

BRIEFING PACK

Regeneration and investment in the public realm

Dalston - 8 February 2013

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February 2013

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Dalston Area Action Plan, Section 6: Enhancing the Public Realm

Is this what you mean by localism? A project overview of 'Making Space in Dalston'.

TEN Group

TEN is a small group of senior local government officers in London who have met regularly over eight years to share ideas and exchange knowledge on how to achieve urban renaissance. Using the principle of *looking and learning* they visit pioneering projects to draw out lessons that can be applied in their own authorities. In the process the members develop their skills as urban impresarios and place-makers, and are able to build up the capacity of their authorities to tackle major projects.

Photographs: unless otherwise stated provided by TEN Group members and URBED Ltd

Front cover: Top left - Gillett Square; dalstonpeople.co.uk

Middle - Dalston peace mural; ghostsigns.co.uk

Right - Dalston Overground Station; opendalston.blogspot.com

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TEN Group | Fifth meeting of the Ninth Series

08 February 2013 | Dalston

BRIEFING DIGEST

The fifth meeting of the TEN Group in this ninth series aims to look at the role that public art and space plays in regeneration. Dalston with its reputation as a hotbed of artistic and cultural production seems like a great area to focus on. Because of rising property prices in areas nearby; artists and other new communities have moved in looking for a cheaper alternative to Shoreditch and Islington. Over a period of thirty years Dalston has gone from being a disadvantaged and isolated inner city area to an up and coming and well-connected commercial and residential location. In researching the area, the sub theme of the meeting became clear; local involvement is key to making great spaces in London. Instead of simply looking at sculptures and murals we will be considering community driven initiatives such as gardens, redundant space converted into studios and creative enterprises, urban farms, markets etc. In Dalston there is a legacy of community-driven development that predates the current interest from major property developers, which means that articulate local people are able to become key stakeholders and active participants in initiatives such as 'Making Space in Dalston' (a project developed and designed by muf architecture/art and J&L Gibbons landscape architects, funded by the Mayor of London's regeneration arm and Hackney Council)

Our walking tour will centre on Dalston Square, the first new major square in Dalston for over 100 years, which links two previously derelict sites owned by TfL and Hackney Council. The development provides 307 new homes in the first phase and 309 new homes in the second phase. It includes communal roof terraces, a new public library, retail units, cafes, workspace and a community facility. In addition to the Dalston Square Barratt development (www.barratthomes.co.uk/dalstonsquare) we will look at the following projects:

- Dalston Eastern Curve Garden. Awarded the 2010 Hackney Design Award, the Eastern Curve was built on overgrown, abandoned railway land secured with a mean while license and a governance structure of local interests.
- Farm Shop. Once a derelict shop and now the world's first urban farming hub - a workspace, cafe and events venue. (<http://farmlondon.weebly.com/farmshop.html>)
- Ridley Road Market. New shopping to supplement the market as well as public realm improvements including resurfacing, electricity provision to market stalls, cycle parking and improved lighting.
- Ashwin Workshop. Includes pioneering projects to convert redundant space for small enterprises and creative firms. Trees have been planted on street and flowering plants in pavement improve the open space.
- Gillett Square. Opened in 2006 to re-vitalize arts, culture and employment around a vibrant community space. (one of the few Mayor's Hundred schemes to be completed) Gillett Square. (<http://www.gillettsquare.org.uk>)

Other points of interest nearby are:

- A major area regeneration scheme in the 1990s funded through City Challenge, and attracting £200 million along with the singular public housing project at Holly Street.
- The impact of the Overground with its new stations

AFTERNOON PROGRAMME

- 2.30pm** Meet outside Levitt Bernstein's office, 1 Kingsland Passage, London, E8 2BB
- 2.35pm** Walking tour starts
- 4.00pm** Meet back at Levitt Bernsteins office for discussion.
- 5.30pm** Close of Meeting

Our tour will be led by Levitt Bernstein who have been heavily involved in development of the area and know the route well. We would like to thank Patrick Hammill for all his help in making this meeting possible and trust you will benefit from his expertise as former head of urban design and regeneration at Levitt Bernstein, a director of Renaisi, and long-term local resident. The discussion will take place in the Levitt Bernstein offices and will address the following:

1. How do you judge and measure success, and from whose perspective?
2. What causes an area's image and attractions for investors to change?
3. How do you assess the impact of public art and good landscape design?
4. How can you exploit improved connectivity and capture the benefits?
5. What can be done to help the less advantaged get on the ladder and not feel excluded?

DELEGATE LIST

John East | Director of Community Infrastructure | Newham Council

Karen Galey | Head of Economic development | Camden Council

Pat Hayes | Executive Director Regen & Housing | Ealing Council

Mark Lucas | Acting Chief of Planning and Regeneration | London Borough of Redbridge

Craig McWilliam | Executive Director | Grosvenor Developments

Sue Foster | Executive Director of Housing, Regeneration & Environment | Lambeth Council

Julia Moulder | Development Director | Catalyst Housing Limited

David Hennings | Consultant

Nicolas Falk | Founding Director | URBED

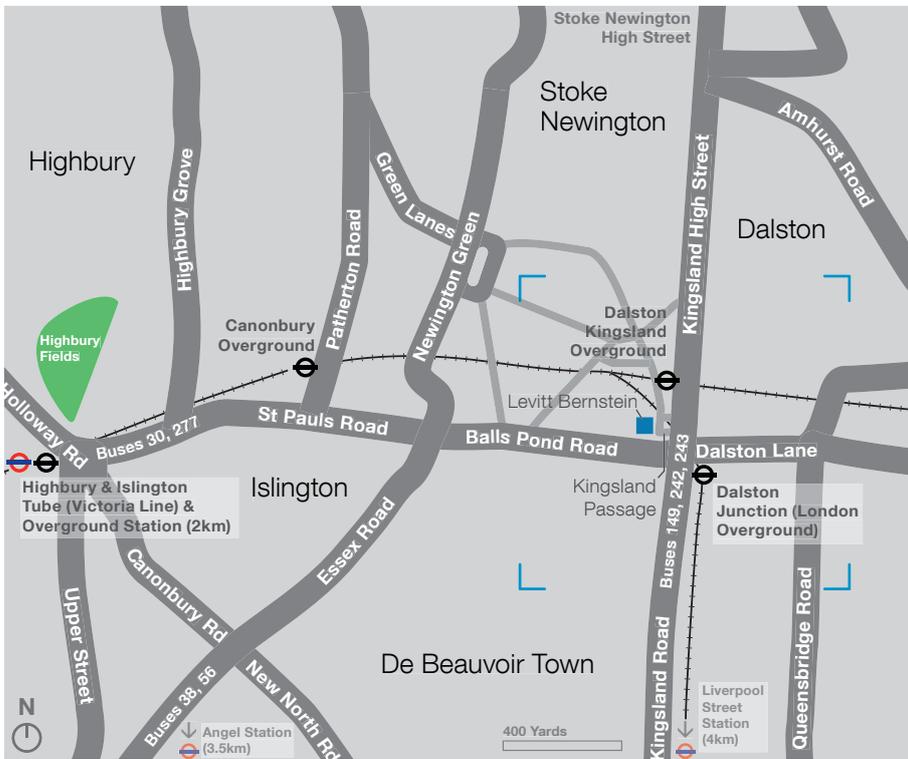
Jess Bousie | Executive Assistant | URBED

APOLOGIES

Marc Dorfman | Assistant Director Planning & Regeneration | Haringey Council

Stephen Tapper | Stephen Tapper Associates

Ed Watson | Assistant Director Regeneration and Planning | Camden Council



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Directions

By public transport

Train

Overground

Trains on the London Overground Network running between Richmond or Clapham Junction and Stratford stop at Dalston Kingsland Station. Trains on this line run four times an hour and connect to the underground network at Highbury and Islington. When exiting Dalston Kingsland Station turn right to head down Kingsland High Street, Kingsland Passage is then the second road on your right.

The office is a 3 minute walk across Kingsland High Street from Dalston Junction station (on the East London line). Trains run every 5 minutes and connect to the underground network at Whitechapel.

For timetables see www.nationalrail.co.uk.

Bus

From Highbury Station you can catch either the Overground train or the 30 or 277 bus.

From Angel Station catch either the 38 or the 56.

From Liverpool Street Station use 149, 242 or 243.

By bicycle

We have secure bicycle facilities on site.

By car

Limited on site parking is available on request. Pay and display parking is available off Bentley Road (see detail map).

You cannot turn onto Kingsland High Street from Balls Pond Road or Dalston Lane.

We are located outside the congestion charge zone.



Gillette Square
Mayors 100 spaces 2005
Masterplan 1998, opened 2006

Kingsland Dalston
Opened 1983

Kingsland Centre
Late 80's

Arcola Theatre 2012

The Print House
Bootstraps 1977
Ashwin Street

Road Safeguarding removed mid 80's

Balls Pond Road

LBA

Dalston Lane

Dalston City Challenge
1993-98
Planned total spend
£200m

Dalston Junction
open April 2010

Housing
start 2006
£160m

De Beauvoir
Square

Holly Street Regen
1993-2012
£100m total spend

A10 corridor
EH/HLF/LBH
Conservation Area Partnership
£1.17m
1998-2001

Kingsland
Basin
1995-

Viaduct purchased
LBH following
closure 1986

Hackney
Community
College

Shoreditch New Deal
1998 - 2008
£45m Grant funding

Old Street

South Shoreditch
Conservation Area Partnership

Map showing destinations on our walking tour

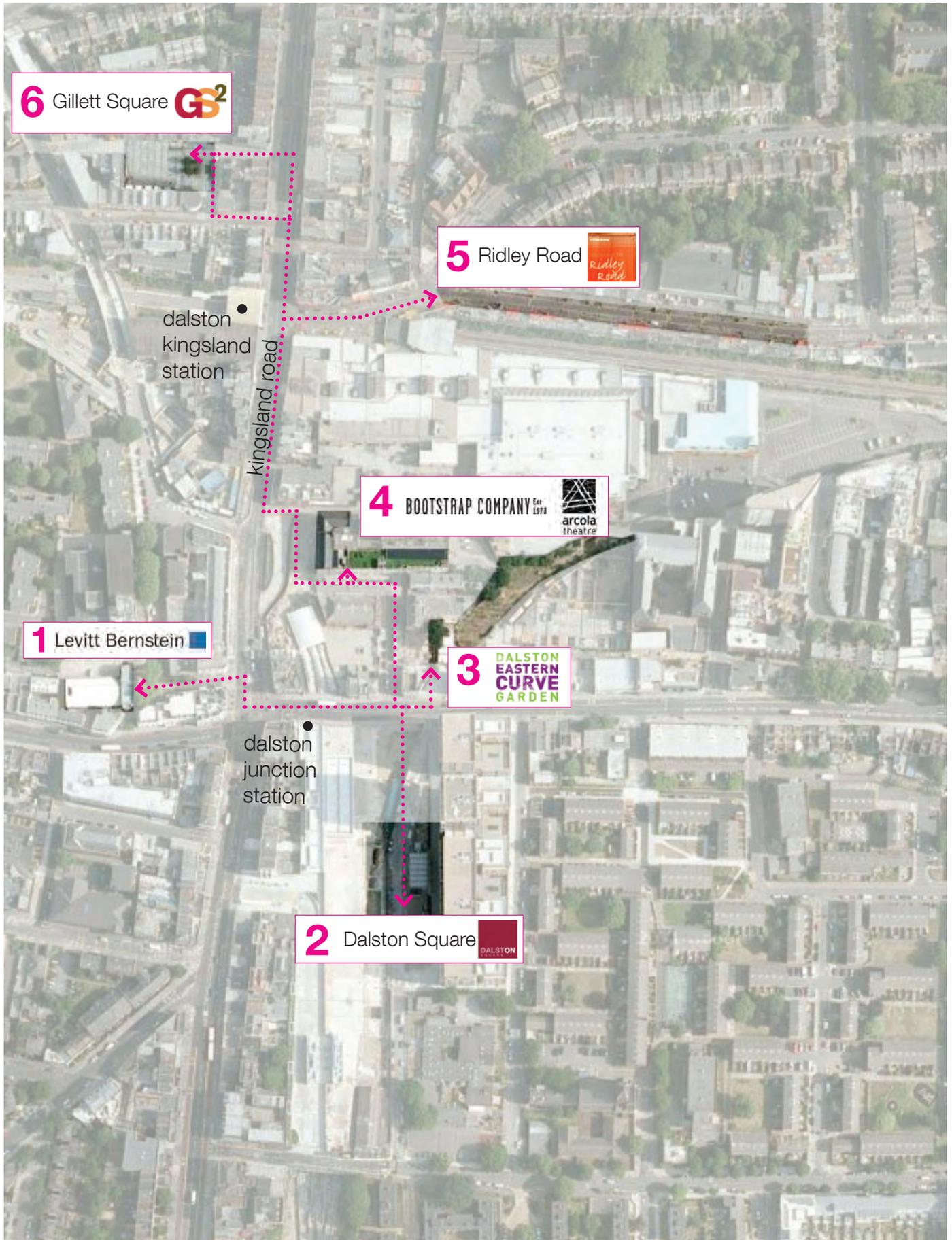
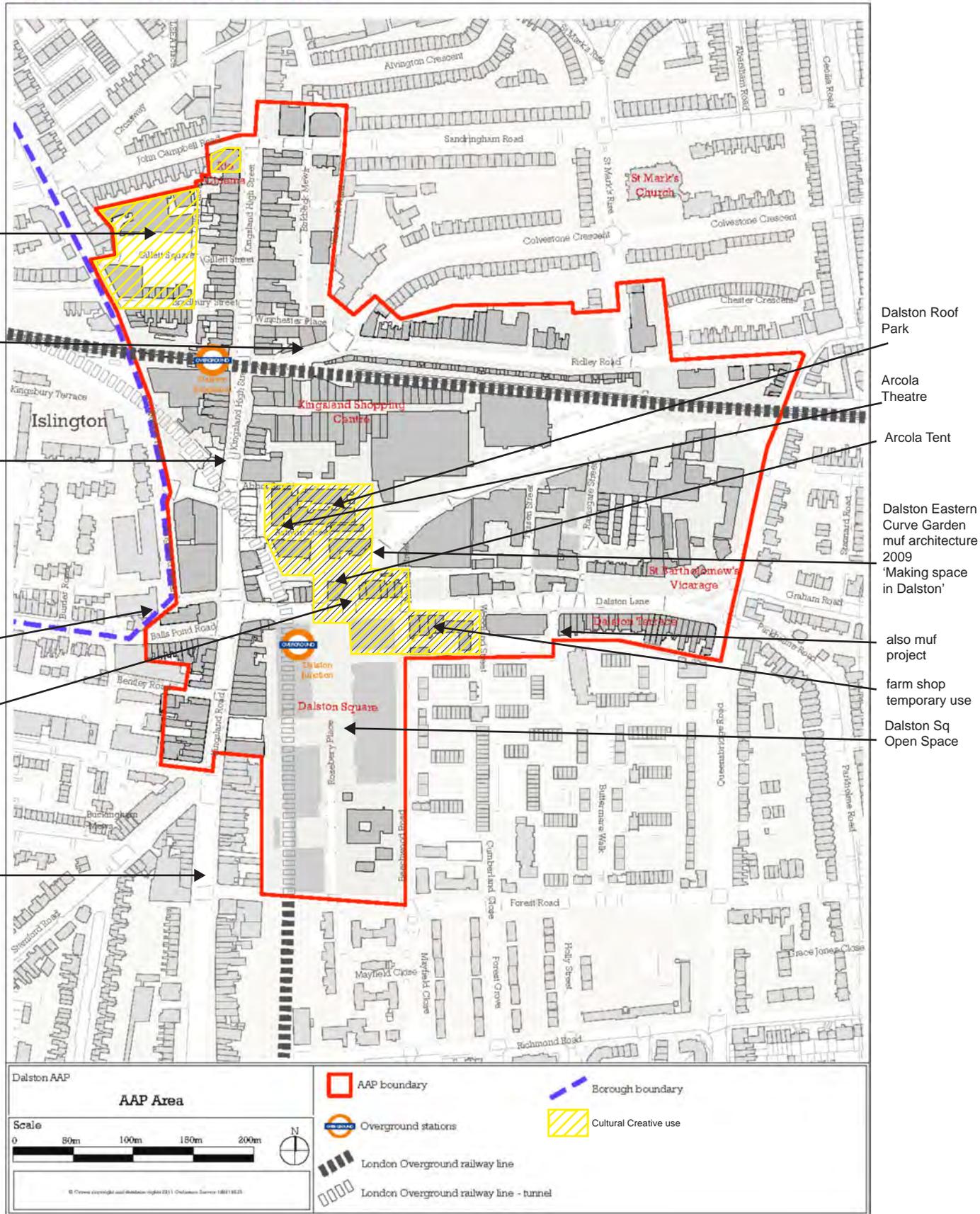


Figure 2: Dalston AAP Area



With the 'Arts' and Streetscape improvements added.

06 *Enhancing the Public Realm*

Objective 3: To revive the public realm by developing a network of new and improved public open spaces that are attractive, safe and accessible for people to enjoy.

6.1 Overview of the Public Realm

The public realm encompasses streets, public squares, parks and everything within, including benches, plantings, paving, street lamps, signs and more.

At present, a significant weakness of Dalston town centre is the lack of public open space (e.g. squares, parks, play spaces). Whilst the activity and vibrancy of the streets is a positive feature, there is a distinct lack of space which people can enjoy. The AAP addresses this deficiency by designating areas of public realm to create a coherent network of spaces and places that will help define a vibrant town centre character and support a variety of activities.

The Public Realm Strategy is indicated in Figure 12 and combines public open space proposals and proposed improvements to transport-related infrastructure.

POLICY DTC 11 – PUBLIC REALM QUALITY

1) All new development will be required to make a positive contribution to the quality of the public realm. Development must:

a) Promote active building frontages that contribute to the public realm visually and functionally by providing active building frontages and ground floor uses that face onto the public realm, including new and improved building frontages identified in Figure 5;

b) Emphasise the points of arrival into the town centre (as identified in Figure 12) through innovative surface redesign and improved pedestrian crossings;

c) Respect public open spaces and streets by ensuring that building forms are appropriately scaled to their context and do not provide excessive overshadowing;

d) Accommodate a range of functions and activities within the public spaces to cater and appeal to Dalston's diverse population, including developing and/or enhancing the following five principal public spaces identified in Figure 12 by drawing on existing and emerging public realm character identified in 6.2:

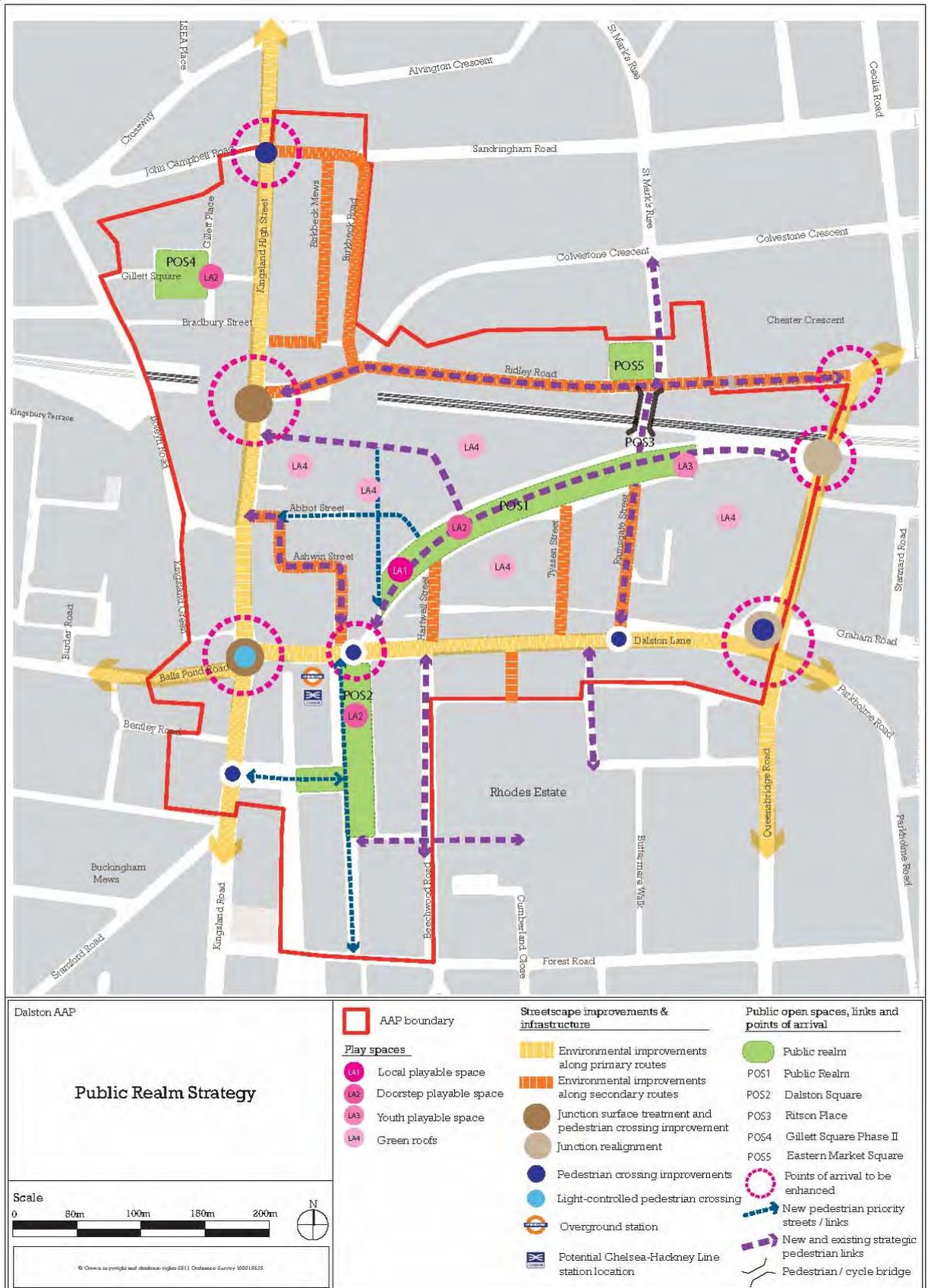
- A new public realm along the existing Eastern Curve (POS1);**
- Dalston Square (POS2);**
- A new 'youth space' at the eastern end of the Eastern Curve (Public Realm) close to the proposed pedestrian/cycle bridge – Ritson Place (POS3);**
- Gillett Square (POS4); and**
- A new market square at the eastern end of Ridley Road - Market Square (POS5);**

e) Help reinforce a clear street hierarchy by implementing a cohesive approach to streetscape design with bolder designs along principal routes and spaces and designs of a more intimate nature along secondary routes;

f) Utilise the most suitable, durable and high quality materials available within the public realm, with special attention to detail and maintenance; and

g) Specify management and maintenance regimes for areas of the public realm.

Figure 12: Public Realm Strategy



6.2 Local Distinctiveness

It is important that any new areas of public realm draw upon existing character such as:

- Kingsland High Street – a constrained and contained pedestrian environment, but always busy and rich in its diversity of activities;
- Ridley Road Market – with its intensity of activity contained within an intimately-scaled street environment;
- Gillett Square – the only public square within the area, with its contemporary design and use of high quality materials providing a forum for cultural and community activities; and
- Ashwin Street – an emerging cluster of unique creative/cultural, community and third sector uses, centered around the locally listed Reeves & Son building.

These are accompanied by Dalston Square, designed to accommodate a range of functions including children's play and community entertainment or exhibitions.

6.3 Principal New Public Spaces

Five new or improved principal open spaces are proposed as part of the public realm strategy.

1. Eastern Curve: Public Realm (POS1 and POS3)

Redevelopment of Kingsland Shopping Centre would facilitate the creation of a major new public realm along the Eastern Curve. As discussed in Chapter 15, should redevelopment of the Shopping Centre not be pursued, a series of more modest proposals could be considered.

The Eastern Curve public realm would constitute a bold new space that will benefit its location in the heart of the town centre. The public realm is envisaged as a series of inter-linked spaces of different character and atmosphere (that could accommodate areas of green space). Pedestrian and cycle routes would provide seamless connections between Dalston Square / Dalston Junction station (and potential Chelsea-Hackney station), the new shopping centre and other facilities of the Eastern Curve area, with Ridley Road Market beyond.

It is envisaged as a series of urban spaces that vary in the degree of activity that they accommodate. A lively urban space could be provided at the western end fronted onto by shops, cafes and potentially other community facilities, with outdoor seating to take full advantage of the sunny open southern aspect. Close to this could be a play space.

At the far eastern end, a 'youth space' could be provided close to the proposed pedestrian/cycle bridge (referred to as Ritson Place POS3). This is where young people aged 12 and above could meet and take part in informal sporting activities. The space could be given creative architectural expression.

At present, the gateway to the 'Eastern Curve' (where the Peace Mural adjoins Dalston Lane) is occupied by a successful community garden

installation delivered as a joint project between London Borough of Hackney and Design for London as a temporary improvement scheme located on both Council and privately owned land. While this project is temporary in nature, it demonstrates just one of the many types of spaces that could be possible as part of a broader vision for a new urban public realm along the Eastern Curve that could come forward as part of the redevelopment of the Shopping Centre.

2. Dalston Square (POS2)

Dalston Square is currently under construction and will be fronted onto by a new public library and archive and new shops and restaurants etc, with residential use above. Approved plans include a civic space with artwork and public seating where people can meet close to the new library, an entertainment space for community performances and exhibitions and a children's play area with some green spaces.

3. Gillett Square (Phase II) (POS4)

The redevelopment of Stamford Works could complete Gillett Square – creating active frontage along its northern side and potentially enlarging the space itself. This could include a small informal play area to help redress current deficiencies. Some play equipment has been introduced to the square as part of the joint LBH and Design for London 'Making Space in Dalston' project.

4. Eastern Market Square (POS5)

The space at the eastern end of Ridley Road could be redesigned as a much improved market square - a hard-landscaped space of high-quality materials that provides a meeting place for local people and signifies the eastern terminus of Ridley Road Market. The Square could be fronted onto by a new four-storey building with a south-facing facade that will anchor the open space and also help cross-fund its delivery. The new square would be used during the day as a marketplace, but could take on a different character in the evenings and could be used for temporary installations and/or events.

Surface water levels and flood risk should be considered as part of any development proposals, including public realm improvements (refer to Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment and emerging Surface Water Management Plan). Similarly, biodiversity should be protected and enhanced (refer to Core Strategy Policy 27 and emerging Local Biodiversity Action Plan).

6.4 Management and Maintenance of the Public Realm

Significant expenditure in the public realm would be wasted, and the improvements would degrade, if adequate management and maintenance regimes of the streets and public places were not in place. Well maintained streets and public places encourage their use and add to their vibrancy.

Proposals for improvements to the public realm should be considered in a holistic way, taking account of the lifetime of the project in terms of initial investment and levels of on-going maintenance. This management and maintenance plan has been detailed in the implementation plan in Part D.

6.5 Play and Recreation

Dalston town centre is at present deficient in children's play facilities and the Council therefore considers it a priority area for the provision of new play space. The AAP identifies areas for new open space and play space (Public Realm Strategy 12) following GLA guidance.

POLICY DTC 12 – SPACES FOR PLAY AND RECREATION

1) Development should incorporate the quantum and types of new play facilities identified in Figure 12. Proposed playable spaces are distributed throughout the area and inter-linked via safe and attractive pedestrian routes as follows:

- a) A new local park within the Eastern Curve Public Realm, to include both 'Local Playable Space' (LPS) where children aged up to 11 can play and a Doorstep Playable Space (DPS) for the under 5's.**
- b) An informal 'Doorstep Playable Space' within Dalston Square.**
- c) An active youth space at the eastern end of the 'Eastern Curve', provisionally named Ritson Place.**
- d) An informal 'Doorstep Playable Space' within Gillett Square.**
- e) Unofficial play areas in addition to those identified above should be considered.**

Landscape improvements elsewhere within the town centre will present additional opportunities for incorporating features of interest to children and their carers. Studies of children's play have emphasised the appeal and use of unofficial play areas in addition to planned children's play areas (roof gardens should also be considered in this regard).

IS THIS WHAT YOU MEAN BY LOCALISM ?

Can we learn
from *Making Space
in Dalston*?

What do local
people know
that those in the
town hall don't?

How do we
build trust?

Are we ready
to invest in
a process?

How local
is local?

What is
the value of
people who work
for free?

What is
*deliberative
planning*?

Can I trust
a process with
no predictable
outcome?

Can less money
lead to
better solutions?

Should
I really include
everybody?

What is
emancipatory
practice?

What is
Localism?

IS THIS WHAT YOU MEAN BY LOCALISM ?

Essay by Kieran Long

Work by
J&L Gibbons LLP
muf architecture/art LLP

Supported by
Mayor of London
Hackney Council

March 2012

INTRODUCTION

I am delighted to introduce this superb celebration of all that the *Making Space in Dalston* initiative has achieved so far. Go and see all that has been happening there and, with this book in your hands, understand how it came about.

In these difficult economic times we must all do everything we can to create jobs, opportunities and growth. We must also ensure Londoners are equipped to take advantage of those opportunities where they are available by arming them with the right skills and attitude.

This initiative is a brilliant example of how local involvement is key to making good places in London. Seizing the benefits of regeneration, and carefully improving the public's realm can do so much to support a strengthening of community life and a new vibrancy. This is indeed a valuable contribution to the debate about localism in our great city.

Concordia discors [Harmony in discord]

Horace



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Boris Johnson'.

Boris Johnson
Mayor of London

The *Making Space in Dalston* project is a test case for how the idea of the Big Society will play out at the point of delivery of new urban plans, public spaces and buildings. The project was developed and designed by muf architecture/art and J&L Gibbons landscape architects, funded by the Mayor of London's regeneration arm and Hackney Council. The budget was small (£1m), but the ambition high. The results were a range of public realm projects that were diverse in their natures but rooted in a deep understanding of the area. The projects involved local individuals and businesses in maintenance and upkeep, taught young people new skills, nurtured lasting relationships between individuals and institutions and helped citizens ask questions of their local authority about the future of their town centre. The timing of the commission meant that there could be no official consultation period, but before any proposals were made a wide ranging conversation was initiated which continued for two years.

Making Space in Dalston addresses local concerns in concert with strategic ones, and was delivered in partnership with local people and public sector stakeholders. Despite being conceived over 3 years ago, it is the definitive retrospective exemplar of how some of the thinking in the recent Localism and Decentralisation Bill could play out if the necessary investment were available. The recent passage of the bill prompts the need for initiatives like this one to be shared and understood as good examples.

So far so optimistic. But alongside its successes, *Making Space in Dalston* also reveals the difficulties of involving local people in decisions and delivering projects addressed at their concerns and desires. This ongoing project has been a long and sometimes painstaking process of mediating competing interests. The project's leaders have had to say no to worthy requests, have proceeded with others that not everyone agreed with. Everybody involved in the project is proud of its successes, but also highlights

the lessons it offers for local authorities, planners, consultants, and developers.

This publication is aimed at planners, project managers, politicians and other local authority stakeholders, about how to build the business case internally for design focus and deliver good place making. It also has much to teach developers, architects and urban designers about how places can be planned and projects delivered in a meaningful way for local people. It predates and pre-empted the policies now emerging from central government and as such holds up a mirror to localism, offering lessons and demonstrating risks from the point of view of those working on the ground.

Making Space in Dalston is also a design-led example of deliberative planning. This is a phrase often used today to describe a process in constant feedback between thinking and doing, where partners prefer to get their hands dirty in collaboration with local people, rather than spending money on reports kept on file in council planning offices. The outcomes of the project, which Design for London is now applying to other projects, are the built consequences of a long-term investment in trust by all partners, and the enduring legacy of the project are both the projects themselves, but also this trust.

WHAT'S NEEDED

If Localism is to have a role in changing places, there are clear requirements above and beyond simply the devolution of decisions to local people. One of the most critical is a mechanism to translate the interests of composite client groups into meaningful proposals. For *Making Space in Dalston*, that role was played by muf and J&L Gibbons. Their role was not just to answer a brief. It has been to co-write that brief, invite the participation of stakeholders who might typically oppose development, win the trust of those stakeholders, develop personal relationships, have ideas that respond to those conversations and then substantiate

them. Delivering meaningful design while keeping the promises made to local people and institutions is a challenge when working with limited resources. Also, as the brief was re-written with local people, the designers had to ensure that the client was on board as the project evolved. All of this has taken commitment and a skill set developed from the experience of many years working with communities and multi-headed clients.

Mark Breatley, head of Design for London, says: "In specific places like Dalston you are faced by the challenge of getting the right kind of talent involved in the process." It is true that the expertise to deliver projects in this spirit is rare, but it is possible to find, and this talent requires investment and practical encouragement. *Making Space in Dalston* was effectively undertaken as a research project by the architects involved, and the fees they were paid were not enough to cover the time demanded by such in depth collaboration with local stakeholders. Muf and J&L Gibbons gave much of their time pro bono to the project over three years. The public sector also put in time well in excess of what a work plan would describe. This can not be relied upon as a model of how to procure design services in the future.

There is also a key role fulfilled by local government agencies and local authorities who can bring to bear expertise that can make projects like this happen. The Localism Bill proposes directly elected mayors in more UK cities, and it was a mayoral agency, Design for London, that enabled and provided funding for this project. Their stewardship allowed *Making Space in Dalston* to be developed gradually by its authors in response to conversations rather than working to a predetermined brief, ensuring that the consultants were re-procured and given an ongoing role in the process. Design for London has also seen its resources cut as part of the recent savings, and repositories of skills like this one, that could help deliver localism in the public realm, face uncertain long-term futures. *Making Space in Dalston* helped Design for London to demonstrate its value within London Government at a time of restructuring and staff cuts.

The local authority, too, has had to be open minded about an unconventional process. As Andrew Sissons, Head of Regeneration Delivery for Hackney Council, says of one of the key projects, the Eastern Curve garden: “It has a nice energy to it and we’ve been very light touch on it. It’s completely out of the normal way of doing things.” The success of the project has depended on a local authority trusting the team to pursue a process, the outcome of which has not always been predictable.

DALSTON: THE BACKGROUND

Dalston is in the London Borough of Hackney, and oriented around Kingsland Road, an ancient route into London, still a major traffic artery and a bustling high street.

The area has a long history of culture and community-led development, which predates and forms the background to *Making Space in Dalston*. Dalston has celebrated cultural venues like the Arcola Theatre, Dalston Jazz Bar and Dalston Theatre (which had been the home of the famous Four Aces club until it became derelict in the 1990s and was demolished to local outcry in 2007), plus a density of studio spaces and other venues that make it a natural magnet for artists and creative industry workers. Dalston also has a thriving retail centre, oriented around the busy Ridley Road market, which sells cheap and diverse goods.

The recent history of Dalston’s physical development is dominated by the arrival in 2010 of the East London Line at Dalston Junction and the subsequent, very visible, housing developments prompted by the arrival of the new station. Dalston is also changing due to rising property prices in areas nearby; artists and other new communities have moved in looking for a cheaper alternative to Shoreditch and Islington, and because of Dalston’s own reputation as a hotbed of artistic and cultural production, and its vibrant night time economy.

There is a legacy of community-driven development in Dalston that predates the current interest from major property developers, and provided articulate local people who were able to become key stakeholders and active participants in the process. In particular, the work of Hackney Co-operative Developments at Gillett Square, which identified and initiated a series of developments that result in the high quality public space we see today at Gillett Square, and the buildings around it. This work represents an alternative model of development to those led by developers, and has meant that stakeholders like Hackney Cooperative Development (HCD) were well equipped to actively participate in the process of *Making Space in Dalston*.

REGENERATION, CONFLICT & THE MAKING SPACE IN DALSTON PROCESS

The stakeholders of *Making Space in Dalston* have different takes on the success of the various projects, but all of them agree on one thing – the process has not ended with one happy family, neither are the outcomes simple and fixed. Perhaps one of the most significant legacies of the project is that it has allowed conflicts within the development process to come to a head and be expressed openly and in the public realm. This has meant that despite opposing views, the groups consulted on the project feel that they have been listened to and have ownership over the outcomes.

The longer term benefit is that these lines of communication remain open today as new projects emerge, allowing a continuing dialogue around the future shape of Dalston town centre.

The initial prompt for the project was the more conventional and large-scale development of Dalston Square (a residential development by a partnership including the London Development Agency, Hackney Council, Transport for London and Barratt Homes). These large buildings, built over the new Dalston

Junction station, was undertaken in a way that responded to mainstream policies of urban regeneration of recent years. The site was created by the construction of a concrete raft over the station which was part-funded by the public sector with developer contributions. The huge site is being built out by Barratt Homes as sole developer.

Dalston Square is exemplary in terms of mainstream housing policy: substantial investment in infrastructure, high density development at a transport node and an ongoing conversation about architectural quality of both buildings and public spaces. However, for community groups, the top-down process left a legacy of distrust and scepticism. Some, like Hackney Cooperative Developments, felt that the project was designed to alter the centre of gravity of Dalston's town centre, and compromised their own attempts to make a local centre at Gillett Square, just a short walk away. Local campaigning group Open Dalston felt that the process was opaque to them and that their concerns about the heritage and character of the area were not listened to. They also felt that the architectural and urban character of the development was not relevant to Dalston, contrasting markedly as it does in scale and architectural expression with the surrounding streets.

The anger and feelings of impotence on their part centred around the perceived lack of understanding of the history of Dalston and the value of community assets on the part of the development partners. One of the principal flashpoints was the decision by the council to approve the demolition of the historic Dalston Theatre building, which had been home to the infamous Four Aces music venue. This demolition, after a vociferous campaign to save it, had radicalised opposition to the council's plans, and was an emotive topic. The strategies behind Dalston Square, to these local groups, was ironic. They felt that this kind of development was in danger of eradicating the very identity of Dalston that made it attractive to the developer in the first place.

Adam Hart, director of HCD, says: "It was so clear to us that the historical value [of the theatre] was largely unknown to people in the town hall. The first error

in our view is that the powers that be didn't first go out to consult with the likes of us for these plans. We were essentially given one option and told well if you don't agree with this you're not going to get anything."

During the campaigns against the development, it became clear that some of the consultation methods used for the original application for the Dalston Square development had not worked effectively. Andrew Sissons says: "I think essentially that we were focussed on the big ticket issues for Dalston – Dalston Square, the plan to redevelop the shopping centre, a future Crossrail Two station, and the sites that could help us meet our objectives with GLA housing targets. So I think there was a concern from residents that it was all focussed on big ticket items. We had to find projects we could all coalesce around."

Lord Low of Dalston, a patron of Open Dalston, had been vocal about the problems in the House of Lords, and lessons were learned. Jo Gibbons was appointed as landscape architect for the public space of Dalston Square, and strongly encouraged Barratt Homes to adopt a new approach to consultation. This led to the first conversations with local groups, and germinated the idea of *Making Space in Dalston*.

Tobias Goeverdt of Design for London, who initially acted as client in the early stages of *Making Space in Dalston*, and who continues to lead the project from Design for London/ Greater London Authority, says that the outcome of the Dalston Square had brought to light groups within the community that needed to have a say in the future of the place. "I started to wake up to the fact that there was a group of people [in Dalston] whose arguments I could totally understand who were not involved enough in the process and who were angry," he says. "When muf and J&L Gibbons then came forward with a proposal to unpack this whole story around who's there and what they want, I very much supported that. It was exactly the right thing to do." The two architects first met at a design coordination group for Dalston Square (set up by Design for London), as muf were designing the interior of the new library, and J&L Gibbons were working on the square.

The aims of *Making Space in Dalston* were never to convince every stakeholder that there was one answer to the question of how to make a decent public realm for Dalston. Instead, it aimed to involve people in those decisions, and allowed local partners to take ownership and in some cases governance of the projects. This complex negotiation was carried out while delivering to a time programme that was challenging in itself.

These conflicts could be passionate on both sides, and there were certain individuals in the process who bore the brunt, some of it deriving from the frustrations of Dalston Square. Ben Todd, Director of the Arcola Theatre, says that he had his share of shouting matches, but that this conflict demonstrated people's passion for the project. He says: "There were some community groups throwing bricks at each other [metaphorically speaking], but I would say that all that conflict showed that people cared. *Making Space* shows that if you drop £1 million into the hands of the right consultants, you'll get a lot of people wound up and something really good can happen."

Marie Murray of Open Dalston says: "This was a coming together of quite strong community organisations, strong individuals and designers and the powers that be, all coming together and something gelling. Some of it by design and some of it is the way it panned out."

BUILDING CONSENSUS & INVESTING SWEAT EQUITY

A stated aim of the government's Localism Bill is to remove barriers to development, and enable local people to initiate change that influences the future of their neighbourhoods. One of the potential barriers to this are conventional masterplanning processes, which can be very top-down affairs, directed by the local authority and its consultants, with public consultation undertaken as part of this larger process. Making

community projects relevant and integral to large-scale regeneration projects is also a profound challenge, as large developments often appear (to local people) to continue unchecked while there are constant fights for the smaller amounts of money needed to deliver local, public projects. In Dalston today, you can observe this tension on the ground. The Eastern Curve Garden, a place of vibrant community activity is struggling to maintain revenue funding of mere tens of thousands of pounds as the Dalston Square development (total budget £168 million), just across the road, continues to release properties on to the market.

Making Space in Dalston began with the intention of trying to create a dialogue with Dalston Square about what the future of the place might be. Its ethos was to show and build commitment to a process, without full prior knowledge of what the outcome might be. While the aim was never to come up with a masterplan, the scale and significance of the resulting projects revealed the qualities and potential of the various sites. Local community groups and local people, through their very direct involvement with these projects, also invested their own significant sweat equity. This investment has ranged from the efforts of residents and children at the Somerford Grove estate participating in the gardening workshops run by local gardener Robin Grey to the management of the Eastern Curve garden, shared by the Arcola Theatre, Open Dalston and others. There are many other examples.

This investment on the part of local people demonstrates that the process gathered trust and made people enthusiastic about public space in Dalston. But Andrew Sissons of Hackney Council warns that getting this voluntary resource is not a way of simply saving money, and must be properly resourced. "I hope that people get more involved and contribute to better town centres. But I do think it needs to be properly resourced." If projects like this are attempted using only voluntary resource, there are questions as to how democratic, and high quality, they are likely to be. There is a need to invest in mechanisms for bringing stakeholders and local people together meaningfully and to invest in their future sustainability.

DELIVERING PROJECTS AT SPEED WITH FULL PARTICIPATION

A concern raised about a new 'localist' planning regime based on large amounts of public participation is that it has the potential to strangle the planning process with delays due to the concert of voices demanding input on projects. In fact, the projects of *Making Space in Dalston* happened at pace – all were developed with stakeholders, designed, received planning permission and were built within 12 months.

The ability of this complex process to result in swift action is down to the trust and enthusiasm for the projects that was built up through the process. Also, because people were involved in projects from the beginning, they supported them at planning application stage – disagreements were thrashed out beforehand. The architects and the local authority had the ability to react quickly and produce proposals for which they could be confident there was broad public support.

This teamwork was crucial for winning commitment: by constructing a robust business case, and having a convincing presentation of the arguments for investing in a design-led solution was key to securing the project's funding.

Andrew Sissons says: "We got to a place where there was a level of trust – between council, stakeholders and architect and people from the community. That takes a lot of time of going out and attending meetings."

Part of the reason for effective delivery was due to the personal commitment made by all parties, from Hackney Council's Clerk of Works Paul Farrell, to the young men from Forest Road Youth Hub who dedicated their time to the construction of the barn. These commitments created a continuity of key individuals within the client, designer, community and contracting organisations, all of whom invested significant time in the project and each other.

The project also relied on close management by J&L Gibbons and muf to ensure that communications

were fluid and open, and they ensured that briefing sessions were set up with local councillors as well as the LDA, DfL and borough officers to build and maintain client confidence in the project. This most clearly manifested itself at critical moments when funding was at stake, or timescale, personnel changes or procurement issues threatened the process. At one point, the threat was a single word: when it became clear that the inclusion in documents of the world 'culture' would exclude the project from a particular source of funding, the team had to act fast. The strategic, behind the scenes role of the architects in handholding, maintaining the confidence of all parties in the process, was critical to the success of *Making Space in Dalston*.

TEMPORARY PROJECTS AS ACTION RESEARCH FOR A NEIGHBOURHOOD

Making Space in Dalston realised that the speed of its delivery presented an opportunity to road test the assumptions and propositions of the masterplan for Dalston town centre that had already been commissioned by Hackney Council.

Meanwhile, Design for London, part of the LDA, had applied on the borough's behalf for funding for the *Making Space in Dalston* work, and that money came with the covenant that it must be spent quickly. This meant that the ideas about Dalston's public realm coming from the *Making Space in Dalston* project were to be delivered in a much shorter timescale than the projects in Hackney Council's Area Action Plan, which are dependent on developer financing and large-scale planning permissions.

Former Hackney Council project manager Bruce McRobie, who was responsible for *Making Space in Dalston* and sat on the steering group of the Dalston Square development, says: "Short-term doesn't mean the same as temporary, but the projects [in *Making*

Space in Dalston] had to be deliverable quickly, and the proposals had to be free of planning and land-use issues.”

The best example, and McRobie’s favourite project in the *Making Space* plan, is the Eastern Curve Garden, a key part of the masterplan strategy but at the time an unloved and inaccessible empty site in the town centre. The local authority’s masterplan had designated this as a new street, but J&L Gibbons and muf proposed turning it into a garden, celebrating urban ecology, advocating food growing and testing the potential of a public open space in this location. The detailed design work undertaken was combined with working out a temporary lease for the land, and helping to establish a governance structure for the resulting garden, while training local young people and directly involving them in the construction of Dalston Barn.

Liza Fior of muf initiated this transformation when her contact with the Barbican Art Gallery resulted in a proposal for an art commission on what is now the Eastern Curve Garden in 2008. Dalston Mill, designed by Exyzt Architecture, and a recreation of Agnes Denys’ 1982 artwork Wheatfield (originally made for another contentious site in Lower Manhattan) was built as part of the Barbican’s Radical Natures exhibition and brought the 15,000 visitors to the site in three weeks, while also bringing London-wide attention to Dalston’s transformation and possibly helping to secure the capital funding of £1 million. muf and J&L Gibbons followed this up in 2009 with Dalston Barn (also built designed with Exyzt, and one of the six built projects illustrated in this publication), a community building that is now looked after by a management group run by local organisations. The Arcola Theatre acts as the responsible body for the garden, managing its small budget, but Open Dalston and others are also responsible for its management and staffing.

The landscape adjoining the barn is a green haven, working with the existing ecology to create a tranquil spot. Local schoolchildren maintain an edible garden here, and the barn itself is used for a variety of community uses, given life by the constant commitment and goodwill of groups like Open Dalston and the Arcola Theatre who were determined enough to resolve

disagreements about governance and management. Ongoing revenue funding is still a severe challenge. The Mayor of London has agreed a second year of funding to maintain the garden’s activities, but the management group is now looking at alternative sources of funding for future years.

Bruce McRobie adds: “I think that the project has given the masterplan a reality, rather than it being just a book sitting on a shelf. If you hadn’t done any of this it would be easy to come along and say well this masterplan is wrong. But now they’ve actually made a start to it it almost entrenches it.” The Eastern Curve is both an amenity for locals today, and a live test of the masterplan ahead of time. It demonstrates the potential to ‘interpret’ a local authority’s masterplan with input from the local constituency, taking broad-brush aspirations and articulating them in ways the community can understand and experience.

IS THIS WHAT YOU MEAN BY LOCALISM?

How do you make a planning process that results in real, visible change, that responds to local people’s desires and also contributes to an ongoing, strategic plan for a place? That is the challenge that *Making Space in Dalston* takes on, and there are many valuable lessons that emerge from the completed projects. Together, they constitute a method for a kind of planning that has much to say about the new political discourse of Localism. It demonstrates that the results of engaging meaningfully with local people and groups are not predictable, and the outcomes are sometimes born of conflict as much as consensus. *Making Space in Dalston* is a great example of how these processes work in practice.

The Localism and Decentralisation Bill says that the Big Society is about people working together for the common good. But it also expresses the desire to achieve those collective goals in ever more personal and individually tailored ways. If you empower personal

preference within the planning system, it poses questions about the way that strategic, long-term change happens in needy and complicated places like Dalston. One person's common good is often different to another's. One of the most challenging consequences of this will be how competing views on the future of places play out, and how local authorities and their consultants are able to interpret these views into meaningful plans.

Making Space in Dalston also demonstrates how labour intensive it is to work in this way, and that the sweat equity invested must have a return if projects are to be self sustaining. One of the major assertions of the Localism and Decentralisation Bill is that the removal of bureaucratic barriers will help empower local people to influence the shape of their own places. This is only half the story. A major barrier to great local projects happening is the lack of individuals within public and private sectors who are willing and able to conduct meaningful dialogue with communities and translate those conversations into buildings and public spaces that work and can be sustained. From a local authority's point of view, a critical consideration is to ensure continuity on both client and consultant side. The latter is made extremely difficult due to public sector procurement rules, and the often piecemeal funding arrangements for such projects. Without this continuity, confidence, trust and risk taking are difficult, and new and fresh ideas are less likely to come to the fore.

Making Space in Dalston has brought together a wide range of community groups, local government stakeholders, voluntary organisations and London government agencies and made modest but significant alterations to the public realm in Dalston that all these stakeholders feel positive about in different ways. With too many large scale developments, attempts to connect to context come too late. The project's honest approach to differences of opinion and belief in maintaining dialogue is a model for design-led change. It is a rare example of what localism might mean for places, if the agenda is taken at face value.

Kieran Long

COMPLETED PROJECTS

The projects delivered as part of *Making Space in Dalston* were designed and built at speed (between Spring 2008 and May 2009), it must be seen in the context of the broader regeneration project that is going on in the town centre. This is particularly true of the large-scale development at Dalston Square, which forms the background to *Making Space* ...

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