

Too many quangos – like ants around sugar

By Baroness Jo Valentine

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Suddenly, London's Thames Gateway has become the beacon of hope in a difficult economic landscape. With transport connections by rail and air to the rest of Europe, the City and Canary Wharf as its near neighbours, the world's biggest entertainment venue (the iconic O2), new green spaces and waterside housing and commercial development, it could be an estate agent's dream.

London's 2012 Games, Crossrail, Tube improvements and Thames Tideway tunnel are the very countercyclical investments espoused by Government and Mayor. Olympic preparations, especially, are revolutionising infrastructure for a small part of the Thames Gateway, an opportunity which if seized could kick start regeneration in this marginalised quarter of London.

But I fear we might be about to let the opportunity pass by. Not because the authorities haven't spotted it – but perversely because they are falling over each other to shape it.

An overheard conversation makes my point for me. A London politician asked a highly successful property developer why he wasn't currently investing in the Thames Gateway. "There are dozens of agencies who want to help you get in there," he said enthusiastically. "That's precisely why I am not investing" was the answer.

Agencies, quangos, partnerships and steering groups, names and acronyms, gather around the Thames Gateway like ants around sugar. The TGLP, LTGDC, HCA, LDA, ODA, LVRPA, CLG, DCMS, GLA It reminds me of Monty Python's Life of Brian – where the Judean Popular Front and the Popular Front of Judea can't agree how to realise their shared objectives.

We need fewer well-meant partnerships and more prospective deals with investors. Who should an inward investor or developer talk to, about his or her iconic multi-million pound project? Who will provide the support and advice to position a six-star hotel within a taxi ride of Stratford International station? Who is out there selling the sizzle of East London's steak?

Where is the equivalent of the Docklands Development Corporation, the single-minded company charged with doing the deals and making the regeneration happen; a one stop shop for London's Eastern Promise?

Let's not spread our resource and effort thinly across the whole Gateway. The Olympic venues are already big stones in the pond. We need to amplify the ripples around the Lower Lea Valley first – build momentum for a rejuvenation from which eventually the whole of London and the Estuary will share the benefits.

Last week, in the absence of clear government policy making for Games regeneration legacy, London First launched its own Green Paper. It sets out what is needed for regeneration of the London end of the Gateway:

A shared vision of what East London aspires to become.

Strong leadership from Boris, who should appoint a **legacy champion** to own the vision, herd local, regional and national government cats and sell the opportunity to international investors - there are plenty still ready to spend in this difficult time. **Infrastructure** to support communities. Not just roads and bridges but schools and health centres too. A **one stop shop**, to hold the hand of those investors, so they are not put off by the myriad of agencies.

If the 2012 Games are to cushion London from the worst of the recession and spark a revitalisation of the Eastern quarter, we must act fast. So, to all the agencies, meeting this week as the Thames Gateway Forum: if you have something to add, **get on with it!** If you haven't, **get out of the way!**

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