

Many direct impacts of the Olympics are already positive, not least that the follow-through is actually happening

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Tomorrow marks the one-year anniversary of the start of the London Olympics, a grand sporting event intended also to re-vitalise London's East End. Interviews with residents of the Borough of Newham before and after the games show that a majority of them feel their area has improved. **Anne Power** concludes that, whilst it is too early to say how the legacy will play out over a longer period, it is being followed through with more thought and commitment than forecast.



The Games will transform one of the poorest and most deprived areas of London. They will create thousands of jobs and homes. They will offer new opportunities for business in the immediate area and throughout London...

– Rt Hon Jack Straw MP, Foreign Secretary, statement to the House, July 6th 2005

The London Borough of Newham, home of the main Olympic Games park and stadium, is London's poorest borough and within the top handful of deprived areas in the whole country. It has changed very fast from being a white, working-class dock area in the 1960s, to a high unemployment, low skill, semi-neglected area in the 1980s, to becoming a dynamic hub for regeneration in the 1990s and 2000s. One of the tools of transformation was to create a major transport hub linking Eurostar, CrossRail and a high speed route to King's Cross, all at the Stratford Interchange.

The population changed rapidly from mostly white to majority minority by 2001 and housing also changed from being mainly rented through the local council to being predominantly rented through an even share between the council, housing associations (other non-profit landlords) and privately. The volume and share of private renting has doubled since 2001. Meanwhile the low income level for ethnic minorities and for male manual workers remained stubbornly high, as in places like Liverpool and Glasgow. Only half of the working age population was in work in 2011, but this was an improvement from previously.

So have the Olympics produced the legacy that was desired and hoped for? LSE Housing and Communities went out onto the streets of Newham to get a sense of local perceptions on the Olympics both before (March to July 2012) and during the 2012 London Games in August 2012. We asked 140 residents about their opinion of the Olympics and their levels of involvement, from attending the Games to gaining employment on the site.

The majority of residents we interviewed felt that the area had benefited from the Olympics.

- *The area has been known under a negative image, now everyone is coming to east London and I think that will only improve things.*

But few people knew of someone who had received training or a job through the Olympics and those that had said the jobs were temporary.

- *The Olympics is a missed opportunity for jobs for young people – I don't know anyone who's got a job through it. I feel very sorry for young people.*

70% of residents interviewed said they looked forward to the new facilities.

- *It will help youngsters who have nothing else otherwise. If they keep the buildings open there will be swimming and sports for the youngsters. There will be places for them to go.*

Residents felt the area had come together around a common theme.

- *Everyone is smiling, saying hello, there's great weather. People are having BBQs and drinking outside. I can't believe this is England – people are celebrating, happy – it should be like this every day.*

The majority of residents are cautiously optimistic about the new infrastructure and facilities.

- *It's had a positive knock on effect for youngsters. It's inspiring. I think the Olympics has made them take pride in their borough.*
- *After the Olympics they mustn't forget about helping people without jobs, they must continue to give people jobs in the area.*

Local infrastructure and new facilities improved the image of the area.

- *Everyone will be talking about the Olympics for years, and it's already a better place to live now.*
- *The whole regeneration is impressive, but it's really just going to be for those who have the money.*

The legacy is being followed through with more thought and commitment than forecast, tackling several major local priorities:

- housing,
- education,
- jobs,
- health,
- local facilities,
- access and connections.

East Village

The Olympic Village has been converted in one year from accommodation for 30,000 athletes into 2,000 homes from rent. They will be ready to let in autumn 2013. Half will be for rent from local social landlords; half for private rent.

Around one third of the socially rented homes will be for 'shared ownership', a low cost way of being part-tenant, part-owner of your home. Tenants acquire an equity stake of at least one quarter of the value of the property by paying a deposit and taking out a mortgage. They pay rent on the rest of the flat (up to three quarters) to the local housing association that owns the property, Triathlon.

The high density and the integration of social and private homes requires tight, on-site management, which all parties have signed up to. It is a bold social and design experiment worth of the legacy promise. It harks back to the Victorian model dwelling companies that pioneered quality rented flats for tenants on moderate incomes.

Community Development

The Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park reopened on 27th July with facilities, events and celebrations for the local community and a much wider public. There will be further events over the course of the summer in the Park for the local community. A community hub has been built at the entrance to the North end of the Park and will be run by Community Links, a long-standing local community enterprise, providing a café, youth facilities and other services.

There are over thirty new bridges now connecting the Park, Village and future development sites to the surrounding community, carrying a strong message of determination to make the £9 billion investment in the Olympics actually be shared with East London. A health centre has also been built adjacent to the Village on the edge of the Park.

Education

A big commitment in the plan for the post-Olympic Village was a new Academy School for children of all ages from nursery through to post-16. The new school will be open to the surrounding areas as well as the immediate Village in September 2013. Places are in high demand. Unfortunately, many Village tenants will not be allocated homes in time. Newham is pioneering several highly praised initiatives in all its schools focusing on literacy, numeracy and music. All primary pupils learn an instrument for at least two years; the reading and numbers teaching are bearing fruit; and free school meals help children concentrate.

Jobs

Many jobs have been created over the years of the Olympic development, partly because of additional regeneration activity, partly because of Westfield, and partly because a lot is happening in Newham and surrounding boroughs. However, the growth in zero hours contracts, insecure and part-time jobs limits progress.

Housing

Newham Council is pioneering a voluntary registration scheme for private landlords and so far over 15,000 private landlords have registered. But there are still at least 10,000 unregistered landlords, thought to be those operating illegally in sometimes atrocious conditions. But until stronger government and London-wide policies are introduced, the pressure of low-paid insecure jobs will combine with a limited supply of cheap homes to drive standards in the unsupervised private landlord market of East London.

A new housing experiment

Newham could create its own private rental experimental model, much as it is doing in school, training, jobs. Its failed deal with University College London to sell off a tower block estate near the Park, the Carpenters, opens the door. Several hundred flats could be renovated to high energy standards and let at breakeven rents, to prove that 'long-term, patient' slow investment pays off, as the Peabody Trust has demonstrated over a hundred and fifty years. The tower block flats are structurally sound with high 'Parker Morris' space standards, great views and fantastic location. What a great legacy and a pioneering model for quality-regulated private renting!

Conclusion

Overall, it is too early to say how the legacy will play out over a longer period. Lord Coe, Chairman of the Olympic Committee, says we need ten or twenty years to build the legacy in sport. It will probably take 30 years for the bold regeneration plans of today to come to fruition. However, many direct impacts of the Olympics are already positive, not least that the follow-through is actually happening.

- *They used to say it's the most rundown borough in London. I think the Olympics has changed that.* (Newham resident during Games)

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