns its back on the waterfront spaces, choosing instead to turn in on its own more urban spaces, and thus rejecting the most powerful character-giving element and remnant of the area’s former existence. Edwards (1999: 23) concluded that:

Canary Wharf displays the most conspicuous failure to extend its admittedly attractive inner sanctum of streets, malls and squares outwards. This well detailed, if lumpy estate of towers, office blocks, fountains and restaurants forms a firm edge to most of the waterside and a barrier to the remainder of the Isle of Dogs.

For Hebbert (2000), however, the spaces at the heart of the complex represent an opportunity to create a new central nucleus for Tower Hamlets, a borough without a clearly defined centre. Thus, although privately managed, he argues that the complex increasingly acts as a real public realm, and one that, given time, has the potential to join up with the tissue that surrounds it.

The significance of Canary Wharf is certainly reinforced, at the developer’s initiative, by embracing the potential of public transport infrastructure — first the DLR and then the Jubilee Line—as an integral part of the development. This was in sharp contrast to the rest of the Isle of Dogs, where DLR stations took the form of high-level isolated platforms, which by the end of the third wave remained unrelated to the development around and below them. As such, they have largely failed to become the centre of nodes of activity and intensity that might have been expected, and instead the line weaves through the Island in a discordant and disconnected manner (although in the process offering a constantly changing perspective of the unfolding landscape for its riders).

Space syntax analysis of the Canary Wharf estate at the end of the third wave revealed that Canary Wharf remained segregated from its surroundings, and although internal movement within the boundaries of the estate was increasingly strong, the development remained “spatially imprisoned within its natural boundary” (Yang, 2005: 20). Not only was this spatial segregation of the Canary Wharf estate actively undermining movement between and within neighbouring areas of the Island, but in so doing it was acting to encourage the development of enclave-type, socially homogenous developments in these areas (see below). As such, the wider regeneration of the Island was being compromised.

Fig. 24 illustrates the figure-ground plan for the Island in 2002 at the end of the third wave. It demonstrates the major expansion (south and east) of the Canary Wharf Estate during this period, representing by far the major change to the Island during the period (the centre of the Island remained virtually untouched). It shows the breaking away from the rigid Beaux Arts geometry, but also the continuing isolation of the estate from its immediate hinterland, north, south and east, and the enduring fragmentation of the Island landscape.

During this phase, the development was finally able to establish the skyline profile that the original developers had sought as a highly visual and symbolic manifestation of East-End regeneration. Following the completion of the central 50-storey Cesar Pelli tower, the prevailing economic conditions looked likely to threaten the completion of any other towers on the site, leaving this single poorly proportioned symbol to stand in isolation until Phase Two finally got under way. The result has been a better balanced collection of towers, each unremarkable in themselves, but collectively establishing a powerful symbol of a new financial centre that can be seen from around much of central, east and south-east London (see Fig. 25).

Looking back at the end of the previous (second) wave of development, Hollamby (1990: 12–15), the ex-Chief Architect and Planner for the LDDC, had provided a telling account of missed opportunities and abandoned ideas. Where, he asked, are the great public buildings and spaces and architectural drama that the French would have provided? The answer, as far as there is one, came in the third wave, with the civic and park spaces (Canada Square—between the HSBC and Citigroup blocks—and Jubilee Park) that the private sector began to provide in Canary Wharf, and in Norman Foster’s monumental Jubilee Line station commissioned by London Underground (Fig. 26). The latter marked a massive increase in public transport capacity to the area, and was complemented by major extensions to the DLR network and to the capacity of the trains. Realising their Achilles’ heel, Olympia & York had contributed 41%, or £156 million, to the cost of the first of these extensions—to Bank in the City of London—which opened in 1991, just before they went into receivership (Gordon, 2001: 155). This was followed in 1994 by an extension to Beckton and, most dramatically, under the river to Lewisham in 1999.
5.3. The architecture develops

Inspired to some degree by Fred Koetter’s preference for urban complexity (see Rowe & Koetter, 1978), the period was marked by a shift, both architecturally and in the treatment of the public realm. It was also marked by a move from the almost exclusive use of US architectural practices to design Canary Wharf (Cesar Pelli, Kohn Pedersen Fox, Koetter Kim, SOM, etc.) to bringing British designers into the mix, including Terry Farrell, Foster and Partners, Future Systems and Ron Arad (Fairs, 1998). The move reflected a view of the Canary Wharf Group that British practices, who had been behind in their commercial office knowhow, had now caught up (Fairs, 1999). It also marked a shift in architectural styles, although perversely in the direction of even greater non-place internationalisation (Fig. 27).

The first wave of development on the Isle of Dogs had been characterised by lightweight structures, the use of nautical references, by bright colours and expressive building profiles (for example Nicholas Lacey’s original development on Heron Quays—Fig. 28). The first phase of Canary Wharf, by contrast, had been characterised by the altogether more serious and heavy pseudo-classical
aesthetic and by a strict Beaux Arts geometry and carefully controlled relationship between buildings and public space. Thus, the private master plan and design guidelines required developers to build colonnades along certain streets and insisted on the use of stone or marble, tripartite classical subdivisions, and on facades facing the major spaces (Edwards, 1992: 45). Hinsley and Marlone (1996: 55) described the result as:

a paradigm of late twentieth-century architecture, which exploits historical imagery created in the arena of international capital. The combination of a sleek, modern office tower, neo-Edwardian base and beaux-arts landscape may be perceived as bizarre, but it expresses the reality of commodification and the alliance of aesthetics and rent.

In Phase Two the design stipulations were loosened, with buildings instead adopting a variety of international-style curtain walling systems, whilst arcades were no longer a stipulation, and the strict geometrical layouts began to break down, both in the positioning of buildings (on Heron Quays) relative to each other, and in the more organic treatment of Jubilee Park (Fig. 29). At the same time, although major new office blocks such as the HSBC and Citigroup towers now presented...
almost continuous unmodulated blank facades at ground level onto the spaces they occupied, some attempt was made to establish lively active frontages onto key routes to and from the Jubilee Line station.

This simple revision to previous practice has helped to animate some of the key routes and spaces through the Canary Wharf complex in a manner that the initial phase, with its inward-focused use pattern, had never been able to achieve (Fig. 30). For the first time, a real sense of a ‘public’ place was being created, as opposed to a privatised office enclave and shopping mall. However, the move remained only partial, with the majority of development, including the hugely expanded shopping facilities at Canary Wharf, remaining introverted in their design and operation.

As Hinsey and Malone (1996: 55) argued, ‘Socially Canary Wharf remains a place of corporate imagery. The references are to public urban space, but this is private territory produced for private ends’. In this sense, the development corresponds to what Fainstein (2005: 9) has characterised as a limited diversity of uses and activities, without the corresponding social diversity or the real mix of uses that might be found in, for example, a traditional urban centre. In Canary Wharf, the street life corresponds to such a model, being generated largely by commuter traffic and high class restaurants and bars to appeal to the office worker and affluent local residents.

The buildings themselves have been widely recognised as ‘state of the art’ commercial architecture, built to a very high standard and quick to attract the biggest footloose international corporations. Fairs (1999) notes how for each site a selection of off-the-peg design solutions is prepared, each by big name architects, from which companies can choose—‘haute couture buildings, prêt à porter convenience’. Thus, even the Norman Foster designed HSBC building, although the largest single occupancy building ever built in the UK, was explicitly not designed as an architectural statement, but instead as a beautifully detailed commercially driven solution. But with the emphasis on international commercial design have come critiques that the results are bland and anonymous.

Thus, Fainstein (2005: 6) has argued that the vast scale of such developments inevitably cuts out the opportunity for genuine diversity:

Shopping malls and office buildings look the same the world over, taking on somewhat different forms depending only on whether they are in central cities or the outskirts. Occasional efforts by commercial developers to give their constructions a local character are rare and superficial—the Pudong extension of Shanghai looks little different from London’s Docklands.

For her, although the first phase of Canary Wharf evoked the older buildings of central London and were an attempt to respond to a local vernacular, after the demise of Olympia & York, ‘glassy, international style buildings resembling skyscrapers in major cities the world over’ became the norm (Fainstein, 2005: 16–17).
5.4. The Isle of Dogs Development Framework

Elsewhere on the Island development was slower during this period, with the exception of sites immediately to the north and south of Canary Wharf (discussed above), re-development work associated with the extension of the DLR across the Thames to Greenwich, and a number of large apartment complexes around the periphery of the Island on the remaining empty sites. Indeed, by 1997 a housing boom was being reported on the Isle of Dogs, with even the Canary Wharf Group submitting their first application for 310 housing units in the same year (Fisher, 1997).


- To record the Corporation’s achievements: ‘It illustrated the way in which the Corporation has comprehensively considered the area.’
- To demonstrate the Corporation’s aspirations for the future: ‘It provides reassurance that development of the highest quality will be supported. The Island should become an area of the highest urban and environmental quality.’
- As an input into the statutory Unitary Development Plan (UDP) then being prepared by Tower Hamlets.

But in addressing these, it chose to exclude the whole of the Canary Wharf estate from its consideration as an area covered by planning permissions established in the Canary Wharf Master Building Agreement. Its scope was therefore immediately limited, as indeed was its vision. In fact, the document largely concentrates on the first of the above objectives, categorising the LDDC’s various interventions up until that time. The remainder of the document focused largely on the remaining development opportunities as the LDDC saw them, each itemised, described, and made the subject of basic indicative design proposals (Fig. 31).

These proposals in the main represented an admirable attempt to fix some of the damage of earlier episodes of development, by reflecting key urban design principles, such as establishing better access to and along the river, protecting and exploiting local views, enhancing Island permeability, respecting the height and scale of neighbouring buildings, and reinforcing local character. Unfortunately, with the exception of the river path, the establishment of which was a requirement of developers since the mistakes of the first wave of Island development were recognised, few of the other design proposals were subsequently taken on board by subsequent developments. Instead, the range of private residential development that gradually filled the majority of the identified sites during the third wave relentlessly drove up both development scale and plot coverage, to a point where an almost continuous and homogenous necklace of private enclaves surrounds the Island, separating the river from the council estates and dock hinterland behind (Fig. 32, see also Fig. 21). In reality this plan was ignored, just as its predecessors (local authority and LDDC) had been before.

5.5. The LDDC withdraws

As well as the IRA bomb and the remarkable recovery of Canary Wharf, the period of the third wave was marked by two further dramatic events: first, the downfall of the Conservative administration in 1997 and its replacement by New Labour; and second, the winding up of the LDDC. Once in power the new government continued the ambivalence to Docklands that had characterised the previous Conservative administration, following the area’s decline in fortunes and the blowing apart of the LDDC’s earlier inner city flagship status. Thus, soon after coming to power, Labour Environment Minister Angela Eagle told an audience that a development like Canary Wharf must never be allowed to happen again: ‘This is the kind of regeneration we do not want. Communities must be helped to transform their own lives rather than having a development dropped in their midst without them having any say’ (quoted in Lewis, 1997). Unsurprisingly, Canary Wharf Group were somewhat dismayed by this early ambivalence, citing their community programme and employment initiatives with Tower Hamlets in their defence. But the new government’s resolve was firm, and initially no new money was to be forthcoming for Docklands (Barrie, 1998).

The winding up of the LDDC in March 1998 finally brought to an end a 17-year period when a UDC had effectively usurped local democratic control. In its final years, the LDDC came to recognise that the Isle of Dogs was not without its problems, although characteristically these were spun by the Corporation as ‘problems of success’ and ‘not a planning issue [but] . . . caused by the availability of finance, excessive optimism and deregulation of financial markets’ (Eric Sorensen, LDDC Chief Executive, quoted in Hinsley & Marlone, 1996: 57). Yet, despite the negative statements of the new
government, this period represented one of better relations between the community and the LDDC and a more positive partnership between the boroughs and the regeneration agency.

The LDDC at this time were positive about their achievements, citing the huge areas of land that had been regenerated and the jobs and businesses that had been attracted to the area (849 hectares and 75,485 jobs, respectively—Kochan, 1998: 8). In addition, 24,300 new homes, including 6,000 for social housing and a further 8,000 council units refurbished (most after 1991—Bazlinton, 1998: 38); £8.7 billion of private investment for a public outlay of £2 billion from the LDDC, and another £2 billion by London Transport (ODPM, 2004); but concern persisted about how the work would be taken forward. As their Development Planning Manager, David Simpson, argued:

I liken our job to pushing a rock up the slope of a hill. Our task is to get the rock of regeneration to the top and just over the crest, because the momentum will continue beyond that point. Having opened up
opportunities for people in east London, we have brought the area into the mainstream of metropolitan life and regeneration can continue post de-designation (quoted in Hirst, 1997: 17).

Unfortunately, not everyone in the area shared the LDDC’s optimistic view of the opportunities now available. In this regard, Janet Foster’s (1999) ethnographic study of the Isle of Dogs provides a valuable insight into the contrasting views and experiences of the regeneration at the time. Although her research found that many of the newcomers were committed to the area and concerned about the wider community as well as their peer group, others often expressed a lack of awareness about the particular constraints and pressures that the established community faced, arguing instead that they should simply sit up and recognise the new opportunities that existed and grasp them. By contrast, a report commissioned by the Isle of Dogs Community Foundation (IDCF—see Section 6.8) concluded that:

Action needs to be specific and tailored, to address the difficulties that Isle of Dogs residents experience in finding employment as result of a lack of appropriate skills and knowledge, educational qualifications and language difficulties; the particular difficulties faced by young people and people from the ethnic minority communities; the specific problems experienced by the long term unemployed; the reasons why more Isle of Dogs residents are not taking the opportunities that are available locally; and to prepare residents for a further influx of job opportunities (Inform Associates, 1997: 4).

For the report’s authors, the fact that, 17 years after the regeneration began, these issues had not been systematically addressed represented a catastrophic failure in human and social terms.

Although Foster (1999: 328–331) detected promising signs of aspirational change amongst long-term residents, particularly amongst the young, she also extensively quoted the wide range of statistical evidence gathered by Inform Associates (1997) of a growing divide between the Island’s new and established communities. For her, the poorest sections of the community should have received more from the development than they did, and therefore the regeneration had not been inclusive. Instead, ‘local residents never really gained a voice or participated in the process at all’ (Foster, 1999: 348).

5.6. The 1998 adopted plan

The winding up of the LDDC meant that the local boroughs finally regained their full powers as planning authorities, and the responsibility of dealing with the LDDC’s legacy—good and bad—effectively fell to them. In the case of Tower Hamlets, although the borough had retained plan-making powers during this period, effectively the 1981 plan had been rejected by the Department for the Environment as not adequately reflecting the national interest in their proposals to retain industry and public housing on the Isle of Dogs, whilst the 1986 plan had abdicated responsibility for large parts of the Isle of Dogs altogether, by masking these areas of their plan.

The 1998 adopted Unitary Development Plan was therefore the first public sector plan to cover this part of London since the proposals of the ill-fated DJC in the 1970s. The result was somewhat underwhelming, offering little beyond warm words, a basic site allocation plan (Fig. 33), and a standard suite of development control policies by way of a vision for the area’s future. Importantly, however, explicit recognition was made of the national importance of Tower Hamlets as a location for ‘Central London core activities of a scale and type compatible with fostering London’s role as a financial, commercial, tourist and cultural centre’ (LBTH, 1998: 78). Central Area Zones were defined east of the City and in the Isle of Dogs (focused around the old Enterprise Zone area), in which such activities would normally be permitted. Thus, the borough had come full circle, admitting: ‘The development of Docklands, principally the Isle of Dogs Enterprise Zone, has done much to prepare London for future growth’ (LBTH, 1998: 76).

Within these zones the emphasis was on a mix of uses, with an aspiration included in the plan that commercial developments of 3,000 m² or above should include other uses, such as entertainment, cultural, community and, particularly, residential, in order to diversify these zones and avoid the problem of them becoming unused during
the evenings and at weekends. This had certainly been a problem in the commercial parts of the Isle of Dogs, including in Canary Wharf until the Phase Two developments progressively came on stream in the early noughties. There, as in the City of London, the preponderance of office-based activity left the area largely desolate after work hours. But, quite independent of the developing Tower Hamlets policy, Canary Wharf Group had recognised both commercial and urbanistic advantages in diversifying the scheme, reflecting the new desire to establish a more vital and varied urban environment (see above). The phase therefore included a major expansion of retail provision, including a Waitrose/John Lewis store, and a significant expansion in restaurants, bars and cafes, with 625,000 ft² of retail space operating by 2003, and open seven days a week.

Elsewhere on the Island, proposals in the 1998 plan were few and far between, although a Designated District Centre was identified around the site of the ASDA superstore immediately north of Mudchute, a store that had been attracted to the Island by the LDDC and which opened in 1983, but which from that day to this largely sits in glorious isolation, as an introspective retail shed surrounded by extensive car parking and little sense of place (Fig. 34). Nevertheless, the potential of this location for something more significant had been consistently recognised in successive Island-wide plans since the 1970s.

5.7. Market-led/opportunity-based

From 1998 the adopted UDP became the basis through which development was guided on the Isle of Dogs and remains the statutory plan 10 years later.
The plan reflects a public planning process that had consistently been undermined for almost two decades and which in the process seemed to have lost any sense of vision or ambition. What emerged was a plan with little more sense of direction than the LDDC’s Isle of Dogs Development Framework that it superseded. Like the earlier framework, it reflected a trend-based planning process, with the market charting the direction, and the public sector following and only influencing change at the edges through the development control process. Effectively, this period in the Island’s planning history had been marked by a market-led process guided by opportunity rather than any effective plan-making process (Fig. 35). Thus, the Canary Wharf master plan was rapidly recast in the light of the new market context, whilst the LDDC and Tower Hamlets plans that followed represented little more than, respectively, a promotional tool and a borough-wide development control manual.

6. The fourth wave—post-2002

6.1. The London Plan

But things were to change, just as the context within which planning on the Isle of Dogs was also to dramatically change. In 2000 the Greater London Authority (GLA) was established, with a mission (amongst other things) to re-introduce strategic planning back in the capital. The new Mayor, Ken Livingstone, immediately let it be known that he was supportive of the expansion of London as a global financial capital, as well as of London’s growth (economically and in population) and its densification, to achieve an urban renaissance. His prescriptions were much along the lines discussed by the Urban Task Force (1999) in their influential report of the year before.

Four years later the London Plan was published, giving the Isle of Dogs a particular status and role in what was in any case a plan for growth. Indeed, the area was listed as an Opportunity Area, destined (along with parts of the City fringe and Stratford) to take the expansion of a range of central London activities (Mayor of London, 2004: 2.3 and Policy 5C.1). To do this, the Mayor envisaged the area accommodating 150,000 jobs and 3,500 new homes by 2016, and required that the planning framework for the area should be developed to meet these ends (Mayor of London, 2004: 5.66). Four years later, in his Consolidated with Alterations Since 2004 plan, the figures rose to 200,000 jobs and 10,000 new homes by 2026 (Mayor of London, 2008: Table 5C.1).

The particular status of the area was also underlined by an exceptional exemption (along with the City of London) from having to meet the London Plan requirement to deliver a mix of uses, including residential uses in all major commercial office schemes in the Opportunity Areas and Central Activities Zone. In these areas, off-site provision of housing was deemed to be acceptable as part of a planning agreement (Mayor of London, 2004: 3.125). Although the Isle of Dogs looks well on course to deliver the housing required of it (see Section 7), for some this status only acted to underline the Mayor’s determination to preserve the status of London as a global economic hub, and the key role the Island was to play in delivering this, so much so that in these areas he was prepared to abandon one of the critical precepts of the urban renaissance (Stevenson, 2007).

The Mayor recognised that: ‘The Isle of Dogs and Stratford will be key beneficiaries of the substantial planned increased in transport capacity and accessibility and would therefore be able to sustain considerably increased development levels’ (Mayor of London, 2004: 5.59). During the fourth wave, as in all the previous waves of development, the Isle of Dogs (and in particular Canary Wharf) continued to prove adept at sucking in public investment. Thus during this period the capacity of the Jubilee line was increased, a process also under way on the DLR (for the second time). At the same time, approval was finally given to the £16 billion Crossrail project due to pass through Canary Wharf, and to which the Canary Wharf Group, along with the City of London Corporation and the British Airports Authority (BAA), are collectively contributing about £1 billion, illustrating the benefits they see in the project (http://www.guardian.co.uk/business/2007).

In addition, as one of four Strategic Economic Areas established in the Thames Gateway Delivery Plan (DCLG, 2007: 22–26), Canary Wharf now has access to
a share of the Government Strategic Economic Investment Fund of some £200 million (Ross, 2007). Thus, Canary Wharf is identified in the plan as a ‘spatial transformer’, with the potential to lead further growth in the region. Despite the early ambivalence of the New Labour government to Canary Wharf, by 2007 a conversion in views and relationships had clearly taken place. However, unlike the LDDC, whose interest in Canary Wharf was all directed west, to the potential the area had to reinforce the position of the City of London, Labour has increasingly seen the potential of this node at the most westerly end of the Thames Gateway area as a driver of growth (and therefore regeneration) in an easterly direction as well.

With Crossrail due for completion in 2017, the rail capacity to Canary Wharf will increase by 54%, offering significant real potential to support further jobs growth at Canary Wharf, and also residential growth in the Gateway (DCLG, 2007: 25). Tower Hamlets (LBTH, 2006c: 32) estimated that, although the transport infrastructure to support the existing and planned growth on the Isle of Dogs would increasingly come under strain until the completion of Crossrail project, particularly after 2014, the decision to fund the scheme meant that this time around, the infrastructure was at least attempting to keep pace with the development. As a result, Canary Wharf would become one of the most accessible nodes in London, a complete transformation from its position in the early 1980s.

6.2. Isle of Dogs Planning and Regeneration Framework

But, at the beginning of the fourth wave, the rapid development of Canary Wharf had meant that the Isle of Dogs had increasingly become an Island of two halves. One—the Canary Wharf estate—was highly managed and regulated by private interests, while the second—the remainder of the Island—was developing in its shadow in a largely uncontrolled manner, if and when opportunities allowed. Approaching the end of the third wave, Edwards (1999: 23–24) concluded that the Isle of Dogs was still a chaotic townscape without a strong network of streets, parks and squares to tie the different and largely insular major projects together. For him:

Contrary to what many architects claim, the effect of removing controls and abandoning urban structuring plans has resulted in visual chaos and social disorder on an unprecedented scale. . . . [Instead] A new kind of master plan is needed which stitches the inward world to the outdoor spaces. . . . and action is needed to create an infrastructure of support for the communities in Docklands.

This then represented the challenge for the fourth wave, a challenge that now rested with Tower Hamlets. Initially, it seemed that Tower Hamlets were up for the challenge, publishing two documents towards the end of the third wave to create a context for the fourth. In 1999 the Isle of Dogs Planning and Regeneration Framework was published as a draft for public consultation, intended to have the status of non-statutory supplementary guidance (LBTH, 1999). The intention of this document was to take forward the LDDC’s 1994 Framework for the Island, but this time to consider the whole of the Isle of Dogs, including Leamouth. The aim was to provide some continuity between the two authorities, but at the same time to establish a more proactive and strategic strategy for the long-term regeneration of the Island. The strategy that emerged might best be summarised as a continuation of the development that had been re-shaping the Isle of Dogs, but with a re-focus of some of this energy away from Canary Wharf to the southern parts of the island, with warm words about community regeneration.

In particular, the redevelopment of the Millennium Quarter—an area immediately south of Canary Wharf and extending down the west side of Millwall Inner Dock—was proposed as a showcase for sustainable urban development, with major arts, cultural and leisure amenities amongst its mix of uses, in order to help draw local people and tourists south. A major proposal was the establishment of a new high street through the centre of the Island, linking areas to the north of Canary Wharf, to the Wharf itself, then down through the proposed Millennium Quarter to Crossharbour and the London Arena and finishing at the ASDA superstore (Fig. 36). The route was to be lined by shops, markets, amenities, restaurants and other facilities. Although laudable in aspiration as a means to reinforce the identity and coherence of the Island, the alignment of the new street was perhaps 20 years late, in that it seemed to ignore the urban form that had been established in the intervening period on the Island. The remainder of the document contained Island-wide guidance, supplemented by short aspirational briefs for key sites on the Island, for which master plans were advocated.

In fact the framework (like the LDDC’s that proceeded it) seems to have had little impact, was never taken beyond the draft stage, and was forgotten as quickly as it was produced. Partly this is because the draft framework provided the context for a more limited
(geographically) but more significant (in impact) master plan for the Millennium Quarter.

6.3. Millennium Quarter Master Plan

Produced by EDAW and published in 2000, the master plan had been commissioned by Tower Hamlets following mounting pressure to make planning decisions on several large development proposals in the area. This central part of the Island was characterised by the sorts of low density sheds and office complexes that had been such a feature of the first (Enterprise Zone) wave of development on the Island, and which had been so criticised, both architecturally—as an architectural zoo—and urbanistically—as a series of introverted privatised compounds in multiple ownerships.
The desire to ‘avoid turning the area into an[other] office ghetto’ (Long, 2000) had motivated Tower Hamlets to commission the proposals for a mixed use development, with 2,000 new homes alongside the inevitable office space (almost half a million m² and 20,000 jobs). Principal Urban Designer at Tower Hamlets—David Black (quoted in Long, 2000)—argued that it was hoped that the area would become an area of high quality development and that the master plan was aimed at giving clarity to the various developers following extensive consultation with residents and landowners. Local councillor Martin Young commented: ‘This master plan is about jobs, housing and better transport, not enabling unrestrained development’ (quoted in Long, 2000). The plan itself made direct reference to the recently published work of the Urban Task Force (1999), arguing that the need was to create a sustainable urban quarter, and that the location of the Millennium Quarter next to public transport made it one of the best locations in Europe to try out the higher density, mixed used, urban solutions being espoused as part of the urban renaissance (LBTH, 2000a: 2).

The Master plan was adopted as Interim Planning Policy by Tower Hamlets in 2000 and included large- and small-scale commercial uses, residential (for sale and rent), leisure, shopping, community facilities and open space (Fig. 37). The intention was to further reinforce the commercial heart of the Docklands focused on Canary Wharf and to realise the area’s transformation over a period of 10–15 years, with the master plan used as a development control tool during this period. The laudable intention was also established of creating the kind of sustainable urban quarter that would not be possible if development was allowed to happen in a piecemeal way. Thus the northern part of the quarter was to be a mix of hundreds of smaller companies, whilst the southern part was to be lower rise residential apartments. All was to be infused with a high quality public realm evident in a new pedestrian network, including public gardens and squares, and a new bridge link over South Dock to Canary Wharf, starting in the process to break down some of the north–south disconnection of the Island. The blocks themselves were to establish a permeable network of routes across the quarter, with single buildings occupying most blocks, but with internal and external routes allowing cross movement and active frontages at the ground floor level.

The Millennium Quarter Master Plan was significant because it represented the first truly public sector attempt to chart a proactive direction for any part of the Isle of Dogs since the ill-fated DJC almost a quarter of a century earlier. In establishing a detailed urban design framework for the area, it moved beyond the earlier two-dimensional zoning approaches of the borough and reflected instead the three-dimensional design-led approaches that private Canary Wharf had long been pursuing to the north (Fig. 38). Tower Hamlets seemed to have learnt that a coherent vision for the Island amounted to more than simply allocating a few sites and uses on a map. Moreover the goals were clearly ‘public’ in nature, with attempts to respond to a community perspective, and the position of the development in its broader strategic setting, as well responding to the insular economic realities of the site itself.

Unlike its private-sector counterpart, however, the area was collectively owned by over 30 separate organisations, none of whom was the local authority. Tower Hamlets’ role was therefore restricted to highway authority (having earlier adopted the roads) and development control authority. The plan also required an estimated £23 million of planning gain to be paid by the various developers in order to deliver the ‘public’ elements of the scheme, including an improved South Quay DLR station (Syms, 2002: 279–280) and a 25% affordable housing provision. To deliver this, a Millennium Quarter Contributions Framework was published alongside the master plan itself, establishing in some detail how contributions would link to projects, and how they should be paid (LBTH, 2000b).

As such, implementation, if not the vision, was likely to be incremental, and would require a regulatory mode of planning, with the local authority working with the various private-sector interests to deliver the collective vision over time. Reflecting this modus operandi, explicit recognition is made in the master plan of the need for flexibility. Thus, instead of a hard and fast blueprint, the master plan sets guidelines for scale of development, uses and the built form, and establishes a phasing diagram to ensure that development is brought forward in a manner that does not overload the existing infrastructure and that allows developer contributions to be made in an ordered and consistent way. As such, it ‘does not describe detailed proposals’ (LBTH, 2000a: 10), and instead of marketing, subsidy and brokerage—the tools of the LDDC—Tower Hamlets were to rely on persuasion and negotiation to meet the new ends; although the very presence of the master plan itself did of course represent something of a marketing tool.

This marked the instigation of a new era of design-led regulation on the Island; an approach to be further developed through the preparation of a prescriptive Millennium Quarter Landscape Plan, commissioned by
Tower Hamlets in partnership with local developers and landowners. The attention to detail and pursuit of quality in the public realm again reflects a desire to match the quality of neighbouring Canary Wharf, but this time delivered through a complex partnership of public and private interests, and over time.

6.4. Options and analysis for the Isle of Dogs

The approach continued after the provisions of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act of 2004 came into force. This required Tower Hamlets to abandon work on its Unitary Development Plan which, at the
time, was in the process of being rolled forward, and to move instead to the production of a Local Development Framework (LDF). Significantly, reflecting the provisions of the Act and the concentration of activity in the area, an early decision was taken that the Isle of Dogs required its own Area Action Plan as part of the LDF, to sit alongside the Core Strategy of the LDF.\footnote{See Carmona, Punter and Chapman, 2002 for an explanation of the provisions of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act as they relate to planning and design.} The Planning Green Paper of 2001 had made it clear that Area Action Plans were discretionary, but were to be produced in areas for regeneration, major development, or conservation, and for important opportunity sites, in order to provide more directed and detailed guidance about the future shape of development in such areas (DTLR, 2001).

The early work on the draft Planning and Regeneration Framework fed into the preparation of this Area Action Plan, which was also based on extensive local consultation during 2005, initially on Issues and Options, and subsequently on Preferred Options. This latter document amounted to a draft plan for the Island, one which, for the first time since the Isle of Dogs Development and Design Guide of 1981, started to suggest a physical spatial strategy for the area (LBTH, 2005—Fig. 39). Thus, a strong emphasis was apparent on establishing better cross-Island interconnectivity, an enhanced public realm, vital water edges, and intensification of uses across the Island. A new Island high street was proposed, traversing the Canary Wharf estate from east to west across the Isle of Dogs and linking this (in the future) to the Wood Wharf area (see below). The spatial strategy was accompanied by a series of design principles for the Island’s heritage, for four identified Island quarters, and for views and tall buildings.

The Action Plan also drew upon a wide range of background analytical work commissioned for the LDF. A Property Market Review commissioned from Jones Lang LaSalle concluded that the: ‘Isle of Dogs has Canary Wharf as its economic engine, and the opportunity to balance the remaining development sites between more office accommodation and residential...
Fig. 39. Isle of Dogs Area Action Plan, Preferred Options key diagram (2005).
uses’. It advised that the key office sites in and near Canary Wharf could be used to both add to the critical mass at Canary Wharf and provide accommodation for support businesses to the global companies, but also that Canary Wharf needed increased residential accommodation nearby to support its working population and to create a sustainable community. It argued that other parts of the Isle of Dogs were well suited to provide this (LBTH, 2006a: 21). With regard to the new District Town Centre that had been proposed on the ASDA site since the 1970s, it concluded that, given the need to reach agreement with ASDA for the site’s redevelopment, other sites could be brought forward more easily.

A borough-wide housing needs study revealed the somewhat alarming conclusion that ‘Overall, the need for additional affordable housing represents over 100% of the estimated newbuild in the Borough’, or an additional 2,625 units per annum over and above the 360 or so that were actually being provided at the time of the survey (Fordham Research, 2004: 6). The obvious conclusion made by the consultants was that not enough had been done to meet need and that every opportunity in the future needed to be taken to meet the pent-up demand.

A Character Area Assessment of the Island specifically concluded that the character of the island had irrevocably changed, establishing the area as London’s new business district. Canary Wharf to the north had now become the main activity area of the Isle of Dogs, whilst the south of the Island was quiet and residential with a subdued atmosphere during working hours and weekends when many residents were absent. For the consultants—EDAW—the character of the Island was still changing, with the success of the high value, high density residential developments in the northern section of the Island beginning to diffuse into its more southern reaches; and in so doing pushing out the existing older community. For them, pedestrian connectivity remained poor, exacerbated by the ring of development still to come.

Collectively, therefore, the analysis revealed both massive market potential, but with the danger of further social fragmentation and a failure to meet the identified chronic local housing needs. The resulting Isle of Dogs Area Action Plan, published and submitted for approval in November 2006 to the Secretary of State, had the task of balancing these needs. This weighty document of over 100 pages covered the period up to March 2016 and listed in excess of 50 potential development sites, collectively covering approximately 70 hectares of the Island, including much of the former Enterprise Zone outside of the Canary Wharf estate. The latter illustrated both the short life expectancy of the first wave schemes, but also the huge extent of development still to come.

6.5. The Isle of Dogs Area Action Plan

The vision contained in the document that emerged was for ‘a compact, cohesive and distinct part of London that contains a vibrant mix of commercial, leisure, tourism, recreational and residential uses’, that ‘will be bound together by a high-quality, well-planned environment’ (LBTH, 2006c: 26). This was to be achieved through the provision of 2,000 houses and 30,000 jobs over and above those required (3,500 and 150,000, respectively) in the 2004 London Plan (LBTH, 2006c: 27). The intention was therefore to continue the onward march of the area as a location for investment, but with a view to establishing a more sustainable community, with, for example, an emphasis on the needs of families, adequate transport infrastructure to support future growth, and a mix of uses. The proposals were summarised in a highly diagrammatic Spatial Strategy Diagram (Fig. 40), with further simple diagrams for key development sites.

As such, the Area Action Plan was clearly not a design framework, and indeed all the Island-wide urban design proposals that had featured so strongly in the Preferred Options plan (see Fig. 39) had been removed. Instead, the document resembled most closely a comprehensive development plan, with a suite of sector-based policies amounting in effect to a development control manual, followed by more specific land-use proposals and accompanying policies for five identified Island sub-areas. The emphasis of the plan was also clearly on guiding new development, rather than on addressing the existing situation, or the relationships between this and the new. As such, no emphasis was placed on addressing the physical and social segmentation that has become a feature of the island. Moreover, the proposals, surprisingly, contained no obvious aspirations for affordable housing, with just one mention of affordability in an identification of ‘Key issues facing the Isle of Dogs’ (LBTH, 2006c: 25).

Physically, the plan included a strong emphasis on the provision of new and improved public open space across the Island, with a detailed appendix carrying proposals for in excess of 30 new open/civic spaces to be provided, along with key development proposals. These were to complement densities that were
decidedly urban in nature, with residential densities specified for each sub-area, and peaking at 1,100 h/ha for the northern and central sub-areas.

The suggestion in the earlier Property Market Review that the ASDA site should not be re-developed was rejected, with proposals for a new district centre for the Isle of Dogs maintained in this plan, to be urban in character, and with a mix of retail and residential uses (see below). Finally, the skyline dominance of One Canada Square was to be maintained, with all high
buildings to respect the dominance of the original Canary Wharf tower in their height and design.

All this was to be negotiated through the use of development control powers, with a strong emphasis on negotiating contributions from developers to community needs, including health, education, open space, infrastructure and transport needs, and through the preparation of four new master plans, two development briefs, and design codes as and when required for key development areas. Unfortunately, despite providing the first comprehensive and positive (if limited) development plan for the Island since the days of the DJC, in October 2007 the Secretary of State ordered the withdrawal of the entire LDF (including the Area Action Plan) following the rejection by the Government Office for London of the Tower Hamlets Core Strategy because, under the terms of the new legislation, it was not considered ‘spatial’ enough. As such the inadequate 1998 UDP remained the Adopted Borough Plan and all proposals to formally adopt the Area Action Plan were dropped. Instead the revised Core Strategy will adopt a more spatial approach, with policy relating directly to each of the Borough’s character areas, including to the Isle of Dogs (LBTH, 2007); work is under way at the time of writing. But, as with so much of the recent history of the Isle of Dogs, development continues in spite of (and some might argue, because of) the absence of a coherent development plan.

6.6. Fourth wave development

If the third wave of development on the Isle of Dogs had been dominated by a further massive expansion of Canary Wharf, effectively sucking in all demand for major commercial development in the area, the initial years of the fourth wave saw a less active (although still expanding) Canary Wharf, restrained in part by a sequence of developments elsewhere in the capital coming onstream; at Paddington Basin, Paternoster Square in the City, and south of the river at London Bridge City (Hamnett, 2003: 241). Elsewhere on the Island, demand continued to spread out from Canary Wharf, resulting in the further expansion of office floorspace. Also, for workers who had come to rely on the Jubilee Line and DLR systems to reach their workplaces—both of which were now operating well above capacity for significant periods of the day—a sequence of developments to meet the pent-up demand for housing in the area.

By 2008, well into the fourth wave, Peter Buchanan’s (1988: 38) critique of two decades earlier was still relevant, with the fragmentation so apparent in the 2002

figure ground still dominating the island landscape (see Fig. 24). He argued:

this is an inadequate urban model for the larger scale. The major roads are still only conceived for access and parcelling land. Within their net, scattered pockets of urban intensity will pop up here and there in a way that fails to add up to any coherent and integral urban whole. They remain islands in a kind of super suburban business park in which some plots no longer contain just a tin shed but a mini-Manhattan.

But things were changing fast, with a huge wave of proposals, both on the ground and in various stages of the planning/development process. The question remains, are the schemes on site and on the drawing board likely to change the Isle of Dogs for the better, and finally overcome the 20-year-old critiques of this part of London?

Proposals can be divided into two distinct groups: those in and around the Canary Wharf estate to the north of the Island, and those in and around the Millennium Quarter in Island’s centre (Fig. 41).

The former, listed in Table 1, are each large developments with, collectively, the potential to deliver a further massive expansion in the critical mass of the wider Canary Wharf area. The emphasis continues to be largely commercial, with residential and hotel development designed to support the wider development, rather than to support the wider Tower Hamlets community. Thus, predominantly, the Canary Wharf formula continues to be replicated across the area, ably supported by international ‘big name’ architects, most notably, and most often, by Richard Rogers, the author of much earlier derision of the development (see Section 5). For the Canary Wharf Group, perhaps learning from the critical mistakes of their predecessor (Olympia and York), developments are incremental, being built out individually as and when demand (and usually tenants) are found. This leads to a slower rate of return, but also to less risk, with development sites either pre-let and then built or remaining vacant (Gordon, 2001: 161). Hamnett (2003: 241–242) concurs, contrasting the academic condemnations of the early 1990s, with the success trumpeted in the media coverage of the scheme in the noughties. The Times, for example, reported that Figs. 42 and 43:

---

3 Information on developments in this section obtained from LBTH planning reports (http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/data/planning); GLA planning reports (http://www.london.gov.uk); and http://www.emporis.com
Canary Wharf is a stunning example—architecturally and financially—of how success can be built from disaster. . . . What once seemed in danger of being a white elephant on the river is now such a popular location that it will soon be running out of space (Wheatcroft, 2000).

Spurred on by very low vacancy rates in Canary Wharf (just 0.4% in 2007—http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=newsarchive&sid=awEcq9OU7bjQ), in this part of the Island, a range of other developers have increasingly put forward proposals on the edges of the Canary Wharf estate—many, in height and scale, to rival and even exceed the proposals of the Canary Wharf Group themselves. Each development now includes major planning gain packages, with, variously, contributions to Crossrail and the DLR up-grade, to public realm, public space and public artworks, to local training and skills development, and to a range of social and community facilities and environmental works. Thus,
for example, the Riverside South scheme alone (now on site) includes provision for:

- £2 million for social and community facilities through a Trust Fund;
- £2.9 million for social/community and environmental works to be agreed;
- £1.5 million capital contribution to the Canary Wharf IDEA Store (library);
- £5.3 million IDEA Store and Skills Match rent-free period;
- £5 million public realm and public art contribution;
- £0.5 million to be held in trust for TV reception monitoring and mitigation;
- £3 million for the DLR three-car upgrade;
- £85,000 for Section 278 highway works;
- £0.9 million for increasing bus capacity;
- Delivery of the Heron Quays roundabout for adoption;
- Preparation of a green travel plan;
- Preparation of a code of construction practice;
- Delivery of a publicly accessible riverside walkway;
- Establishment of a local labour in construction scheme.

### Table 1

Island proposals in and around Canary Wharf (2008).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fig. 41 (ref.)</th>
<th>Scheme</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>New Providence Wharf</td>
<td>Partially completed</td>
<td>At Blackwall Way (Isle of Dogs/Leamouth borders), largely exclusive residential enclave development of 1,548 apartments (263 affordable), but including a Radisson Hotel and some other limited associated uses; designed by SOM for Ballymore Properties and including a public riverside walkway and the highest residential tower (the Ontario Tower) on the Thames at 31 storeys and a further 44-storey tower proposed (Fig. 42).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Riverside South</td>
<td>On site</td>
<td>To the west of Canary Wharf at Westferry Circus and proposed by the Canary Wharf Group; includes two towers by Richard Rogers (45 and 34 storeys), one of which will be the tallest in the UK (taller than One Canada Square), whilst the development will have the longest river frontage in London; the site was originally earmarked for residential development by the Canary Wharf Group, but subsequently re-zoned for commercial uses (Fig. 43).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>15 Canada Square</td>
<td>On site</td>
<td>Kohn Pederson Fox Architects designed 69 m high, 15-floor KPMG headquarters building for Canary Wharf Group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>5, 20 and 25 Churchill Place</td>
<td>On site</td>
<td>Three blocks, ranging from 12 to 15 storeys, by architects including HOK International and Kohn Pederson Fox Architects, all office headquarters buildings for Canary Wharf Group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Alberta House</td>
<td>Full permission given</td>
<td>Erection of 133 residential units, 46 m² ground floor A1 retail space and 26 m² D1 community space, by Swan Group and BLDA architects, 35% for social rent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>North Quay</td>
<td>Full permission given</td>
<td>To the north of Canary Wharf, proposed by the Canary Wharf Group, two office towers by Cesar Pelli and Will Alsop at 44 and 38 storeys, plus an 18-storey linking building on a 6.7 acre site, built on top of the new Crossrail station, and including a new public space at West India Quay Station, new footbridge over the dock and active frontage at ground level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Columbus Tower, 2 Hertsmere Road</td>
<td>Full permission given</td>
<td>293 m tall tower of 63 storeys, proposed by developer SKMC and to be the UK’s tallest building once completed at the western end of West India Quay, containing a mix of hotel, service apartments and offices, designed by DMWR architects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Newfoundland</td>
<td>Application submitted</td>
<td>Patel Taylor architects clear and opaque glass design for the 37-storey tower and podium hotel development, proposed by South Quay Properties, part of the Canary Wharf Group. The 2,500 m² site is currently a 75-space private car park.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>One Park Place</td>
<td>Application submitted</td>
<td>Grattan Properties slimline office building standing 183 m tall, with 45 floors running along the edge of the Canary Wharf estate at Cabot Square, topped by a large roof terrace that will be accessible to the occupiers of the offices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Heron Quay West</td>
<td>In pre-planning</td>
<td>Proposed by the Canary Wharf Group, two offices (40 and 29 storeys), designed by Richard Rogers on the site of Nicholas Lacey’s original wave one Heron Quays development, connected by a large atrium.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Wood Wharf</td>
<td>Master plan approved but scheme being revised</td>
<td>Proposed by British Waterways, Canary Wharf Group and Ballymore Properties on a 20-acre site immediately east of Canary Wharf, master planned by Richard Rogers; to include a mix of residential (1,400 units) and commercial space (400,000 m²) in a series of towers in excess of 40 storeys and medium-rise buildings; to include a new canal and canal basin and landscape scheme by Martha Schwartz.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The list demonstrates how the expectations from development have changed since the days of the LDDC, with an explicit social agenda, as well as one directed towards mitigating the negative externalities of each development. In each development, however, the majority of publicly accessible space being produced is planned to remain in private ownership and management, with rights to control, and potentially to exclude, also being retained (see below). As such, the social agenda does not extend to delivering a truly ‘public’, public realm.

If these developments are realised, the physical limitations of the Canary Wharf estate will almost have been reached (although the large Billingsgate Market site to the north of Canary Wharf offers significant potential at some point in the future for redevelopment). The collective impact will be a much more coherent piece of urban form, that finally stitches itself into the surrounding physical fabric, and therefore no longer sits as a pocket of unrelated urban intensity. The Wood Wharf and Canary Wharf Crossrail Station developments in particular will aid this process, helping to make better north–south and east–west links in this part of the Island (Fig. 44). Although continuing to evolve and change in response to market and planning factors, the principles for Wood Wharf were initially established in the 2003 Wood Wharf Masterplan, prepared in cooperation with Tower Hamlets in recognition of the need for a comprehensive approach to the site’s future development (British Waterways, 2003: 1.0—Fig. 45). The plan was subsequently adopted as a development brief by the council and further reinforces the move to an approach based on public/private partnership around an agreed design vision.

In this, the role of the GLA is also increasingly clear, as under the act setting up the GLA, developments over 15,000 m², or 30 m in height, need to be referred to the Mayor for consideration. As many Isle of Dogs developments fall inside this definition, the Mayor has been influential in helping to shape the final agreed outcomes. The extent of this role and the extent of
development pressure in the Borough is demonstrated by the fact that as in 2007 more planning decisions were made by the Mayor relating to Tower Hamlets than for any other London borough (including the City of London) (Mayor of London, 2007: 17). Analysis of GLA planning reports consistently demonstrates a concern for design, and that buildings contribute to the delivery of high quality animated public space. Criticism of 1 Harbour Quay by the GLA (2005), the first Wood Wharf development to come forward for detailed planning permission, and its subsequent withdrawal by the applicant, demonstrates this added layer of authority and its effective use in raising design quality.

Further south, the emphasis has been predominantly residential, with a rash of schemes in and around the Millennium Quarter (Table 2). Collectively, these proposals are likely to deliver an even greater impact on the urban form of the Island than the schemes to the north, where the structure is already fixed by Canary Wharf. Here the developments being brought forward are so far contributing to the bigger vision envisaged in the Millennium Quarter Master Plan, although in a flexible manner that remains true to the spirit, if not the detail, of the plan. Thus sites are coming forward in an uncoordinated manner, with no obvious respect paid to the phasing envisaged in the Master Plan. Moreover, the evidence from the early schemes suggests that although the street pattern and sequence of public spaces in the Master Plan is being respected, with sums earmarked through planning gain for their delivery, schemes are being built to a higher density, with a higher plot coverage than envisaged. Thus some of the intra-block permeability is being lost, as is the transition in heights across the quarter. The result may be a rather claustrophobic sequence of public spaces, having to rely on doubtful techniques such as that being adopted at Indescon Court, where reflective stainless steel is being proposed to reflect light down into the ground level public spaces.

In land use terms, the preponderance of uses to the south has so far been residential, with in the region of 25% of unit numbers allocated for affordable units, on or off site. Given the continuing massive expansion of commercial office space to the north, this emphasis on residential development to the south seems economically and environmentally logical. It does, however, depart from the aspiration in the Master Plan to provide accommodation for hundreds of smaller companies to the north of the Millennium Quarter, with medium- and low-rise residential accommodation to the south. The result will be far less commercial space, but far more residential units than the 2,000 originally envisaged (Fig. 46).

At the ground level, schemes have been delivering the active frontages envisaged in the plan, but although it is early days, indications suggest that these are not proving easy to let (Fig. 47). It may be, however, simply a case of needing to wait for the critical mass to make
these units viable. Elsewhere, the likelihood that the ASDA site will finally be realised will represent a major victory for the vision contained in the Isle of Dogs Area Action Plan, and for the potential to finally establish a new local centre for this part of the Island.

6.7. A network of private landscapes

It is clearly too early to determine whether the totality of the fourth wave schemes will deliver the sort of high quality urban environment aspired to, but rarely
delivered, in so many of the plans that have come and gone over the last 30 or so years. With time, some more considered critiques of the urban design on the Isle of Dogs are beginning to emerge. Jon Lang (2005: 228), for example, concludes that the private controls adopted in Canary Wharf resulted in a considerably less flamboyant design solution than many commercial schemes, and although this was slated by contemporary critics, he argues it is ageing well, with some high quality public space, buildings with entrances opening directly onto the streets (in contrast to La Defense, for example) and buildings that are differentiated from each other, reflecting the decision to use a range of architects.

Yet what is being delivered is a part of London where users will find themselves traversing from one privately controlled environment to another—Canary Wharf, to Wood Wharf, to South Quay, through the Millennium Quarter, to Baltimore Wharf (formally the London Arena). The inclusion of Millennium Quarter in this list demonstrates how the powerful impact and potential commercial advantages secured through the types of integrated urban management adopted at Canary Wharf were not lost on Tower Hamlets. Thus, the Millennium Quarter Master plan explicitly considered questions of the long-term management of this area, with its fragmented ownership and local authority responsibility for the roads and public spaces. The solution is to be management of the quarter as a single estate through a single purpose company—the Millennium Quarter Estate Company—funded jointly by the public and private-sector interests in the area along the lines of a Business Improvement District (BID) (see McNeill, 2003).

For Tower Hamlets this seemed to represent the best means of balancing the interests of the owners and occupiers in the quarter with those of the adjacent communities. Its role will be both physical and social, with responsibility for the everyday security, cleaning and maintenance of the public realm, but also for delivering and operating the various community facilities envisaged in the plan (LBTH, 2000a: 25). With representatives of the council, landowners and the surrounding estates on the board, the operation and language was clearly one of
public/private partnership, but also, arguably, of a degree of privatisation of public space.

The approach was designed to enable this new quarter to compete with Canary Wharf, but more importantly to complement it, and to spread some of the benefits beyond the confines of the immediate site. Nevertheless, critiques of the potentially exclusionary nature of all forms of private and pseudo-private forms of public space management have been widely debated and are well known (see Carmona, de Magalhaes & Hammond, 2008: Chapter 3). Imrie & Sakai (2007: 448) comment that: ‘it appears that much, if not most, public space provision is occurring through privatised urban redevelopment schemes that have capacity to restrict access to, and use of, public areas.’ Discussing Canary Wharf, some way along the public/private spectrum from the Millennium Quarter towards full privatisation, they comment that the area is managed by a single entity, the Canary Wharf Group, with little public involvement in how the estate is managed. Thus, the group are the landowners, developers, builders and managers of almost all the buildings and all the public space on the 91-acre site. This contrasts strongly with patterns elsewhere on the Island, which, although featuring large swathes of privately owned public space, are more fragmented and interwoven with public owned and managed highways and spaces.

In interviews with Canary Wharf Group representatives, Imrie and Sakai (2007: 449) detected a conscious policy of controlled entry to, and use of, the public space in the area. An active management programme is designed to control access to the estate, with the Estates Manager commenting ‘We don’t allow anyone to wander in and do whatever they want to do’. Instead, access is conditional on being in small groups and well behaved. This very active approach to managing public space is reflected in the fact that Canary Wharf Group employ the largest private security force in Europe, backed up by 1,600 CCTV cameras, the highest concentration anywhere in the world (Imrie & Sakai, 2007: 449). Not only is the security force highly visible and dressed to reflect the attire of the Metropolitan Police Service, but signage makes visitors very aware that they are on private land, and that their visit is entirely at the discretion of the landowner (Fig. 48).

For the Canary Wharf Group, this level of management brings benefits in standards that are much higher (in their terms) than found in the competition, and noticeably superior to the Tower Hamlets land that surrounds the estate. The intention is not only to keep the area clean, well maintained and crime free, but, when activity occurs that is not approved of, to quickly move in to stop the behaviour in the act (Imrie & Sakai, 2007: 449–450), or even before. The latter was demonstrated in 2004, when rather than allowing cleaners employed in the complex to protest about their employment conditions, Canary Wharf Group obtained an injunction to prevent the protest on the grounds that the area is legally private property. A small group of demonstrators, heavily
outnumbered by police and security, did eventually choose to defy the ban and protest, although without the support of the Transport and General Workers Union, who had withdrawn their support for the protest following the injunction (http://www.indymedia.org.uk; http://www.guardian.co.uk; Fig. 49). Given the size of Canary Wharf and its status as the effective ‘town centre’ for the Isle of Dogs, this ability to exclude has profound implications for the area.

For the Canary Wharf Group, the concerns over freedom and civil rights are counterbalanced by the heightened fear for safety and security, irrespective of land ownership. For them, the active management is justified, both by their commercial imperatives (advised by a forum of representatives from their tenant companies), but also by the public amenities (parks, shops and programme of events) that the complex makes available to users. Quoting footfall of half a million a week in their retail malls, they argue:

“The quality of the public realm matches the best in the world. The estate is accessible not just in terms of the transport infrastructure—the roads and rail connections—but, critically, in terms of the welcoming environment and range of amenities provided. The success of Canary Wharf has been achieved by offering a better environment which is accessible, attractive and safe (Sheppard, 2008).

6.8. The funding goes on

Undoubtedly the Isle of Dogs now has a major new retail and leisure focus at its heart, although the extent to which the exclusive shops are used by all sections of the greatly expanded community remains an open question. As physical regeneration continues apace, a critical question remains: how have the less affluent parts of the community fared? A steady stream of funding has certainly continued to find its way into this community from government and, latterly, from commercial sources.

From its establishment in 1990, the Isle of Dogs Community Foundation (IDCF), has gradually become the mouthpiece of the local community, in effect taking over the role from Docklands-wide organisations such as the Docklands Forum and Docklands Consultative Committee, whose operations gradually wound down in the 1990s. IDCF is a partnership between local businesses, statutory services, the voluntary sector and other intermediary agencies, with an objective to support deprived communities in the area. When the LDDC withdrew from the area it attempted to establish an endowment of £6.4 million, a figure that was cut back by the incoming New Labour government to just £1 million. This reduced amount was placed in the hands of the IDCF, and by 2008 had grown to £4 million—income which is available for grant giving, along with any other funds that the Foundation raises (http://www.idcf.org). At the time, however, community leaders were heavily critical of the government, arguing that there would be an effective shortfall of some £300,000 a year if the social regeneration of the area was to be sustained (Naib, 2003: 152).

Following the demise of the LDDC, the IDCF increasingly became the major source of additional support and funding for the deprived communities of the Island. As well as the endowment fund, in 1999 the IDCF became one of the first voluntary sector-led organisations to win a government-funded Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) grant, in this case £3.1 million, on top of which a further £7 million was levered from commercial and other sources to focus on three themes (IDCF, 2006):

- Effective training for real jobs;
- Community regeneration; and
- Community capitalisation through support to small businesses and social enterprises.

In 2006 this funding came to an end, having delivered a wide range of social educational and employment schemes. It was replaced by a formal agreement, signed between Tower Hamlets and the IDCF, that social and community planning contributions resulting from the Millennium Quarter development would be managed through the Foundation for the benefit of local people living and working on the Island. Under this arrangement, approximately £500,000 was awarded to IDCF in a pilot phase, for a range of initiatives focusing on support for non-statutory early years and education, lifelong learning and employment-related training. In addition, there will be an emphasis
on projects that capitalise on the opportunities offered by the leisure and hospitality trades, as well as arts and cultural activities, with a proportion going towards building the IDCF endowment. The total overall package of Section 106 planning funds will be subject to individual negotiations between the local authority and developers, but is likely to be in the region of £5 million over the next 10–15 years, on top of which match funding will be sought (IDCF, 2005).

Additional funding is also being funnelled into the neighbouring Lower Lea Valley area through the auspices of the London Thames Gateway Development Corporation (LTGDC). In 2008 the LTGDC jointly funded and launched a National Skills Academy for Financial Services with the Financial Services Authority and the Learning and Skills Council. Established in Poplar immediately to the north of the Isle of Dogs, and in spitting distance of Canary Wharf, the remit is to provide focused training for financial services to the local community. The Academy will eventually take 600 students annually, 90% from black and minority ethnic (BME) groups, and all from the deprived communities around the financial hub of Canary Wharf that have in the past been largely cut out of the lucrative jobs market there (Hayman, 2008), which as a result is currently dominated by an ethnic mix that is far removed from that of the surrounding neighbourhoods (Fig. 50).

This and other initiatives may eventually have an impact on the local imbalances. Yet, in 2002, after 20 years during which Tower Hamlets had been the recipient of some of the largest and most sustained public funding and new private investments in Europe, the borough remained the most deprived in the UK, with 15 out of 17 of its wards in the most deprived 5%. It remained a destination for often impoverished immigrants, with 80 languages spoken, 19% of its population were on income support (compared with 9% in the population as a whole), with unemployment at 12% as opposed to 3.6% nationally. Forty-five percent of the population were on housing benefits, and 14,000 remained on the council waiting lists (Sym, 2002: 277).

6.9. Market—state/plan—opportunity balance

How this is impacting on the Isle of Dogs is discussed in the final section, below. In process terms, the fourth wave has (so far) seen a combination of trend and regulative planning; trend planning in the sense that the key local plans—the Area Action Plan and various master plans—are loose documents, established with the changing needs of the market at their core. These are in turn being interpreted in a flexible manner, although still with many of the critical design aspirations and public realm, community and social benefits of the various plans being carefully negotiated and enforced through development control. The process illustrates the need for a vision on which to base public sector decision-making, but also the importance of skilled interpretation as, over time, market impacts come to bear. Finally, it demonstrates the power of establishing firm design aspirations at the strategic policy scale—in this case in the London Plan—and the power exerted by a strategic authority that is willing to enforce these aspirations. As such, the period demonstrates (perhaps for the first time) a pragmatic planning that balances state and market agendas, informed by plan and opportunity combined (Fig. 51); a form of planning that, one might argue, reflects the essence of the British plan-led yet legally discretionary planning process.4

4 See Carmona, Carmona, and Gallent, 2003, Chapter 2, for a discussion of the British discretionary planning process and its alternative.
7. Conclusion

7.1. Taking the long view

This paper started from the proposition that to understand how an area such as the Isle of Dogs has been shaped, it is valuable to take a historical perspective, one that traces the different episodes of planning and associated development over time. For the Isle of Dogs it has been useful to think in terms of a sequence of development stages, each characterised by a wave of development, that over the last 30 years or so have made their mark on the Island.

For anyone engaged in research on this part of London, it is immediately obvious that the surfeit of research, scholarly endeavour and reportage that characterised the period up to the early 1990s (waves one and two) is only matched by the dearth of writing ever since (waves three and four). This paper has attempted to redress the balance by taking the long view and bringing the analysis up to date. The analysis has identified four waves of development, five distinct models of planning, 12 key plans that have attempted to guide development in the area, and across a period of 35 years has tracked a renaissance... of sorts.

To conclude, it is useful to return to the research questions with which the paper began:

1. What forms of planning have we seen?
2. What role has design played in this?
3. What outcomes have resulted from these processes?
4. Have we seen an urban renaissance?

7.2. What forms of planning have we seen?

The analysis suggests that planning on the Isle of Dogs in different ways and at different times has encompassed almost all of the styles of planning introduced in Section 1:

- Pre-LDDC, the then public authorities aspired to emulate the dominant model of the post-war period, a form of public-investment planning (with pretensions of popular planning). Ultimately, in the absence of any actual public investment or private market, the approach proved ineffective.
- The period of the LDDC itself was characterised by a large dose of leverage planning, somewhat perversely delivering the long sought after public investment at a time when a market model was outwardly being favoured. Although leverage continued throughout the tenure of the LDDC, it was in the first wave when the approach was used almost in isolation and ultimately as an effective (if expensive) means to stimulate a viable private market. The area continues to suck in significant public sector funds today, emphasising the failure of the early investment to tackle the area’s multiple endemic social problems.
- With the arrival of Canary Wharf, a new model of planning also arrived—private-management planning—which increasingly came to shape the northern part of the Island, as the Canary Wharf estate relentlessly expanded over the second, third and fourth waves. Although the closing of the second wave brought with it the demise of Olympia & York, and a realisation about the limits of this model of planning, its continued existence ever since as part of a more mixed planning landscape can testify to its value in the eyes of prestige developer/investor organisations such as the Canary Wharf Group.
- For the public sector, trend planning has remained the dominant model throughout the LDDC and post-LDDC period. The approach featured strongly, as exemplified by the Isle of Dogs Development and Design Guide alongside the leverage model during the first wave period. It dominated the third wave, as practised first by the LDDC and almost without change by Tower Hamlets, and continues to feature in the fourth wave in a modified form, alongside a flexible form of regulatory planning.
- Regulatory planning, the final model, has increasingly featured in the fourth wave, as the confidence of Tower Hamlets to address the complex planning and design requirements of the Island has grown, and as the influence and undoubted power of the GLA has come to bear. Yet, despite this growing importance of an active planning process at the development control stage, this continues to sit alongside a flexible trend-based process of plan-making. In a boom market, the model has proven to be effective at delivering private and, increasingly, public goals, but as the market turns down, its effectiveness is likely to wane.

So the recent history of the Isle of Dogs, and even the period of the LDDC’s tenure, has been characterised by multiple and often overlapping forms of planning and associated development processes. Thus, although the period of the 1980s is often characterised as one of ad-hoc, opportunistic and market-led planning, as still engrained in the Island’s urban fabric and the antithesis of the more design-led approaches later advocated by the Urban Task Force (1999), it was also characterised by Olympia & York’s concern to create a new ‘place’ in the sea of chaos, as a means to safeguard their massive long-term investment. The result was that a detailed
master plan and design code was imposed at Canary Wharf (albeit by the private sector rather than the public sector), which, alongside examples such as Broadgate in the City of London and Brindleyplace in Birmingham, spearheaded a move back to design-led development. If the dominance of this model in the commercial development world is anything to go by, then over time the Canary Wharf experience has helped to convince receptive developers that another route to value creation is possible. As a by-product it has been an unheralded inspiration for the urban renaissance.

Edwards (1992: 19) argues that what happened in the Isle of Dogs marked the end of two centuries of British town planning that began with the great Georgian estates, included the great civic achievements of the Victorians and the utopian social visions of post-war architects and planners in, for example, the GLC (the remnants of whose philosophy could be traced in the plans of the DJC in the Docklands), but which came to a halt in the 1980s. For him, at this point the assumption that urban development must serve a wider social or environmental purpose was at its lowest ebb. Yet, for all the criticisms of the approach, he argues that: ‘In fact, we may have to thank Docklands for providing an unassailable case for the necessity of ... urban design vision in the regeneration of the inner cities’, as the bridge between government policy on the inner cities and the development and design objectives of those providing the buildings (Edwards, 1992: 64).

The experience in London’s Isle of Dogs from 1981 to 2008 marked a major contrast with that in other major European cities during the 1980s and 1990s. Whilst the Isle of Dogs was without a public sector plan that was at the same time visionary and deliverable, Paris was building its Grand Projects and using international competitions to focus on design, Berlin was master-planning the Internationale Bauausstellung (IBA), and Barcelona was planning its great Olympic legacy. When London had no city-wide governance to promote the public interest, these cities each possessed an active public sector that retained a belief in planning and a proactive approach to delivering coordinated urban design. Although some of the results, notably La Defense in Paris, were not without their critics (Lang, 2005: 222), in time the model was duly lauded by the Urban Task Force for the public sector leadership and vision it demonstrates. In the Isle of Dogs, by contrast, their absence perhaps reveals one of the reasons why there continues to be a failure to deliver anything more than unconnected segments of a high quality public realm.

Despite this, there has been no shortage of planning if the 12 plans reviewed in this paper (approximately one every three years over 35 years) are anything to go by. But this plan-making has been largely ineffective. Instead, when plans have been prepared, they have either quickly and quietly been set aside as new developers have come along, demanding ever bigger buildings and more of the water area (Edwards, 1992: 43), have failed to engage with the realities of the new Dockland’s context, have been relegated to life as development control manuals, or have been overtaken by the process-driven imperatives of central government. This, arguably, represents an indictment of planning, just as what we see today represents a triumph of the market, and increasingly (in the absence of a coherent plan) of ad-hoc discretionary development control, with every case seemingly judged on its merits. A key and unanswerable question therefore remains: with a more effective system of plan-making, might we have delivered so much more?

Looking back at the period of the LDDC, Florio and Brownill (2000: 58–59) argue that the Corporation’s legacy can be seen in the role it played in breaking up the opposition to private investment in the inner cities, achieving flexibility in land and labour markets, and establishing a context in which public investment in the built environment now only occurs when it also suits the interests of the private sector. The cost for the LDDC (and the government) was a growing realisation that property-led regeneration by itself could not solve all the problems of localities, and should occur instead as part and parcel of a social contract that would also invest in the social infrastructure of the community. This partnership of interests reflects the neo-liberal settlement that in the New Labour (post-1997) era has dominated British politics and which, if evidence from the fourth wave of development on the Island is to be believed, is proving effective, combining as it does state and market leadership (see Fig. 51). It has certainly silenced the critics.

Through evaluating the sequence of 10 monographs published by the LDDC in its final year as its own obituary, Florio and Brownill (2000: 56) conclude that the LDDC was able to present its use of ‘incremental opportunism’ as part of a strategic approach to regenerating the Docklands. Moreover, for them, ‘within today’s planning world, it has become possible to be very open about practising incremental opportunism while still maintaining that a strategy is being pursued.’ An evaluation of the experience by the National Audit Office (2007: 24–27) broadly accepts the case, and includes the London Docklands among a range of European examples that have achieved a renaissance. They argue that the experience in the Docklands demonstrated clear and strong leadership around a shared vision, not of a particular place that would be built, but instead of a brand
that could be delivered if the marketing and fiscal incentives were right.

It is clear that incremental opportunism largely remains the strategy adopted by both private and public actors in the area. In part this is likely to be a legacy of the weakened role of planning—which—although under the New Labour government has substantially recovered its place in the governance of British cities—no longer has the skills and resources to command real change from a position of vision and power. Recent plans for the Island continue to reflect this, combining social and very broad design aspirations with a flexibility borne out of a determination not to stifle market opportunism; the goose that (through planning gain) has (so far) laid the golden eggs (see Fig. 51).

7.3. What role has design played in this?

For Hinsley and Malone (1996: 51–52), although the failure of the early urban design visions for the Isle of Dogs can be put down in part to the antipathy of the LDDC towards planning, it also represented a failure of urban design theory and practice. For them, these urban designers were too concerned with the physical, formal and spatial issues of development, and with the ability of the public realm to provide a unifying framework for investment. As such, the proposals failed to give adequate weight to the pressures exerted by development interests and ‘missed opportunities to provide strategies for Docklands based, in greater measure, on planning, land-use and market criteria’. For them, the form-based strategies of the urban designers were challengeable in themselves, and unlikely to penetrate the defences of market-led development interests.

An interesting perspective on this debate is offered by the former Principal Architect with the LDDC, Charles Attwood (Hinsley & Malone, 1996: 52–53). Attwood argues that the conflict between urban designers and the LDDC revolved around a reluctance of designers to recognise that in a location where no market exists, there is a need for an introductory development process in which planning is marginalised in favour of development interests. For him, a fully developed urban plan was never likely to provide the confidence that an incremental phase would offer as a means to build up momentum, and for the property market to determine an appropriate direction for the redevelopment process to take. He argued that Canary Wharf marked the watershed and effectively provided the necessary direction.

Hinsley and Malone (1996: 53–57), by contrast, suggest that architects and urban designers were involved in the development process of the Isle of Dogs, but the results establish that their form-based preoccupations come up short as a basis for large-scale development. For them, it was the exclusion of planning (rather than design) that undermined the project, and that was manifest in a lack of a strategic framework and adequate public-investment programme for the area. As a result, when eventually development was attracted, it sat stranded as an ‘Island of international capitalism’.

Continuing the theme, Gospodini (2002: 61) quotes Harvey’s (1989) assertion that in the postmodern world, there is no ‘planning’, only ‘designing’; something that resonates with the experience on the Isle of Dogs. Thus, in a context of growing volatility of capital and increasing competition amongst cities, long-term planning can be at odds with the flexibility required to attract investment. For Harvey, therefore, two options are possible: either the powers that be need to be highly adaptable and fast-moving to respond to market shifts; or they have to be able to mastermind the market shifts themselves by manipulating market tastes, opinions and needs in order to fit into a proposed design scheme. Arguably, the LDDC (initially at least) strongly favoured the first of these options, whilst Olympia & York, and latterly the Canary Wharf Group, have favoured the latter. Tower Hamlets today, in common with many planning authorities, makes noises about the latter, whilst actually (consciously or not) pursuing the former. None of these actors has taken a strategic (planning) approach seriously at any stage, although the master plans of Olympia & York, and latterly Tower Hamlets in the Millennium Quarter, confirm that design is on the agenda.

The Urban Task Force made the case forcefully for such three-dimensional master plans, yet over the 35-year period covered by this paper much of the development that has occurred on the Island, and still much of the Isle of Dogs today, has not been guided by a coherent design vision. Thus, Reg Ward (1987: 35) argued:

What London Docklands is trying to do is to manage uncertainty. You do not manage it by creating artificial certainties within it, but by accepting the uncertainty by adopting an organic approach which enables one to respond to actuality . . . It is difficult, often uncomfortable but it is totally productive and rewarding in the results that can be achieved.

As such, the approach adopted on the Isle of Dogs raises profound questions about the increasingly dominant mantra of governments, summed up neatly by Gospodini (2002: 60), who argues that:

While for centuries the quality of the urban environment has been an outcome of economic growth...
of cities, nowadays the quality of urban space has become a prerequisite for the economic development of cities; and urban design has taken an enhanced new role as a means of economic development.

In the case of the Isle of Dogs, few would question that the truly transformative investment that became Canary Wharf was attracted without any significant public sector urban design vision in place or a quality public realm in which to fit; or that the non-planned areas, initially the sites of so many design horrors, over time are gradually giving way to a more coherent urban landscape (see below).

On the other hand, the Canary Wharf development under different ownerships has consistently pursued a strongly design-based strategy (even if not universally applauded), and one that, after the wave two crash, has recorded unparalleled success in attracting blue chip footloose tenants. For Bell (2005) the overriding lesson from Canary Wharf has been that design can be used as a means to both create and protect value, by convincing investors and tenants of the merits of a scheme, and by creating quality that will deliver over the long term. Thus, for him, the master plans that have been produced (even if endlessly modified thereafter) have (in contradiction to Reg Ward’s assertion) been used as a means to provide the design and development certainty that the Urban Task Force and others have argued that major investment requires.

The conflicting evidence perhaps points to what we always must have known, that the old adage ‘location, location, location’, still holds true, and the genius of Reg Ward, Paul Reichmann (the brains behind Canary Wharf), and others, was in recognising it. To what extent, therefore, the experience of the Island is transferable is an open question, as few other locations in the UK, or internationally, ever had such untapped locational potential, potential which has been enhanced in the case of Canary Wharf through the design-based strategy, but undermined elsewhere on the island (until recently) because of its absence. With hindsight and recent experience, perhaps the adage can now confidently be modified to ‘location, location, location, and design’ if, as Gordon (2001: 165) has argued, we should sit up and take notice ‘when powerful private developers insist on imposing planning regulations upon themselves’. Again, it leads one to ask, could we have done better?

7.4. What outcomes have resulted from these processes?

For some, could we have done better is met by a firm ‘yes’. Streetsweeper (2004) argues that few sites ever had so much going for them, yet the Island is characterised by 10 mediocrities:

1. The architectural styles are as jumbled as a warehouse shelf at Toys- R-Us.
2. The central space (Cabot Square) is normally in deep shade.
3. The Isle is strewn with vast empty expanses of unused paving.
4. Some north-facing sunless waterfronts are devoted to cafes and some south-facing waterfronts to emptiness.
5. The new Thames-side walkway is as broad as it is vacant.
6. There is no coherent planting strategy and very few trees.
7. There are no sensibly planned pedestrian routes from anywhere to anywhere.
8. Cycle routes seem to have been planned by engineers with a contempt for cyclists.
9. The Isle has no sign of the smallest token of sustainable design.
10. The Isle appears to have more uniformed security guards than it has flowers—and they do not have dogs.

Others confirm the assessment. Ted Hollamby (1990: 12–15) argued the Docklands’ major asset, its waterscape, was largely ignored as a structuring device, and although large areas were preserved, they were done in such a way that they were unable to stamp their character on the new environment. Edwards (1992: 170) concludes that ‘The myth that urban quality can be created by private-sector developers enjoying unprecedented levels of design freedom should be finally buried by the example of the Isle of Dogs.’

But were these judgements made too soon? Even now, comparisons with other comprehensively designed financial centres in Europe (La Defense, Paris), China (Pudong, Shanghai) and the Middle East (Dubai, UAE) leave the area in a positive light (Hardy, 2008; Lang, 2005: 222; 239–240). Although much remains to be built, or even given planning permission, the evidence from analysis of the fourth wave proposals suggests that, if built out, for the first time the Island will begin to possess a continuous, connected urban fabric, and, with the arrival of Crossrail, an enviable public transport infrastructure (Fig. 52). In addition, the area will finally be a major residential, as well as office, location, benefit from a diversity of (pseudo-) public open and civic spaces, and possess a unique urban form with a distinct identity in both London and global terms. Even now,
therefore, it is too early to make final judgements, particularly given the massive transformation that is currently under way on large parts of the Island.

On the question of environmental sustainability, consideration of the concept has largely been absent from the debates about, and plans for, the Isle of Dogs, just as it has been largely absent from the wider urban renaissance agenda (see below). It has certainly failed to feature as a guiding force behind the architecture of the Island (despite the efforts of local school children to put it there—Fig. 53). Yet, despite this, the concentration of activity and mix of uses, all served by an increasingly impressive public transport network, has ensured that at least some environmental precepts have been met. Plans for the Millennium Quarter promise (at least on paper) to build on this.

Elsewhere, the impact is immediately tangible, if indirect—for example, the impact the Island’s development has had on the City of London. Despite unleashing the shackles of its conservation policy in the 1980s in order to deliver a more competitive context for new development (so rivalling and arguably undermining the Isle of Dogs—Gordon, 2001: 153–145), the City has been able to retain a good part of its historic fabric as the pressure for expansion was funnelled elsewhere. Today, Peter Rees, the longstanding City Chief Planner, is sanguine about Canary Wharf, arguing that the area is now as much part of London as the West...
End, but with a different character to the City, and one that for him satisfies the short-term and temporary demand for large floor plates (Lemon, 2008). For HRH the Prince of Wales, a still influential voice in debates about the built environment in the UK, the location also represents a major opportunity to save the rest of the capital from what to him is the damaging impact of high buildings on the historic fabric: ‘New skyscrapers should be built in Canary Wharf, rather than overshadowing Wren’s and Hawksmoor’s churches’ (quoted in Carpenter, 2008).

What is clear is that if London was to remain a global financial centre, then it needed to break free from the shackles of the Square Mile. The Isle of Dogs in many respects represented a logical and highly desirable location for this expansion to occur, and it is not surprising that the extent of this need and the associated opportunity was first recognised by the private sector, and only later accepted across the public sector, where today the need for a third commercial pole for London, outside the City and the West end, now goes unquestioned. To some degree, the conflation of the permissive enterprise culture of the LDDC and the growing demands of the financial sector were a happy coincidence. The result (eventually to be in excess of 2.5 million m of commercial space—Gordon, 2001: 164) has gone a long way to securing the future of London as a world financial capital. London and the UK would quite literally be significantly poorer if this development had not happened. Yet, many commentators believe that in the short term the cost has been high: in social inequity, urban fragmentation, public subsidy and private economic catastrophe.

But if over the long term the transformation of the Isle of Dogs has been in the interests of UK plc, has it also been in the interests of the local community, in other words, has the philosophy of trickle-down economics worked? The official government (New Labour) assessment of the regeneration gave the LDDC’s time at the helm a clean bill of health, concluding that the amount of new social housing created was higher than would have been created without the LDDC, whilst a total of £110 million was spent on social and community development (half on education and training) across the Docklands during the Corporation’s life (ODPM, 2004). Yet, indices of multiple deprivation compiled by central government in 2007 demonstrated that Tower Hamlets retains the most deprived wards in London (four in the county’s top 500—http://www.communities.gov.uk), and also that deprivation in Tower Hamlets remains evenly spread across the borough, with pockets of severe deprivation in all areas. Drawing on the 2004 version of this work, and at the finer Super Output Area scale of analysis, Tower Hamlets themselves have graphically demonstrated the proximity of very affluent areas on the Isle of Dogs with highly deprived areas, with deprivation focused on and around the Island’s council estates that seem to have remained largely untouched by social and economic regeneration (http://thisborough.towerhamlets.gov.uk/Default.asp).

Despite this, throughout the Docklands regeneration, the community has gradually become less vociferous and more compliant with the changes. It may be that the historic working class communities have become resigned to the change and weary of struggle, or simply that increasingly they have become out-numbered by the incomers, to such a degree that the original voices can no longer be heard. For Merrifield (1993: 1261), adopting Lefebvre’s (1991) term, conflict has instead become ‘inscribed’ in Docklands space, particularly in the Isle of Dogs, where the landscape that has emerged represents, for him, a spatial inscription of social conflict, and of:

such variegated processes as changing international divisions of labour, the rise of financial capital, structural unemployment and deindustrialisation, shifting relations between central and local government in Britain, and outbreak of community resistance.

Alternatively with, across Tower Hamlets, 40% of residents now working directly in the financial sector, it may simply be that most residents in one way or another are directly benefiting from the expansion of the sector in the area and no longer see any alternative.

Despite this, Hamnett (2003: 244) concludes that: ‘there is little doubt that the redevelopment of Docklands and Canary Wharf has generated winners and losers and that most of the winners are not locals’. For him,
this does not necessarily undermine the overall success of the scheme. Its success needs to be measured in terms of the massive redevelopment of Docklands in a way which was almost unimaginable fifteen years ago. . . . It is extremely doubtful that any of the alternative schemes being considered in the 1980s would have been anywhere near as successful.

Similarly, he argues that the manufacturing-based plans that were being considered in the 1970s were doomed to failure as manufacturing as a sector was in terminal decline, whilst what was required was an acceptance (forthcoming from the LDDC) that employment growth in a post-industrial era would come from different sources. The inevitable consequence was a different landscape on the Isle of Dogs, although one which could have paid far more regard to what was already there, in particular to the dire housing needs. He concludes:

more affordable housing could and should be provided to ensure that the local residents and their children can remain in the area. They should not be reduced to the status of children with their noses pressed against the glass of the new sweet shop but unable to go in and buy (Hamnett, 2003: 245).

Yet, even in this most intractable of problems, things are beginning to change. The most recent Mayor’s Annual Monitoring Report (2005–2006) demonstrated that average residential development densities in Tower Hamlets far outstripped those across London (including the City), at 486 units per hectare (up from 113 just five years earlier). This has helped to ensure that the borough contributed 2,734 new housing units in 2005–2006 (1,000 more than any other borough), of which 1,126 were affordable (600 more than any other borough) and 44% of the total (compared with 31% London-wide) (Mayor of London, 2007). With much of this development occurring or planned on the Isle of Dogs, the most recent wave of development is likely to have a significant impact on the social housing stock available to residents, at a time when affordability of the market stock has climbed well out of reach of many—the average property costing £390K in early 2008 (www.upmystreet.com), declining dramatically in late 2008 and 2009 (Kasriel 2009), but expected to increase again when the Crossrail effect begins to be felt (Thomas, 2007).

On other fronts, work by the IDCF (2004) to establish a baseline for their grant-giving priorities concluded that:

- 80% of children in Blackwall and 67% in Millwall (the two Isle of Dogs wards) live in households with no or low incomes—on the poorest estates the average income was just £13,800.
- Unemployment was 13.9% in Blackwall and 9.1% in Millwall, more than three times the national average.
- Tower Hamlets as a whole had the lowest level of adult literacy in the country.
- The perception of crime was high.

Their analysis revealed that the influence of Canary Wharf has been profound in driving up the affluence of the area, so much so that the two Island wards, alongside the city fringes, were the least deprived wards in the borough, and clearly outside the most deprived 20% of wards nationally. But the high levels of affluence amongst incomers effectively acts to mask pockets of extreme deprivation ‘which sit side by side with pockets of very significant wealth’ (IDCF, 2004: 3). So, although the labour market and opportunities have grown, the 13,500 living in the Island’s social housing estates remain largely excluded from the surrounding economy, with particular disadvantage felt amongst BME groups (ICDF, 2004: 6).

Despite the very obvious physical changes on the Island and the less obvious but still steady social and economic programmes that in recent years have continued to funnel resources into the Island’s most deprived communities, the area retains the same essentially divided character that the LDDC was so criticised for perpetuating in the 1980s. Ten years after the demise of the LDDC, the gap between the haves and the have-nots on the Isle of Dogs and in the wider Tower Hamlets area remains larger than ever, although the physical environment of the estates, access to London’s wider jobs market via the DLR and Jubilee line, and the availability of affordable units and training opportunities have all improved. Trickle-down is working, but very slowly indeed.

7.5. Have we seen an urban renaissance?

The Isle of Dogs has certainly been physically regenerated, parts of it twice in the last 30 years, but whether it has undergone a renaissance will depend on who you ask. If the test is whether developers are willing to invest, and service sector companies and their workers are prepared to locate in the area, then clearly a renaissance has taken place. If the area has, continental style, become a haven for cappuccino drinking and alfresco dining (Fig. 54), then again, yes, a renaissance has occurred. But if it means that this new wealth and opportunity is being shared by all, and that all sections of
society are now able to enjoy a coherent, connected and welcoming urban landscape, then change has occurred, but the Isle of Dogs still has some way to go (Fig. 55).

In unpacking New Labour’s urban renaissance, Colomb (2007: 6) identifies four key themes: the construction of a new urbanity; the concept of social mix as an engine for cohesion; strong local communities; and the idea of good urban design as a precursor to civility and citizenship. Unpacking what has occurred in the Isle of Dogs, one might conclude that on the first count, a new urbanity has certainly emerged, both physically, but more significantly in a willingness amongst investors to invest, and homeowners to buy, in the area. Not only has there been a huge growth in employment on the Island, but so too has the resident population grown, now approaching 30,000, up by over 50% since 1991 (LBTH, 2006c: 14). For Schoon (2001: 147) this huge return of jobs and population to inner London means that the story is far more about success than failure. He argues that the project:

is probably the world’s greatest feat of urban regeneration, and was a lot better than nothing. And nothing was pretty much what the residents of Docklands had had, under both Labour and Conservative governments, for years and years as one by one the capital’s docks closed through the sixties and seventies.

On the second count, at the macro scale there is certainly a much greater social mix than ever before, with the majority of incomers holding well-paid jobs and choosing to buy or rent from the burgeoning private rental market in the area. Today just one-third of homes on the Island are in the social rented sector, almost a complete reversal of the situation in the 1970s (IDCF, 2004: 31) and new affordable housing is finally being provided, albeit often physically separated in less advantageous locations or sites than its private counterparts. Yet, on the micro scale, communities remain starkly divided, both physically and socially, and a mix at this level has not so far occurred (Fig. 56).

On the third count, although strong, long-established communities exist in many of the Island’s council estates, these sit side by side with the more transient and
part-time residents occupying many of the new apartment blocks, where a high level of second-home ownership and churn is readily apparent. Butler (2004: 275), for example, in his analysis of middle-class gentrification in London, revealed that the typical occupants of the new residential developments in Docklands felt that where they lived was largely a relationship born of convenience rather than commitment, and ‘the attraction of Docklands was its lack of commitment’. ‘They did not wish to become integrated into their neighbourhoods, or become friendly with their neighbours; rather, they simply wanted “efficient” living arrangements with minimal commitments’ (Butler, 2004: 278). The findings are confirmed by the experiences on the ground of the Isle of Dogs Community Foundation, who have reported great difficulties building community capacity in such a context, and where involving younger residents in particular provides a major challenge (IDCF, 2004: 36).

Finally, on the question of design, analysing the various plans that have signalled the coming and passing of successive waves of the Isle of Dogs experiment, it seems clear that a lack of planning from the very start of the regeneration process has been perpetuated in a lack of convincing plan-making (if not development control) throughout the process and even today. In a very real sense, this has been and remains a market-led process, guided in large part by opportunity rather than planning. Even if the intention was that an initial period of market building and incrementalism would establish a market, after which normal planning service would resume, this does not seem to have happened, at least not if normal planning implies planning based on a coherent vision for the whole Island. Moreover, the initial period led to an incoherent landscape, through the subjugation of urban design to market forces, and to a landscape that in many of its essentials is still with us today, despite recent improvements. As an early Isle of Dogs developer put it:

The LDDC was Thatcher’s instrument to give developers the chance to make money from locations that would otherwise have remained derelict. It worked, but ignored the fact that buildings remain for a long time. The result is a tribute to capitalism but a poor legacy for future generations’ (Preston, 1998: 42).

Nevertheless, recent improvements in and around the Canary Wharf estate, and potential improvements (yet to be realised) in the Millennium Quarter, where the new public realm has yet to emerge, bode well for a less fragmented and more coherent urban fabric in the future.

In assessing the impact of the wider English urban renaissance on the locality, undoubtedly the greatest impact has been in the acceptance once again of higher density urban living on the basis of better urban design. This philosophy is firmly incorporated in the London Plan and in the emerging (if still problematic) LDF documents of Tower Hamlets. It is being delivered through development control processes at strategic and local scales, leading to a host of social benefits (via planning gain) and to the funding of the new public realm that is gradually emerging.

But the jury is still out, the redevelopment is still happening, and the city is not yet built. The evidence is mixed on whether an urban renaissance has occurred, but undeniably the area has been transformed and now plays an indispensable part in London’s global city role. Some sort of renaissance has therefore occurred, even if not of the type envisaged by the authors of Towards an Urban Renaissance (Urban Task Force, 1999) some 25 years after the redevelopment process of the Isle of Dogs began. In essence, this has been a renaissance born of private initiative and public subsidy that, once established, has only gradually incorporated a more proactive, if as yet still hesitant, public sector contribution to charting its future. The multiple public sector plans that have been produced over the course of this regeneration have largely been ineffective as a means to establish a clear vision for its future, and have only become effective when the lessons of the highly effective private sector alternative have been learnt. These are, that in England today, for planning to succeed requires a clear physical vision (to guide economic and social objectives), sustained commitment to its delivery and, above all, private sector buy-in and thereby resources.

We may yet end up with a well-shaped and cohesive part of the city that has a part to play beyond the very obvious economic role that it currently performs. The high cost of office space in London (the highest in the world, and three times more expensive than the next most expensive European city, Paris—Cheshire & Hilber, 2007), the massive planned expansions on site or on the drawing board, and the new determination of the public sector (local and London-wide) to shape this development in a more proactive and positive manner than in the immediate past, all seemed in early 2008 to bode well.

But planning of this type needs one more thing to succeed; a buoyant economy. By late 2008, all future plans were in doubt as the area moved once again into a more uncertain global economic climate, one in which commentators such as George Soros have persuasively argued that the super-boom of the last 60 years is finally coming to an end (http://www.ft.com), and that the
financial services on which the Island’s expansion has been predicated will be hit hardest. The fact that British Waterways has been actively considering pulling out of the massive Wood Wharf development (see Section 6) is a sign of these uncertain times (Wilner, 2008), as is the liquidation in 2008 of one of the Canary Wharf Group’s largest tenants—Lehman Brothers—accounting for 15% of the group’s income (http://www.bloomberg.com).

It may be that 2008 marks a turning point and the drawing to a close of the fourth wave, to be replaced by a period of stagnation; at least until the impact of Crossrail, and a possible fifth wave, begins to be felt. Alternatively, the credit crunch that is affecting the financial sector across the world may yet be short-lived, and its effect on the development of the Isle of Dogs just a blip in an otherwise relentless progress. A critical lesson from this whole analysis, and one that academic commentators as well as investors will do well to remember, is the importance of cycles of boom and bust to development (Hamnett, 2003: 213). Long-term success (or failure) can only be measured over the course of successive cycles of the property market. In regeneration of this scale, 35 years is just too soon to judge.

References


**Matthew Carmona** (BA, BArch, MA, PhD, ARB, MRPTPI, FRSA) is Professor of Planning and Urban Design and Head of the Bartlett School of Planning, University College London (UCL). He has previously lectured at the University of Nottingham and before that worked as a researcher at Strathclyde and Reading Universities, and as an architect in practice. His research has focused on the policy context for delivering better quality built and natural environments, having worked on a range of research projects examining:

- design policies and guidance
- design coding
- residential design and development processes

**Websites**

• delivering urban renaissance
• the value of urban and architectural design
• the working relationships between housing providers and planners
• measuring quality in planning
• managing external public space
• local environmental quality and standards
• contemporary London squares.
