

No-one left behind: in pursuit of growth for the benefit of everyone

Report of the Barking and Dagenham Independent Growth Commission

Summary version

February 2016



The Growth Commission

The Growth Commission was a panel of independent experts who were asked by Barking and Dagenham Council to review the Council's ambition to be London's growth opportunity, and to recommend how to maximise the contribution of the Borough and its people to the London economy.

They carried out their review between October and December 2015, and they have now published their conclusions and recommendations. They consulted many organisations and key stakeholders, and they reviewed a wide range of evidence on economic and social opportunities and challenges in the Borough.

The Commission has made 109 recommendations about the future of the Borough. This is a summary of their key findings and proposals.

Their full report is at www.lbbd.gov.uk/growthcommission.

The Commission's key conclusions

The Commission concludes that the Council has the right vision: Barking and Dagenham really is London's growth opportunity. They say that the leadership of the Council is far bolder and ambitious, and more outward looking than ever before.

The Borough is at a key moment, and it has the ambition and the political will to become an inclusive, prosperous and resilient place, in which all communities have the opportunity to fulfil their potential.

Much needs to be done, across the Borough, to turn this vision into reality. This is not a job for the Council to do alone. It is one that requires every part of the Borough to play its part.

The Council needs to continue the lead it has established and be both bolder and more strategic whilst being prepared to step back in other areas.

Above all the Council needs to empower the people of Barking and Dagenham to play a greater role in shaping the future of Borough and in shaping public services. The business community has a bigger role to play too.

This means the role of the Council will change and that it should seek to be enabling and supporting, setting the direction with people, businesses and the community and voluntary sector, as well as government. The traditional role of the Council as the provider needs, in many areas, to evolve so that it is doing less itself, and enabling others to do more.

Change is needed and doing nothing is not an option. A failure to act, or accepting things as they have been in the past, would lead to a worsening situation.

Vision, goals and principles

The Commission recommends that the Council commits itself to a twenty-year vision, backed by a series of ambitious goals, and commits itself to seeing these through.

The goals should be developed in consultation with residents, businesses and partners, and should include:

- Very clear plans for each distinctive part of the Borough.
- Commitments to volumes of new homes and the creation of new jobs – the Commission proposes at least 35000 new homes and 10000 new jobs.
- Ambitious targets in relation to educational attainment.
- Reduced rates of unemployment and dependence on welfare benefits.
- Significantly improved health and life expectancy.

They say that achieving those goals will require a series of major transformations in the Borough:

- Much more active involvement of local people and communities, organised and empowered to support and challenge the public and private sectors.
- The development of the housing offer of the Borough to reflect London's diversity. More and better affordable housing stock, a well regulated private rented sector and very substantially increased numbers of owner occupied housing.
- A vibrant local business community, providing a home for local entrepreneurs and businesses, large and small from around the world.
- A commitment that no-one, and no ethnic group, is left behind, and that the Council will support every person and every family to fulfil their potential through education, work and, where needed, social support.

The Commission also recommends some principles to guide the way the Council operates:

- Ensuring that the local community and business, as well as the Council and other public sector organisations, play an appropriate leading role.
- The excellence that is part of the best of the Borough's history in housing and manufacturing should be the benchmark for everything the Council does in the future.
- The Council should commit itself to take decisions based on the very best available evidence.

As an early statement of intent and determination to achieve the Council's goals, the Council should set up a Borough-wide regeneration vehicle. That would bring together the expertise of the Council, other statutory partners, and the private sector in a new Council-owned company to manage the delivery of the Borough's housing and regeneration plans.

Housing

The Commission recommends that a Borough-wide economic, housing and land use plan reflecting strategic and urban design ambitions should be prepared that sets out the desired overall structure for the different areas of the Borough

That should include housing should of all tenure forms. The commitment to social justice is much more important than attachment to any particular tenure type. This is important both for attracting a range of residents to the Borough, and for community building within specific areas, and across the Borough more generally. Second, it will be necessary to put in place appropriate safeguards to ensure that areas become and remain attractive for the private market. For social housing tenants that will mean that rules and regulations should be clearly articulated and enforced where there are breaches. For the private rented sector, licensing accompanied by enforcement is crucial. For owner-occupied properties, restrictive covenants should be used to limit the conversion of such properties to multiple occupancy.

The Borough's Areas

Barking town centre should be the initial priority and should be used as an exemplar for the Council's new approach to its urban areas. The superior transport links and close proximity to key economic areas in other parts of London, have already seen the housing market start to move positively. The tenure and price mix of the area should encourage a more aspirational population, although the town centre should be an area for all household income and family types, with a well-designed urban feel.

The town centre should continue to develop as a more urban centre, with an active, interesting street life, a broad range of retail and restaurants and places of employment. To the west of the town centre the Upper Roding area should become a destination with well-designed, compact, high-quality housing with a distinct sense of place. The Upper Roding should become a place for both leisure opportunities and a particular kind of new economy workplace, with the possibility of other institutions alongside the Ice House.

Development of **Barking Riverside** has been under way for a decade. It is the view of the Commission that now is the time to review the successes and shortcomings of what has been developed to date and set the direction for its future development.

The **Becontree estate** was an area of excellence when built, and has proved resilient in the decades since. The area should continue this role as a high-quality suburban neighbourhood with excellent amenities and a distinctive character.

The Council's aim should be to restore the estate to its former glory as a place with not only an urban form of character but also a 'moral purpose', with the recreation of sense of suburban dignity central to the conception of the estate

The regeneration of **Chadwell Heath** should be a priority. At the moment the area is mixed with a large and diverse residential offer alongside industrial and limited retail opportunities. The Council plans to relocate existing light industrial uses to facilitate new housing. Such uses should be retained elsewhere in the Borough whilst an investigation should also be made of what new business uses could be encouraged on other sites.

Once Crossrail is operational in 2019, Chadwell Heath will have the best transport links in the Borough. The potential for retail and employment opportunities that could be brought to the Borough should be examined, focusing on those that would not displace activity from elsewhere in Barking and Dagenham.

Dagenham Riverside, in the south-east of the Borough, contains a mix of residential and industrial areas, as well as significant areas of vacant land. It is the part of the Borough with the least clearly defined identity but a unique balance between housing and employment uses. Retaining some industrial areas is important for the development of the Borough. The strategy should be to consider carefully what types of activities are economically valuable and/or can be made compatible with a broader environmental agenda.

The A13 is a major arterial road that links central London with east London and south Essex. Despite its strategic importance, it has a significantly negative impact on the surrounding area within the Borough of Barking and Dagenham. Due to the high volume of traffic, including freight, the road represents a visual as well as physical obstacle, causing noise and reducing air quality. In addition, in the 1960s, a temporary flyover was built at Movers Lane/ River Road which is still to be replaced with a permanent structure.

The Commission recommends the removal of the barrier of the **A13 corridor** by burying the roadway. The development of lands freed-up by that initiative should be an important medium to long-term priority.

Opportunities and Potential: Supporting People

Ensuring that people have the capabilities and capacities to benefit from the opportunities that come to the Borough, and those around it, will be critical to creating prosperity and cohesiveness.

It will require a commitment to ensure that every child's most basic social needs are met: no child should go to nursery or school hungry and inadequately clothed, as is experienced by some in the Borough. It will require vision and a long-term commitment to driving up the ambitions of the people, businesses and public services within the Borough, and enabling them to fulfil those aspirations. Without a sustained commitment to improving the opportunities for people in the Borough the ambition will be lost.

The Children's Centres within the Borough are already performing well. Tackling the complex challenges many children confront and enabling them to make the best of their lives demands early, cross-sector action. The whole community must be involved to enable children to achieve the best outcomes.

Despite improvements in recent years, educational attainment in the Borough remains low by the standards of London. Greater ambition within the Borough is central to driving up educational attainment more rapidly and expanding the opportunities for people in the Borough. The Commission recommends that the Borough should be more ambitious in raising aspirations and educational outcomes.

Increasing the skills and qualifications base of the Borough is crucial to tackling the precariousness which many individuals confront. The absence of a skills strategy and baseline studies around the growth sectors and job creation potential, or an explicit consideration of the skills needs of areas with high employment growth potential, such as Stratford and Canary Wharf, highlights that this is an area where the Borough needs to invest.

The root causes for many of the challenges in the Borough are the low skills and qualifications, and low incomes. Some communities in the Borough have a high level of motivation to change that, but for others there is little motivation. Tackling those root causes will be central to improving the position and outcomes for all in the Borough.

Supporting and Growing Business

The Commission recommends immediate steps to help the development of local business:

- A register of businesses should be compiled and a survey of all businesses undertaken.
- A market assessment should be undertaken drawing in property agents and advisors from across London to establish market perceptions of the Borough and the kinds of projects for which it needs to create capacity in terms of available sites and premises.
- A full inventory of should be carried out to analyse the quantity and quality of available sites and premises. The key issue is ensuring that the Borough has a ready supply of what businesses need.
- To guide the Borough through this process, a Business Leadership Team should be established to advise the Leader of the Council.

Culture

The Commission concludes that there is a strong role for culture to play in the Borough. Culture can contribute to socio-economic development, and also helps support the creation and maintenance of social capital. The Council should harness the potential of cultural activities to support their wider well-being agenda and as a way of creating a strong, positive vision of the area.

‘Anchor institutions’

An ‘anchor institution’ refers to a significant, non-profit institution which once established, tends not to move location, becomes identified with the area, and is a significant driver of visitor numbers and therefore of economic growth throughout the area. Given the potential and needs of the Borough, the Commission believes that the Council should pursue a number of different opportunities to secure such organisations in the Borough.

Working Together

The Commission concludes that the ability of organisations to work together will be critical to the future success of the Borough.

The Council should put in place a formal structure that brings together representatives from the public and private sector as well as community and third sector organisations. The purpose of this would be to provide a formal structure for meaningful discussion and engagement around the development and implementation of the strategic priorities of the Borough.

What happens next?

The Commission's full report is published at www.lbbd.gov.uk/growthcommission.

In April the Council will publish its strategy for transforming the borough, and transforming the way in which the Council is organized. That will include our detailed response to the Commission's report.

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