

A golden opportunity

Transforming east London and beyond

Gareth Blacker, Director of Olympic Land at the London Development Agency, explains the main ways in which his organisation is aiming to maximise the short- and long-term economic and environmental benefits offered by the 2012 Games, in the Lower Lea Valley and throughout London.

The London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games are not just about sport. They are also an opportunity to regenerate one of the most deprived parts of London, with wider London benefits in terms of jobs, business opportunities, skills training, environmental regeneration and tourism.

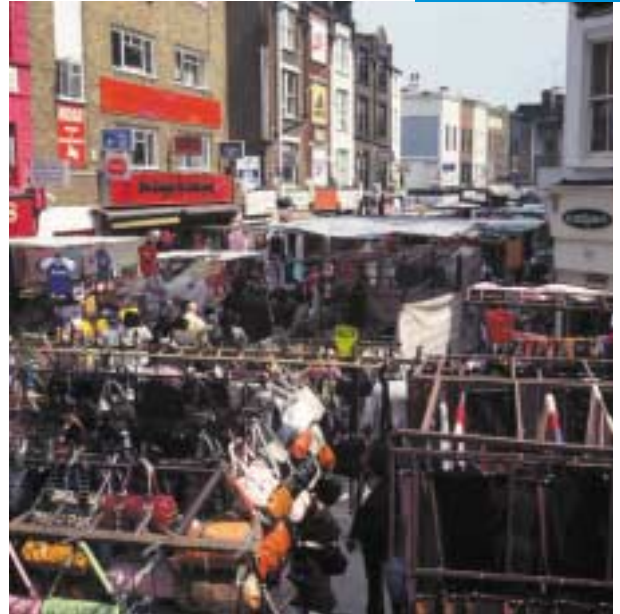
The London Development Agency (LDA) co-funded London's Olympic Bid precisely because of this tremendous opportunity, and has a continuing role, not only in securing and remediating the land for the Olympic Park but also in ensuring that the Olympic legacy continues well beyond 2012.

Transforming lives

The LDA has met one of the most important challenges for London in 2012 by helping to establish the London 2012 Employment and Skills Taskforce. The Taskforce aims to give Londoners the edge in getting the appropriate skills and support so that they are in a competitive position for securing the jobs that will emerge as a result of the Olympic Games. It will analyse the capacity of the local and London labour market to meet the demands set by the 2012 Games. The Taskforce will also assess the potential, through policy interventions, to maximise the benefits of the Games to people in east London and different communities in the capital. A clear objective is to ensure that jobs get to those people who need them most.

The LDA has also allocated an initial £9 million to a job brokerage and employment outreach programme through the Local Employment and Training Framework, which will set out the scope of a series of programmes giving one-to-one support and advice, access to basic skills and interview skills training for local job seekers. These programmes will provide specialist support to employers in the construction industry and assist developers, main contractors and sub-contractors in maximising recruitment from local areas. They will also ensure diversity in what is usually a white, male-dominated career sector.

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Early estimates indicate that there will be thousands of jobs in building the Olympics Games venues, but there will also be more than 11,000 permanent jobs created in the Olympic Park, in IT, community leisure, sport, hospitality, media and retail. The LDA is committed to working with employers to bring about a permanent change in the way that they recruit from within their local areas, making them more aware of local resources.

The LDA's work in employment and skills management for 2012 is therefore already building a future for Londoners in 2013 and beyond. Indeed, for many local Londoners, getting involved now could mean a job for life.

The Games are also an opportunity for growth in the tourism industry, which is worth £15 billion a year to London and accounts for around 10% of the capital's GDP. The LDA is working to deliver the Mayor's tourism strategy, which aims to attract visitors to all parts of the capital rather than just central London, again creating economic benefits for local businesses.

In 2004, as part of a major restructure and refocusing of the tourism industry in London, the LDA published the East London Tourism Development Strategy. It detailed a series of actions and projects designed to ensure that east London's vibrant and culturally diverse offering for local and overseas visitors could be represented effectively, in order to generate the greatest economic return. This strategy will help one of London's most important industries to make the most of the 2012 Games.

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Cleaning up the site

Yet the legacy of the Games will be felt in even more visible ways. In the Victorian era, the Lea Valley was not only a vital part of Britain's industrial revolution but also a site of urban squalor and industrial waste. The Games present a unique opportunity to regenerate parts of this area, preserving its exceptional history whilst creating a memorable and sustainable legacy for spectators and participants, local residents and tourists, businesses and athletes.

Precisely because the area earmarked for the Olympic Park involves former industrial sites, the clean-up process is vital. Much of the site is a contaminated area, and the soil may contain heavy metals and pockets of oily materials. A key task for whoever wins the remediation contract for the area will be to treat as much of the contaminated ground as possible on site, using techniques such as soil washing and bio-remediation.

Much of the Olympic site is already under public control. Remediation of the full Olympic area depends on the rest of the site being vacated in time, a process that the LDA hopes will be settled through negotiation with local businesses and residents. Once the Agency has finished the remediation process, the Olympic Park will be the biggest urban park to be built in Europe in the last 150 years.

By 2012, thousands of Londoners will have already helped transform an area of great potential into an Olympic model for Britain and the world. At the same time, the opportunities offered by the Olympic Games will have transformed the lives of thousands of Londoners. The LDA is committed to ensuring that this Olympic legacy will continue well beyond the Games themselves.

Gareth Blacker, London Development Agency