



Baroness Jo Valentine's speech in the House of Lords Mawson debate on the Olympic Games 2012 Legacy

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My Lords, I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Mawson, for securing this debate. I, too, have visited the Bromley-by-Bow Centre and been impressed by his activities there.

Understandably, government attention has focused on staging the Games in 2012, and excellent progress is being made. But it was the promised legacy that persuaded the IOC to pass the Olympic torch to London. There are many forms of legacy, but the Games will have succeeded if they transform people's lives. This morning, I will focus on the once-in-a-lifetime catalyst that the Olympic legacy represents for the revitalisation of the East End of London. It is easy to say that the East End needs changing. It is more difficult to define what it should change to. This week, at the O₂ in Greenwich, a certain reformed girl band is singing:

"I'll tell you what I want, what I really really want".

We must uncover what east London really really wants. We must offer a positive, ambitious new vision which embraces and raises the aspirations of east Londoners, new and old.

My contribution to the vision for the area would include building on its potential as an international tourist destination, raising employment by exploiting the area's advantages as a business location, and building modern, necessarily dense, attractive green and waterside housing where people from all walks of life both want to and can live. Perhaps new and old east Londoners want allotments, pubs, wind turbines, mosques or churches. We need to uncover what enables people to relate to their east London village, to make each a place where people want to live and work—a new-generation London.

East London has the potential to be a world-class visitor destination. It has a string of venues: the O₂, the world's most popular entertainment venue; ExCeL's exhibition centre; the Silvertown aquarium; the Olympic swimming pool and velodrome; and Lea Valley Park. The South Bank has seen extraordinary change in the last decade, so why not the same for east London in the next? It has superb access to markets, with the world's most important financial centres on its doorstep, together with European links via City Airport and the Channel Tunnel station at Stratford, and of course Crossrail will add further links. East London could aspire to be a quartier for French headquarters in Britain; East 15 could become the 15th arrondissement. After all, it takes the same time to get from Stratford to Paris as it does from London to Manchester. Whatever the right answer, the opportunity is there.

The Lower Lea Valley is next door to the Olympic park. It is a forlorn, ex-industrial area where planners have identified the potential to build 35,000 homes in the next decade. It has eight miles of canal and river frontage—the distance along the South Bank from Greenwich to County Hall. Because of the challenges, the Government designated it a priority area for regeneration—before we won the Olympic Games—and appointed an urban development corporation. However, government investment in the Lower Lea Valley languishes. The so-called Legacy Masterplan Framework for 2012 looks almost only at the park. Regeneration infrastructure for the Olympic park needs £2.7 billion of Olympic money, yet only £120 million has been committed to the Lower Lea Valley, an area over twice its size. One thing is for sure—that will not be enough to underpin the targeted 35,000 homes, let alone a broader vision.

The area needs government commitment to providing bridges, roads, schools, health centres and utilities. Perhaps the mayor or the new Housing and Communities Agency could underwrite that investment. It would be naive to hope that developers will cough it all up; the public sector needs to woo them to the area, not deaden potential by taxing first and delivering—maybe—later. Developers have to tackle a plethora of policy and bureaucracy emanating from a veritable multitude of public bodies. There are more bodies responsible for the Thames Gateway than emerged in the aftermath of rail privatisation. Development is subject to regulation from three London boroughs, Lea Valley Regional Park Authority, English Partnerships, the Housing Corporation, the London Thames Gateway Development Corporation, the mayor and

his agencies, the DCLG's Thames Gateway Executive and a partridge in a pear tree. What is the Thames Gateway? Where is it? The 1980s marriage of convenience by the noble Lord, Lord Heseltine, between parts of Kent, Essex and London initially helped to secure attention and funding, but nobody living in Stratford, Greenwich or Ebbsfleet would call themselves a Thames Gatewayer. London now has a mayor and a measure of devolved government so, for Londoners, the Thames Gateway may have passed its use-by date. I could argue that the Thames Gateway was as relevant as Clwyd or Yugoslavia.

Of course London needs to grow eastwards, and these areas need regenerating. But the funding and powers of the Thames Gateway Executive should pass to the organisation set up by the Government to deliver regeneration in this area, the currently under-resourced London Thames Gateway Development Corporation. That corporation should be made accountable to the mayor, while embracing the involvement of the boroughs and, most importantly, their communities. Then public money will be targeted where it is most needed, taking account of local people's needs and aspirations. Private investors will then gain the confidence to produce plans for a vibrant, flourishing east London.

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