City with global reach: imperial, post-colonial, financial, cultural

Greater London boundary and M25. The administrative border is "Greater London" = roughly area inside M25 motorway / green belt. This area has about 7.5 million of the 15 million people in the functional region.

Polynet commuting map (Peter Hall et al). Due to the expenses of living in London, the commuting region is very extensive: many people commute between one and two hours a day.

The entire region is interspersed with a great deal of privileged 'countryside' and is thus the opposite of 'compact'. It is heavily dependent on car trips, except for commuting to Central London.
Description / Reason for this choice / Background / context

Silwood Estate

Purpose

- regeneration" of ex-railway land but really to help finance TGV and make a profit.

Dimensions

- Silwood Estate

Projects costs

- £10 million

Investors

- London and Quadrant

Architects

- PRP Architects

The land has remained unused for a number of years despite proposals and input from local residents, who want the area to be a space for children to play since the former play area and youth centre were demolished. The plans to allow private contractors to build 900 flats are heavily opposed by local people.

Significance for New Metropolitan Mainstream

The decision to build the flats is being upheld by Lewisham Council despite formal resistance from local residents. This comes after the local community centre was also demolished and replaced with a much more expensive, privately-owned community centre. Further investment in local infrastructures has not followed. Example of dominant private interest fuelled by government grants unopposed.

Stakeholders and their interests

London and Quadrant has already profited substantially from the community centre regeneration and will make further profit from the sale of private housing to major local landlords.

Deals

The application ignores local need and desires and is for the purpose of private gain, with which the local council has been complicit. Profit will be shared with local landlords.

Impacts

The project serves only the business interests of London and Quadrant, who have so far shown no sign of future development in the area. Due to the scale and speed of the development, the impact is acute – for the youth in particular – there is a desperate need for affordable housing on the site, which will be lost. Private housing is likely to drive up prices and become a catalyst for indirect eviction and displacement.

Battersea Power Station

Purpose

- Global nomadic sports events

Dimensions

- Haydwy / Stratfed, East London – Vislomors and supporting venues

Projects costs

- Estimated £6 billion

Investors

- Numerous Public and Private

Architects

- Hopkins (VeloSudom)

The Olympics is an example of a mega-event inspired by global city competition that physically relocates existing infrastructures. Funded by the government and sponsored by large corporations and businesses, the site will – and has already begun – to demolish existing heritage, local business and community provisions in favour of urban regeneration, private gain and opportunism, and temporary financial stimulus.

Stakeholders and their interests

The Olympics has numerous big-name private and public investors, contractors and sponsors. Private gain will be shared with the exclusion rights these companies are buying to sell products in and around the event. It purports to be the greenest Olympics in history.

Deals

The sale of private housing and the rent for businesses and leisure space will provide considerable private gain, and there is likely to be less affordable housing or public space because of the company’s rising debt.

Impacts

In the event of the demolition of the pumping station and elements of the power station, a substantial amount of heritage will be lost. Private housing is likely to drive up prices and become a catalyst for indirect eviction and displacement.

Description / Reason for this choice / Background / context

London Olympics 2012

Writing about the situation in London, and there are scattered victories - e.g. in Battersea Power Station - which they inherited for £400 million. The current planning application, which is being decided on in July by Wandsworth Council, is likely to be approved.

Deals

The sale of private housing and the rent for businesses and leisure space will provide considerable private gain, and there is likely to be less affordable housing or public space because of the company’s rising debt.

Impacts

In the event of the demolition of the pumping station and elements of the power station, a substantial amount of heritage will be lost. Private housing is likely to drive up prices and become a catalyst for indirect eviction and displacement.

Description / Reason for this choice / Background / context

Battersea Power Station is one of the UK’s greatest cultural icons, gracing the skyline of London. It has been disused for nearly 50 years, having been decommissioned in 1983. Since then it has been the battleground of several different contractors, each time proposing varying scenarios. It has accrued considerable financial value and is currently owned by RED and Treasury Holdings. Battery Park offers a few undemocratic planning opportunities on the site, possibly leading to the removal of the chimneys and the adjacent Grade II listed pumping station.

Significance for New Metropolitan Mainstream

The regeneration of the Battersea Power Station site would be a big example of the removal of significant heritage in favour of private business interests. The introduction of a gabled community would be a continuation of standardised architecture as opposed to any adventurous ideas for use or renovation.

Stakeholders and their interests

RED and Treasury Holdings are the owners of the Battersea Power Station site, which they inherited for £400 million. The current planning application, which is being decided on in July by Wandsworth Council, is likely to be approved.

Deals

The sale of private housing and the rent for businesses and leisure space will provide considerable private gain, and there is likely to be less affordable housing or public space because of the company’s rising debt.

Impacts

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Synergy synthesis of all four projects and outlook

London shows the successes and the failures of the neo-liberal world-city: very strongly, Labour (and private) housing markets are very open and transparent, attracting strong flows of migrants to fuel a dynamic economy. This drains talent from the UK and the world and permits London not to reproduce its own labour. Iniquities, in a society always stratified, have become the worst in advanced Europe since the 1970s, partly due to the extreme escalation of rent in the housing markets. Floods of money into land and property drove up prices, enriched the rich and impoverished the poor. Speculation even more attractive.

"Regeneration" schemes, often targeted at poor populations, tend to benefit private developers, replacing small enterprises by corporate occupiers and delivering few benefits to the supposed beneficiaries - as we see at Silwood and King’s Cross. The largest and most ambitious "regeneration" sites are very vulnerable to crises - Battersea Power Station and King’s Cross seem to need everlasting boom conditions to get completed. Meanwhile many smaller projects can start and finish with a single boom period. And of the mega-projects only the Olympics are exempt from these problems. Therefore, however, the supposed target benefits will probably be lost because of the need to commodify and sell everything to repay public debt and make good the withdrawal of 'private partners'.

"Shrink" public service workforce. The three main political parties share neo-liberal visions and are all backing the pre-Keynesian "sound finance" measures which will now worsen inequality dramatically in London and heighten social tensions. There is some dissent, as always, within the Labour Party; the Green and left parties are weak still. The threat from the far right has been fought off a bit in London, but continues to lurk. Rapidly worsening contradictions and tensions in the coming years may revive the far right unless alternative resistance channels open up.

Some right-to-the-city type resistance is found in localities in London, and there are scattered victories - e.g. in protecting local markets at Queen’s Market and Ward’s Corner. At a London level the Just Space alliance is new. The Green Party’s London Plan aims at least to show that it has its head in the sand about the economic crisis and the environmental crisis.
Social structure

Average income per head is high by national and European standards, and in terms of income it is the most unequal city in the world with the richest 279 times the lowest earners. Middle incomes are under-represented thanks to the drive to own housing in the eighties. Increasing gentrification means that affluence varies greatly borough to borough.

Social class mixture varies, but even wealthier areas are not exclusively populated by high-earners, mainly because of the long history of social (“council”) housing which still embeds some middle-income earners and pockets of poverty.

Child deprivation inside Greater London (GLA)

% of Population white, 1999 (Buck et al)

Inner (and now more outer) parts of Greater London also have ethnic diversity; but beyond Greater London the population is substantially white, except in a few industrial towns like Luton, Slough.

Real estate market

Office rents

Asset values

The UK has experienced severe inflation of housing and other real estate asset values, becoming a rentier economy.