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## A promised future and the open city: issues of anticipation in Olympic legacy designs

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1 The promise of change, original watercolour with pen, 2010

Issues concerning urban design and development are examined in an exploration of how Olympic legacy masterplans address the promise of long-term sustainable regeneration.

## A promised future and the open city: issues of anticipation in Olympic legacy designs

Juliet Davis

In the literature that has dealt to date with architecture and urban design related to London's 2012 Olympics and their urban legacy, emphasis has been placed on questions of *where* and *what* has been built or envisioned, and on how this can be viewed as reflective of broader political agendas, economic contexts and accompanying issues.<sup>1</sup> In this, there has been relatively little emphasis on design processes and ideas, and particularly on questions of how these are oriented toward and help construct urban legacy as a future – as a matter of *how* and *when*. An urban legacy design process was established in 2008 to facilitate the transition of the Olympic Park to a set of new neighbourhoods by 2031 and, through it, to help fulfil a promise of long-term sustainable regeneration for east London. The twenty-three year timeframe and its intended outcome raise questions concerning the urban and architectural imagination of distant futures as of the possible processes of their realisation. Indeed, the ability to design for legacy depends on ways of anticipating the social, political and economic realities that will shape development in east London in the future and of using these to both chart and represent possible paths and conceptual approaches to desired outcomes.

Focusing on urban legacy design processes in the run up to and immediate aftermath of the Olympics in 2012, this paper asks how designers approached and interpreted the challenge of the promise of long-term sustainable regeneration. I begin by highlighting the significance of the promise in the light of Olympic development history, which has been seen to all too often fail to realise positive legacies for host cities. Indeed, from early on in the commentary surrounding London's bid for and award of the 2012 Games, one of the most pressing questions was how Games leaders might manage to prove the possibility of a different sort of Olympic future and, simultaneously, the feasibility of a mega-event led regeneration future for post-industrial east London. I consider how the role and scope of urban design was formulated in the context of these two distinct yet overlapped futures, but argue that to date there has been

relatively little reflection on their significance for and translation to design approaches, processes and ideas.<sup>2</sup> This represents a surprising lacuna, especially given that questions of sustainability and social impact relating to the fabric of the Games and the politics of development have been prominent in public debates and in the media,<sup>3</sup> but also as broader urban studies and architectural theory have flagged up the fruitfulness of exploring the political and ethical implications of the ways in which futures are constructed through urban design, architecture and development.<sup>4</sup> Providing such a reflection forms the focus of the remainder of the paper.

I do so first by looking at the promise of sustainable regeneration as a benchmark for urban legacy design. I consider its discursive context – ways of evaluating the Olympic site's industrial past and pre-Olympic condition, but also the shifting political environment in which its meanings have been defined and adjusted in recent years. Drawing on Barbara Adam's and Hannah Arendt's theorisations of the wider social character and role of promises with respect to future uncertainty,<sup>5</sup> I consider some of the political and ethical issues raised, alongside a certain lack of clarity over to whom and/ or to what promises have been made. These, I argue, create challenges for design, and form the focus of the analysis of the final section.

The theme of future uncertainty and a view on how design should approach it lie at the heart of legacy masterplanners' conceptual framework of the 'open city'. In the final section then, I explore this notion as the basis for addressing the task of imagining development over more than twenty years. The 'open city' was applied to the development of the 'Legacy Masterplan Framework' (LMF) (2008–10), but remained important for its successor document, the 'Legacy Communities Scheme' (LCS) (2011–12). In essence, it expresses the idea that the role of an 'ethical' design should be to establish an urban matrix to guide but not predetermine the form and appearance of future architecture. I will argue that while in theory, it is positioned to enable the outcomes and meanings

of sustainable regeneration to be shaped in an unfolding democratic development context, issues arise in its translation to the LCS. These relate to the relationship and tension between values of prescription through planning and ideas of reliance on the free market to provide the vehicle for shaping the architectural and social meanings of sustainable regeneration.

In undertaking the research for this paper, my focus has been largely on documents – strategic plans, policies and promotional material related to the Olympic legacy, writings by legacy designers, and the various iterations of the legacy masterplan framework. I draw on close analysis of the London Legacy Development Corporation's (LLDC) 'LCS' and earlier analyses of the LMF (in the context of my Ph.D., 2012), focusing particularly on understanding the forms of evidence (projections and forecasts) used to construct legacy proposals and on interpreting the range of drawings and other visual representations. Together, these documents and my notes from semi-structured interviews with designers along the way make up a vast corpus of data, from which I extract a few key points in framing my arguments.

#### **Olympic legacies of design and designing for legacy**

Olympic history is littered with 'white elephants' – examples of architecture and urban design that have failed to sustain a utility and economic viability beyond the Games. Examples include the infamous Olympic Stadium designed by the French architect Roger Taillibert for Montreal's 1976 Olympics, dubbed the 'Big Owe', which has been plagued with so many technical problems since its inception that Daniel Latouche has argued that 'the architectural legacy of the Montreal Olympics is difficult to assess with even a minimal degree of "objectivity"'.<sup>6</sup> But they also include the much more recent and much lauded iconic 'Bird's Nest' Stadium by Swiss firm Herzog & de Meuron for Beijing 2008.<sup>7</sup> The risk or failure connected to Olympic development to which these elephantine failures or ruined futures testify is seen to raise important critical questions of accountability and responsibility that, as planners Flyvbjerg et al point out, are relevant to the analysis of megaprojects more widely.<sup>8</sup>

From early on in the commentary related to London's Games, the prospect of white elephants in the light of such analysis was presented as a major spectre hanging over the Olympic Bid and its accompanying proposals for the redevelopment of a 250-hectare site in the Lower Lea Valley. In 2004, a report commissioned by the Institute for Public Policy Research and the UK-based think-tank Demos expressed this by arguing that 'the challenge for London is to create an architecture for a Games that is on target for delivering the mandated twenty nine days of sporting spectacle, but also connects and nourishes the long-term needs and aspirations of the communities that are playing host'.<sup>9</sup> A meaningful urban designed and architectural legacy, its editors argued, would be one which

helped create an inclusive and sustainable 'social legacy' for east London as an area associated with high levels of social disadvantage. This, for contributing geographer Mike Raco, would require London's legacy leaders not only to transform the agenda commonly associated with flagship projects and the Olympics from one centred on marketing, brand and urban 'boosterism' to one focused on genuinely improving the 'quality of life' of host neighbourhoods.

Since London's successful bid was announced on 6 July 2005, commentators have looked at how London's Games organisers have sought to distance themselves from the white elephant narrative, by emphasising the credentials of London 2012 as the sustainable 'Regeneration Games' through a set of key legacy promises, and by emphasising the need for long-term planning and the long-term governance needed for realising them. London, indeed, began to identify potential long-term reuse strategies several years before the Games actually took place and sought to integrate these into the architectural design of venues and parklands from the outset. However, in developing the LMF, the London Development Agency (LDA) and its successor organisations looked not only to the transformation of parklands and venues to facilitate public access and reuses of various kinds but the creation of what architect, and the London School of Economics (LSE) professor, Ricky Burdett calls a whole new 'piece of city' from these Olympic foundations, as discussed further below.<sup>10</sup> As design cultures professor Graeme Evans argues, realising regeneration goals and promises relies on the ability to use this 'piece of city' to address resource deficits in the Lea Valley area and in east London more broadly. The most pressing among these are, of course, not sports facilities, but employment, housing and the spectrum of social and transport infrastructure necessary to advance local health, education and job prospects.<sup>11</sup>

Provision is seen to depend on the governance of the legacy planning and development process, the contours of which have shifted continually since 2008 with the demise of the LDA leading to the creation, in 2010, of the Olympic Park Legacy Company (OPLC) and, in 2012, of the London Legacy Development Corporation (LLDC) – organisations with subtly distinct remits and powers related to planning and development, as well as changing relations to different tiers of government. It also depends on the influence of the property market on calculations of development viability and risk, and on how evolving urban policy and planning strategy regulates such issues as housing affordability as well as access to services and decision-making. Affordability – a growing issue for London as prices soar to new heights on average 134% above those for the rest of England and Wales in 2014<sup>12</sup> – is seen as a particular pressing matter, one upon which a significant part of the answer to the question of whom urban legacy is for and whether it will be a regeneration legacy will rest, as geographer Paul Watts argues in his paper 'It's Not For Us'.<sup>13</sup> There

is relatively little consideration in current London legacy literature of how design might, or might not, be engaging with these issues.

Notwithstanding, attention has been focused on how, in the process of seeking to create a social and economic regeneration legacy by design, London has aligned itself with the approach to urban planning developed by Barcelona for the 1992 Games rather than with other Olympic models. The Barcelona model, as geographer Jon Coaffee argues, 'was the first to include strong and long-term visioning alongside urban design excellence' and to endeavour to integrate morphological alterations with social programmes.<sup>14</sup> In drawing on the Barcelona model, London continued a pattern of lesson learning from Barcelona that had been engrained in urban regeneration approaches from the late 1990s. Ideas of 'urban renaissance' which underscored the urban policy of the Labour government from 1997 broadly speaking until 2010 were influenced as much by the approach developed by Barcelona's leaders to its rejuvenation from the 1980s, as by the governance that this implied. In early iterations of the LMF in particular, the ideas formulated by architect Richard Rogers of how to achieve an 'Urban Renaissance' informed how designers approached the future, particularly by endeavouring to identify a *process* and not only a morphology to express the promise of sustainable regeneration and its realisation.

In the semi-official architectural literature produced in the wake of the Olympics and in the architectural press, writers have focused on how designers have risen to the challenge of legacy transformation, on the credentials of Olympic architecture – with the Stadium, Velodrome and Aquatics Centre having received shortlists for the prestigious Stirling Prize in 2011, 2012 and 2014 respectively – the sustainability credentials of particular developments and construction processes, and the site's planning and design history. Tom Dyckhoff pays attention to how venues and parklands in particular were developed with transformation in mind – a significant innovation from earlier Olympic parks which had proved less readily adaptable.<sup>15</sup> While the spaces left over from temporary venues such as Wilkinson Eyre's lightly resting and almost ephemeral Basketball Arena provided 'serviced platforms' primed for mixed-use redevelopment, adaptable structures such as Zaha Hadid's Aquatics Centre and Populous/ HOK Sports Stadium were designed with removable structural elements to facilitate different audience levels after the Games. The parklands were designed to undergo a complex transformation that resulted in the opening out of the enclosed Olympic Park to its surroundings through the integration of more bridges and connections threaded through a complex topography of river ways and infrastructure. The idea that regeneration would, indeed, 'start with a park' is presented by Olympic Delivery Authority Parklands director John Hopkins as a key planning principle.<sup>16</sup> Informative as these discussions are, there is all too little critical

reflection on the future beyond what has been achieved to date, on what it might amount to when and for whom. As Evans argues 'regeneration is both a process and an outcome',<sup>17</sup> so it is insufficient to focus on designs or results somehow in isolation, as glossy visualisations and press photography.

This argument ties in with Mike Raco et al's call for emphasis in urban studies more widely on what he terms the 'politics of space-time' in urban development. Raco argues that principles of sustainability shifted emphasis towards long-term outcomes in ways that 'put a concern with time and imagined futures at the heart of development agendas', and yet have political implications as they relate to speculative publics not able to participate in their construction.<sup>18</sup> Fran Tonkiss also emphasises the political nature of urban development timescales, considering relationships between recent austerity urbanism and a certain shortening of investment, planning and building timeframes.<sup>19</sup> Ways of anticipating the future are clearly essential for being able to project outcomes such as those denoted by sustainable regeneration for London's legacy. Within architecture and urban design, there is a growing scholarship around future-related decision making that deals with notions of anticipatory learning and investigates tools such as scenario planning. As architectural scientist Malcolm Eames argues, questions around foresight, visioning, forecasting and also future-proofing are now highly pertinent to research on processes that may facilitate how the transition to low carbon technologies is to be accomplished.<sup>20</sup> However, as social theorists Barbara Adam and Chris Groves argue, anticipatory tools are socially constructed and carry political and ethical implications as such; they often arise in the context of capitalist society's preoccupations with progress, innovation and change and can prove equally unreliable within it too.<sup>21</sup> Realising the promise of a sustainable regeneration legacy from London's Olympics depends on anticipatory tools, but what issues do these raise?

### A promised future

Let us begin by looking more closely at the promise of sustainable regeneration. This originated in the context of London's Olympic bid, with the Candidate file announcing 'Regenerating east London communities and their environment' as one of four key legacy priorities. It was in this context that the aim to ensure that no 'white elephants' resulted was first linked to ideas of a regeneration legacy for London,<sup>22</sup> and that sport legacy became tied to a vision for the creation of healthy, regenerated spaces. The promise of legacy was developed and reformulated after the bid by the Greater London Authority (GLA) under Ken Livingstone in the context of his 'Five Legacy Commitments', 2007. Four of these were concerned with issues of sustainability and regeneration, placing these principles at the heart of planning and design.<sup>23</sup> In the same year, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) launched

'Our Promise for 2012',<sup>24</sup> also in five parts, the second and fourth of which were directly related to sustainability and regeneration and dovetailed with Mayoral Commitments. Here central government promised that 'We will transform the heart of east London' and that 'We will make the park a blueprint for sustainable living', in the process outlining a series of strategic priorities with respect to design quality and urban environmental measures of quality of life, green space, remediated waterways, renewable energy, homes for key workers, transport infrastructure and job prospect for London's workless.<sup>25</sup>

The implied message was that existing, local residents would stand to benefit, as the promise was centred on the provision of resources understood to be crucial for addressing present local needs. Indeed, it is important to clarify that these needs were formulated in the context of a range of analyses which flagged up the reality of post-industrial decline as a major contributor to high levels of deprivation. The Olympic site was developed from the early twentieth century as the industrialisation of the Lower Lea Valley extended north along the Lea River and its tributaries. Lying at London's border, it became a site renowned for noxious industries including chemicals and brewing, many of which survived into the 1970s. These were gradually replaced by a wider range of typically small-scale firms, marginal from the perspective of London's shifting economy but of which there were 208 at the time of the site's Compulsory Purchase by the LDA in 2006–07.<sup>26</sup> Residential areas to the west were noted for their poverty by Charles Booth in the late nineteenth century, but deprivation appears to have acquired new significance in the context of industrial decline and, in these terms, become a focus for legacy planning.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, arguably the discursive role of decline in the context of the promise of Olympic legacy has supported a counter-narrative of redevelopment, economic growth in post-manufacturing sectors and of the role of the high-profile event of the Olympics as catalyst in promoting and achieving this. My interpretation of this transformation is shown in figure 1 [1].

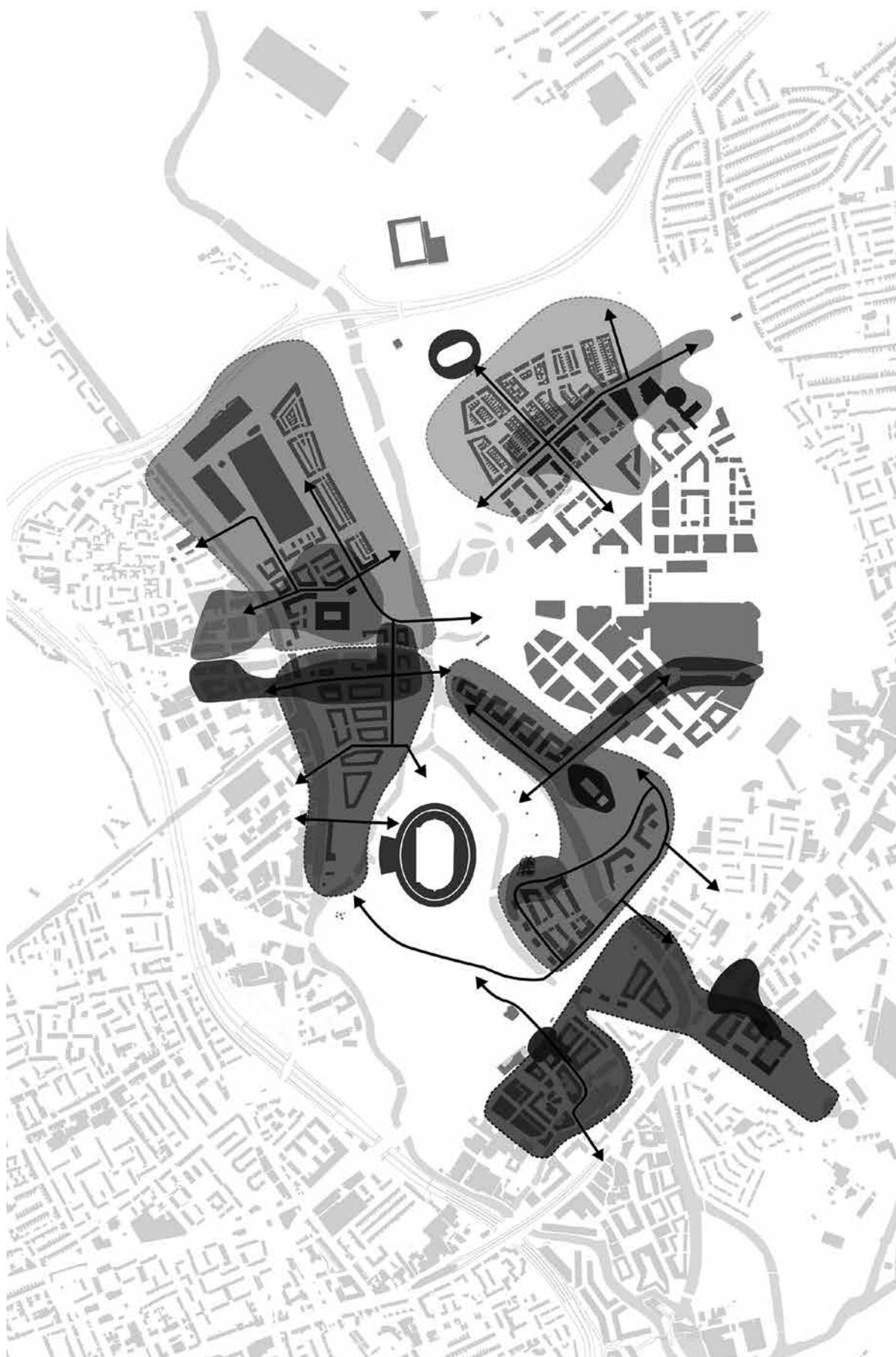
The promise of legacy was reformulated in 2010 under the incoming Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition government and following the succession of Ken Livingstone as London Mayor by Boris Johnson. Its constituent components were reduced from five to four, and emphasis was drawn subtly away from planning and planned outcomes for ensuring that 'the Olympic Park can be developed after the Games as one of the principal drivers of regeneration in east London'.<sup>28</sup> Greater attention was placed in general terms on participation and engagement while also, revealingly, on the scope for government assistance in the cultivation of private sector-led opportunities for development – assertions consistent with the political ideology and the free-market, voluntarist rhetorics of the 'Big Society'. This was developed as a flagship principle in the Conservative Party's 2010

general election manifesto and formed part of the subsequent legislative programme of the Coalition Agreement with the Liberal Democrats.

In this context, the remit for masterplanners became vaguer, as emphasis was placed on the form of long-term governance needed to cultivate and manage economic interests in the Olympic site in order to realise an economic regeneration legacy. Concurrently, the emphasis on building sustainable, 'compact' communities in the LMF was subtly shifted towards a vision of 'neighbourhoods, each with its own distinct character'<sup>29</sup> and formed more in tune with London's historical morphology or 'DNA' than with European high-density precedents. The amount of housing that the legacy was promised to provide was actually reduced – from 9000 homes in the Olympic Park in 2007 to 'up to 6,800' in 2011.<sup>30</sup> Those specific promises which remained engrained at this stage, such as the promise to deliver 102 hectares of parklands and the provision for 30% affordable homes, tended to form part of established planning permissions and/or sensitive policy, which provided additional security. By 2012, in a new document entitled 'Beyond 2012', the DCMS focused attention on how Games strategists had apparently already 'made good' on Olympic Bid promises – by leaving no 'white elephants' but also by facilitating the (planned) creation of new postal district 'E20' from the infrastructure left by the Olympics. Emphasis was placed in this context less on the past and present needs of east London than on ideas of great new prospects, with design now offering a 'blueprint for *modern* [rather than sustainable] living' and helping to produce the 'high-tech future'<sup>31</sup> hinted at in the 2010 document.

Thus, we see that while the tendency to formulate promises has remained a feature of Olympic legacy future-making, creating a certain forward momentum under the pressure of the need for future accountability, the specific substance of them has clearly altered, with attendant consequences for design approaches and development processes. To the extent that changes can be seen to reflect shifting ideas about the respective roles of the state and private sector in realising a sustainable regeneration legacy, forged in the context of a new government and mayoralty and in the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis, they can be interpreted as outcomes of a democratic process. However, the curious combination of continuities and changes raises deeper questions about the nature of promises, the social relations they imply, and their effectiveness as ways of delimiting the future.

These are questions which concern Barbara Adam in her explorations of some of the diverse ways in which futures have been constructed socially. Adam argues that it is important to recognise that promises are fundamentally 'social in orientation'<sup>32</sup> toward the future as they serve to draw people into relations of obligation and responsibility. These relations, she argues, do not of course 'eliminate the uncertainty and unreliability that arises



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2 The Legacy  
Communities  
Scheme  
neighbourhoods,  
2012



3 View across the rooftops of Hackney Wick, 2013

from the networked chains of social interaction associated with human freedom'. However, as Hannah Arendt argues, they can be seen to provide 'the only alternative to a mastery which relies on domination of one's self and rule over others'. Promises leave, for Arendt, the 'unpredictability of human affairs and the unreliability of men as they are, using them merely as the medium as it were, into which certain islands of predictability are thrown and into which certain guideposts of reliability are erected'.<sup>33</sup> The effectiveness of such guideposts clearly depends on the abilities of promise-makers to follow through on their commitments but, in the meantime, they act as crucial bases for experiences of trust and faith, for return acts of commitment, choice, political support and the like. They acquire meaning only to the extent that they are received and can exist in the context of an exchange of mutual intentions, actions and expectations.

In these terms, it becomes clear that the role of promises in the context of legacy is to garner support for future plans in which the British public is invested as a consequence of the public funds committed to regeneration and the Olympics – to enable elected political leadership to enter into relations of obligation that secure public confidence and, more importantly, votes. In this democratic context, the prospect of support provides a crucial motivation for maintaining a sense of purpose as for an emphasis on future outcomes that could benefit a wide cross-section of people. However, having said this, it is interesting to note that the promise of sustainable regeneration has been made to different geographical scales over time – London, east London, the host boroughs, the Lea Valley. Most often, it has been to these as evolving *places* rather than as *people* in the present. This has an evident bearing on the social orientation of this particular promise, as the motivation to maintain it appears to come adrift from a specific social context of exchange or expectation of reliability.

If it is unclear who should expect to be a recipient of a promise, then it is reasonable to ask what the legitimacy of an expectation might be, either now or later and, further, what significance this has for accountability in the future, whether to existing residents, the presently defined deprived of the Lea Valley and east London or those impacted by compulsory purchase. Certainly, it would seem that a promise of sustainable regeneration to place, with its emphasis on long-term physical outcomes – a new 'piece' of London – creates a good deal more flexibility and scope for changing direction or shifting the focus of social legacy than a promise to specific people.

This brings us back to the question of how promises serve to delimit the future. For Adam and Groves, their effectiveness and indeed believability depends in essence on how accessible to foreknowledge the future is, as this enables them to be made and responsibly sustained in informed ways, in the light of calculable possibility. They argue that the future tends to become less available in direct proportion to rates of change, innovation and progress. This is significant in the context of Olympic legacy as an urban future inescapably created from the basis of a *tabula rasa*, a condition which opens it up in theory to a wide spectrum of opportunities, and yet a similarly wide spectrum of unknowns.

But, for Adam and Groves, making a reliable promise also depends on a conceptual orientation toward the future, one formed against the widespread view of it as an 'open' or 'empty' realm. In philosophy and social theory, the 'open future' denotes orientations to time itself which is 'not-yet' as a form of *tabula rasa*. It is interpreted as an endless field of potentiality and opportunity, freedom and choice – those key tenets of a liberal

culture.<sup>34</sup> However, in more obviously concerning ways, the ‘open future’ can appear to be ‘there for the taking, open to commodification, colonisation and control, available for exploitation, exploration and elimination’.<sup>35</sup>

Notwithstanding, this idea has been seen to raise some important conceptual difficulties. For sociologist Niklas Luhmann, an ‘open future’ fundamentally can ‘not begin’ as any attempt to reach out in real-time instantly forecloses the range of choices that can be made and the scope for possible ‘future presents’.<sup>36</sup> The future, in other words, is continuously delimited by the past and present. Building on this problematic, drawing on Heideggerian and Deleuzian philosophy, Adam and Groves endorse an alternative view of the future in ontological terms as already with us, as lived and living. It is in the living future, they argue, a condition of temporal experience fully integrated with that of the past and present, that domains of knowledge, ethics and action become possible to reconcile.<sup>37</sup>

The relevance of this for legacy lies primarily in the problematic issues of futurity that it throws up, creating a strong basis for exploring the anticipatory tools that allow future urban realities to be constructed in advance. It helps to shed light on the apparent brittleness of specific promises for which insufficient foreknowledge of future political and economic contexts was clearly available, and yet the resilience of the promise overall. It also suggests a certain irony in the fact that the promise of sustainable regeneration for the Olympic legacy has been articulated as an outcome of cultivating potentials that change is seen to stimulate. Change, Niklas Luhmann argues, ‘requires more anticipatory behaviours – literally more acting before the event’ than does continuity.<sup>38</sup> Thus, these reflections now raise questions related to legacy masterplanning and design – to the goal to raise a living place and to the social construction of that future. How do designs for urban legacy (2008–12) approach the promise of sustainable regeneration? What deeper orientations to temporality do they imply? And, what do they suggest of possible outcomes?

### **A promised land?**

Although a legacy plan formed part of the early stages of planning for the Olympics (2004–07), the Legacy Masterplan Framework (LMF) was initiated as a distinct project in January 2008 with the commissioning of a consortium of urban design and architectural practices by the London Development Agency (LDA). The consortium was made up of three firms: international urban planning, landscape and design practice EDAW (now AECOM), the English architectural practice Allies and Morrison Architects, and the Dutch architectural and urban design practice KCAP.

From the outset, the major focus of this design team was on envisaging a process of urban development following on from the initial transformation of the completed Olympic Park – the removal of Games temporary venues and

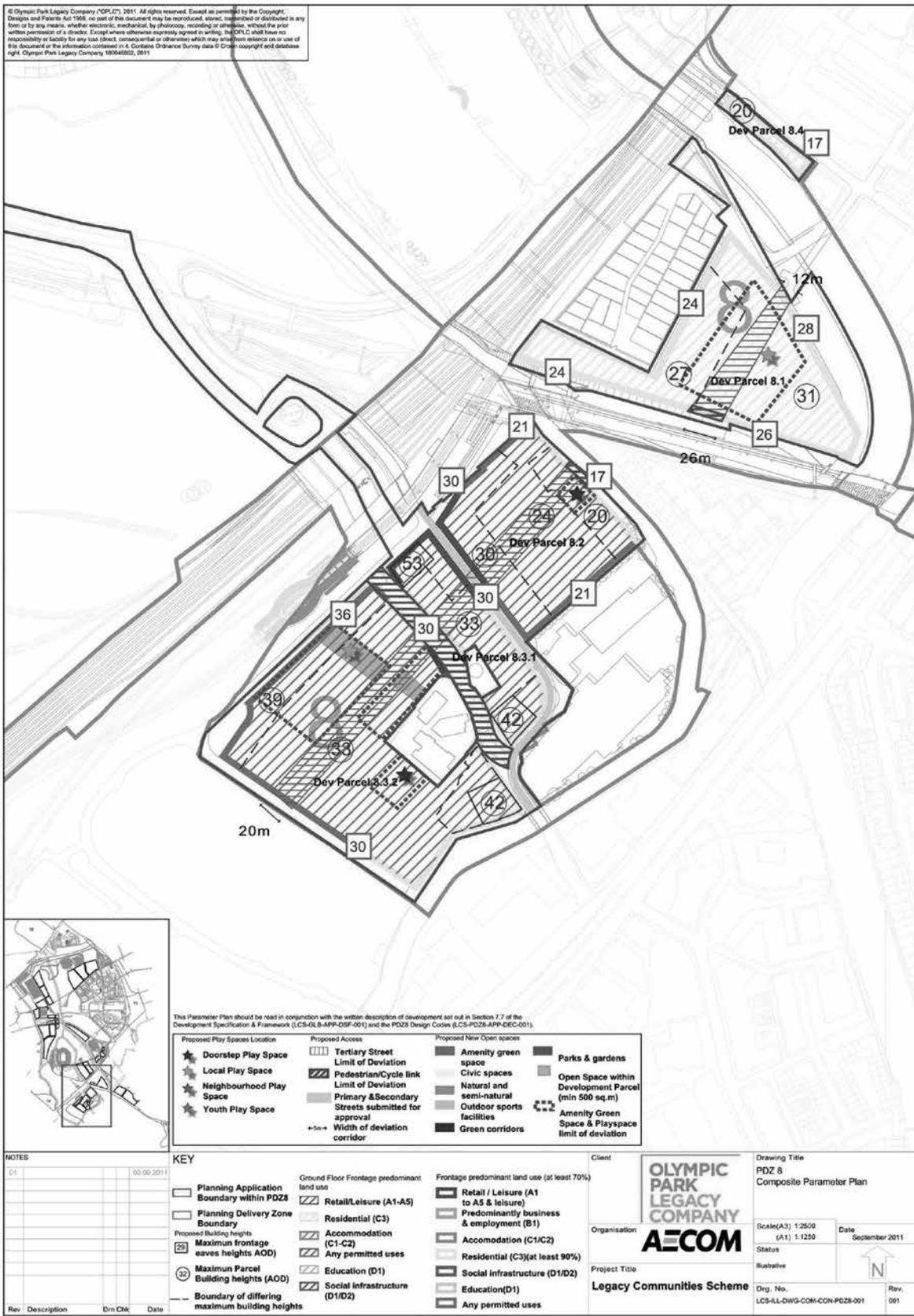
‘overlay’, the adaptation of five ‘permanent’ venues, the International Broadcast Centre and Press Centre, and the opening of the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park to the public. The LMF was to chart a way forward for ‘urbanising’ the spaces left vacant following this transformation, and thereby realising the promise of sustainable regeneration by building on the immediate legacy of sports facilities, remediated landscape and public spaces. As the vast Olympic Park occupies the heart of the site, running north–south along the Lea River and its tributaries, its major focus was on five areas totalling around 65 hectares which lie between it and adjacent Olympic ‘fringes’ [2]. These fringes were first urbanised in the later nineteenth century for a mixture of industrial and residential development – the former including the Great Eastern Railway’s vast ‘Stratford Works’, the latter the neighbourhoods of Leyton, Stratford New Town and West Ham to the east, and of Bromley-by-Bow and Hackney Wick to the west. Following a number of stages of transformation that continue to the present day in contexts of planning strategy related to the wider Lower Lea Valley ‘Opportunity Area’ and private development initiatives catalysed by public investment, they constitute a socially and spatially variegated urban topography including mixed-use ex-industrial architecture, Victorian terraces and modern mixed (re)development [3].

A major priority in the re-urbanisation of the Olympic site was ‘stitching’ the post-Olympic park via new urban development to this existing urban context, so creating a matrix of new connections across the ‘seam’ of the Lea Valley. For Burdett, building on this regeneration metaphor, the masterplan was to initiate a ‘sophisticated grafting exercise’ involving the need to focus close attention on the potential role of connectivity within physical as well as socio-economic regeneration. However, the process of urbanisation was envisaged to unfold over several decades, and thus the legacy masterplan was required to provide a vision encompassing this as well as a spatial framework within which development could unfold. Indeed, the LMF was established as a prime vehicle for realising the promise of sustainable regeneration over time, by providing a conceptual and procedural strategy for leveraging investment, building value incrementally, and staging development supply. This cautious incrementalism was presented by the LDA and other legacy leaders as key to an ability to offset costs associated with land remediation, infrastructure, the public realm, social infrastructure and affordable housing as well as avoiding the white elephant tragedies of past Olympics.<sup>39</sup> It is denoted in the idea of a ‘masterplan framework’ rather than a traditional masterplan, one in turn reflecting an ‘urban renaissance’ conception of design as the imagination and translation of social and political processes rather than just the creation of products. The idea of the ‘open city’ which had underpinned KCAP’s conceptual approach to their HafenCity masterplan in Hamburg and had been developed as a design



4 Site wide access and routes: parameter plan

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5 PDZ 8 composite parameter plan, 2012

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philosophy by its principal Kees Christiaanse was brought to bear on this processual brief.

So, what is an 'open city'? According to Kees Christiaanse, speaking at the London School of Economics in 2007, the notion articulates a concern with questions of how physical planning and design for future urbanity might and should reflect knowledge of the city's dynamism and adaptability, and also approach issues of contingency and indeterminacy.<sup>40</sup> It denotes a general intellectual orientation to the future with implications for design practice. From the perspective of architectural theory, it stems from a broader critique of the Modernist tendencies exemplified by Le Corbusier to emphasise the city's static form, its durability and capacity to create a sense of lasting order – tendencies which all too often resulted in the compulsion to remake urban places from scratch. Christiaanse draws on theorist Christopher Alexander's work, for whom such tendencies had led to the production of abstract blueprints, putting design out of step with the 'living city' as a complex socio-temporal organism.<sup>41</sup> For Alexander, this suggested the need for urban design to be less future-determining and more engaged in nurturing latent and multivalent creative potentials available in the present.<sup>42</sup> It suggested a city structured not as a whole but 'by the interaction of the rules that govern the construction of the parts'<sup>43</sup> – a process of piecemeal and organic growth. This would seem to resonate with Lefebvre's notion of the city as 'oeuvre', a lived work of participation, use and appropriation, rather than only as the fixed products of the logic of the market or top-down state bureaucracy.<sup>44</sup>

One of the most important points Christiaanse made in his rambling and in many ways problematic talk at the LSE was the need to advance Alexander's arguments by being explicit about the purpose and value of establishing rules for long-term development, and of at the same time building in the potential for flexibility and dynamic assemblage. The open city reflects the desire to identify an alternative to either Alexander's 'tree city' of modern authoritarianism or the so-called 'free city' of rampant late capitalism. Seen as analogous to ideas of an 'open society',<sup>45</sup> it implies a political orientation toward the future, encompassing belief in the potential for designers to act in the broad interests of the city, to synthesise and translate multiple city-making contexts and at the same time to create loose space for the democratic interaction of many 'individual acts of building'. These ideas overlap with, and are better expressed by, sociologist Richard Sennett whose 'open city' is also resiliently opposed to the 'brittle' modern city and fundamentally democratic – a city lived, its fabric shaped by politics and interaction.<sup>46</sup>

The outcome in visual terms of these ideas is as aesthetic denotive of incompleteness – an urban fabric continually worked on and thus an endlessly unfinished assemblage of historical traces, construction and vision. The implied role of the architect for Christiaanse is one of assistance,

by expertise, to futures latent or already in the making. This is a role which would seem to be not dissimilar to that which Deleuze and Guattari assign to artisans who 'follow the matter-flow' of their materials, and are able to realise the living futures already latent within them.<sup>47</sup> For an architect to adopt such a role – contributing to the 'form of a continuous development' as Deleuze and Guattari put it<sup>48</sup> – is to effect a shift in conventional understandings of architectural practice as principally concerned with the representation and imposition of form, image and order. The 'open city', it would appear, might be said to represent one attempt to achieve this, by suggesting a more contextually responsive and interpretive approach to design over time.

And yet, this idea sits awkwardly with the realities of the Olympic site at the start of the masterplanning process. In the words of one architect, masterplanners had to quickly move beyond the obvious question of 'what can be the authenticity of an architecture built from scratch?'<sup>49</sup> Beginning the process before the Olympics and in the context of a tabula rasa required them to engage primarily with a set of future-making contexts and related forms of knowledge. These included Olympic planning processes bound by the count-down to 2012, projections of population change and the progress of the housing crisis over coming decades, the London Plan and its 'compact city' development priorities, evaluations of resources needed to address deprivation in east London as well as to cater to incoming population, property market estimations and the economic climate, market research related to housing typologies, and the like. Thus, in line with Luhmann's observations above, the 'open city' provided conceptual means to deal with a multiplicity of anticipatory behaviour stimulated by change, for guiding their interaction in the present while recognising issues of unpredictability and potential. It denoted an approach indeed to the production of 'representations of [future] space',<sup>50</sup> intended to translate to commensurate lived space some time down the line.

The open city strongly informed versions of the LMF published in 2008 and 2009. Following a design review in 2010 which accompanied the establishment of the Olympic Park Legacy Company (OPLC), KCAP's involvement came to an end as, according to one senior Allies and Morrison architect, it 'got entangled in internal politics' and was ironically seen to be advocating a European city image which had become unpopular in the return to British vernacular town-planning traditions that accompanied new political leadership. The masterplan was briefly renamed as the 'Olympic Park Legacy Masterplan' and included the contributions of a wider range of design firms – AECOM, Allies and Morrison, Caruso St. John, Maccreeanor Lavington, Panter Hudspith, Vogt Landscape Architects, West 8 and Witherford Watson Mann. It was in this context that significant changes were made to the promise of sustainable

regeneration in terms of housing offer and density. The preparation of the 'Legacy Communities Scheme' (LCS) for which planning permission was sought in late 2011 was headed by AECOM on town planning and Allies and Morrison on design, with significant contributions from Witherford Watson Mann, Maccreanor Lavington and Vogt Landscape Architects.

In the same architect's view, 'the open city remains embedded in the intellectual framing of the masterplan', proving resilient to the imposition of new constraints and more varied architectural design approaches to spatial structuring of the site's neighbourhoods. There are three arising strategies that I will focus on in the remainder of this paper that I see as crucial in addressing the question of how the 'open city' as approach to futurity is positioned to realise the promise of sustainable regeneration. I do so by turning from Christiaanse's general ideas to explore their instrumentation through the LCS planning application documents, aware in the process that the translation is not exact. The first is a strategy of balancing determinate aspects of the plan with less determinate ones; the second an issue of design and development timescale; the third a strategy related to the permanence or impermanence of development.

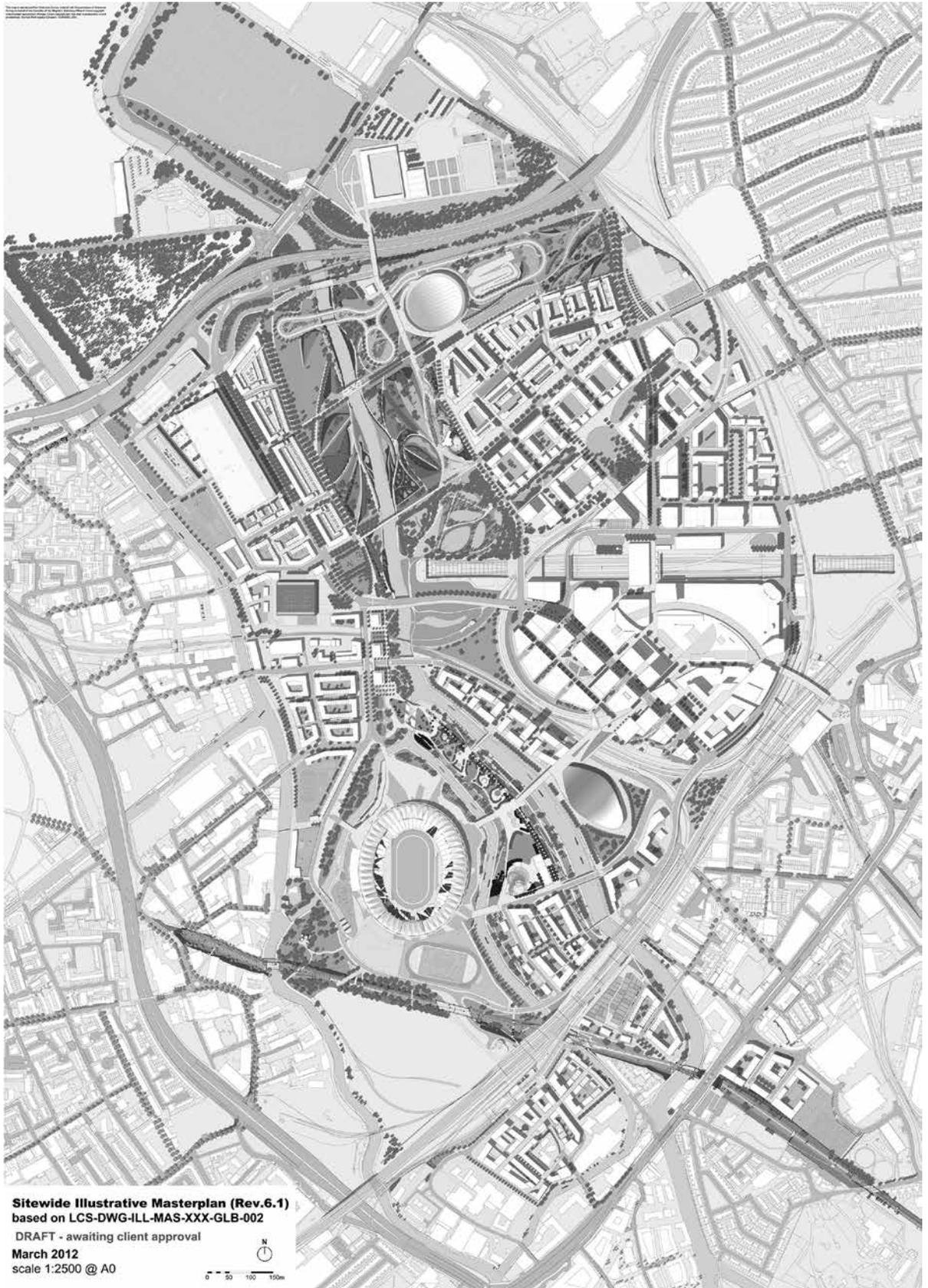
The design content of the LCS is on the surface of things less evocative, and is certainly more rigid than the LMF. The same project architect confirmed that this reflected how 'the idea of open-endedness in planning' had become problematic for the determination of the application for outline planning permission leading in the end to compromise on the 'open city' vision. 'At King's Cross', he argued, 'built form was, to a significant degree, allowed to depend on the economic climate. The question became how to create a masterplan that was resilient [...] The determination of the legacy scheme has been, by comparison, stupid.' The loss of openness appeared to relate to the wider tendency of legacy leaders (politicians, OPLC, LLDC) to emphasise the need for promises to denote specific quantifiable deliverables at the expense of processes and qualities, and thus for accountability to be constructed in these rather bald terms. It was also seen as indicative of a wider issue within planning wherein 'planners feel that it is their moral responsibility to have certainty [though] the city will do its own thing anyway.' For Allies and Morrison, the more moral approach would be one that acknowledged uncertainty as an ongoing reality, and sustainable regeneration as a constructed and yet contestable horizon of values – ones predicated on ideas of quality, diversity and democratic engagement.<sup>51</sup> Of course such an approach raises questions about who would be engaged and how and thus how it could genuinely reflect more than just a faith in the market.

The 'Design and Access Statement' confirms that the LCS establishes 'design codes [...] intended to guide subsequent design work according to

qualities of neighbourhoods, buildings and open spaces in each character area'.<sup>52</sup> It is said to determine the parameters necessary for facilitating rather than constraining 'integration', 'diversity', 'flexibility' and 'community' – terms all in theory open to interpretation yet here somewhat surprisingly assigned relatively fixed meanings through urban form. The principles are represented in a series of 'parameter plans' and explained in the LCS's various chapters. The plans define a series of development parcels and planning delivery zones related to the five neighbourhoods. As illustrated [4, 5] they establish urban form by means of a series of limits, extents and permissible deviations from rule. They are used to delimit the scope of possibility, opportunity and freedom to capitalise on the benefits of adjacency to the Olympic Park.

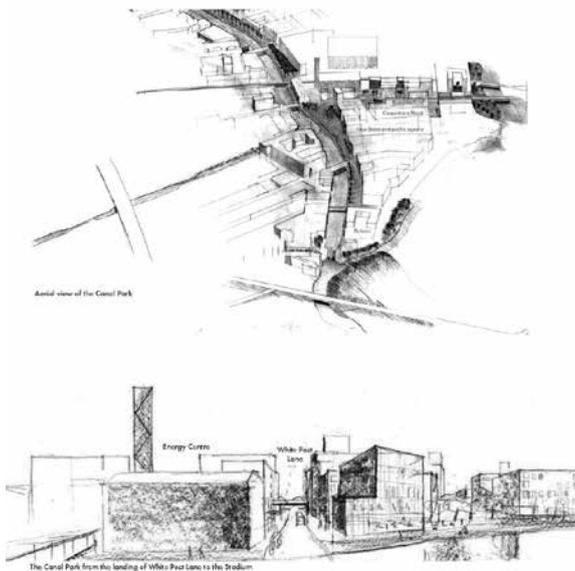
To offer a specific example, densities are constrained across the area to around eight to twelve storeys; only in two particular plots adjacent to the already tall development of Stratford City are they able to jump up, to an impressive maximum of ninety-nine metres. Land uses are constrained by development plot to ensure a mixed outcome integrating a variety of neighbourhood facilities across the site. In turn, levels of social infrastructure provision are based on complex correlations of population projections with evaluations of the future population's need for resources ranging from school places to hospital beds, current ways of measuring relative deprivation in terms of access to such resources, and the like. In turn, anticipated housing provision is constrained in terms of tenure breakdown and unit size by the London Plan, the Mayor's Housing Strategy, a long-standing commitment that 40% of all units would be family-sized, and by understandings of the present local housing needs of the diverse communities of each of the Olympic host boroughs. It is informed by a set of local and city-wide population forecasts that enable the anticipated or speculative future public to be 'profiled' against housing types.

Thus, while the parameter plans set out the limits of capitalist enterprise, they also establish a rule and measure of public benefit. Principles of open space within development parcels, of public access, social infrastructure and mixed-tenure housing represent attempts to secure from capital those ingredients of social legacy that congeal the promise of sustainable regeneration into lasting form. We see in the plans the translation of a formula for securing public benefits from the private sector, and a view of what is appropriate for urban design to determine in this context. It is an approach which to a degree appears to shift, in Jeremy Till's words, the scope of architectural knowledge 'away from any notions of authority and certainty' yet without the collapse of understanding of what an architectural responsibility to the future might be.<sup>53</sup> And yet, clearly it does not do this much, at least by comparison with the participatory spirit of the 'open city' framework. In general, the plans are positioned to facilitate decision-making and negotiation at the top.



6 Site wide illustrative masterplan, 2012

7 Views of the canalside park, by Witherford Watson Mann, 2012



7

The relationship between determinacy and indeterminacy in the LCS proposals is reflected in the variety of drawings and other representations included beyond the parameter plans. Scenario plans, for example, such as that shown in figure 6, are used to test the possibilities offered by the parameter plans rather than to lay claim to any fixed and final outcome of the development process [6]. These kinds of drawings have been produced since the LMF and have subtly changed as parts have been built and others have become subject to new ideas, underscoring both the resilience of the approach and the impossibility of sustaining a singular design vision over time. From the perspective of designers, they represent idealised outcomes – the ‘best’ long-term scenario – and can serve as political tools in this regard in negotiations with developers and clients over contracts and more specific design development. Models and perspectival drawings are used to communicate in more publicly accessible terms matters of impression, sense, scale and the possible life of the future place. These reveal the ‘hands’ of the varied contributing firms to the LCS and thus the ongoing scope for architectural hybridity. Charcoal and pencil sketches by Witherford Watson Mann (WWM) in the ‘Design and Access Statement’ for example, do not, on the one hand, do more than provide an atmosphere and the bones of a scene – as a cyclist hares down a lane, blocks of buildings front a canal, and shadows are cast over weathered walls [7]. On the other hand, the seemingly tentative explorations of possibility in WWM’s drawings are among those representations that derive most clearly from the lived experience of east London and a sense of the site’s past. Other drawings and models may be more detailed and differently ‘styled’, but may be still regarded as conversation pieces rather than as final propositions. Though they can be interpreted as consistent with a view of the ethical architect as facilitator rather than authority in a democratic urban assemblage, they also seem to reduce ideas of indeterminacy

and plurality to architectural language, raising questions of social legacy and production.

With regard to timescales, development process is viewed in terms of procedural phases established between 2013 and 2031<sup>54</sup> – which for Mike Raco are the predominant ways of conceiving the ‘bureaucratic timeframe of development’.<sup>55</sup> The eighteen-year timeframe for development overall has been based on calculations of how costs associated with regeneration, the Olympics, an emphasis on design-led change, sustainability criteria, parklands and other public benefits could be recouped relative to anticipated levels of incremental land value uplift and land sales over time. Seeking to recoup sooner, as one private-sector advisor to the OPLC explained to me in 2009, could put regeneration promises at risk, as short-term development would probably not be able to bear the costs associated with providing amenities and resources.<sup>56</sup> Financially sustainable regeneration would rely on the LLDC being able to benefit from the value uplift of land and property and, at the same time, to cautiously manage the supply of prime land to the market. A ‘time of debt’, to use economists Reinhart and Rogoff’s term,<sup>57</sup> becomes linked in these terms to a time of investment and an anticipated time of property market rises, and these all inform the anticipated timescales of development. However, as design-led regeneration relies on ways of escalating the site’s value, it raises questions of potential impact on affordability and, hence, of public accessibility to the site in the future.

Up until 2031, the site is likely to comprise a mixture of undeveloped sites, construction sites and ‘finished’ areas. An important idea that originated with the LMF for preventing this incremental process from leading to an absence of life and the impression of a construction site was that development plots could each undergo a gradual transformation to ‘permanent development’ via ‘interim uses’. These uses, as explained in the ‘Interim Uses’ section of the LCS, would be able to exist for timeframes ranging between one day and twenty years. Some so-called interim uses might eventually transition to more lasting ones, while others might shape the site’s character only fleetingly. The overlap of so-called interim and permanent development as well as the varied nature of the interim would produce, in reality, a ‘spaghetti of durations’ according to the project architect already cited.<sup>58</sup> Notwithstanding, the prescription of phases and allusion to the dialectic of permanence and change is revealing. These concepts do not fit comfortably with the idea that ‘open city’ design for the long term is attuned to understandings of the contingency of development on unfolding social, political and economic contexts, or that it is concerned with ethical orientation rather than fixed image and form.

### Conclusions: the possible future

Throughout this paper, I have considered the role of urban design in materialising the promised urban legacy of sustainable regeneration, and

the orientation of design practices toward socially and spatially constructing this future. Recognising that the promise of a sustainable regeneration legacy to London 2012 Olympics was formulated in relation to two apparently distinct contexts – on the one hand the historical failure of Olympic Games-related investment in parklands and venues to translate into sustainable use and economic value, and ‘deprived’ east London on the other – I began by looking closely at the idea of a promise and considering its significance for legacy design. I argued that the promise of sustainable regeneration has been predicated on a narrative of growth and redevelopment – ideas that tend to increase uncertainty by privileging change over continuity, raising questions of social impact as well as potential benefit to local residents. While the promise has remained a horizon for urban design and a benchmark for London’s legacy overall for over a decade, in many ways serving as an effective tool for materialising specific outcomes, subtle transformations in how it has been articulated highlight the scope for meanings to evolve and be contested in a shifting political context. It is apparent that the public to whom the promise is made is as much a speculative general public as it is any existing community. As this suggests issues of ethical responsibility related to existing and future publics as well as to the long-term outcome of major public investment, so it also raises questions of how design for urban legacy has been materialising the promise in conceptual, spatial and procedural terms.

While there has been a tendency to translate the promise into readily digestible and reportable outcomes – areas of parkland and the like – the idea of the ‘open city’ reflects some masterplanners’ views that sustainable regeneration cannot be boiled down to a singular image, but that an appropriate approach to the long-term future is one which encourages participation and keeps

diversity in play in its construction. Such an approach coheres with Jeremy Till’s contention that contingency is ‘far from being a threat to the establishment of firm rules, [but rather] becomes the necessary context for the development of an ethical position’.<sup>59</sup> This, within the conceptual framework of the ‘open city’, would appear to be founded in opposition to rigid, socially engineered, top-down, ‘brittle’ solutions, and in the will to establish rules of engagement with the potential to create permeable, hybrid, sustainable and accessible or inclusive urban environments. And yet, one major issue in how this idea has been translated into the LCS is that, owing to the speculative nature of development, the forces in play in shaping the urban future are, at least in its early phases, all connected to policy, planning and projection – ‘representations of space’ in Lefebvre’s terms. Another is that the more free or flexible side of this framework and its more regulatory aspects, as two faces of a democratic urban assemblage, do not seem to sit easily together. What the first can offer by way of dynamism, the other can restrain on grounds of risk, clarity of vision and regeneration; and, what the other can offer by way of ‘benefits’ on grounds of public value, the first can in theory strip on the basis of economic viability and capital value. And yet a continually negotiated balance of these aspects is clearly crucial if the relation between physical and social legacy is to be sustained over the long term. The emphasis of the LCS planning documents on determining the form, scale and phases of legacy development reflects the difficulty of achieving this. But, coming back to Arendt’s conceptualisation of promises, it also indicates a certain failure within the planning process to grasp the potentially social and political nature of sustainable regeneration – the conceptual and practical alternative it offers to ‘a mastery which relies on domination of one’s self and rule over others’ in the context of uncertain futurity.

#### Notes

1. For example see: Stephen Ward, ‘Promoting the Olympic City’, in *Olympic Cities: City Agendas, Planning and the World’s Games, 1896–2012*, ed. by John Gold and Margaret Gold (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 148–66; Jon Coaffee, ‘Urban Regeneration and Renewal’ in *Olympic Cities: City Agendas, Planning and the World Games, 1896–2012*, ed. by John Gold and Margaret Gold (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 180–93; Dean Baim, ‘Olympic-driven Urban Development’, in *Olympic Cities: 2012 and the Remaking of London*, ed. by Iain MacRury and Gavin Poynter (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009).
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4. Mike Raco, Steven Henderson and Sophie Bowlby, ‘Changing Times, Changing Places: Urban Development and the Politics of Space-Time’, *Environment and Planning A*, 40 (11) (2008) 2652–73 (p. 2653); Francine Tonkiss, ‘Austerity Urbanism and the Makeshift City’, *City*, 17:3 (2013), pp. 312–24. For a more architecture and design practice oriented perspective, see: Jeremy Till, *Architecture Depends* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009).
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