A RESIDENTIAL SEED:

Mixed-Use Strategies for Urban Deceleration along River Road, Barking & Dagenham, London

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Relatore
prof. Angelo Sampieri

Candidata
Marta Erby

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Abstract

ENG

Within the wider redevelopment of the London Thames Estuary, the Barking & Dagenham territory represents a critical threshold where the city's industrial past is being rapidly overwritten by an aggressive residential future. Large-scale strategies often operate through a *tabula rasa* logic, treating the existing industrial fabric as a mere void to be filled. This process raises a necessary question: can we design this transition, or are we destined only to manage its erasure?

This thesis project does not seek a permanent equilibrium between industrial legacy and living form, rather, it captures a spatial snapshot of the transitional process toward a new residential neighbourhood. It acknowledges that the total displacement of working spaces, which still live in the territory, may be inevitable, yet it refuses to accept a silent disappearance.

Starting from a critical reading of current planning narratives along the Thames Estuary, the proposal urban form fits as a "Residential Seed", a strategic infiltration that manages the coexistence, albeit transitory, between working and living spaces.

The design explores a radical urban strategy along River Road, within Barking & Dagenham territory, where mass-driven volumes accommodate domestic life in a state of deliberate friction with industrial fabric. A transitional landscape, delineated by the linear park along the riverfront, acts as a connective tool, mediating between productive uses and domestic life. However, as the volumes move deeper into the existing fabric, the housing settlement begins to fade, ending in an unfinished edge. This blur represents the "question mark" of the intervention: a point where the residential seed and the industrial legacy merge, left open to the uncertainty of future urban transition.

Ultimately, the thesis argues for an architecture that documents the "already there" rather than just facilitating its replacement; by challenging the logic of mono-functional zoning, the project proposes a model where the temporary friction between "working" and "living" becomes a tool to witness, and perhaps delay, the final transition of the riverfront.

IT

Nell'ambito della più ampia riqualificazione dell'estuario del Tamigi a Londra, il territorio di Barking & Dagenham rappresenta una soglia critica in cui il passato industriale della città viene rapidamente sovrascritto da un futuro residenziale aggressivo; strategie su larga scala spesso operano attraverso una logica di tabula rasa, trattando il tessuto industriale esistente come un mero vuoto da colmare. Questo processo solleva una domanda necessaria: possiamo progettare la transizione o siamo unicamente destinati a gestire la sua cancellazione?

Il progetto di tesi non cerca un equilibrio permanente tra l'eredità industriale e l'abitare, ma cattura, piuttosto, un'istantanea spaziale di un processo di transizione verso un nuovo quartiere residenziale. Riconosce che il dislocamento totale degli spazi di produzione urbana, ancora presenti, potrebbe essere inevitabile e, contemporaneamente, ne rifiuta una scomparsa silenziosa.

Partendo dalla lettura critica delle attuali narrazioni progettuali lungo l'estuario del Tamigi, la forma urbana proposta si inserisce come un "seme residenziale", un'infiltrazione strategica che gestisce la coesistenza, seppur transitoria, tra gli spazi della produzione e dell'abitare.

Il progetto esplora una strategia urbana radicale lungo River Road, nel territorio di Barking & Dagenham, dove i nuovi volumi massivi accolgono la vita domestica in uno stato di deliberato attrito con il tessuto industriale esistente.

Un paesaggio di transizione, delineato dal parco lineare sul lungofiume, funge da strumento connettivo, mediando tra gli spazi del lavoro e la vita domestica. Tuttavia, man mano che i volumi residenziali si addentrano nel tessuto esistente, il nuovo inizia a sfumarsi nell'esistente, concludendosi con un limite incompiuto. Questa sfocatura rappresenta il "punto interrogativo" dell'intervento: un punto in cui il "seme residenziale" e l'eredità industriale si fondono, lasciando la forma urbana aperta all'incertezza delle future transizioni.

In conclusione, la tesi sostiene un'architettura che documenti l'esistente anziché limitarsi a facilitarne la sostituzione; sfidando la logica della zonizzazione monofunzionale, il progetto propone un modello in cui l'attrito tra il "produrre" e l'"abitare" diventi uno strumento per assistere, e forse ritardare, la transizione finale del lungofiume.

0.

Introduction

Ongoing construction works at Beam Park © Callan Construction Ltd.

Contested Land: Housing and Industry in the Making of Thames Estuary

London embodies many of the tensions that define contemporary metropolitan regions: once a centre of industrial modernity, and later a global capital of post-industrial finance, the city now faces the difficult task of accommodating a rapidly growing population while preserving its productive activities (Hall, 2014). These tensions converge on land, the city's scarcest and most contested resource, where industrial legacies, demographic pressure and planning strategies collide, often in contradictory ways.

With its population approaching nine million[1], London has undergone profound demographic transformations over recent decades, shaped by various waves of international migration, and, although Brexit may potentially slow the influx of immigrants, its population is projected to surpass ten million by 2030s[2]. Such increase has placed extraordinary pressure on the need to address housing shortages, while simultaneously confronting another challenge: England's planning system remains oriented toward containing urban sprawl and safeguarding the green belt, prompting the potential repurposing of land within the city boundaries[3].

While multiple factors, including private ownership, housing speculation and green belt policies, are contributing to the housing crisis, the general consequence has been a steady increase in housing costs, especially over recent decades. According to ONS data, London

1 Data based on *London's geography and population* 2024, https://trustforlondon.org.uk

2 Data based on *GLA 2024-based population projections – research outputs*, https://www.london.gov.uk/

3 Ferm, J. & Jones E. (2015). *London's industrial land: Cause for concern?*, Bartlett School of Planning, University College London.

average monthly rent has increase from around 1600£ in 2015 to 2200£ in 2024[4]. As a result, finding affordable accommodation, especially within Inner London, has become increasingly challenging and brought the attention to the outer regions of the city. Here, the housing market remains relatively affordable and the overall costs of living are still sustainable compared to central London.

This trend coincides with a broader structural change that is emerging in the post-pandemic era: the widespread adoption of remote working. For decades, proximity to the workplace was fundamental and justified the pressure on city centres, while today this logic is far less compelling. Many employees that are involved in administrative, digital and professional roles, no longer need to live near major employment hubs; freed from the constraint of daily commuting, many are reconsidering the periphery as real and often desirable alternative to overcrowded and expensive city centre. Census data from 2011 to 2021 reflects this reorientation, showing substantial population growth towards peripherical areas, with particularly notable increases across the eastern territories associated with the East End[5].

London East End has attracted not only residents seeking affordable housing but also developers and investors drawn by the availability and relatively low cost of land; in many cases, these opportunities coincide with brownfield sites, but, increasingly, they also include active industrial land[6], whose lower market value compared to residential use makes it equally attractive to investors. Over recent decades, large portions of industrial land have then been converted into housing, while operating businesses have been displaced by real estate pressure. The underlying cause lies in the disparity in land values: residential plots are worth on average 3.2 times more than industrial land across London, and up to 7.6 times more in the city centre[7]; this process has accelerated the erosion of London's productive capacity, often displacing viable firms not only because of their economic decline, but because housing redevelopments promised higher financial returns. Between 2001 and 2020, more than 1,400 hectares of industrial land were lost to other uses (mostly housing) despite policy safeguards[8].

Yet, industrial sites continue to play a crucial role in London's economy: the city's industrial heritage, encompassing roughly 7,000 hectares (around 4% of the metropolitan area)[9], is managed through a hierarchy of protection. Strategic Industrial Locations (SILs) safeguard major hubs of manufacturing, logistics, and related capacities that are essential for the city's functioning, while Locally Significant Industrial Sites (LSISs) are monitored at borough[10] level[11].

Despite its long decline, the importance of maintaining productive capacity within the city has become increasingly evident. Urban production remains crucial for building resilient local economies: it supports nearby supply chains, offers employment across a wide range of skill levels, and fosters innovation through collaboration among diverse professionals[12]. Furthermore, contemporary manufacturing, within urban production, relies on advanced technical expertise, creating high-value jobs in fields such as roboti-

4 Data based on *Private rent and house prices, UK: January 2025,* https://www.ons.gov.uk/
5 Data based on *Census 2021* https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/
6 Ferm, J. & Jones E. (2015) *London's industrial land: Cause for concern?*, Bartlett School of Planning, University College London.
7 Ferm, J., & Jones, E. (2017) *Beyond the post-industrial city: Valuing and planning for industry in London*. Urban Studies, 54(14), 3380-3398.
8 PorterPe (2020) *The Barking* & *Dagenham Industrial Land Strategy: Final Report*.
9 Ferm, J., & Jones, E. (2017) *Beyond the post-industrial city: Valuing and planning for industry in London*. Urban Studies, 54(14), 3380-3398.
10 London is divided into 32 local authorities that are called *boroughs*.
11 PorterPe (2020) *The Barking* & *Dagenham Industrial Land Strategy: Final Report*.
12 Croxford, B. et al. (2020) *FOUNDRIES OF THE FUTURE: A Guide for 21st Century Cities of Making,* T U Delft: Delft, The Netherlands.

cs and precision engineering, while also offering accessible opportunities for marginalized groups, including immigrants and those with limited formal education.

These assertions gain even greater significance when we consider the ongoing re-evaluation within contemporary discourse regarding the role of productive sites as integral component of urban settlement rather than outsiders. The industry of the future will increasingly rely on skilled labour, research facilities, and technology hubs that benefit from proximity to markets and knowledge networks, in other words, to the urban settlement. Moreover, urban production continues to sustain the everyday functioning of cities by delivering essential goods and services, underscoring the mutual interdependence between production and urban living[13]. This dual role positions urban production as a key lever for advancing both innovation and social equity in contemporary cities.

These broader considerations find a tangible expression in East London, within Thames Estuary territory; here, the tensions, between housing demand and productive land, form the core of current planning debates. The area, during twentieth century, hosted a wide range of industrial activities that benefited from their proximity to the River Thames, including power generation, oil refining, and manufacturing, indeed, it was one of the London's "backyards" (Edwards, 2008). While inner London hosted a dense fabric of small-scale manufacturing and workshops, often organised in relatively small production units, large-scale and heavy industries were progressively displaced towards the metropolitan periphery. Activities such as gas works, chemical plants, armaments and power generation, required extensive land, direct access to the Thames and were incompatible with residential central areas. In this context, these bulky and polluting infrastructures were not merely located along Thames Estuary for logistical reasons, but also as part of a broader strategy of spatial segregation, in which the city's most undesirable functions were systematically pushed out of sight.

Still frame from the movie *Il Deserto Rosso*, Michelangelo Antonioni, 1964.

Edwards articulates this framework particularly clearly throughout his essay "Blue Sky over Bluewater?" within "London's Turning" book[14]; here, Edwards analyses the Thames Estuary as a historically marginalised landscape sha-

13 Ferm, J., & Jones, E. (2017) *Beyond the post-industrial city: Valuing and planning for industry in London*. Urban Studies, 54(14), 3380-3398.

14 "London's Turning" refered to the *London's Turning: Tha Making of Thames Gateway* (2008) book, edited by Michael J. Rustin and Philip Cohen; the book is a essays collection which examines the impact of urban planning and demographic change on East London's built and social environment.

ped by the concentration of environmentally harmful and socially undesirable activities, deliberately displaced from the metropolitan core:

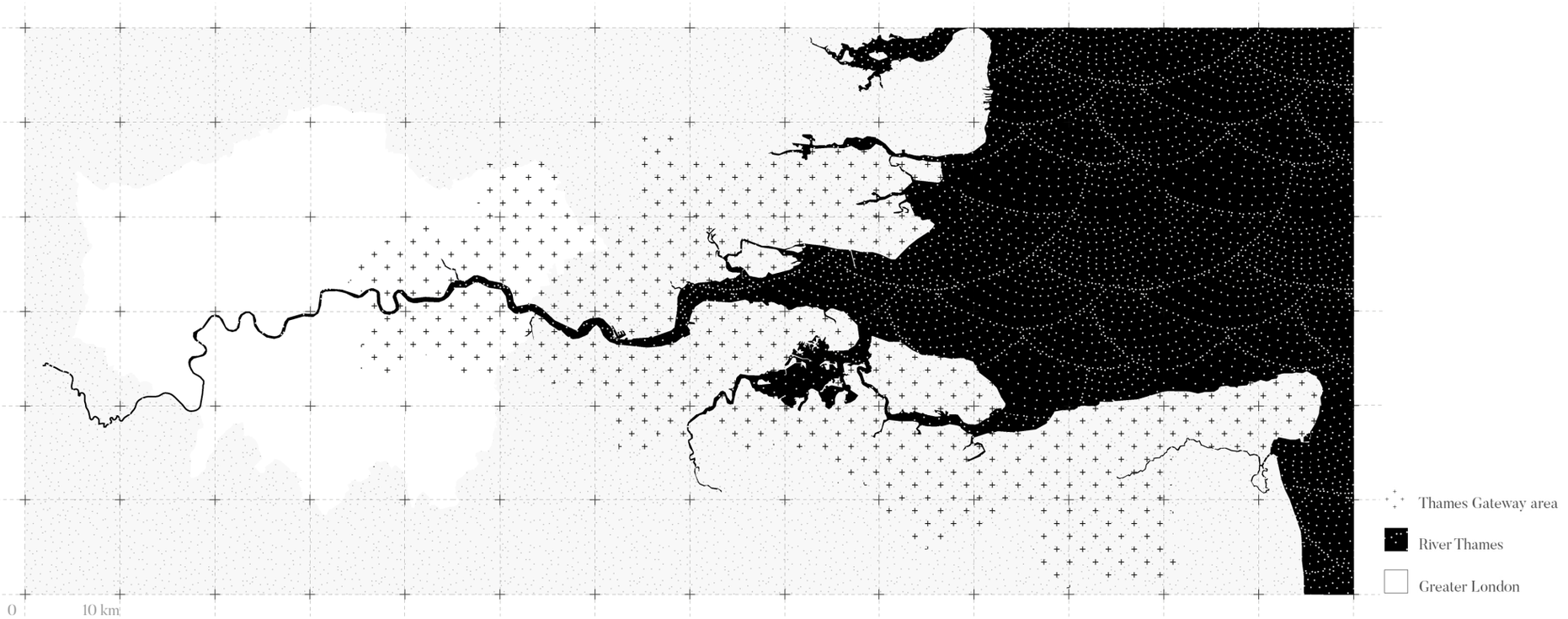
"London has a long history of problems to the east. This is where the most polluting industries went, outside the environmental and safety controls of the old London County Council – east of the River Lea on the north bank and east of Greenwich on the south bank. It was the backyard of London with power generation, garbage disposal as landfill in the Mucking marshes, car-breaking and the rest. It also had the Ford plant at Dagenham, oil refineries, cement, armaments, paper and cardboard manufacture among its main industries. With the destruction of manufacturing in the UK since the Thatcher period this part of England suffered catastrophic job losses which produced an abandoned working class and a fertile ground for racism."
(Edwards, 2008)

Another insight, this time provided by Marriott within the same book, concerns the ambiguous position of those outer territories of London that were incorporated into the city's administrative boundaries only in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While often framed as peripheral or marginal within the metropolitan narrative, indeed, these areas concentrated the most intense forms of industrial production and accommodated large-scale factories that were largely absent from the historical core of the city:

"[…] Despite the fact that London remained the greatest centre of production and consumption, it was seen to possess few of the features that defined the experience of industrialisation. Large factory production and heavy engineering, for example, were conspicuous by their absence. London manufacturing continued to be dominated by small-scale workshops employing fewer than 25 persons because the capital was simply too remote from the sources of coal and iron ore and land was too expensive to allow it to compete successfully with the burgeoning industrial heartlands. […] the Great Eastern Locomotive works at Stratford in West Ham employed 7,000[15], the Thames Ironworks in Canning Town 6,000, Siemens in Woolwich 7,000, Woolwich Arsenal 70,000, Beckton Gasworks 10,000 and Ford's at Dagenham 15,000. At a time when London was putatively dominated by small-scale production units, these figures point to a rather different experience."
(Marriott, 2008)

Nevertheless, following the decline of large-scale industrial production, parts of the Thames Estuary territory underwent a gradual functional reorientation; rather than disappearing, productive activities adapted to new forms of operation, increasingly centred on logistics, storage, and distribution, supported by the continued infrastructural relevance of the Thames as a navigable and strategic corridor (Meyer, 2008). At the same time, the long-standing role of Thames Estuary as London's industrial "backyard", historically burdened with polluting and undesirable functions, became increasingly visible in the form of extensive derelict and contaminated land; this condition reinforced the perception of the area as a space in need of transformation and renewal, while simultaneously perpetuating its image as socially and spatially segregated (Hall, 2014). The decline of industrial activity also resulted in significant job losses, further exacerbating socio-economic deprivation across the area, which is still visible in contemporary era.

15 The author refers to the amount of jobs provided by specific firms.



London Thames Gateway area.

By the 1990s, as the effects of deindustrialisation became impossible to ignore, the East End started to attract growing policy attention, most notably through the UK Government's Thames Gateway project, an urban regeneration initiative of unprecedented scale in Europe (Hall, 2014). Originally introduced in 1991 through Michael Heseltine's East Thames Corridor concept, this initiative sought to "revitalise" a vast stretch of post-industrial territory extending over 60 kilometres, as a "green-line", from the Docklands to the Thames Estuary, following the route of the proposed high-speed rail link between central London and the Channel Tunnel (Mann, 2008). Its objectives included (at least at the level of official discourse) sustainable urban development, attracting new investment, and relieving development pressure on London's western corridor by redirecting growth towards the long-underinvested eastern periphery. The idea was that much like the decision in 1943 to build Heathrow Airport encouraged growth along the western corridor from London, this strategy could reverse the trend, focusing development on the neglected areas to the East.

"[…] The Thames Gateway plan for sustainable communities to give it its full title, is a comprehensive attempt to tackle these issues[16]*. As such it is the largest and most complex project of urban regeneration ever undertaken in the UK. It has been compared, in*

16 The authors refer to the persistent disparities between East and West London.

proportionate scale, to the rebuilding that took place after the Great Fire of London, or to all the New Towns that were built after World War II. It involves the building of affordable homes for upwards of half a million people; the construction of a new transport network to attract people, goods and inward investment from across Europe; the creation of a whole new apparatus of governance to regulate London's historic turn to the east; the attempt to create a sustainable green environment out of some of the most polluted brown field sites in the country…"
(Cohen & Rustin, 2008)

Rather than a single, time-bound intervention, the Thames Gateway has unfolded over decades, shaping successive urban agendas and frameworks. From Stratford and the Olympic Park to Woolwich, Rainham and Barking, the strategy has involved a wide range of large-scale housing, infrastructure and economic development programmes, each at different stages of realisation. Due to the availability of land, combined with comparatively low prices, Thames Estuary has increasingly assumed the role of a testing ground for large-scale urban transformations (Meyer, 2008).
In this broader context, starting with the 2004 London Plan, several key Opportunity Areas were formally identified, marking the beginning of a new wave of urban transformations within Thames Estuary area; Greenwich Peninsula, Charlton Riverside, Royal Docks & Beckton Riverside, Woolwich, Thamesmead & Abbey Wood and London Riverside are only few of these Opportunity Areas (OAs). This thesis focuses on London Riverside and on those urban transformations that are currently underway or are expected to be initiated in this area. Although it spans the territories of both the London Borough of Barking & Dagenham (LBBD) and the London Borough of Havering[17], this thesis work deliberately concentrates on the LBBD; over the past decade, the area of Barking & Dagenham has been subject to intense estate pressure and large-scale redevelopment processes, making it a particularly rich and illustrative context in which to observe the spatial, social and economic implications of contemporary regeneration strategies.

Given this framework, the River Road Employment Area (RREA), within Barking & Dagenham, stands out as a particularly significant case. Historically designated as a Strategic Industrial Location and now spatially at the centre of multiple housing development initiatives, it encapsulates many of the wider challenges currently facing Thames Estuary, offering a critical lens through which to interrogate the future coexistence of residential growth and urban production.

This thesis, therefore, is structured into four main parts, each addressing a specific scale and mode of investigation, moving progressively from observation to interpretation and, finally, to design.

The first chapter investigates the broader context of estate pressure affecting Barking & Dagenham within the wider London Riverside corridor. Through the analysis of ongoing regeneration processes and selected case studies, this section examines how housing-led development strategies are reshaping the urban form and what are their outcomes for the community. Within this framework, the chapter introduces Barking Riverside and Thames Road as key reference projects; these cases are particularly significant for the broader London Riverside plan and are located in direct proximity to the "employment area" (RREA), exemplifying different approaches to large-scale regeneration and highlighting both their ambitions and their limitations.

17 Havering in one of the 32 boroughs of London; it borders Barking & Dagenham to the East and represents the easternmost borough, marking the outer edge of Greater London before the metropolitan boundary gives way to Essex.

The second chapter, which holds a comparable analytical weight to the previous one, give a contextual framework of Barking & Dagenham territory; this section develops a multi-layered reading of the area throughout historical, economic and socio-demographic perspectives, with particular attention to past and present migration waves. The chapter concludes with a spatial analysis of the existing "backyard" condition of River Road Employment Area, examining the morphology, typologies and everyday functioning of contemporary productive spaces (and beyond), positioning them as a critical yet undervalued component of the urban fabric.

The third part acts as a visual atlas that documents the on-site survey along River Road area. It serves as a narrative journey[18] through the site, using a curated selection of photographs to illustrate the physical reality and atmosphere of the location. By transitioning from technical drawings to a photographic account, this chapter bridges the gap between abstract planning and the tangible, industrial character of the territory. Rather than serving as a purely descriptive survey, this visual corpus acts as a critical interpretative tool, framing the site as a complex and evolving landscape

The final chapter is dedicated to the architectural and urban proposal. Building upon the analytical framework developed in the previous sections, the design proposal explores alternative spatial strategies for integrating housing within the productive land in the context of a rapidly transforming urban landscape.

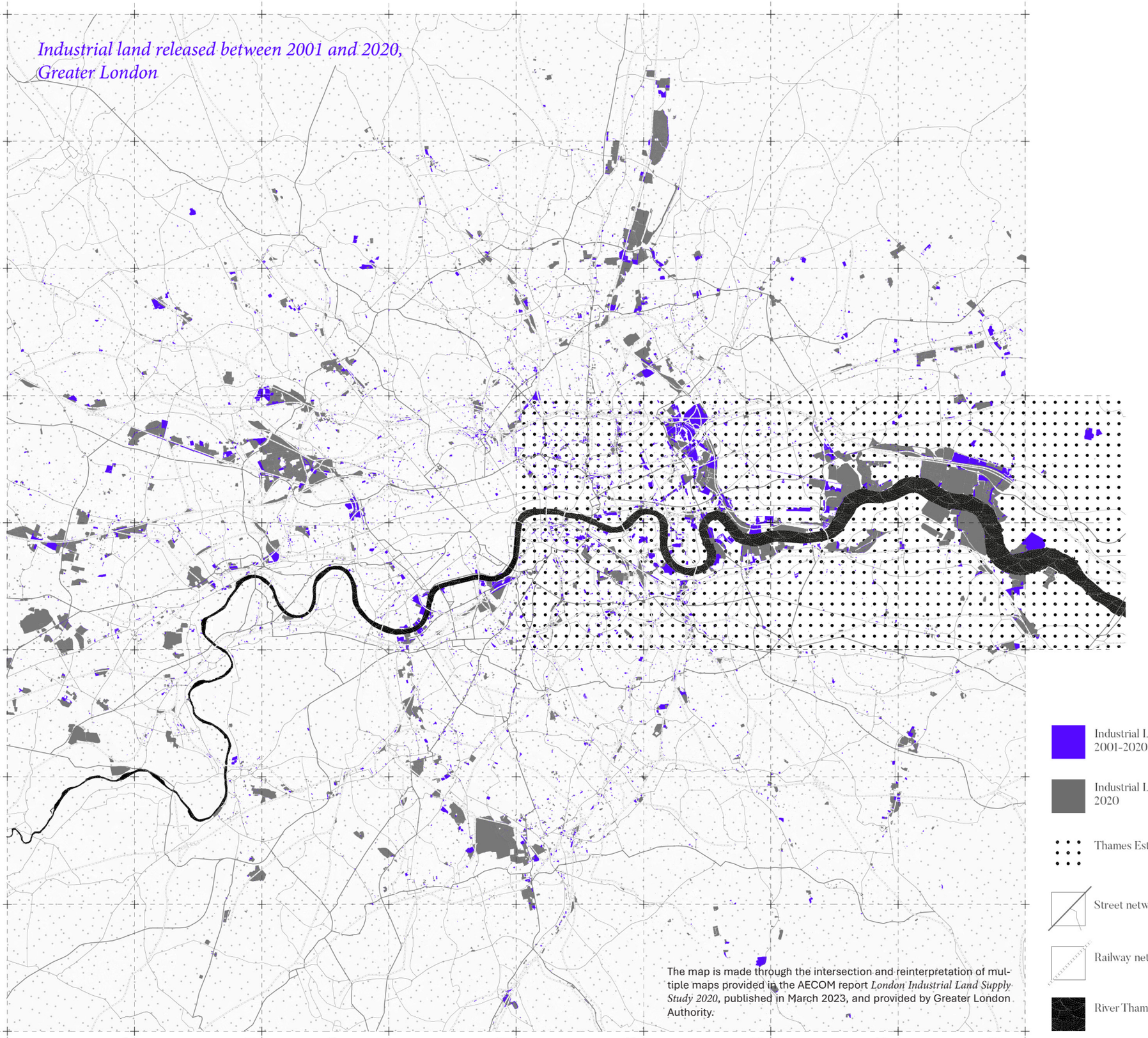
18 The photographic atlas is based on a direct site survey conducted by the author in April 2025. The fieldwork involved on-site observation and photographic documentation of the area, providing first-hand visual material to support the spatial analysis developed in this research.

Terminological Clarification

1. In this thesis, the term **urban production** is deliberately used in place of more conventional labels such as industrial land or manufacturing. This choice reflects the hybrid nature of many spaces that, at a policy level, continue to be classified as industrial. As outlined in the introduction, processes of deindustrialisation have profoundly transformed these areas: rather than hosting traditional heavy industry, they now accommodate a wide range of activities, including logistics, warehousing, wholesale, light manufacturing, and waste management. These functions coexist within the same spatial framework and often overlap, making traditional categories such as industrial or manufacturing insufficient to fully describe their contemporary condition. While the term urban production may appear generic, it is adopted here as the most appropriate conceptual umbrella to capture the diversity, adaptability, and ongoing productive role of these spaces within the contemporary urban fabric. Nevertheless, terms such as manufacturing and industrial land are still used throughout the thesis to indicate specific function if considered appropriate (especially when are referred to the historic use of buildings or land).

2. A further clarification concerns the use of the term **Barking Riverfront**. Throughout this thesis, this expression is preferred to Barking Riverside in order to avoid confusion with the residential development that carries the same name. While Barking Riverside is commonly used to indicate the broader riverside area of Barking within the London Borough of Barking & Dagenham, in this work, the term Barking Riverfront is adopted as a replacement: this distinction allows for a clearer separation between the wider territorial context and the specific housing-led regeneration project.

Industrial land released between 2001 and 2020, Greater London



Industrial Land Released, 2001-2020

Industrial Land Remaining, 2020

Thames Estuary Area

Street network

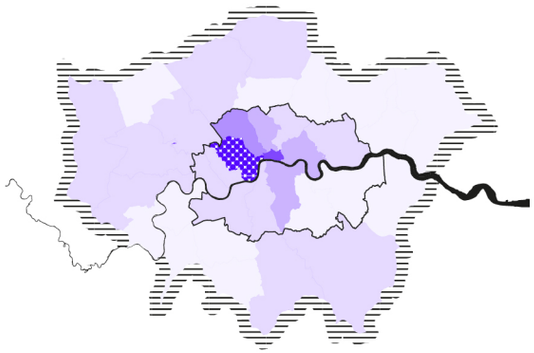
Railway network

River Thames

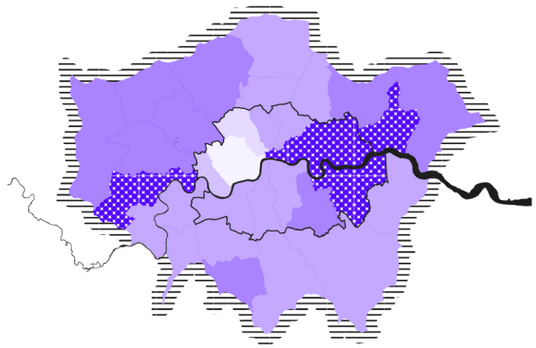
The map is made through the intersection and reinterpretation of multiple maps provided in the AECOM report *London Industrial Land Supply Study 2020*, published in March 2023, and provided by Greater London Authority.

Greater London Overview per Local authority

50k
100k
200k
300k
400k
500k
600k
700k
800k



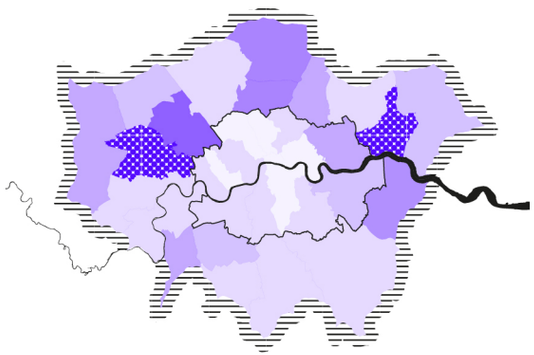
Total jobs number distribution, 2021
Data source: *https://data.london.gov.uk*



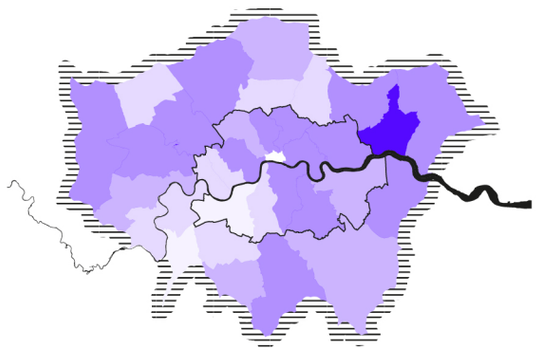
-20%
-6%
-1%
+3%
+7%
+13%
+23%

Demographic Shift in ten years, 2021
Data source: *https://www.ons.gov.uk*

0%
1%
2%
3%
4%
5%
6%
7%
8%



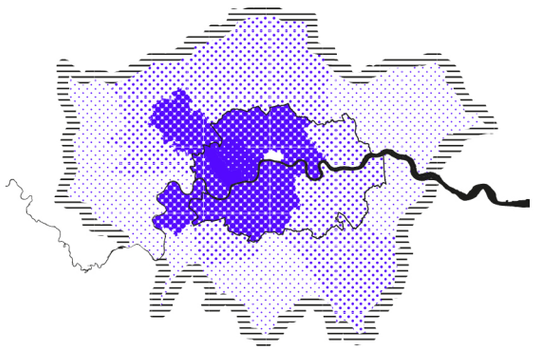
Manufacturing jobs on total workforce, 2021
Data source: *https://data.london.gov.uk*



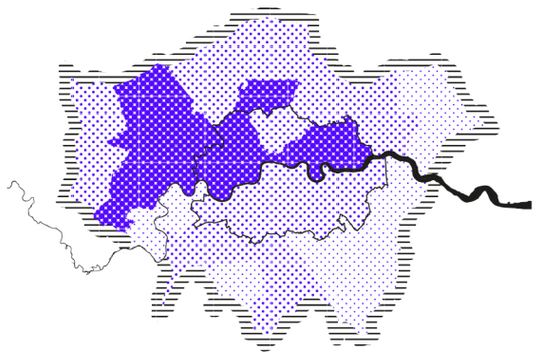
0%
2%
4%
6%
8%
10%
12%

No qualification distribution, 2021
Data source: *https://www.ons.gov.uk*

£ 1,000
£ 1,500
£ 2,000
£ 2,500
£ 3,000
£ 3,500



Housing rent per month, 2021
Data source: *https://www.ons.gov.uk*



15%
30%
45%

Non-UK born, 2021
Data source: *https://www.ons.gov.uk*

1.

Estate Pressure along the Thames:
The case of Barking & Dagenham

Still frames of Barking Reach power station demolition, 2018 © Steve Walpole.

1.1 Urban Transformations and the Practice of *Tabula Rasa*

London Riverside is one of the Opportunities Areas identified by the London Plan in 2004 within the Thames Gateway programme; located in London's East End, the area encompasses 2474 hectares[19] along the Thames Estuary. Although London Riverside spans the territories of both the London Borough of Barking & Dagenham (LBBD) and the London Borough of Havering, this thesis deliberately chooses to focus on LBBD transformation; over the past decade, this area has been subject to intense estate pressure and large-scale redevelopment processes, thereby offering a valuable and sufficiently representative context through which to examine the spatial dynamics generated by current urban evolution.

Before turning to contemporary interplay, this section offers a brief overview of the East End territory, in order to contextualise the spatial conditions in which these urban transformations are unfolding. Located to the north-east of the River Thames within Greater London, the quadrant of East End has traditionally been recognised as one of the London's historical working-class areas, shaped by its long-standing association with industrial activity, docklands, and infrastructure-related uses. Much of what is today referred to as the East End developed at the urban fringe of the city, in close relationship with the Thames and its tributaries, and was only formally incorporated into the administrative boundaries of Greater London in the late 1960s (Cohen, 2008). This relatively recent integration helps explain why large portions of land, particularly in the furthest areas from the "City of London", still retain morphological and landsca-

19 *Opportunity Area locations, Opportunity Area Map,* https://www.london.gov.uk/

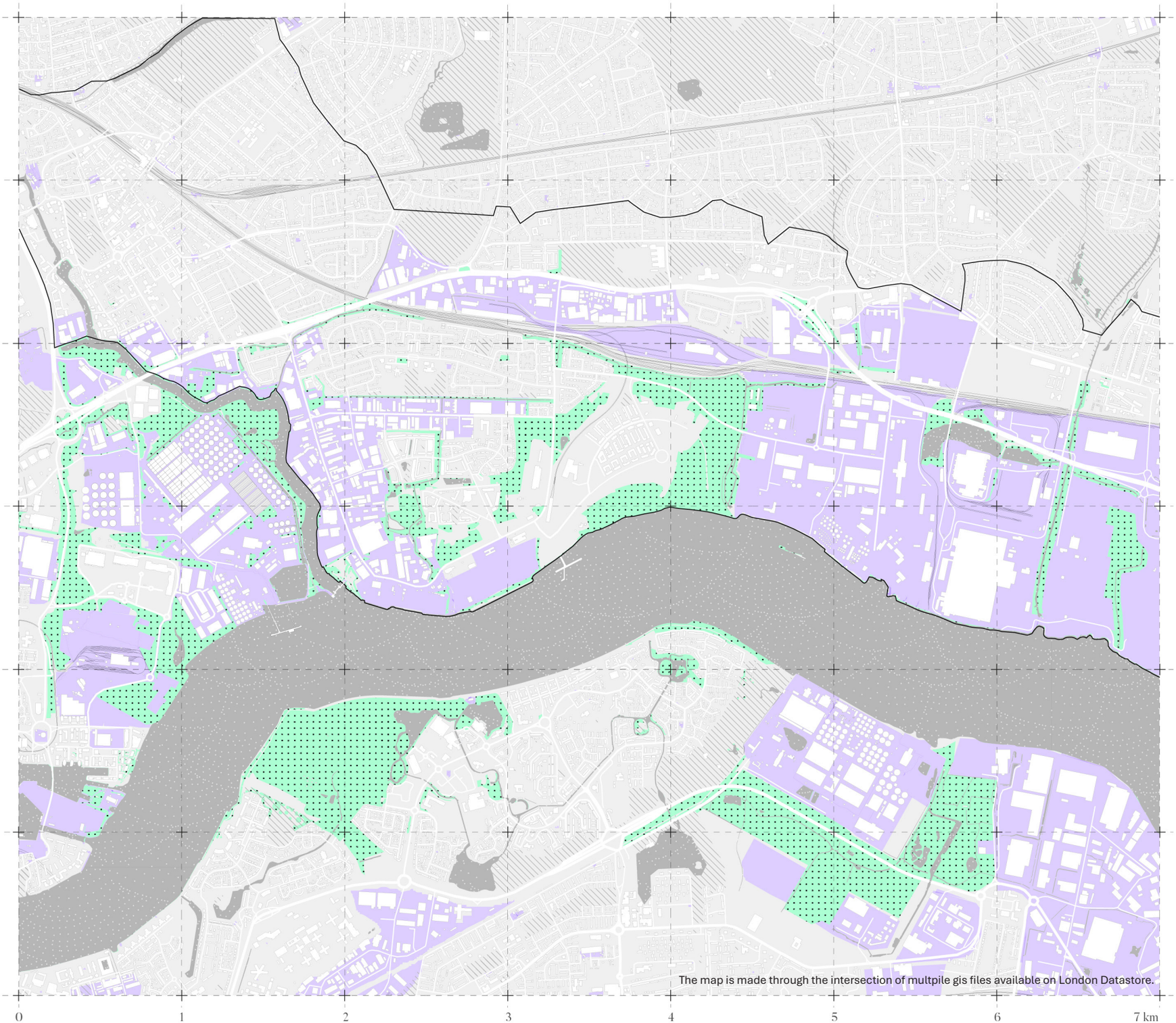
pe features that are not fully urbanised: large tracts of open land, residual plots and often marshy river landscapes are the result of long-standing plannings logics, infrastructural constraints and the historical incompatibility between residential and productive uses. At the same time, it is crucial to acknowledge that much of the East End territory along the River Thames remains deeply affected by the industrial exploitation of land: the urban redevelopment of former industrial land often requires extensive and costly soil remediation processes, which significantly slow down or complicate urban transformations (Edwards, 2008). These areas are frequently constrained by hard and inflexible infrastructural frameworks, such as land parcels fragmented by the intersection of motorways and railway lines, or by the presence of high-voltage power lines and other technical installations that directly limit design possibilities (Mann, 2008). As a result, the apparent openness or incompleteness of these landscapes is less a sign of underdevelopment than the morphological consequence of layered industrial uses, environmental contamination, and infrastructural permanence, all of which continue to shape the form of contemporary urban change.

Nevertheless, the complexity and physical constraints of these territories have not limited estate pressure, another crucial factor must therefore be considered: across London, residential land plots are worth on average 3.2 times more than industrial land, a ratio that rises to up to 7.6 times in central areas[20]. This significant value gap has strongly incentivised investors to target these territories, despite their infrastructural and environmental challenges, and has created the ideal conditions for large-scale housing-led interventions. Given this framework, today, much of this territory is characterised by the coexistence of two parallel realities: on the one hand, the areas that still remain linked to urban production, often associated with logistics, light manufacturing, wholesale, and waste management activities, on the other, large-scale residential developments that settle into extensive vacant plots or replace former productive sites following land remediation processes. It is precisely in the tension between these two systems that the complex and contradictory identity of the contemporary East End is constructed (Cohen, 2008).

Still frame of Docklands environment from the movie *The Long Good Friday*, **John Mackenzie, 1980.**

20 Ferm, J., & Jones, E. (2017) *Beyond the post-industrial city: Valuing and planning for industry in London*. Urban Studies, 54(14), 3380-3398.

London Riverside, Land Use.



The map is made through the intersection of multpile gis files available on London Datastore.

That said, a wave of urban regeneration initiatives has emerged or accelerated over the last decade, catalysed by key events such as the 2012 Olympics and the improved connectivity delivered by the Elizabeth Line[21], which helped redirect public and private interest toward the East End, and of course London Riverside. The latter, according to official documents, has the potential for "44,000 new homes and 29,000 new jobs by 2041"[22], and it is the largest, among the London OAs[23], in terms of housing capacity.

The map at the following page illustrates a "future in the making" for the examined area, providing an overview of the high concentration of projects, though in a necessarily partial way, that have been completed, are currently underway, or are expected to be initiated in the near future. This extensive programme is managed at different level of authority, involving public institutions such as the UK Government, the Greater London Authority (GLA), and semi-public investors such as Be First (the LBBD's regeneration company), Homes England, Transport for London and so on; this multi-layered governance structure further complicates the overall framework and underscores the scale and ambition of the envisaged transformation.

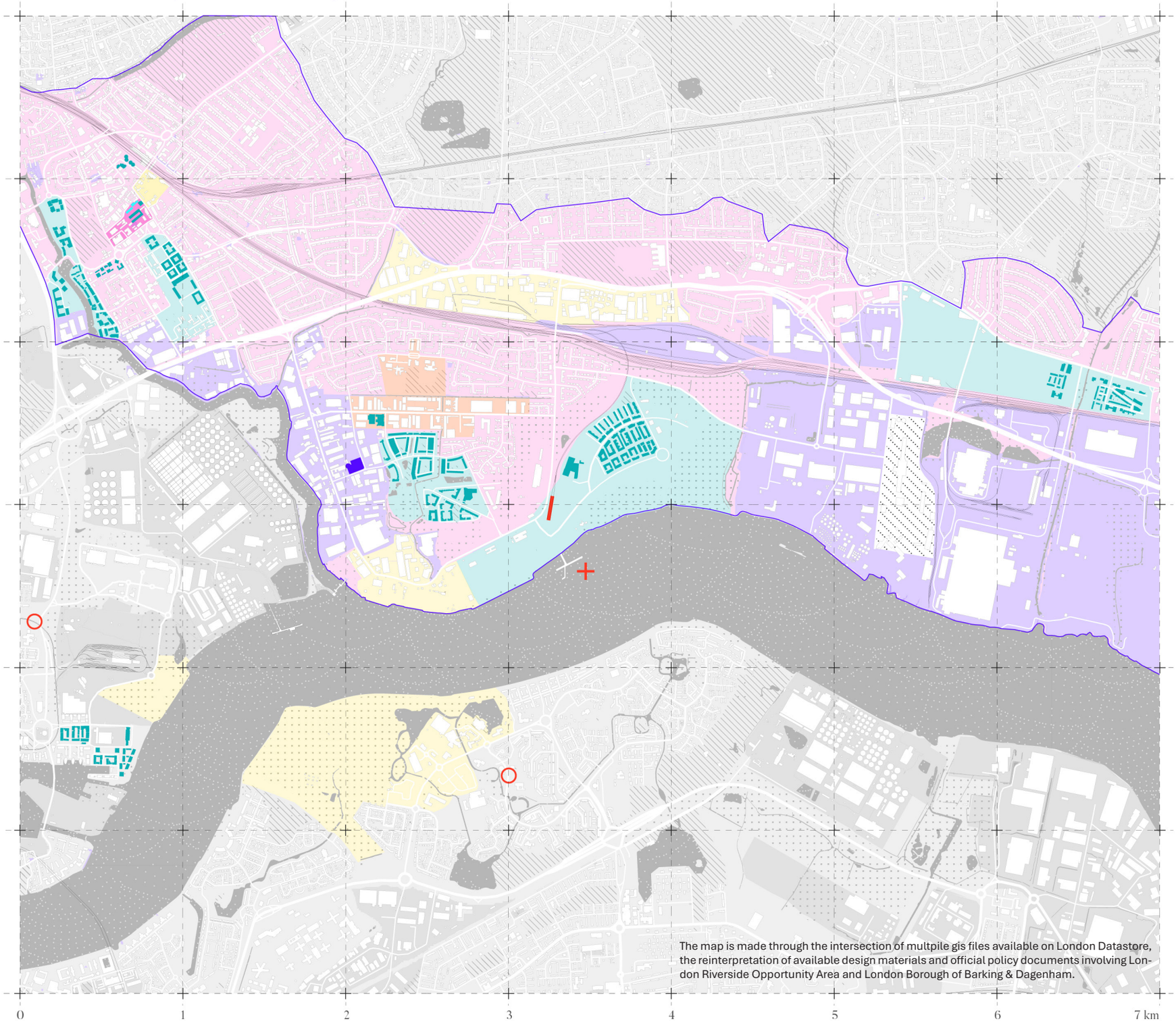
The Opportunity Area Planning Framework (OAPF), which is the official document for overall regeneration vision, outlines the long-term goals for the London Riverside area around mixed-use development, improved accessibility and housing[24]. In practice, however, housing provision has clearly emerged as the dominant driver of the urban transformation.

The OAPF defines different strategic development areas for intensification, of which a large number can be found in waterfront proximity, that provides, as already said, both large amounts of wasteland, often marshland, and extensive urban productive spaces. The industrial legacy and productive character of these spaces are frequently highlighted to promote these projects in official documents, yet, paradoxically, none of the features so proudly advertised are actually integrated into the design choices. On the contrary, industrial buildings are rarely included in envisioned urban form, or even taken in consideration; while public documents promote, through vibrant slogans and patinated renders, mixed-use developments and continuity with existing built environment, all these huge new settlements, or at least the majority, seem to follow the same logic, which can be summed up within two words: *tabula rasa*.

21 Elizabeth Line is a major rail project within Greater London, designed to improve east–west connectivity. Construction began in 2009 and the line officially opened in 2022, with some sections still undergoing.
22 *London Riverside Opportunity Area*, https://www.london.gov.uk/
23 *Opportunity Area locations, Opportunity Area Map,* https://www.london.gov.uk/

24 *Opportunity Area Planning Framework documents, London Riverside Opportunity Area*, https://www.london.gov.uk/

London Riverside, "future in the making".



The map is made through the intersection of multpile gis files available on London Datastore, the reinterpretation of available design materials and official policy documents involving London Riverside Opportunity Area and London Borough of Barking & Dagenham.

Very well-known examples of this kind are Beam Park and Dagenham Green, both located in a former Ford Dagenham site, not far from the site of the Dagenham Market (recently cancelled). The two sites are physically constrained within a narrow strip of land between the London–Tilbury–Southend railway line[25] and the A1306[26] arterial road, a condition that makes the area particularly challenging in terms of accessibility, permeability, and urban integration. The design development of Beam Park, initiated in 2019 and only partly realised, consists in the settlement of 3000 new housing units, a new railway station, two new schools, a medical centre, and various commercial spaces, in addition to a three-hectare park located in the centre of the development[27].

Although the area is already inhabited, at present, several of these key facilities, most notably the schools and the railway station, have not been delivered yet. This has reinforced perceptions of isolation among residents and echoes criticisms previously levelled at other large-scale developments in the borough.

Concerns regarding the area's isolation have recently surfaced in public discourse: a Guardian article published in September 2025[28], titled "'Dagenham is worried': London borough in limbo after Smithfield and Billingsgate move axed", reports widespread frustration among residents following the withdrawal of government support for the long-promised Beam Park railway station.

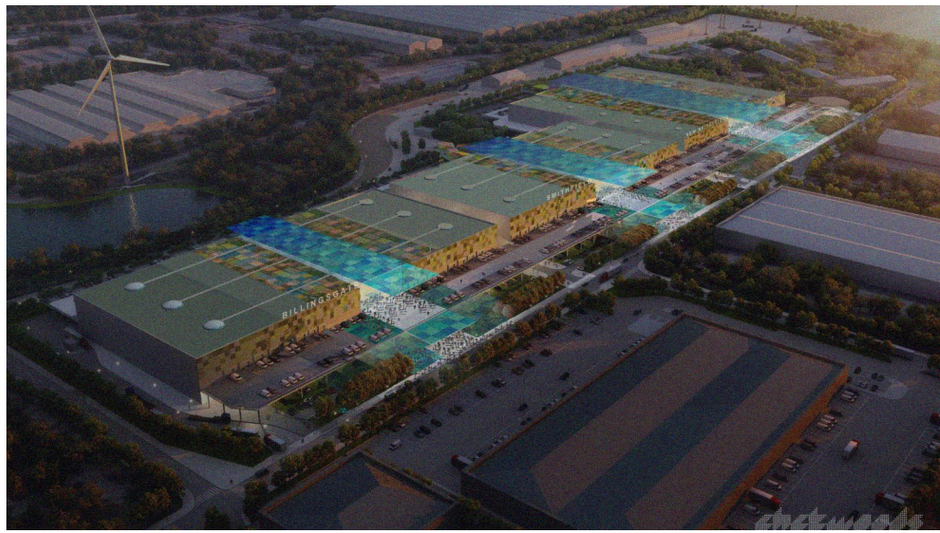
Beam Park and Dagenham Green urban transformation © Google Earth Pro.

25 The London-Tilbury-Southend railway line connects central London with destinations in East London and Essex, including Barking.
26 The A1306 in London is the old route of the A13 trunk road serving East London boroughs such as Barking & Dagenham and Havering.
27 *Countryside Partnerships – Beam Park Regeneration,* https://www.barker-associates.co.uk/projects/countryside-partnerships-beam-park-regeneration/
28 The Guardian, '*Dagenham is worried': London borough in limbo after Smithfield and Billingsgate move axed, 20 Sept 2025.* https://www.theguardian.com/

Despite the wide housing development, many inhabitants feel let down by the lack of transport infrastructure that had been presented as central to the project's vision; as one resident, who moved to Beam Park in late 2022, notes: "It's the whole reason we moved in. It was supposed to be built in a year or two, and my partner was going to jump on the train to work. Now we have to rent a parking spot." This episode highlights how housing-led regeneration on former industrial sites has proceeded faster than the delivery of the supporting infrastructure on which its long-term liveability depends.

Also, the recent cancellation of the Dagenham Market project (2025), initially included in the wider regeneration programme before Smithfield and Billingsgate moved axed[29], provides a revealing insight into the intrinsic fragility of large-scale regeneration strategies. It is not an exception failure, but this episode highlights a structural condition of large urban redevelopments: while conceived as interdependent, individual projects often evolve independently from the wider plan, generating discontinuities and unfinished conditions which affects the broader result and success.

In the case of Dagenham Market, this has not only interrupted the intended spatial and functional coherence, but also deprived the area of the economic opportunities and employment that the wider strategy was expected togenerate, highlighting the social and labour-related consequences of fragmented planning.



Vision for Dagenham Market, 2021 © Chetwoods Architects.

A similar trajectory to Beam Park can be observed in its neighbour Dagenham Green, which is immediately located its west side; although its realization is still in its early stages of development, the available design material suggests a continuation of the same spatial and programmatic logic adopted in Beam Park. The two interventions, therefore, appear to be conceived as complementary, aiming to establish morphological continuity and coherent urban image across the former industrial site, and again, the regeneration programme is predominantly housing-led.

29 The Guardian, *Historic Smithfield and Billingsgate markets find new home in Docklands,* https://www.theguardian.com/

This time, Dagenham Green is expected to host a number of 3500 residential units, alongside a secondary school, 4,400 sqm of retail, community and leisure spaces, 5,000 sqm of workspaces, and a five-acre public park[30]. Both Beam Park and Dagenham Green, which are located in a former Ford industrial site, refuse to incorporate the site industrial legacy into the design code. Instead, the pre-existing industrial fabric has been entirely demolished, resulting in an urban transformation approach that largely erases the site's industrial fabric. This tabula rasa strategy contributes to an overall architectural outcome that appears markedly generic in the official design material: the absence of any spatial or morphological reference to the former industrial buildings produces an urban landscape that could be located almost anywhere.

This condition is further emphasised by the striking repetition of architectural typologies: a residential tower designed for Dagenham Green can be found, almost unchanged, approximately five kilometres away within the Gascoigne Estate[31] redevelopment, in a far more consolidated and urban context near Barking Town Centre[32]. Such repetition highlights how large-scale regeneration schemes, across London Riverside OA, increasingly rely on fast and standardised design solutions, prioritising delivery and coherence of image over contextual specificity and the integration of industrial heritage.

Dagenham Green, 2009 frame © Google Street View.

Dagenham Green, 2025 frame © Google Street View.

30 *Dagenham Green Phase 1*, https://www.dagenhamgreen.co.uk/
31 The Gascoigne Estate is a large, post-war social housing complex located in Barking Town Centre and is now being redevelop. "Essential components of the proposed development were the creation of the new Gascoigne park, two landscaped courtyards within the block arrangement and a new street network to serve the buildings and improve connectivity to the surrounding area." The work is taking place in three phases, of which the first two were completed in 2022, https://nla.london/
32 The Barking Town Centre project is a multi-phase large-scale regeneration plan led by LBBD and Be First, to transform Barking centre into a "vibrant destination with new homes, jobs, cultural spaces, and improved public areas". Works officially started in 2010s and are still undergoing. See *Barking Town Centre Regeneration Strategy 2020-2030*, https://befirst.london

Ongoing construction works at Beam Park, 2023 © Callan Construction Ltd.

Residential buildings at Beam Park, 2019 © Patel Taylor.

Landscape strategy, Beam Park, 2019 © Patel Taylor.

"The development provides a complete framework for living in an inclusive neighbourhood of 50% affordable homes. Supporting amenities include a new rail station, commercial, leisure, community facilities and two primary schools."

Patel Taylor

undergoing...

1.

Urban vision, Dagenham Green, 2023 © PRP Architects.

Residential Towers, Dagenham Green, 2023 © PRP Architects.

Residential Towers, Dagenham Green, 2023 © PRP Architects.

"Dagenham Green will deliver more than 3,500 homes, of which 50% will be affordable and 360 will be build-to-rent. The design also includes a secondary school, up to 4,400 sqm of retail, community and leisure spaces, 5,000 sqm of workspaces to attract businesses and jobs to the area, and a five-acre public park."

PRP Architects

undergoing...

Crown House, new residential development at Barking Town Centre © CJCT Studios.

Gascoigne Estate © White Arkitekter.

Although other regeneration initiatives are distributed across the area and highlighted in the “future in the making” map, they have been intentionally excluded from this chapter, which deliberately concentrates on projects that occupy and replace spaces of urban production, as these are most relevant to the critical framework of the research. Nevertheless, their inclusion in the map remains significant, as they communicate the scale and concentration of regeneration pressures affecting the area as a whole.

Furthermore, other regeneration initiatives highlighted in the “future in the making” map, such as Castle Green[33], remain at a very preliminary stage. Although regeneration programmes have been officially announced, these cannot yet be considered fully defined projects, as the available material is limited to strategic intentions. As a result, any detailed discussion would risk providing an inaccurate or inconsistent representation of their actual scope and spatial implications. Moreover, another vast area, corresponding to the Barking riverfront, has been deliberately excluded from this paragraph discourse, as it requires a more focused and in-depth discussion within the following section.

33 “Castle Green has potential to deliver a major new community with around 10,000 new homes, many new jobs, supported by community infrastructure and new green space”, https://befirst.london/

1.2 Two case studies: Barking Riverside and Thames Road

1.2.1 *A Multi-scalar Governance*

Constructing a clear and linear narrative of the transformations that have unfolded along Barking riverfront over the last two decades is far from straightforward. Rather than following a singular trajectory, the area has been shaped through a layered and often fragmented process, involving a multiplicity of actors operating across overlapping scales of governance; this complexity is largely rooted in the site's inclusion within the London Riverside Opportunity Area. As a result, local transformations are embedded within strategic visions that extend well beyond the power of borough-level planning, and are influenced by regional and national priorities.

Within this framework, different portions of the Barking riverfront have been guided by distinct governance structures and delivery mechanisms. Barking Riverside, the largest and most advanced residential development in the area, is delivered by Barking Riverside Limited, a joint venture established in 2004 between the Greater London Authority (GLA) and the housing association L&Q (London & Quadrant)[34]. This partnership has been supported by key public infrastructure actors, including Transport for London (TfL) and Homes England[35], particularly in relation to transport infrastructures and funding mechanisms. The scale of this institutional involvement reflects the strategic importance attributed to Barking Riverside within London Riverside agenda. However, interest in this territory precedes the formal designation of the London Riverside Opportunity Area: following the closure of the Barking power stations, and in parallel with the emerging policy focus on the East Thames Corridor, early redevelopment initiatives began to appear in the 1990s (Hall, 2014). During this period, Bellway Homes, a private residential developer, completed the construction of approximately 864 residential units across a portion of the site[36]. While relatively limited in scale, this intervention marked an initial shift away from purely industrial use. The decisive turning point, however, occurred with the designation of the area as part of the London Riverside Opportunity Area in 2004. From this moment onwards, the site became embedded within a strategic regeneration framework operating at a metropolitan scale, enabling the involvement of more powerful institutional players and significantly reshaping both the ambitions and the governance structure of Barking Riverside plan[37].

By contrast, the transformation of Thames Road falls more directly within the planning jurisdiction of the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham, yet it is coordinated through

34 London & Quadrant is one of the UK's largest housing associations and a major residential developer, managing over 100,000 homes across London and the South East.
35 Homes England is the UK government's executive non-departmental public body sponsored by the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government. It operates as the national housing and regeneration agency with the mandate to increase the number of new homes and accelerate the delivery of housing across England.

36 GREATER LONDON AUTHORITY, *Planning Report D&P/0150c/01, Barking Riverside in the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham, planning application no. 16/00131/OUT*, 22 March 2016.
37 GREATER LONDON AUTHORITY, *Planning Report D&P/0150c/01, Barking Riverside in the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham, planning application no. 16/00131/OUT*, 22 March 2016.

Be First[38], the borough's regeneration company established in 2017, which occupies a hybrid position, simultaneously acting as planning authority and delivery agent. While this structure allows for a certain degree of local control and strategic alignment, the Greater London Authority continues to exert influence through regional planning frameworks, housing targets, and policy guidance. Local authority of Barking & Dagenham thus plays a crucial role in shaping medium-term development strategies, while remaining embedded within a wider multi-scalar governance system.

Furthermore, Thames Road introduces an additional layer of institutional and regulatory complexity. Historically, the area formed part of the River Road Employment Area (RREA) and was designated as Strategic Industrial Location (SIL), a planning classification intended to safeguard industrial and productive uses from residential encroachment[39]. The gradual reorientation of planning discourse toward housing-led regeneration, although still only partially realised in spatial terms, signals a progressive weakening of this protective framework.

Beyond public institutions, the governance landscape of the Barking riverfront area is further shaped by a dense network of private developers, landowners, housing associations, planning consultants, and technical advisors. Their involvement contributes to a fragmented decision-making environment, where competing objectives, such as housing delivery, industrial protection, environmental remediation, and infrastructure provision, are not always coherently aligned. Rather than forming a unified vision, these actors often operate through parallel and sometimes conflicting agendas.

This institutional multiplicity is mirrored in the extensive body of planning documentation produced over more than two decades, including masterplans, opportunity area frameworks, supplementary planning documents, technical reports, and site-specific strategies. While this accumulation of material testifies to the scale and ambition of the envisaged transformation, it also complicates any attempt to read the overall project.

The Planning timeline, at the following pages, summarises the principal events and key stakeholders involved in the urban transformation of the Barking riverfront and is based on official planning documents already mentioned in this section.

38 *The Factory District Transformation Area,* https://befirst.london
39 PorterPe (2020). *The Barking & Dagenham Industrial Land Strategy: Final Report*.

1980s | 1991 | 1992 | 1993 | 1995 | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2004 | 2005

London Thames Gateway Project

Michael Heseltine's proposal of East Thames Corridor.

The UK government formally adopts the Thames Gateway Planning Framework.

The London Thames Gateway Development Corporation (LTGDC) is established.

Barking Riverside

Initial masterplan prepared.

Planning permission granted for Phase 1A of the masterplan.

Supplementary Planning Guidance.

473
residential units.

Revised masterplan.

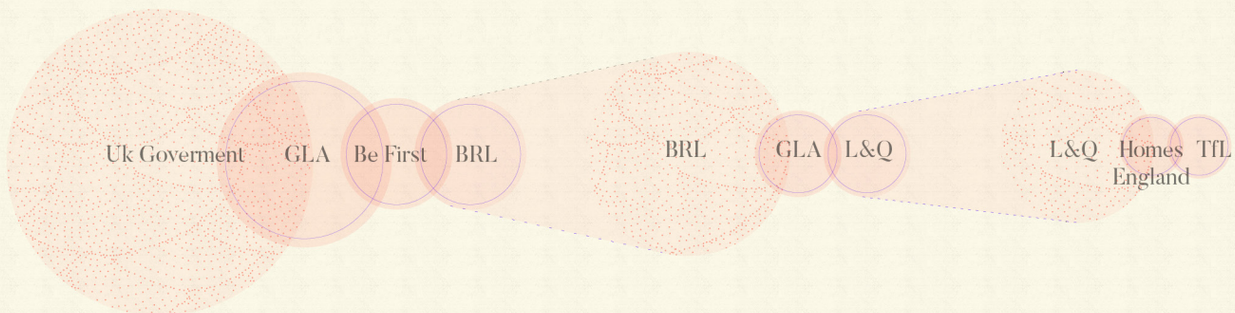
Planning permission granted for revised Phase 1A and Phase 2A.

864
residential units completed.

River Road Employment Area (RREA)

The RREA is identified as a Preferred Industrial Location (PILs) in the London Plan 2004. It will become a SIL in the revised plan of the 2008.

Players



LBBD's Key Events

Closure of Barking **power stations** and landfill operations at the current Barking Riverside area.

The Barking-Havering Riverside area is identified as a zone of change named **London Riverside.**

London Riverside is identified in the Mayor's London Plan as an **Opportunity Area** (OA) for intensification.

Barking Riverside Limited (BRL) is established between the **GLA** and the housing association **L&Q**, supported by Homes Englas and **Transport for London** (TfL).

2007 2008 2009 2010 2011 / 2013 / 2017 2018 / 2020 2021 2022

Thames Gateway Delivery Plan.

Thames Gateway Delivery Plan(01).

First site-wide outline planning permission granted.

10,800
residential units

65,600
sqm
non-residential

Submission of a Second Planning application to the London Thames Gateway Development Corporation.

Second Planning permission granted.

Second Planning permission partly implemented.

686
residential units

Housing development begins at *Barking Riverside*

Homes England approved a £124 million funding package to unlock more homes.

20,000
residential units.

Launch of *Thames Road* plan.

3,500
residential units.

The Barking & Dagenham Industrial Land Strategy.

River Road Employment Area, Supplementary Planning Document.

The Be First Industrial Land Strategy outlines the potential relocation of industrial uses from Thames Road to Dagenham Docks.

The Barking Riverside **Overground Station** officially opened.

Be First Regeneration Limited is established by London Borough of Barking and Dagenham.

LBBD Draft Local Plan 2037

The **Uber Boat** Pier at Barking Riverside is officially opened.

0 1 km

0 1 km

Barking riverfront urban transformation © Google Earth Pro.

1.2.2 *Strategic Ambitions and Lived Realities*

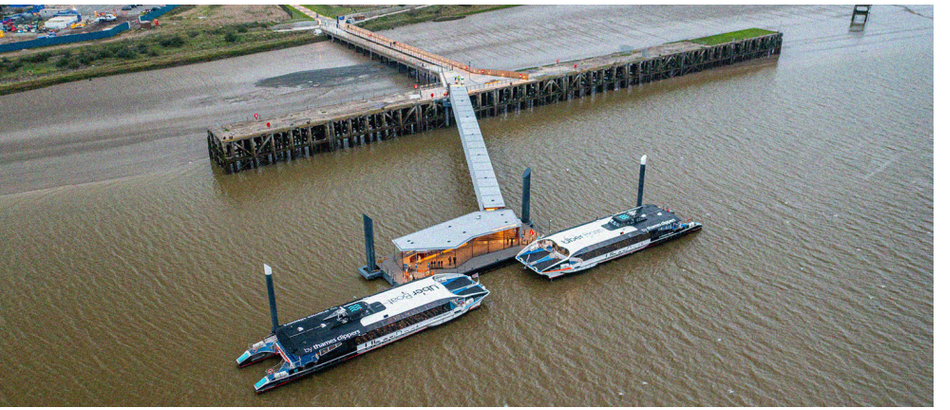
In the last decade, increasing attention has been directed towards the stretch of territory along the River Thames, that will be referred to as “Barking riverfront”. Bounded to the north by the A13 arterial road[40]and the London–Tilbury–Southend railway line, to the east by Dagenham Docks[41], to the south by the River Thames, and to the west by the River Roding[42], this area emerges as the primary focal point of housing development within the wider plan of London Riverside.

Similarly to the territories previously discussed in relation to Beam Park and Dagenham Green, the Barking riverfront area has become a focal point for both public policy and private investment due to the extensive presence of low value industrial land; in addition the proximity to the River Thames further enhances the area’s appeal within the real estate market, as waterfront locations are increasingly associated with higher residential values and strong market demand. Moreover, much of the land remains actively productive here, while other portions consist, or until recently consisted, of large tracts of vacant or underused land: since approximately 2013[43], these residual spaces have increasingly been identified as sites for housing-led regeneration, initiating a process of rapid spatial transformation along the riverfront. Within this context, new residential developments directly confront the persistence of urban production uses, generating a complex and often conflictual spatial condition; in particular, the area is characterised by the coexistence of three main actors: the large-scale residential development of Barking Riverside, the emerging linear residential corridor of Thames Road, and the River Road Employment Area (RREA), designated as a Strategic Industrial Location. Their overlapping logics, expose the spatial tensions embedded in the contemporary regeneration of the Barking riverfront and make it a critical case through which to examine the contradictions of housing-led redevelopment on former productive land.

Alongside these dynamics, the Thames View Estate constitutes a further residential presence within the wider area. Located to the north of the riverfront, beyond the physical barrier formed by the A13 and the London–Tilbury–Southend railway line, Thames View, which is an historical settlement, remains spatially and functionally detached from the main regeneration processes described above.

In support of new residential developments, particularly along the Barking riverfront, several key infrastructure have been delivered, including the extension of the London Overground to Barking Riverside and the introduction of the Uber Boat Pier, in Barking Riverside as well, both completed in 2022. Nevertheless, these interventions were implemented relatively late in the comparison to the housing-development process, arriving several years after the first residential units in Barking Riverside were completed and occupied by residents (2013).

40 The A13 is a major primary route connecting Central London to the Thames Gateway and the Essex coast. Within the context of Barking and Dagenham, it functions as a dominant infrastructural spine, but also as a significant socio-spatial barrier.
41 Historically established to serve the massive Ford Motor Company plant, Dagenham Docks remain one of the most significant industrial and logistical clusters within the Thames Gateway.
42 The River Roding is a tributary of the Thames that defines the western boundary of the Barking riverfront. Historically, the river served as a vital industrial artery, facilitating the development of the Barking Creek area into a hub for trade, fishing, and manufacturing.
43 This deduction is made by the observation of historic satellite imagery available on *Google Earth*.



Uber Boat Pier, 2025 © McLaughlin & Harvey.

The temporal mismatch between housing delivery and supporting infrastructure has significantly affected everyday life for early residents; in 2014, a Guardian article[44] described Barking Riverside as “London’s most isolated suburb”, quoting residents who referred to the area as “living on an island”, with headlines explicitly stating: “No café, no pub, no doctor in London’s most isolated suburb.” Such accounts highlight the consequences of a housing-led regeneration strategy in which social infrastructure and accessibility lag behind residential development, revealing a gap between strategic ambitions and lived experience, a dynamic already observed within the Beam Park development.

On the other hand, Barking Riverside, which cover 443 hectares of brownfield land[45], is often described as one of the largest development sites in Europe (Colenutt, 2020); started in 2013 and currently underway, the settlement appears to expand by simply infilling available land, without establishing meaningful connections within the context. This approach is clearly enabled by the nature of the site itself: Barking Riverside is largely being built on a vast expanse of wasteland, with few existing constraints.

As a result, the new settlement evolves almost independently, with limited spatial continuity or engagement with the surrounding context; its urban layout clearly reflects this autonomy: the development is structured around a circus, a central circular plaza explicitly named The Circus, from which two crescents, Fielders Crescent and Crown Crescent, extend outward, following a compositional logic rooted in the geometry of the initial core. This spatial configuration reinforces the perception of the development as a self-contained urban entity, almost a new town with its own centre, rather than as an extension or transformation of the existing urban fabric. Beyond these, the urban form along the Thames loosely follows the river’s natural curvature, abandoning the circus logic.

44 The Guardian, *No cafe, no pub, no doctor in London’s most isolated suburb*, https://www.theguardian.com/

45 Brownfield Land, in the UK’s planning terminology, refers to any land that has been previously developed and is not currently in use, although it may still contain remnants of industrial or commercial structures.

Ongoing construction works at Barking Riverside, March 2025. Still frame taken from an instagram video by Barking Riverside London [@barking_riverside]

Residential towers at Barking Riverside, 2017 © Lifschutz Davidson Sandilands.

Barking Riverside Vision, 2017 © Lifschutz Davidson Sandilands.

Barking Riverside Vision, 2017 © Lifschutz Davidson Sandilands.

The urban grid appears to pursue a higher density compared to the existing residential context of Thames View Estate[46], with a projected total of approximately 20,000 residential units envisioned[47]; it is predominantly composed of courtyard blocks ranging from five to seven storeys, which alternate with lower residential blocks organised according to the English terrace typology, particularly in proximity to the River Road Employment Area.
Notably, these terraces closely resemble those adopted in Beam Park, both in terms of scale and architectural language, reinforcing the sense of a repeated and standardised residential model applied across different regeneration sites within the borough.

Although southern river edge is far yet to begin, the available drawings and masterplan suggest the rise of dozens of residential towers, which are expected to define the dominant future landscape of the riverfront. Alongside a limited number of community amenities, such as schools, sports facilities, and a series of public squares, some of which have finally been delivered, the spatial language of the settlement remains overwhelmingly residential.

There is little, if any, consideration given to the coexistence with urban production activities, neither in terms of spatial form nor functional integration. Industrial fabric is effectively excluded from the design logic, reinforcing a sharp separation between residential life and the surrounding industrial territory, despite their immediate proximity. Moreover, on the western edge of Barking Riverside, vegetation is strategically used to screen residential development from urban production activities, reinforcing separation rather

46 Thames View Estate is an historic settlment in Barking & Dagenhama which will be discussed later in next chapter.
47 *Barking Riverside set to deliver 20,000 new homes,* https://nla.london/

English terraces at Barking Riverside, April 2025.

English terraces at Beam Park, 2019 © Patel Taylor.

than coexistence; a similar strategy is adopted on the eastern edge to distance new housing from Dagenham Dock. Simultaneously, to the northeast, a vast landscaped void has been introduced, ostensibly framed as parkland but functionally acting as a buffer from the pre-existing low-rise neighbourhoods, suggesting an intention to distance the new development from the old.

A further critical consideration concerns the quality and resilience of the new residential buildings; although it is not possible, within the scope of this research, to fully verify construction standards or material performance across the development, a specific event offers a revealing insight into the vulnerabilities embedded in contemporary housing-led regeneration process. The 2019 fire at Samuel Garside House in Barking Riverside stands as a dramatic and emblematic episode in this regard. As reported in interviews shown in the side pictures and conducted by the BBC[48] with displaced residents, the timber façade adopted in Garside House burned within minutes, exposing the structural fragility of the building and played a decisive role in the rapid propagation of the fire.

Equally alarming was the apparent failure of safety systems: residents reported that no fire alarm was triggered, and that evacuation was only made possible through improvised door-to-door warnings and shouted alerts. This episode suggests that the interests driving the construction of these new settlements are primarily business-oriented, or at least that residential units have once again been delivered before meeting adequate standards of safety and completion. While this represents a different perspective from the issue of spatial isolation discussed earlier, the two aspects are closely connected: both reveal how housing-led regeneration prio-

48 BBC, *Barking fire: Blaze destroys 20 flats in east London*, https://www.bbc.com/

ritises speed and market delivery over the quality, resilience, and long-term liveability of the built environment. In this sense, isolation is not only spatial or infrastructural, but also institutional, reflecting a broader disconnect between strategic ambitions, regulatory safeguards, and the everyday experience of residents.

By contrast, Thames Road is a space in transition. Until very recently, the area functioned as a stable productive corridor within the River Road Employment Area, while today, is being reimagined through planning documents that promote, at least nominally, a more mixed-use approach; however, the project, launched in 2020, is still in its early stages and remains open to interpretation.

While the framework refers to hybrid, mixed-use development, the masterplan clearly allocates the vast majority of land to housing (3500 new residential units[49]), despite the continued operation of many existing businesses; just a small enclave, labelled the Makers District, is designated for light industrial uses and small-scale production[50]. Here too, the architectural language relies on closed courtyard typologies and varied massing, including several high-rise volumes; unlike Barking Riverside, however, the Thames Road site is physically constrained by its industrial surroundings and tightly anchored along the existing axis of Thames Road itself, leaving little room for morphological experimentation. Although some public amenities are introduced, such as a community hub, a local centre, a primary school, and an all-through school, the overall spatial logic remains residentially driven.

Thames Road strategy, 2024 © Be First.

Residential buildings at Thames Road, 2020 © BPTW Studio.

49 Be First (2024) *Thames Road Vision and Design Code, Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)DRAFT for consultation | August - September 2024.*
50 Be First (2024) *Thames Road Vision and Design Code, Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)DRAFT for consultation | August - September 2024.*

Planning documents such as the Industrial Land Strategy-suggest that displaced industrial activities may be relocated to hubs such as Dagenham Dock[51] ; while relocation may offer short-term solutions, it raises critical questions about the long-term sustainability of a development model that continues to marginalise urban production land uses, rather than proposing strategies for integration.

In conclusion, while Barking Riverside and Thames Road may not appear to physically border one another, the industrial fabric (RREA) stretches across both sites, acting as a silent yet persistent presence between them. The two settlements, with distinct forms, scales, and urban logics, seem to evolve as separate organisms, each speaking a different spatial language, and ultimately failing to engage in any meaningful form of mutual articulation with the pre-existence.

Within this context, attention naturally shifts towards the interstitial spaces left outside major masterplans; these spaces, with indeterminate future, suggests a different potential for urban transformation.

What emerge from this overview is that regeneration processes frequently operate as self-contained systems, reinforcing zoning logics and spatial separation. By contrast, these residual areas open up the possibility of imagining more gradual and integrated forms of change, where coexistence between uses may become a condition for the future city.

Thames Road and Barking Riverside, strategy diagram, 2024 © Be First.

undergoing...

51 Be First (2021). *Industrial Land Strategy July 2021.*

2.

Barking & Dagenham:
Contextual Framework

Location:

East End, Outer London

Boundaries:

North - Redbridge
East - Havering
West - Newham/ River Roding
South - River Thames

Connectivity:

District Line
Hammersmith & City line
C2C (rail)
Overground (Gospel Oak to Barking Riverside)
A13 motorway
Ubert Boat

Distance from Central London:

14.5 km

Inhabitans:

~214,000

Population Density:

~6,050 ab/km^2

Population Increase (2011-2021):

+17.7%

Median Age:

33 y.o.

Barking riverfron, 2020-2025 © Hilson Moran

Dagenham Ford, 1950s © PA Media.

Historical and spatial context 2.1

Located along Thames waterfront, within the area of Barking and Dagenham, Barking riverfront is a territory which has been defined by profound socio-spatial changes intrinsically connected with historical industrial activities; their evolution, and the later collapse, shaped not only the morphological landscape but also the economic and demographic backbone of the entire territory.

Although the broader development of the Barking and Dagenham area has been extensively addressed in major academic literature, the evolution of some lesser-known settlements, such as Creekmouth Village, Thames View Estate, Scrattons Farm and Barking Power Station, are primarily documented in a local historical study by Vickers[52] (1992). This work therefore constitutes the main source for the reconstruction of these settlements and is used as the principal reference for the following section.

The area of Barking riverfront is well known for its industrial legacy which settlement started with the establishment of a fishing fleet in 1764[53](the so-called Short Blue Feet was once the largest in the country). This activity played a pivotal role in transforming the local landscape, which was previously composed of heathland, forest and salt marsh, into one shaped by market gardening and fishing-based livelihoods.

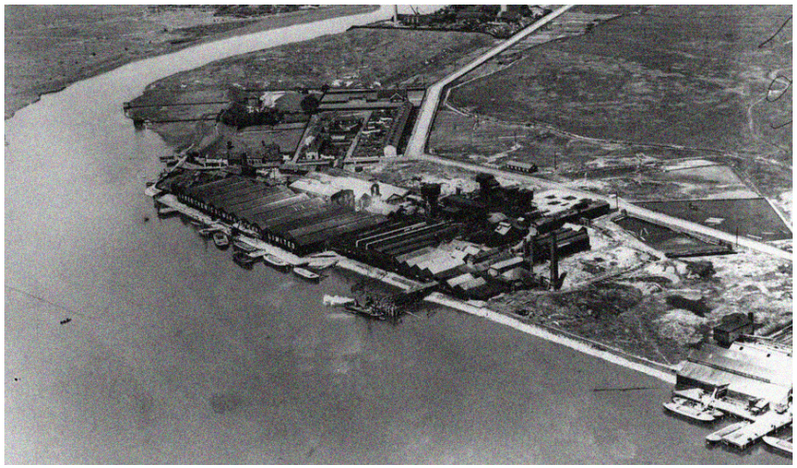
Later, the arrival of the railway in the 1850s marked a shift toward a more modern industrialisation, where traditional sectors gradually gave way to manufacturing activities, initially centred on jute spinning, paint production, and chemical processing (Vickers, 1992).

52 Denis J. Vickers is an ecologist based in London, involved in ecology and nature conservation for 30 years. Vickers is a Member of the Royal Society of Biology and Chartered Biologist. Between 1994 and 2003 he managed the Ripple Nature Reserve and Dagenham Parish Churchyard in London Borough of Barking and Dagenham for the London Wildlife Trust.

53 Fish and Ice, https://thamesfestivaltrust.org/

As industrial activities were expanding and consolidating across the area, early forms of housing also began to take shape. Although less iconic than later developments such as the construction of the Becontree Estate, these early settlements played a significant role in shaping the territory and remain embedded in its collective memory; it is the case of Creekmouth village, built in the 1850s by John Bennett Lawes to accommodate workers employed at the nearby Lawes Chemical Factory. Creekmouth village, which was located in the area where River Thames and River Roding join, originally consisted of 63 terraced cottages (Vickers, 1992); over time, additional facilities were introduced, including a church mission room (St. Paul's), and a church school, both opened in 1894 (Vickers, 1992).

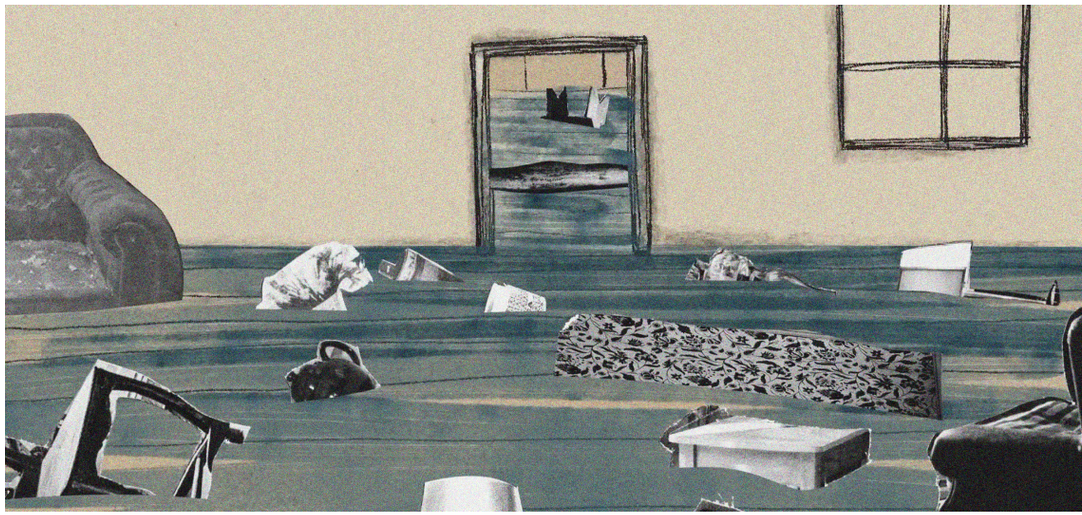
As a result of the catastrophic North Sea flood, Creekmouth village was tragically destroyed during the night of 31 January 1953; nevertheless, it continues to persist in the collective memory of Barking community and is still commemorated today, notably through a mural located within the current River Road Employment Area. A tidal defence system was only implemented approximately thirty years after the flood, with the construction of the Barking Creek Barrier. Still in operation today, the barrier stands as a major piece of infrastructure and a prominent landmark within the landscape, defined by its two massive concrete towers rising approximately 40 metres above ground level.



Lawes Chemical works, 1870s © Historic England.

Creekmouth village, 1870s © Creekmouth Preservation Society.

"It was like a big black sheet of water came over the top and thousands of rats [...] came as well, and all into the houses. "



Still frame from *Creekmouth,* an animation and oral histories project documenting the loss of Creekmouth Village in the 1953 flood, Yasmine Djédjé-Fisher-Azoumé And Creekmouth Preservation Society, 2024.

Still frame from *Creekmouth,* an animation and oral histories project documenting the loss of Creekmouth Village in the 1953 flood, Yasmine Djédjé-Fisher-Azoumé And Creekmouth Preservation Society, 2024.

"In the morning, when you come down you see what it's like in there, it was terribile. There was carpets and the mats, it was all like floating. There was come and coal that was floating outsider and the dustbins have all gone over [...]"

Thames View Estate postcard, 1950s, unknown author.

Following the loss of Creekmouth Village, many of its residents were displaced and relocated to other settlements that were developing during these years across the area. Among the settlements, Thames View Housing Estate became one of their principal destinations; located to the north of the old village, on marshland, it offered a more modern form of living compared to the outdated terraced cottages of Creekmouth, reflecting contemporary approaches to post-war residential planning. The estate, built by the Barking Council, opened in 1954 with 1800 dwellings and continue its expansion until 1960, when 2000 homes where now built, in addition to schools, a church and other facilities for its residents (Vickers, 1992).

Another significant destination was Scrattons Farm Housing Estate, erected il 1939 (Vickers, 1992). Originally established as a rural settlement when the area was still largely devoted to agricultural activities, Scrattons Farm gradually expanded with 282 dwellings and took on a more urban character in parallel with the progressive industrialisation of the surrounding territory (Vickers, 1992).

The development of these two settlements can be understood as part of a broader and interconnected process: while they evolved along distinct trajectories, their growth was closely linked to the displacement caused by the 1953 flood and to the wider industrial consolidation of Barking and Dagenham. During this period, industrial expansion and urban development unfolded simultaneously, reshaping the spatial structure of the territory and redefining the relationship between production and housing.

Furthermore, in the period between the two World Wars, London, and more specifically the London County Council (LCC)[54], was engaged in the construction of large numbers of new dwellings across the city's suburban fringe. These developments took the form of the so-called satellites, inspired by the principles of the Garden City movement (Mann, 2008): at the time, the area that now corresponds to Barking and Dagenham was still largely wild and marshy, offering a perfect habitat for this type of residential settlement.

Within this context, the Becontree Estate was launched in the 1919, transforming a landscape previously devoted to market gardening into a vast urban settlement (Young,

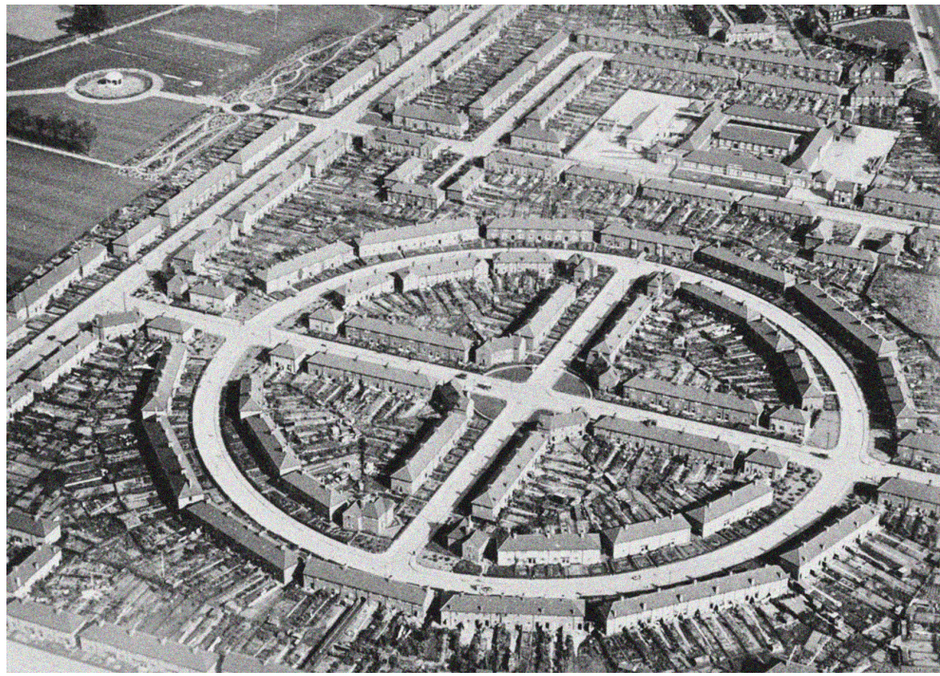
54 The London County Council (1889–1965) was the principal local government body for the County of London and the first metropolitan-wide authority to be directly elected. The LCC played a pioneering role in the development of large-scale social housing, particularly through its "Homes for Heroes" initiative following World War I. While Becontree Estate was later linked to Ford Motor Co., it was originally conceived as one of the "Homes for Heroes".

1934). The project was remarkable for its scale and ambition, becoming the largest council housing estate ever built in the United Kingdom, and even the largest in Europe at that time: its extent exceeded that of many English provincial towns. While the area counted fewer than 9,000 inhabitants in 1922, its population had grown to over 100,000 residents by 1939, becoming the major housing settlement within the area of Barking and Dagenham (Mann, 2008).

As with other “new towns”, Becontree Estate was conceived as a self-sufficient settlement, spatially and conceptually separated from its parent urban authority, but despite all the good promises, local industrial activities were insufficient to provide employment for the rapidly growing population. At the same time, commuting to other parts of London was limited by inadequate transport connections, resulting in high levels of unemployment among estate residents. In other words “Local jobs were few, and public transport links to jobs poor” (Hall, 2014).

Shortly before the Second World War, this situation began to change with the relocation of the Ford Motor Company to Dagenham. Previously established in Manchester, Ford selected the site for its combination of abundant and inexpensive land, direct access to river transport, and the availability of a large supply of low-cost labour drawn from the nearby Becontree Estate. Ford acquired the land previously owned by William Cory & Son, which had occupied the site since 1887 with timber and ice storage facilities, and construction commenced in 1929 (Marriott, 2008).

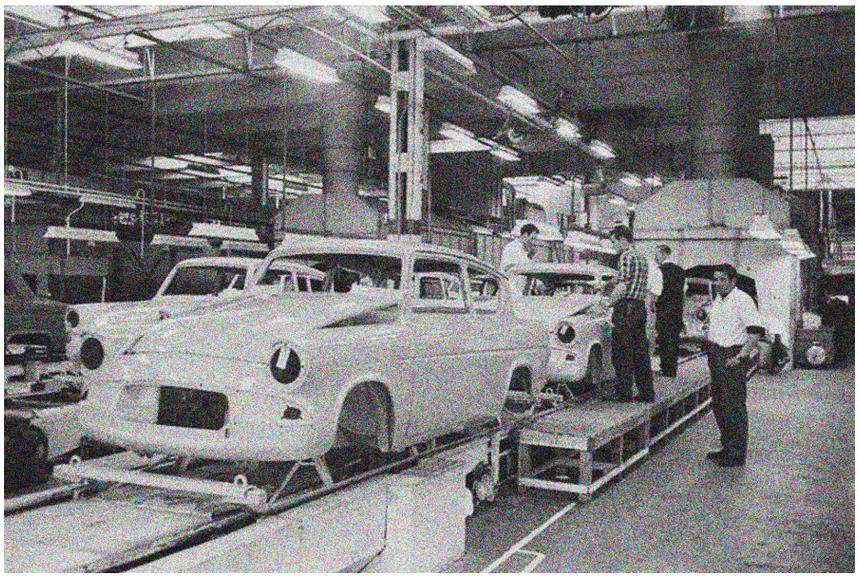
The development of the plant required extensive infrastructural works, including the construction of new roads, railway lines and bridges; to stabilise the marshy ground, approximately 22,000 concrete piles were driven into the soil. Once completed, the factory was able to provide 15,000



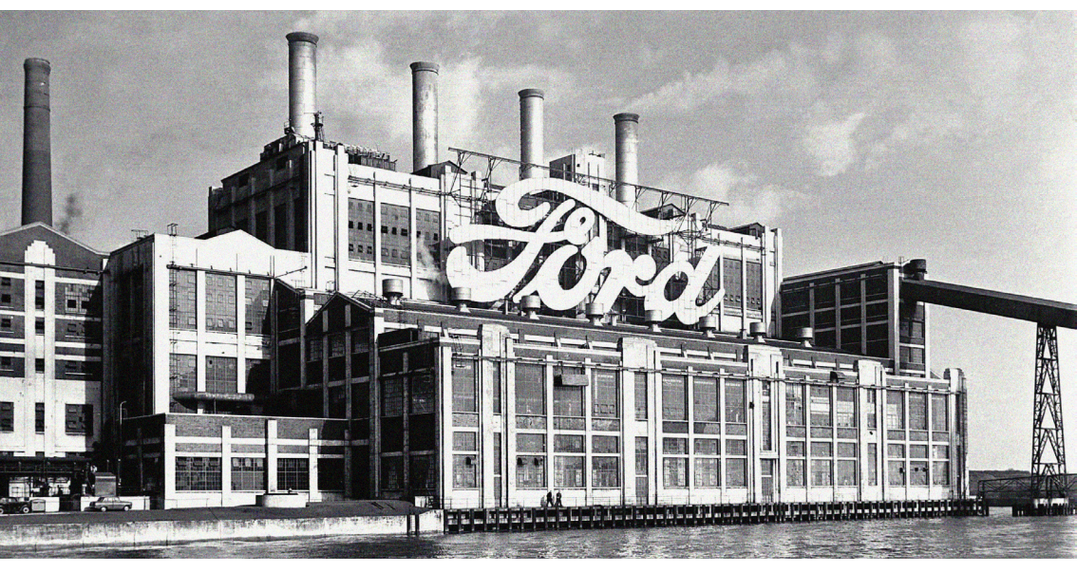
Valence Circus, Becontree Estate, 1930 © London Metropolitan Archives

jobs and functioned as a self-contained industrial complex, equipped with its own power station, foundry and gas plant, as well as a large jetty and cranes capable of handling the largest cargo ships (Marriott, 2008). The establishment of Ford acted as a catalyst for further industrial growth, attracting numerous medium and heavy engineering firms connected to the motor industry and consolidating Barking and Dagenham as a major industrial hub within East End (Cohen, 2008).

Although Ford Motor Co. and Becontree Esate are not located directly within the Barking riverfront area, they represent two major catalytic events that profoundly influenced the development of the wider area; their presence did not



Assembly line at Dagenham Ford, 1959 © Mirrorpix.



Dagenham Ford, 1957 © FORD HERITAGE VAULT.

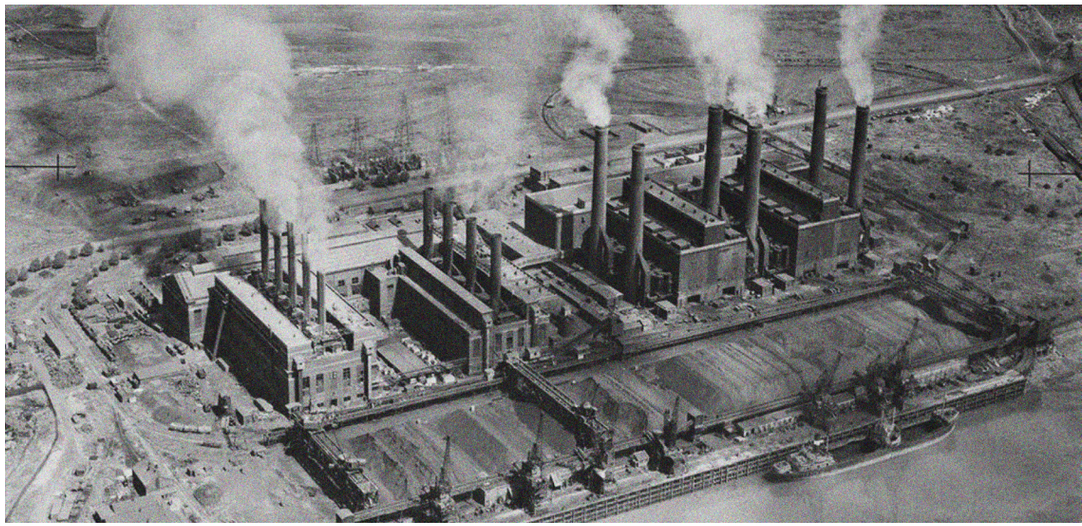
merely transform their immediate surroundings, but reshaped the socio-economic and spatial dynamics of Barking & Dagenham, and even East End. Together, they generated population growth, labour availability, and industrial consolidation, creating the conditions that enabled the subsequent development of productive and infrastructural landscapes along the Thames (Cohen, 2008).

Alongside the establishment of Ford Motor Company, another major event that significantly shaped the Barking riverfront area was the construction of Barking Power Station. The coal-fired power station was inaugurated in 1925 by King George V and Queen Mary and was built by the County of London Electric Supply Company to supply electricity to large parts of Essex and Kent. At the time of its completion, it was the largest steam-powered power station in Europe (Vickers, 1992). The site, located at the junction between River Road and the River Thames, was strategically selected for its direct access to the river, which allowed a continuous flow of coal deliveries by ship.

Once conclude, Barking Power Station functioned almost as a self-contained community, running its own football and cricket clubs as well as a darts team; however, with the gradual decline of coal-based electricity production, the station entered a period of contraction. A redundancy programme was initiated in the 1970s, and the power station ultimately ceased operations in November 1981. The buildings were subsequently demolished and in 1995 another power station was built near Dagenham Breach, where remained operational until 2014 (Vickers, 1992). Today, a new Barking Power Station operates further in Barking, close to new developments of Barking Riverside.

Moving to contemporary era, it is evident that many of the activities that historically characterised this area, particularly within Barking riverfront, have gradually disappeared. With the end of the war economy, the large industrial workforce that once sustained heavy production was no longer required, leading to the closure of many factories. While the area has remained productive, its industrial profile has undergone a significant shift. Unlike the Docklands, which were largely redeveloped following the decline of maritime industries, Barking riverfront retained its productive character rather than being immediately transformed into a residential-led regeneration area (Marriott, 2008).This divergence can be partly explained by geographical and infrastructural factors. The proximity of the Docklands to central London facilitated early investment, particularly in housing-led redevelopment, while large portions of the East End, including Barking riverfront, remained comparatively disconnected from the city. However, this relative isolation, which historically marginalised the area, also became one of its key economic resources. As maritime trade evolved and required larger cargo ships and port facilities, the narrower docks, closer to central London, became obsolete. By contrast, Barking riverfront, located along a wider stretch of the Thames and closer to the open sea (and port of Tilbury), proved more adaptable to the changing demands of maritime logistics (Marriott, 2008).

Today, Barking Riverfront continues to host numerous activities related to sea freight handling, storage, and distribution. Of course, the infrastructural legacy left by the Ford Motor Company has played a crucial role in sustaining this productive landscape. The presence of major road connections, access to the river, and large industrial plots has ensured strong links both to the motorway network (A13) and to maritime routes. The industrial imprint of Ford remains legible in the area, not only through infrastructure but also through the persistence of activities such as vehicle repair, workshops,



Barking Power Station, 1930-1934 © Valence House.

and light manufacturing. At the same time, the availability of large, flexible industrial spaces has allowed the gradual introduction of additional uses, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

A further aspect is the long-standing occupation of the riverfront almost exclusively by industrial functions throughout decades; with the exception of Creekmouth Village, residential settlements along the Thames edge has historically been avoided. This can be attributed partly to the intensive exploitation of the river for industrial purposes, but also to the lasting impact of the 1953 flood, which reinforced the risks associated with building on marshland. In addition, post-war zoning and sanitation policies consolidated the functional separation of the riverfront, encouraging its continued use as a productive and infrastructural corridor rather than a residential one.

Endless View of Becontree Estate, 1930s © Tony Ray-Jones/Riba Collections.

2.2 The Demographic Shift within the Industrial Transition

After the decline of docklands and other various industrial sites across London, a significant demographic shift began to reshape East End (Hamnett, 2003), and, by extension, Barking and Dagenham area. Of course, these dynamics are strictly connected to Inner London, which will be included in the following section in order to give an overlook of Barking and Dagenham role within this transition.

Since deindustrialization, large portions of the population that had, since then, settled in inner-city-slums, due to proximity to workplaces, started to move toward suburbs; at this point, "the City" was overcrowded and expensive, and residents had new housing aspirations than living in a miserable room near the center; on the other hand, numerous inner-city-slums were being cleaned (Hall, 2014). The search for improved living conditions, often associated with access to green spaces and private gardens, encouraged suburbanisation processes that had already begun during inter-war era. In fact, the "white working class" had initiated this migration well before the post-war period, moving to large-scale developments and new towns, including the Becontree Estate (launched in the 1920s), which represents the most emblematic example of this kind. This social process is often described in literature with terms such as "white flight" or "flight from the city" (Watt, 2008).

At the same time, post-war London was experiencing a substantial increase in immigration from New Commonwealth countries (and later from Eastern Europe) particularly linked to labour demands during the reconstruction period which followed wartime bombing (Watt, 2008). Many immigrant communities initially settled in inner-city-slums, right where early post-war reconstruction efforts were concentrated; in addition, the proximity to docklands and other employment are-

as, made Inner London the key point of settlement for ethnic enclave. Over time, and across generations, these communities underwent processes of social mobility similar to those previously seen with the "white working class": as aspirations changed, households increasingly looked for the homeownership, less overcrowded environments, and improved living standards (Butler et al., 2008). The attention of those who were settled to the East part of Inner London (Tower Hamlets[55]for instance) naturally turned toward East suburbs (Mann, 2008), which, during post-war era, were finally been linked through transport infrastructure, including the District line[56]and the major road corridor A13. Such connections facilitated an eastward shift towards outer London, and of course, Barking and Dagenham.

Twenty years after the closure of docklands along Thames in 1960s (Hamnett, 2003), Barking and Dagenham started a profound economic and demographic transition as well. Since 1980s, Ford Motor Company progressively begin to reduce its workforce, culminating in the closure of major production activities in 2002 (Marriott, 2008). The decline of large-scale industrial employment was significantly altering the socio-economic profile of the area: here, much of the population (as already happened with Inner Londoners) was looking for better living conditions, and the proximity to the Ford was no longer necessary (Meyer, 2008). In addition, the area, probably, no longer offered the bucolic suburban landscape that had originally attracted residents, while the city itself was changing very rapidly. Part of the population that were now living in large council estates, such as Becontree Estate and Thames View, took advantage of the "Right to Buy"[57], and using the earnings from the sale of their homes, moved elsewhere in search of new aspirations, often toward deeper Essex, which was still offering access to green spaces (Hamnett, 2003). Those who remained increasingly adapted to the new service sector, and of course, Barking and Dagenham gradually assumed the role of a predominantly residential, commuter-oriented area (Hall, 2014).

Simultaneously, the new waves of residents, that were moving from inner ethnic enclaves, were attracted by relatively affordable housing and less dense urban conditions of the area, as well as "white working class" were doing twenty years before them. The demographic transformation, which began to be largely visible only in the last twenty years, generated tensions within parts of the long-established population, a dynamic that also found expression at the political level. Notably, Barking and Dagenham became one of the few areas in London where the British National Party achieved sustained electoral success between 2004 and 2010, reflecting the complex and often contested nature of socio-demographic change in the borough (Dench et al., 2006). This historic moment is well documented in *The Battle for Barking* film-documentary released in 2010.

Cover from the film-documentary *The Battle for Barking*, **Laura Fairrie, 2010.**

Remarkably, the residential succession in Barking and Dagenham was far less rapid compared to the rest of East End.

55 Tower Hamlets is a London borough located immediately to the east of the City of London and north of the River Thames. As the heart of the traditional East End and home to the London Docklands, it has historically served as the primary entry point and "arrival city" for successive waves of immigrant communities

56 The District Line is a major London Underground service that serves as the primary longitudinal transport spine connecting the City of London to the eastern fringes of the metropolitan area.

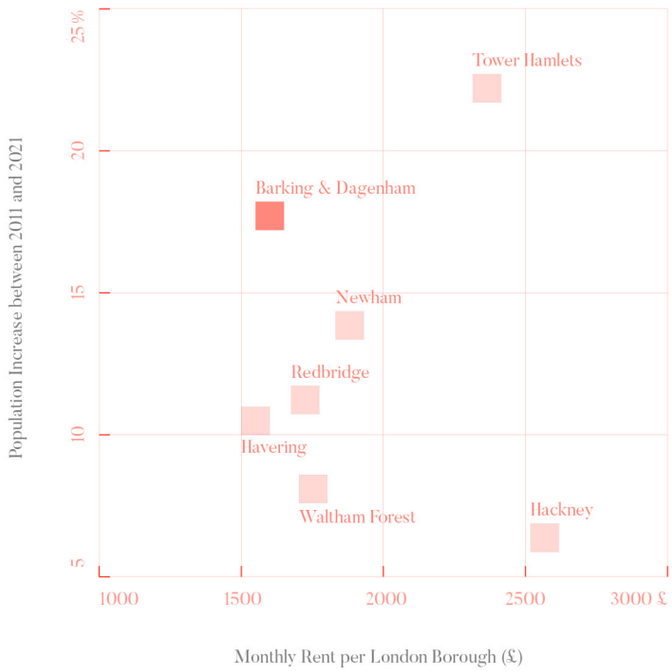
57 The "Right to Buy" policy, introduced by the Housing Act 1980 under Margaret Thatcher's administration, granted municipal council tenants the legal right to purchase their homes at significant discounts.

Here, housing was largely characterized by council estates, whose allocation was based on kinship. For instance, in the case of Becontree Estate, if one of your close relatives was employed at Ford, you had the priority to live in there, resulting in a closed community, strictly related to the old “white working class”. At least, until Ford Motor Company was closed in 2002...

2.2.1 *A New Wave of Migration*

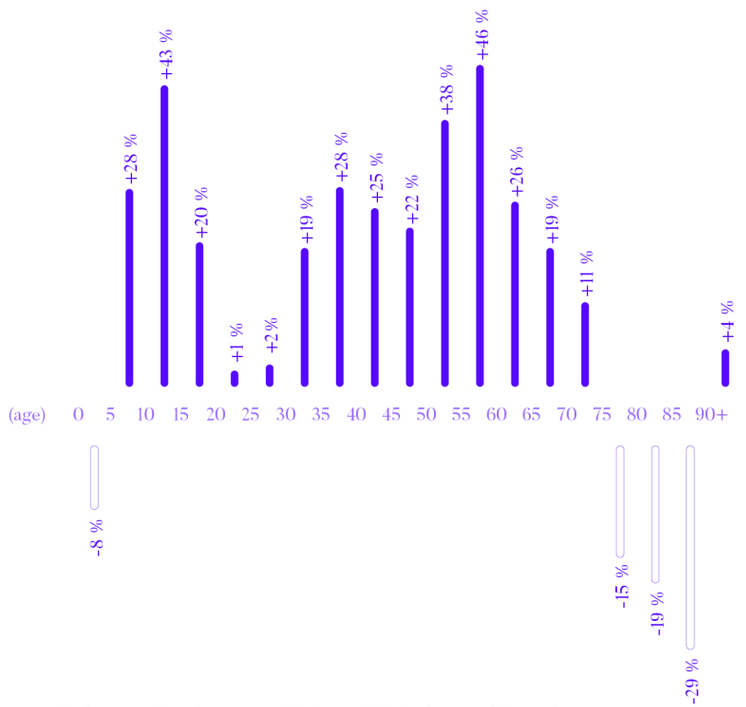
Today, a new wave of migration has been triggered by recent urban transformations in Barking and Dagenham, adding a further layer of complexity to an already stratified socio-demographic context. Census data from 2011 to 2021 corroborate this trend: the borough experienced a substantial population increase of 17.7%, reaching approximately 214,000 residents in 2021[58]. This represents the second-highest growth rate in Greater London, after Tower Hamlets, and is significantly higher than the London average of 7.7%.

This population growth appears to be driven not only by the scale of new residential developments, but also by their relative affordability within the London context. Housing costs in Barking and Dagenham remain among the lowest in East End, reinforcing the borough’s role as an entry point for households priced out of more central or established areas. In 2024, average monthly rents were around £1,400, considerably lower than the East London average of approximately £1,930, while average house prices stood at about £355,000, compared to £474,000 across the wider East End[59].
Census data from 2001 to 2021 provide insight into the de-



Population increase (2011 to 2021) and monthly rent per London Borough (East End) intersection.
Data source: https://www.ons.gov.uk/

58 All population increase data in this text is extract from the *Census 2021* by ONS, https://www.ons.gov.uk/
59 Data has been extract from the *Price of housing, local* section provided by the Office for National Statistics, https://www.ons.gov.uk/



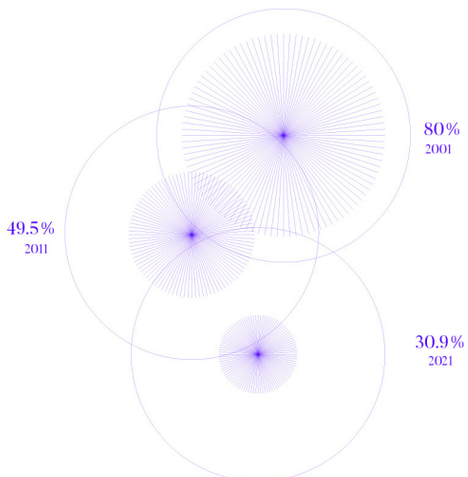
Evolution in Population Age (2011 to 2021), Barking and Dagenham.
Data source: https://www.ons.gov.uk/

mographic groups moving into the area. According to the 2021 Census, only 30.9% of residents identified as White British, compared to 49.5% in 2011 and approximately 80% in 2001[60]. This shift reflects the steady arrival of communities from Africa, South Asia, Eastern Europe, and the Caribbean, which contributes to a vibrant social fabric, visible in everyday life, from the use of public space to the popularity of local outdoor markets. These markets, particularly those selling fresh products, serve not only as commercial spaces but also as important hubs of social interaction and informal economy. They reveal how new forms of community cohesion and local resilience are emerging in parallel with demographic change.

Furthermore, according to official data published by ONS, the area hosts one of the youngest populations in London: more than 50% of residents are under the age of 35, while children aged 0 to 14 account for over 25% of the population, a figure significantly higher than the London average of 18%[61]. Data from the 2021 Census confirms that this youthful profile has intensified over the past decade: between 2011 and 2021, the number of residents aged 0 to 14 increased by 43%, indicating a substantial growth in families with children, probably drawn to a more affordable lifestyle and the new residential developments. At the same time, notable increases can also be observed in older age groups, particularly among residents aged 50 to 54 (+38%) and 55

60 *Census 2021* https://www.ons.gov.uk/
61 All population age data in this text is extract from the *Census 2021* by ONS, https://www.ons.gov.uk/

to 59 (+46%), suggesting the long-term permanence and ageing in place of parts of the existing population. This demographic profile has immediate spatial implications, particularly for education, employment, housing and access to public services. While such a youthful population represents significant future potential, it also raises urgent questions about the adequacy of local infrastructure to support long-term inclusion and growth. Especially, many younger residents belong to communities that face structural disadvantages: overcrowded housing, language barriers, and reduced access to higher-paying employment sectors.



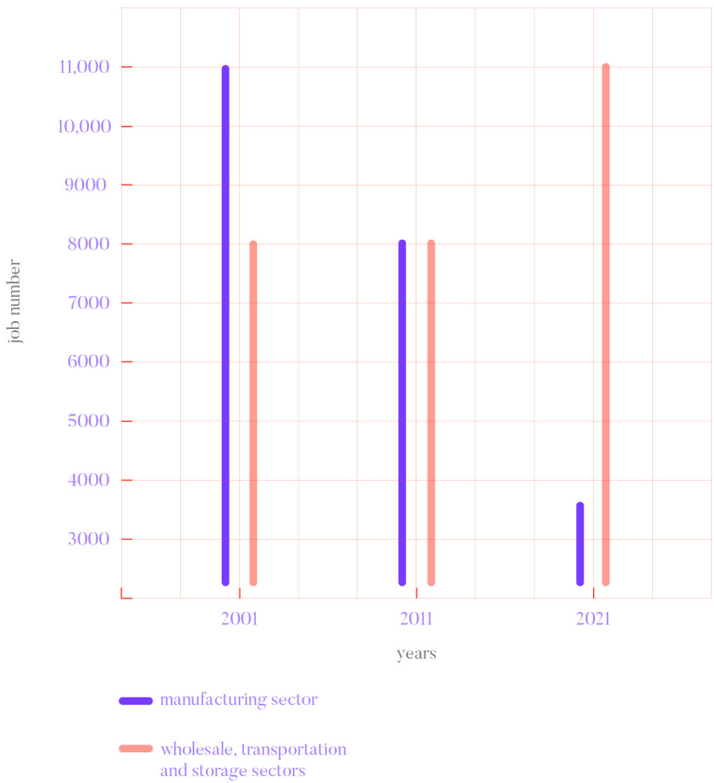
"White British" population percentage at Barking and Dagenham throughout twenty years (2001/2011/2021).
Data Source: https://www.ons.gov.uk/

Urban Life at Barking Town Centre, April 2025.

2.2.2 *Employment, Education and the Risk of Exclusion*

The rhythmic pulse of the Ford Dagenham plant defined the borough's spatial and social DNA for decades, however, the twenty years between 2001 and 2021 tell the story of a "great transition" in demographic composition as much as in its economic features. The effects of deindustrialisation have been particularly acute here, where the local economy was historically anchored to large-scale manufacturing. The gradual erosion of this industrial base, culminating in the closure of the Ford in 2002, marked a decisive turning point, reshaping the local labour market and exposing the population to structural vulnerabilities.

Between 2001 and 2021, the manufacturing sector, once the undisputed backbone of the community, collapsed by over 60%, falling from 11,000 to just 4,500 jobs[62]. Yet, deindustrialisation has not resulted in the disappearance of urban production activities, but created space for the consolidation of light manufacturing, logistics, warehousing and waste management, particularly along the riverfront. This continuity is especially evident in areas such as River Road Employment Area and Dagenham Docks, which have developed as natural extensions of the borough's industrial legacy. Barking & Dagenham, in 2021, recorded the highest number of manufacturing jobs in the East End, representing 7.7% of the local total jobs, which may seem low, but is considerably high compared to approximately 3% in Outer East London[63]. However, the real narrative of the last two deca-

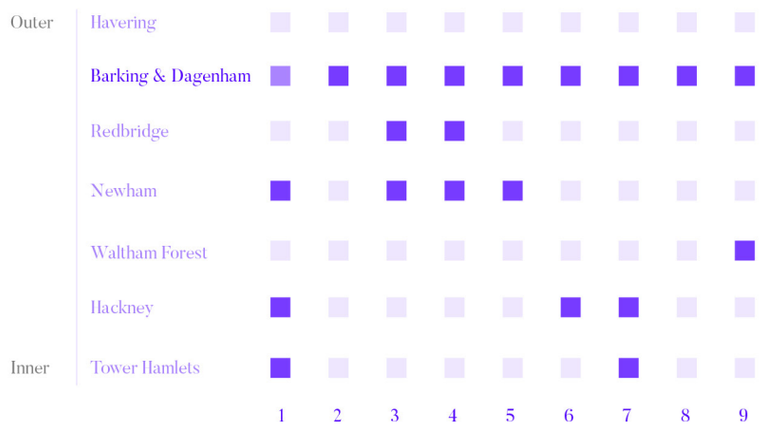


Evolution in manufacturing jobs vs transportation, storage and wholesale jobs between 2001 and 2021, Barking and Dagenham.
Data source: https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/

62 *Borough by sector employee jobs, 1971 to 2021. April 2023 Update,* https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/employee-jobs-by-sector
63 PorterPe (2020) *The Barking & Dagenham Industrial Land Strategy: Final Report*.

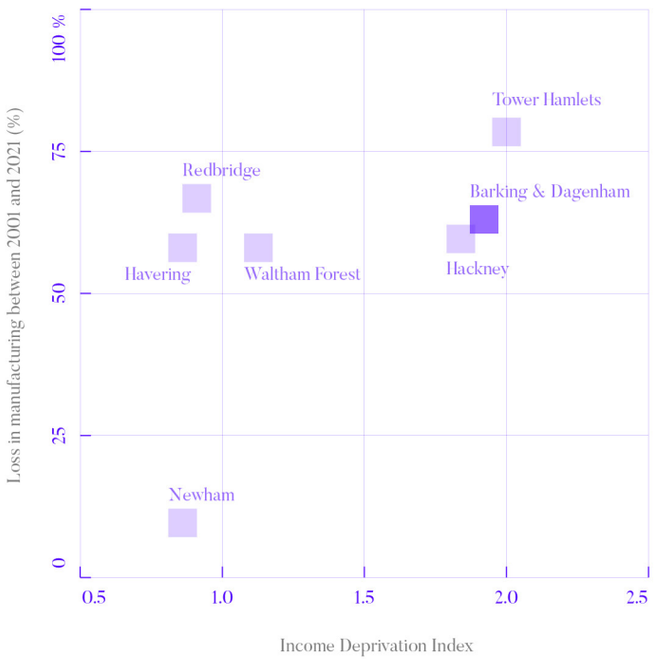
des is the rise of the logistical machine; the combined sectors of wholesale, transportation, and storage now account for 11,000 jobs[64], effectively replacing the numerical void left by the Ford plant.

Furthermore, the local employment structure remains largely oriented towards low-value sectors. Data from 2021 confirm a persistent gap: only 18% of residents are employed in managerial or professional roles, a stark contrast to nearly 40% across London[65]. This is closely intertwined with a bleak educational landscape. Barking and Dagenham continues to register some of the lowest levels of attainment in the capital: 12% of the working-age population holds no formal qualifications (doubling the London average) while a further 20% possess only basic qualifications[66]. This pattern is further reinforced by high levels of child poverty: around 42% of children in the borough live in poverty, compared to a London average of 35%[67]. These figures help explain why only 18% of residents are employed in professional or managerial roles, confirming the structural link between education, employment, and long-term economic exclusion. It is not a surprise that the area records one of the highest unemployment rates in East End: with 6.7%, it is second only to



East End Poverty Profile per London Boroughs (2023/2024).
Data source: https://trustforlondon.org.uk/data/boroughs/

64 *Borough by sector employee jobs, 1971 to 2021. April 2023 Update,* https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/employee-jobs-by-sector
65 PorterPe (2020) *The Barking & Dagenham Industrial Land Strategy: Final Report*.
66 *Overview of London Boroughs,* https://trustforlondon.org.uk/
67 *Overview of London Boroughs,* https://trustforlondon.org.uk/data/boroughs/overview-of-london-boroughs/



Loss in manufacturing jobs (2001/2021) and Income Deprivation Index per London Boroughs (East End) intersection.
Data sources: https://trustforlondon.org.uk/data/boroughs/overview-of-london-boroughs/: https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/borough-by-sector/

its neighbour Newham and it is the third highest across London[68]. This is further confirmed by welfare data: 19.7% of residents claim "out-of-work benefits"[69], the highest proportion in the East End.

In addition, low pay is a widespread condition rather than an exception: according to 2021 Census data, 23.8% of residents are classified as "low paid"[70], reflecting the dominance of insecure and low-wage employment. Income deprivation is just a consequence and remains correspondingly high, ranking second only to Tower Hamlets, with an index value of 1.9[71].

In this context, the borough's ongoing expansion of housing stock, although necessary, cannot be considered as a comprehensive response to residents needs. A young and increasingly diverse population requires more than new dwellings. Long-term social and economic inclusion depends on targeted investment in education, skills training, and employment pathways that are aligned with the local labour market and with the borough's evolving productive landscape.

68 *Unemployment rate by London borough,* https://trustforlondon.org.uk
69 "Out-of-work benefits" refer to a range of social security payments which provide a basic income for individuals of working age who are unemployed or unable to work.
70 "Low-paid" work refers to employment where wages fall below the London Living Wage, often characterized by precarious contracts, part-time hours, or "gig economy" arrangements.
71 *Overview of London Boroughs,* https://trustforlondon.org.uk

2.3 The Persistence of Production: Working Spaces along River Road

As discussed in the previous chapter, the Barking riverfront area represents a transitional landscape where London's industrial legacy intersects with contemporary urban transformation. On the one hand, the wider London Riverside corridor has increasingly taken the form of a large-scale construction site, shaped by housing-led redevelopment projects such as Thames Road and Barking Riverside; on the other, extensive areas dedicated to urban production and employment-related activities continue to persist. This area maintains a strong association with manufacturing-related uses and, above all, with logistics, wholesale, warehousing and waste management. The following section focuses on the employment-related area of Barking riverfront, as residential-led developments were largely discussed in the previous chapter.

River Road Employment Area (RREA), which is the major "industrial area" in the territory, can be read as a direct spatial continuation of Barking's historic industrial fabric. It covers approximately 870,000 square metres[72] and is located along the eastern edge of Barking riverfront, extending between the River Roding and the River Thames. The urban morphology develops primarily along the River Road axis, which runs perpendicular to Thames Road and structures the entire area. In policy terms, River Road Employment Area includes both corridors, despite Thames Road having recently been prioritised for housing-led redevelopment. For this reason, the following survey will focus especially on River Road.

Despite being geographically positioned between two major redevelopment fronts, River Road has remained largely outside the scope of high-profile regeneration interventions, unlike Thames Road. While several strategic planning documents, such as The Barking & Dagenham Industrial Land Strategy (2021) and the LBBD's 2020 Vision, acknowledge the area as a key employment location within the London Riverside framework, River Road currently occupies a form of policy limbo: recognised in principle, yet lacking a clear and articulated spatial vision. In this sense, it effectively operates as the "backyard" of London, a necessary but largely unseen component of the metropolitan system. The only significant contemporary intervention within the area is Industria, a new multi-storey facility for small and medium-sized enterprises, completed in 2023, which provides space for light industrial activities and is expected to generate up to 300 jobs[73].

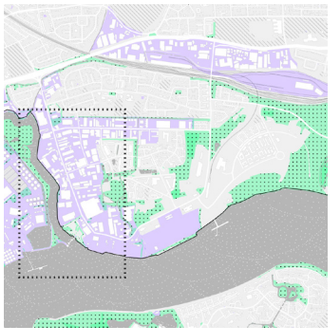
Despite its position along the riverfront, River Road does not translate into public access or environmental amenity; on the contrary, the relationship with the water is primarily infrastructural. In addition, the proximity to large-scale facilities such as Beckton Sewage Treatment Works[74], within the opposite edge of River Roding, reinforces the role of the waterway as a working corridor, historically and contemporarily monopolised by manufacturing, logistical, and infrastructural uses.

72 PorterPe (2020) *The Barking & Dagenham Industrial Land Strategy: Final Report*.

73 The number of jobs is estimated by *Be First* in many online reports, https://befirst.london/

74 Beckton Sewage Treatment Works is the largest sewage plant in Europe, it covers over 250 acres and treats the waste of more than 3.5 million people. https://www.ice.org.uk

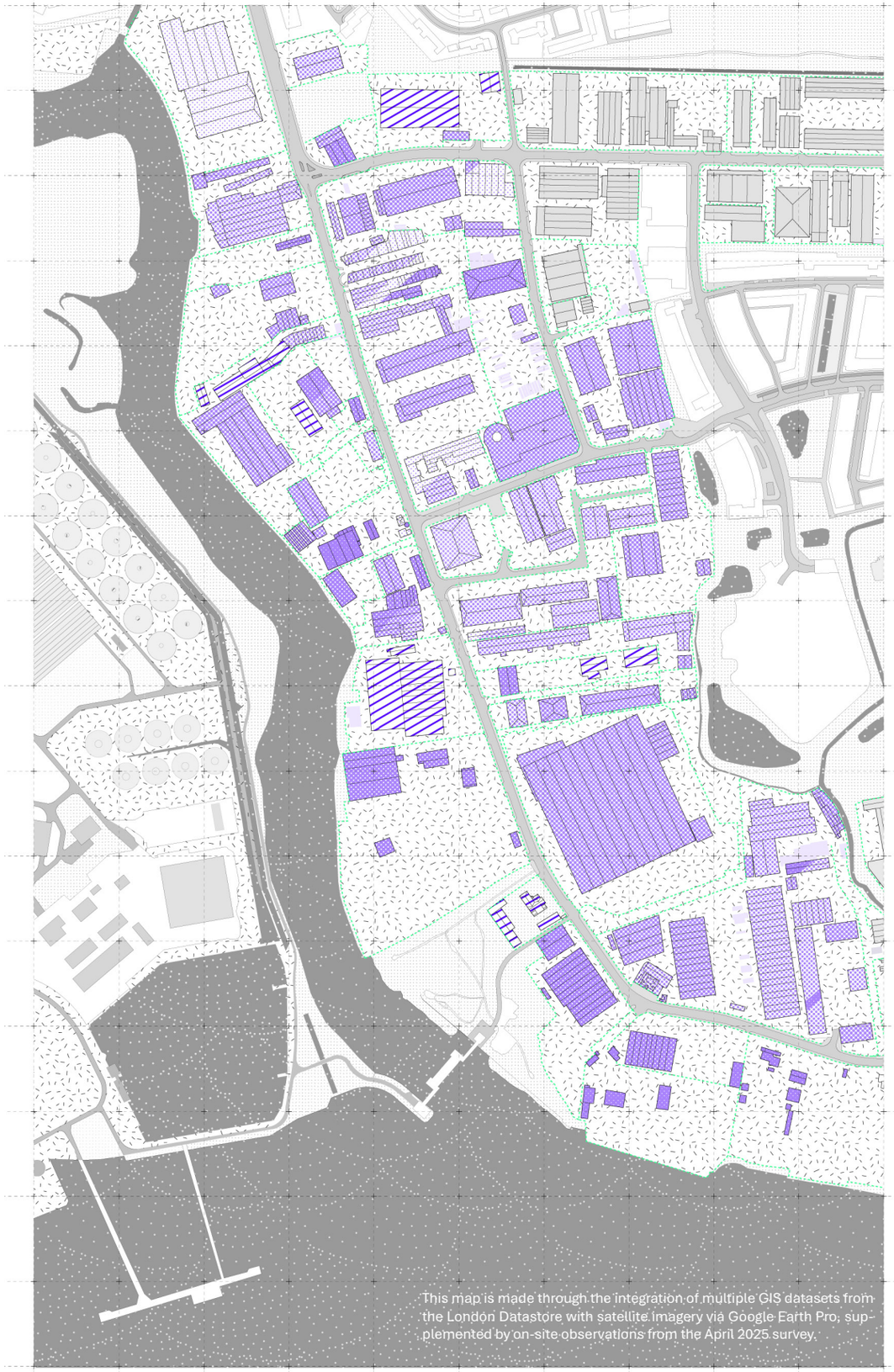
In fact, land use is dominated by logistics facilities, which area distributed throughout River Road and often connected to river-based and metropolitan transportation networks. In addition, and coherently with its “backyard” character, the area accommodated multiple waste management facilities; these uses consolidate the perception of the area as degraded, obsolete, and largely disconnected from the surrounding housing regeneration narratives, while simultaneously highlighting its ongoing functional relevance at the metropolitan scale. Furthermore, despite the ongoing transformation of Thames Road towards housing-led development, major logistics hubs such as Amazon and FedEx still remain in place, reinforcing the area’s role as a strategic node within London’s distribution system.



River Road, Existing Uses and Activities >

- Waste Management Spaces
- Logistic Spaces
- Automotive Workshops
- Retail and Commercial
- Creative And Professional Spaces
- Unknown/Dismissed
- Containers
- Industrial Plots
- Plot Boundaries
- Street Network
- Other Industrial Buildings
- Beckton Sewage Treatment Works
- Residential Buildings
- Open Land
- Water System

Alongside logistics and waste management, the area hosts a substantial concentration of wholesale activities of various kind and a strong presence of automotive-related uses, primarily car dealerships and workshops. Large portions of the site are also occupied by the Transport for London bus garage, as well as activities related to timber and steel construction. At the same time, the area accommodates a range of smaller and less expected professional activities, including tattoo studios, photography studios, and engineering practices. Infrastructure-related functions, linked to energy distribution, are also present, and can be interpreted as direct descendants of the historic power stations once located along the river.



Christ Embassy, church in Thames Road, 2025 © Google Street View.

In addition, the presence of Wharf Studios, a film production facility that has collaborated with major international platforms such as Netflix, appears to have been established on the site since the late 1990s[75], and further adds to the functional heterogeneity of the area.

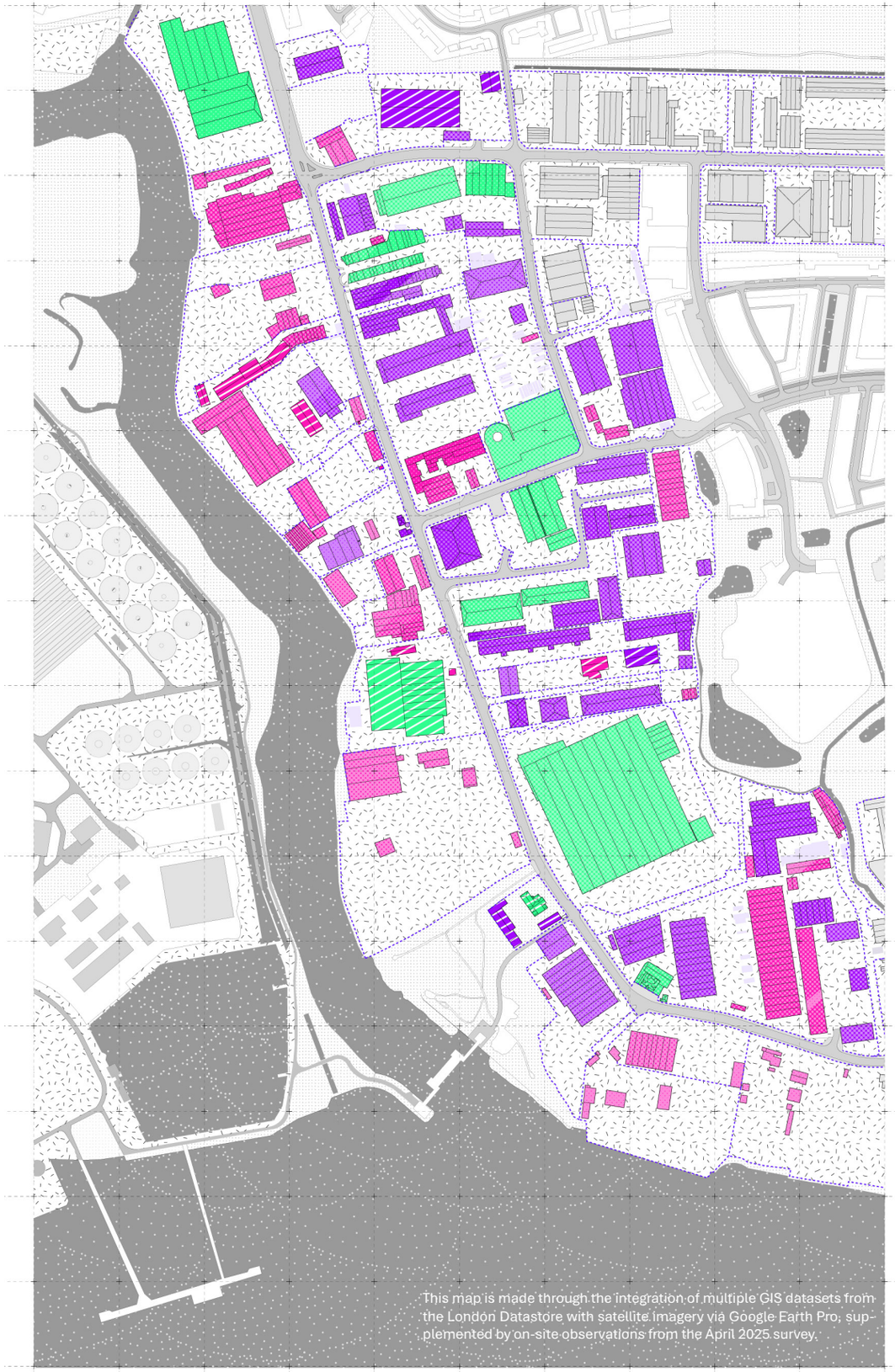
What makes this area particularly distinctive, however, is the presence of a range of informal and hybrid uses that sit outside conventional definitions of an urban production area. The gradual erosion of traditional industrial activities has opened up opportunities for spatial appropriation, more closely related to community life than to a purely productive or labour-oriented environment. The availability of large, adaptable industrial buildings has facilitated the emergence of informal religious spaces, including at least four Catholic churches and one mosque identified within the area. In parallel, several former industrial sheds have been converted into privately operated event spaces available for hire; in this case, the long-standing perception of the area as a noise-tolerant environment has played a key role in enabling these uses to take root.

75 This deduction is made by the observation of historic satellite imagery available on *Google Earth*.

River Road, Current Architectural State >

- Good Condition
- Fair Condition
- Poor Condition
- Containers
- Industrial Plots
- Plot Boundaries
- Street Network
- Other Industrial
- Beckton Sewage Treatment Works
- Residential Buildings
- Open Land
- Water System

Taken together, these conditions reveal the River Road Employment Area as a complex and layered territory: neither fully industrial nor fully post-industrial, neither formally regenerated nor entirely obsolete. Instead, it functions as a hybrid space in which urban productive activities, infrastructural landscapes, and informal community practices coexist. This coexistence highlights both the spatial resilience of industrial typologies and the absence of a strategic framework capable of guiding their transformation, an absence that becomes particularly evident when contrasted with the intensity and clarity of nearby residential-led regeneration projects.



The resulting urban fabric is highly fragmented, characterised by high-density industrial plots, an ageing building stock, with a generally poor-quality public realm, especially in the Roding proximity. Although River Road axis occupies a strategic riverfront position, it functions as a physical and perceptual barrier between the water and the urban environment. The river, rather than acting as an asset, is largely concealed and inaccessible, reinforcing an inward-facing spatial logic.

In addition, the flood defence infrastructure, Creek Flood Barrier, further contributes to this condition, embedding the area within a defensive and infrastructural landscape where water management takes precedence over public or ecological uses.

Building stock is highly diverse, composed of a loose assemblage of buildings developed incrementally over time. The area is dominated by a limited number of recurring industrial typologies. Large portions of River Road are occupied by “clustered volumes”: groups of industrial buildings aggregated through successive extensions, additions, and partial replacements. These clusters often combine different roof profiles and construction periods, resulting in hybrid forms that blur the boundary between single buildings and urban blocks. While visually chaotic, these configurations reveal a high degree of spatial adaptability, as their additive nature allows for selective removal, reuse, or internal reconfiguration without necessitating total demolition.

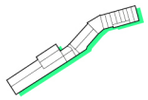
Alongside these clusters, more standardised shed typologies are present: single-pitch and double-pitch sheds constitute a significant share of the built fabric, with the latter appearing in both slender (elongated variants) and bulky forms (more compact). Their structural simplicity and repetitive construction logic suggest a latent capacity for transformation, particularly where generous spans and clear heights are maintained.

Other industrial forms include x-shed buildings and sawtooth-roof sheds, which generally run perpendicular to River Road. Originally designed to optimise daylight conditions and production layouts, these typologies articulate a strong linearity and reinforce the infrastructural character of the area.

Next pages present a comprehensive typological catalogue of the buildings within the study area; this visual index illustrates the diverse architectural characteristics, categorization, and physical states of the existing building stock. The latter is based on the observation of satellite imagery and on-site observations during the April 2025 survey.

Clustered Volumes

Groups of industrial buildings joined together, often through additions, extensions or overlapping volumes and different morphologies. This typology includes hybrid buildings.

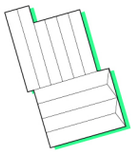


footprint area: 2465 sqm
storeys number: 1 to 4
bulding condition: poor

footprint area: 776 sqm
storeys number: 1
bulding condition: poor

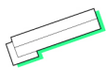
footprint area: 2660 sqm
storeys number: 1 to 2
bulding condition: poor

footprint area: 882 sqm
storeys number: 1
bulding condition: poor

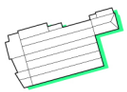


footprint area: 10,000 sqm
storeys number: full-height volume
bulding condition: good

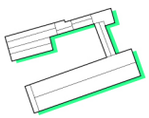
footprint area: 1957 sqm
storeys number: 1 to 2
bulding condition: good



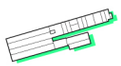
footprint area: 2180 sqm
storeys number: 2
bulding condition: fair



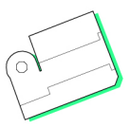
footprint area: 5168 sqm
storeys number: 1
bulding condition: poor



footprint area: 5499 sqm
storeys number: 2
bulding condition: fair



footprint area: 2190 sqm
storeys number: 2
bulding condition: fair



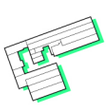
footprint area: 7415 sqm
storeys number: 3
bulding condition: good

footprint area: 2085 sqm
storeys number: 2
bulding condition: fair

footprint area: 1588 sqm
storeys number: 1
bulding condition: fair

footprint area: 7500 sqm
storeys number: full-height volume
bulding condition: good

footprint area: 842 sqm
storeys number: 1
bulding condition: poor



footprint area: 3177 sqm
storeys number: 1 to 2
bulding condition: poor

footprint area: 859 sqm
storeys number: 1
bulding condition: poor

footprint area: 1468 sqm
storeys number: 2
bulding condition: fair

X-Shed

A central shed volume with two pitched side wings forming a cross-like roof structure.

footprint area: 2156 sqm
storeys number: full-height volume
bulding condition: good

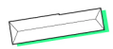
footprint area: 2395 sqm
storeys number: 2
bulding condition: fair

footprint area: 838 sqm
storeys number: 1
bulding condition: fair

footprint area: 2333 sqm
storeys number: full-height volume
bulding condition: fair

footprint area: 1149 sqm
storeys number: 2
bulding condition: fair

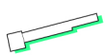
footprint area: 693 sqm
storeys number: 2
bulding condition: fair



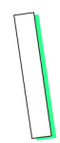
footprint area: 2113 sqm
storeys number: 1
bulding condition: fair

Single-Pitch Shed

A simple industrial building with a single sloped roof.



footprint area: 981 sqm
storeys number: 1
bulding condition: poor



footprint area: 2502 sqm
storeys number: 1
bulding condition: poor

footprint area: 448 sqm
storeys number: 1
bulding condition: poor

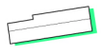
footprint area: 852 sqm
storeys number: 1
bulding condition: poor

footprint area: 429 sqm
storeys number: 2
bulding condition: poor

Double-Pitch Shed

An industrial building with two symmetrical pitched surfaces. Two main variants can be identified: *Slender* (elongated in plan) and *Bulky* (compact plan).

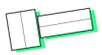
footprint area: 901 sqm
storeys number: 2
bulding condition: fair



footprint area: 1977 sqm
storeys number: 1
bulding condition: fair

footprint area: 2953 sqm
storeys number: full-height volume
bulding condition: fair

footprint area: 639 sqm
storeys number: 1
bulding condition: fair



footprint area: 2263 sqm
storeys number: full-height volume
bulding condition: fair

footprint area: 710 sqm
storeys number: 1
bulding condition: poor

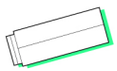
footprint area: 2072 sqm
storeys number: full-height volume
bulding condition: fair

footprint area: 362 sqm
storeys number: 1
bulding condition: poor

footprint area: 2251 sqm
storeys number: full-height volume
bulding condition: fair

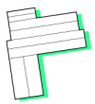
footprint area: 1419 sqm
storeys number: 2
bulding condition: poor

footprint area: 1470 sqm
storeys number: full-height volume
bulding condition: fair



footprint area: 3531 sqm
storeys number: 1
bulding condition: good

footprint area: 1704 sqm
storeys number: full-height volume
bulding condition: fair



footprint area: 4182 sqm
storeys number: 2
bulding condition: fair

footprint area: 939 sqm
storeys number: full-height volume
bulding condition: poor

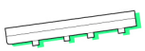
footprint area: 1449 sqm
storeys number: 2
bulding condition: fair

footprint area: 778 sqm
storeys number: 1
bulding condition: poor

footprint area: 4116 sqm
storeys number: full-height volume
bulding condition: fair

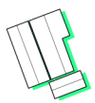
footprint area: 1018 sqm
storeys number: 1
bulding condition: poor

footprint area: 994 sqm
storeys number: 1
bulding condition: poor



footprint area: 2247 sqm
storeys number: 2
bulding condition: fair

footprint area: 1232 sqm
storeys number: 1 to 2
bulding condition: poor

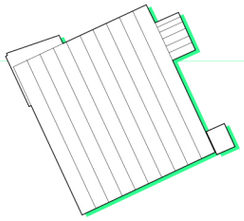


footprint area: 3937 sqm
storeys number: 2
bulding condition: good

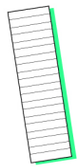
Sawtooth Roof

An elongated industrial building composed of repeated shed units.

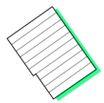
footprint area: 3180 sqm
storeys number: full-height volume
bulding condition: fair



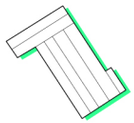
footprint area: 26,234 sqm
storeys number: full-height volume
bulding condition: good



footprint area: 6367 sqm
storeys number: 1
bulding condition: poor



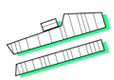
footprint area: 4183 sqm
storeys number: 1
bulding condition: fair



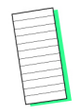
footprint area: 5471 sqm
storeys number: full-height volume
bulding condition: poor

footprint area: 3467 sqm
storeys number: full-height volume
bulding condition: poor

footprint area: 2537 sqm
storeys number: full-height volume
bulding condition: poor



footprint area: 2567 sqm
storeys number: 2
bulding condition: good



footprint area: 3842 sqm
storeys number: 1
bulding condition: fair

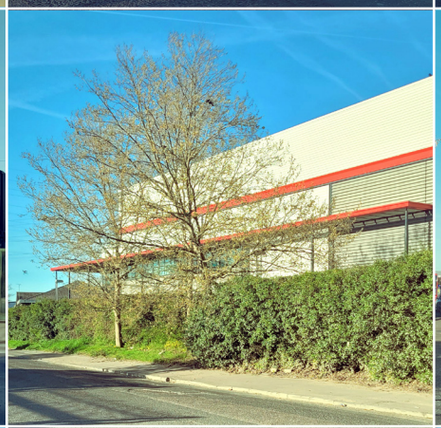
footprint area: 1280 sqm
storeys number: 2
bulding condition: fair

footprint area: 2291 sqm
storeys number: 1
bulding condition: fair


First BM Parts Ltd
OFF LICENCE
GOD IS ABLE
CHERUBIM & SERAPHIM SHILOH LONDON
SHOP 295
OFF LICENCE
FOOD · DRINKS · GROCERY
5
iver Road
VA65 TBV


BiG
Automotive Service
13F River Road
ENTRANCE


TC
COACH WORKS
ACCIDENT REPAIR




NO ENTRY
OUT


LONDON WHOLESALE
Unit 73
Cash & Carry
LONDON WHOLESALE
Cards


SNACK BOX CAFE


75
75


ONE
CARIBBEAN
WAREHOUSE

3.

River Road
April 2025

A Territorial Reading 3.1

The following section presents a collection of pictures taken during a site visit carried out in April 2025 along River Road. The collection is divided into two parts, each capturing the atmosphere of the area from a different perspective.

The first sequence documents River Road as experienced from the street itself; it conveys a sense of desolation, portraying a neglected and impermeable environment. Despite the proximity of two major waterways (the River Thames and the River Roding) their presence remains entirely invisible. Visual and physical access to the water is obstructed by a continuous wall and productive buildings: the river edge is fully occupied by industrial land uses.

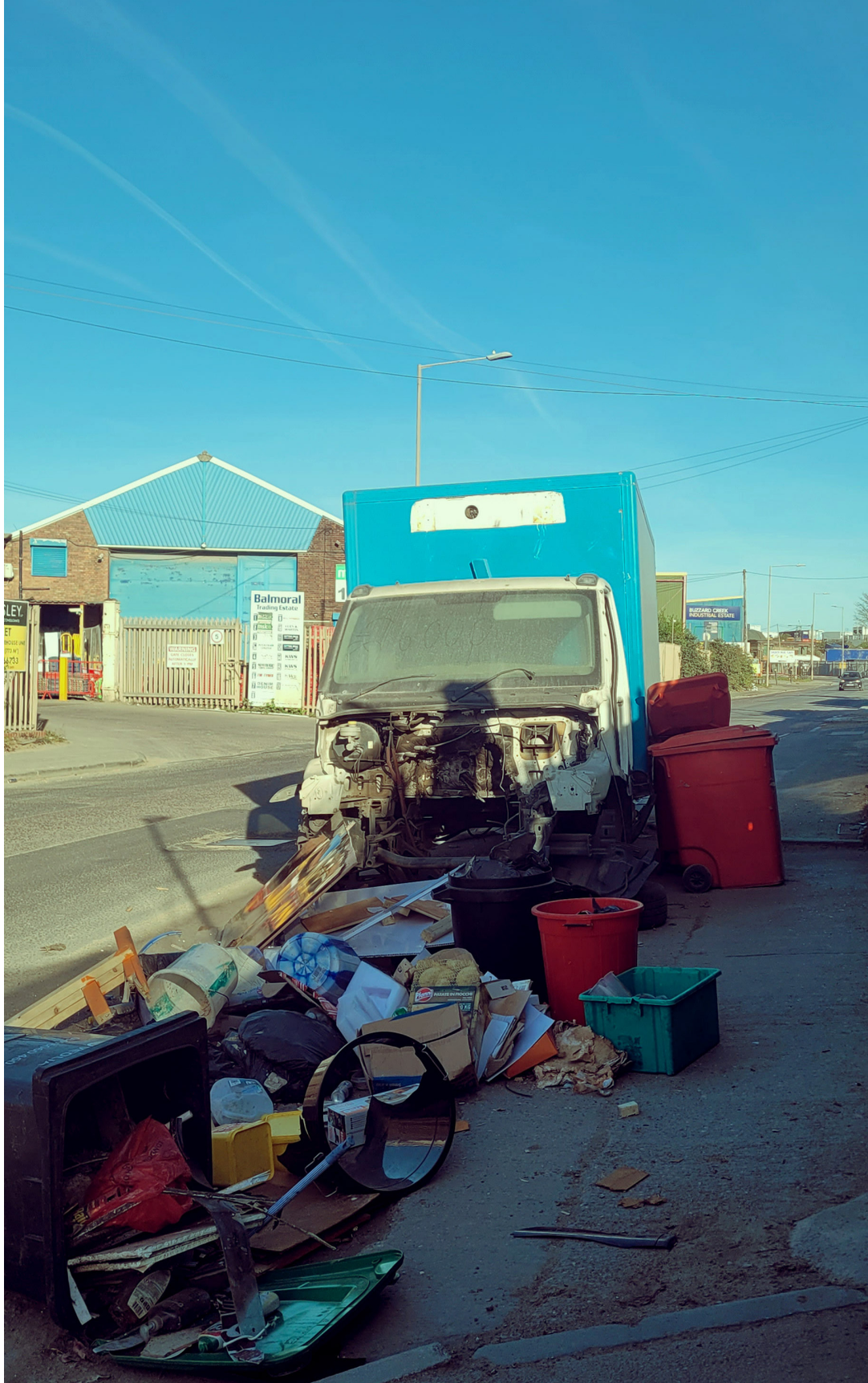
The area appears deserted. Although the site visit took place on working days, the presence of people and vehicles along the street is almost entirely absent: the space feels empty, even though mechanical noises related to ongoing activities can be heard in the background. The photographic journey begins at Barking Riverside Overground Station and continues south along River Road toward Barking Town Centre.

A shift in atmosphere occurs where River Road intersects with Thames Road. Here, the presence of everyday life becomes visible: people waiting at bus stops, walking along the street, and occupying the public space. Vehicular traffic intensifies, and the environment feels noticeably more active and inhabited.

The second sequence continues on the other Roding edge, in the Newham territory. Accessing the area through an industrial zone, the route passes through the Beckton Creekside Nature Reserve, where dense vegetation and wildlife dominate the landscape. Two environmental volunteers encountered along the path point out the possible presence of rabbits and even snakes: the experience feels detached from the surrounding urban condition; the proximity of large industrial volumes momentarily fades from perception.

Reaching the riverbank, it finally becomes possible to observe River Road from an opposite and previously inaccessible perspective. On this day, the water level of the river is low, revealing exposed sediment along the banks. Spontaneous riparian vegetation is abundant on both sides of the river. Even from this vantage point, signs of active labour remain limited; the most impactful activity continues to be waste management. Strong odours permeate the area, and the movement of waste attracts large flocks of seagulls overhead.

The journey concludes at the mouth of the River Roding, where it meets the Thames. Here, the Barking Creek Barrier emerges as a dominant territorial landmark, defining the skyline and asserting its presence within the landscape.



3.


TC
COACH
WORKS
ACCIDENT REPAIR CE
020 8591
storebox
ENTRANCE


Waste Rapid Response

3.


First BM Parts Ltd
GOD IS ABLE
CHERUBIM & SERAPHIM SHILOH LONDON
SHOP 295
OFF LICENCE
FOOD - DRINKS - GROCERY
5
iver Road
VA65 TDV


ipg
BiG
Automotive Service
bigipg.co.uk
0208 591 9292
13F River Road
RAC
ENTRANCE
We are now
disinfecting
vehicle interiors

The Continuous Wall 3.2

The “wall” is not a single structure, but a continuous assemblage of elements: industrial buildings, fenced plots, loading yards, gates, and service entrances. Together, they form a long, impermeable edge that runs parallel to the road, defining movement and sightlines. The river remains hidden behind this accumulation of productive architecture, replaced by surfaces designed for control, separation, and logistics rather than encounter. What emerges is not an absence of form, but an excess of enclosure.


PEDESTRIANS
USE WALKWAY


BLUMSOM


suez
suez


Greenwich Village
PRINCESS ALICE DISEASE


CCTV
OPERATES
24 HRS
WE
PARTS

3.3 The other Edge: Reading River Road from Newham

Distance and vegetation soften the industrial presence, allowing the river to reappear as a spatial and ecological entity. The productive landscape is no longer experienced through proximity and obstruction, but as a background condition: fragmented, silent, and partially absorbed by the terrain. From this side, River Road becomes legible as a continuous edge rather than a place, revealing the asymmetry between access, perception, and occupation along the two riverbanks.


Beckton Creekside Nature Reserve
Welcome
Beckton Creekside Nature Reserve
For the enjoyment of visitors and safety of wildlife we ask that the following are observed:
• Please keep all pets under effective control.
• No Dog litter to be left on site.
• No cycling/motorcycling.
• No fires.
• Please stay on designated paths.
• No Horses/Horse-riding on site.
Thank you
Wildlife to look out for in autumn and winter
Love Wildlife?
Volunteer at Beckton Creekside!
Beckton Creekside Nature Reserve
Live Wild
with Thames
VOLUNTEERING OPPORTU
BECKTON CREEKSIDE NATURE
Held monthly, throughout the


VEHICLE BODYSHOP

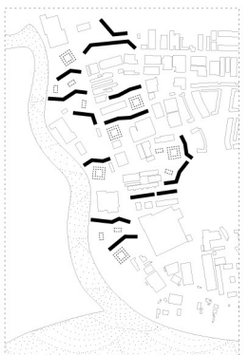

WELDEX
WELDEX
WILLIAMS
SHIPPING

4.

River Road:
Work and Living Neighbourhoods

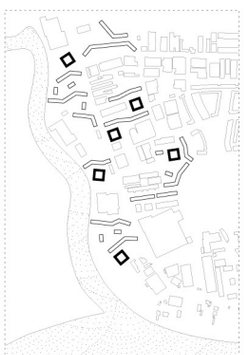
1. Infiltration | Break the Wall

2. Subtraction | Demolished Buildings

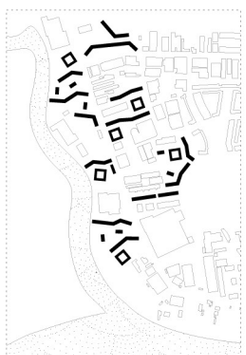


3. Edges | Linear Blocks

4. Vertical Markers | Towers



3. Densification | Courtyards



4. The New Settlement Layout

Strategy 4.1

This project positions itself within the spatial vacuum currently surrounding River Road, not to preserve productive functions uncritically, but to reframe their role within the residential transition. Seen the current urban transformation in the area of Barking & Dagenham, and especially Barking riverfront, it is clear that River Road is currently excluded from official residential agendas.

The fact that the area is protected at the policy level as a SIL could suggest a permanent protection from estate pressure, but recent shifts in the surrounding territory (e.g. Thames Road) suggest an inevitable change. These precedents indicate that the "protection" of River Road, is not a permanent condition, but a temporary delay.

The project, therefore, acts as a preventative strategy to anticipate the residential pressure that is already "at the gates", proposing a model of coexistence between work and living spaces, before the logic of *tabula rasa* takes hold.

Notably the proposed design project is not intended as a permanent equilibrium, but a spatial snapshot of the transitional process toward a new residential neighbourhood. It acknowledges that the total displacement of industrial legacy may be inevitable, yet it insists on a model where the "already there" forms the structural DNA of the new city.

Moreover, by concentrating a complete range of services, workspaces, and educational facilities within walking distance, the new settlement embraces the principle of *urban deceleration*. It envisions a self-sufficient neighborhood that transcends the necessity of long-distance commuting, fostering a slower, more localized, and sustainable pace of life.

Subtraction

The first phase of the design process consisted of a close reading of the existing urban fabric, focusing on both its morphological structure and its functional distribution. Rather than approaching the area as a *tabula rasa*, this phase involved a selective process of retention and removal, in which parts of the existing fabric were critically assessed and either incorporated into, or excluded from, the new settlement.

The criteria guiding this selection were twofold: on the one hand, buildings classified as being in fair or good condition were prioritised, acknowledging their material persistence and potential for continued use.

On the other, large-scale industrial structures were deliberately retained for their spatial adaptability: their generous dimensions, structural robustness, and flexible layouts allow them to accommodate a wide range of functions beyond their original industrial purpose.

In this sense, preservation is not conceived as a nostalgic act, but as a projective strategy, in which existing buildings are valued for their capacity to support transformation rather than for their original use alone. On the other side, the proposal acknowledges that not all uses in this area are compatible with domestic life: it is the case of waste treatments facilities, which generate noise, odour and hygiene issues.


River Road

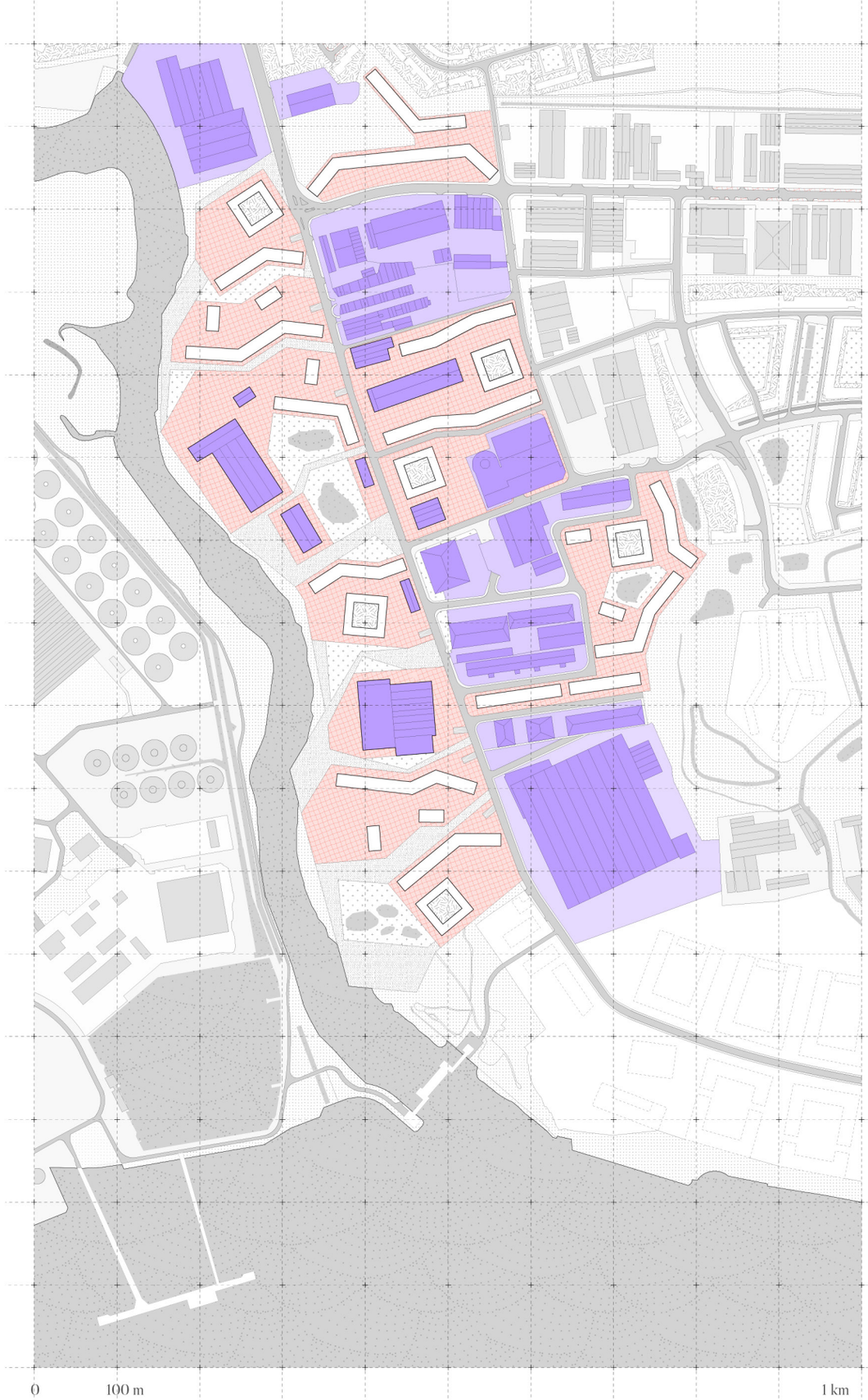

Demolished Buildings

A Residential Seed: the New Settlement

Instead of a silent displacement, the design project proposes the infiltration of a “residential seed” which interfaces with the industrial boxes as structural found objects. The design explores a radical urban strategy where mass-driven volumes accommodate domestic life in a state of deliberate friction with industrial fabric.

However, as the volumes moves deeper into the existing fabric and leave the riverfront, the housing settlement begins to fade, ending in an unfinished edge, leaving open questions of the uncertainty of future urban transition.

- New Residential Settlement
- Industrial Plots
- Existing Ind. Building Legacy
- Existing Res. Buildings
- Future Res. Buildings
- Beckton Sewage Treatment Works
- Hard Movement | Street Network
- Soft Movement | Park Pathway
- Water Ponds
- River Roding
- River Thames
- Private Gardens
- Public Green Spaces
- Unspoiled Nature



Mobility Layers: Soft and Hard Movement >

A transitional landscape, defined by the linear park along the River Roding, acts as a connective tool mediating between domestic life and other uses. Within this space, the project explores a continuous and open pathway where workers and residents are co-present.

Vehicular movement remains confined to River Road and does not access the new settlement facing the park. Parking is therefore conceived as predominantly underground, with access points located along River Road and carved into the park platforms, ensuring a clear separation between vehicular flows and soft mobility.

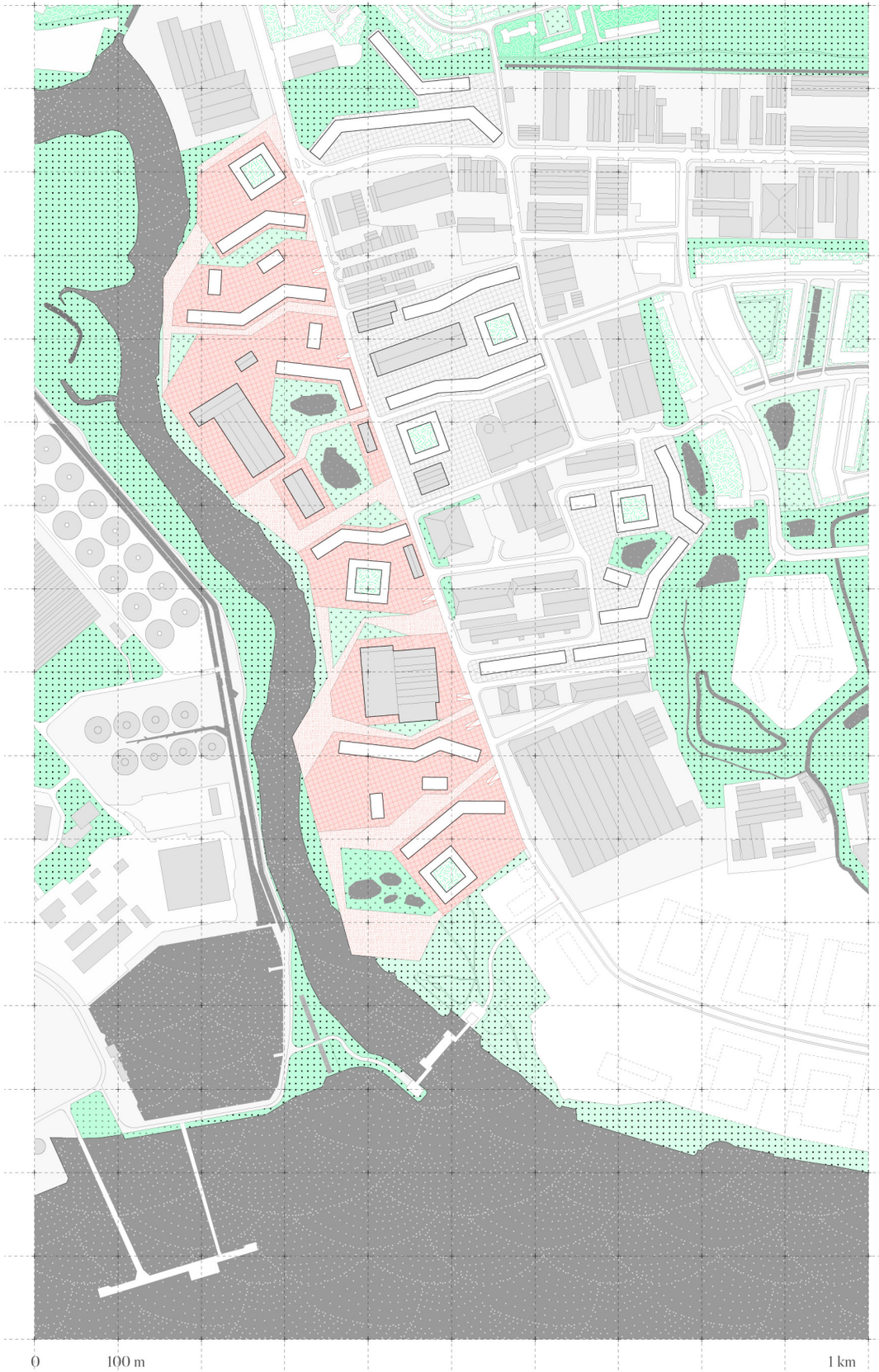
- Hard Movement | Street Network
- Underground Parking Entrances
- Soft Movement | Park Pathway
- Car-Free Path | Housing Platforms
- Public Green Spaces
- Private Gardens
- Unspoiled Nature
- Water Ponds
- River Roding
- River Thames
- New Res. Settlement
- Existing Ind. Building Legacy
- Ind. Plots
- Existing Res. Buildings
- Future Res. Buildings
- Beckton Sewage Treatment Works

The Linear Park

Central to this transformation is the linear park facing river Roding which operates through a series of hard platforms engraves into the terrain to allow the free pedestrian flow.

Where the platforms touch the ground, it is strictly defined, however, where it retreats, it cedes space to the spontaneous fluvial vegetation, allowing the re-wilding of the Roding's edge and the protection of the existing flora. Small ponds are also integrated along the park, complementing the marshy character of the area and enhancing its ecological and visual connection with the natural landscape.

The park is conceived as a seamless continuum with the opposite bank of the Roding, fostering a unified riparian corridor. This approach aligns strategically with upcoming large-scale developments such as Barking Riverside; by mirroring the waterfront promenades envisioned, the linear park establishes a coherent pedestrian link toward the Thames, integrating the site into a broader network of regional blue-green infrastructure.



Beckton Creekside
Nature Reserve

The Residential Tower

The Linear Block

Education District

Market

The Courtyard

Water ponds

River Road edge

Public Green Space

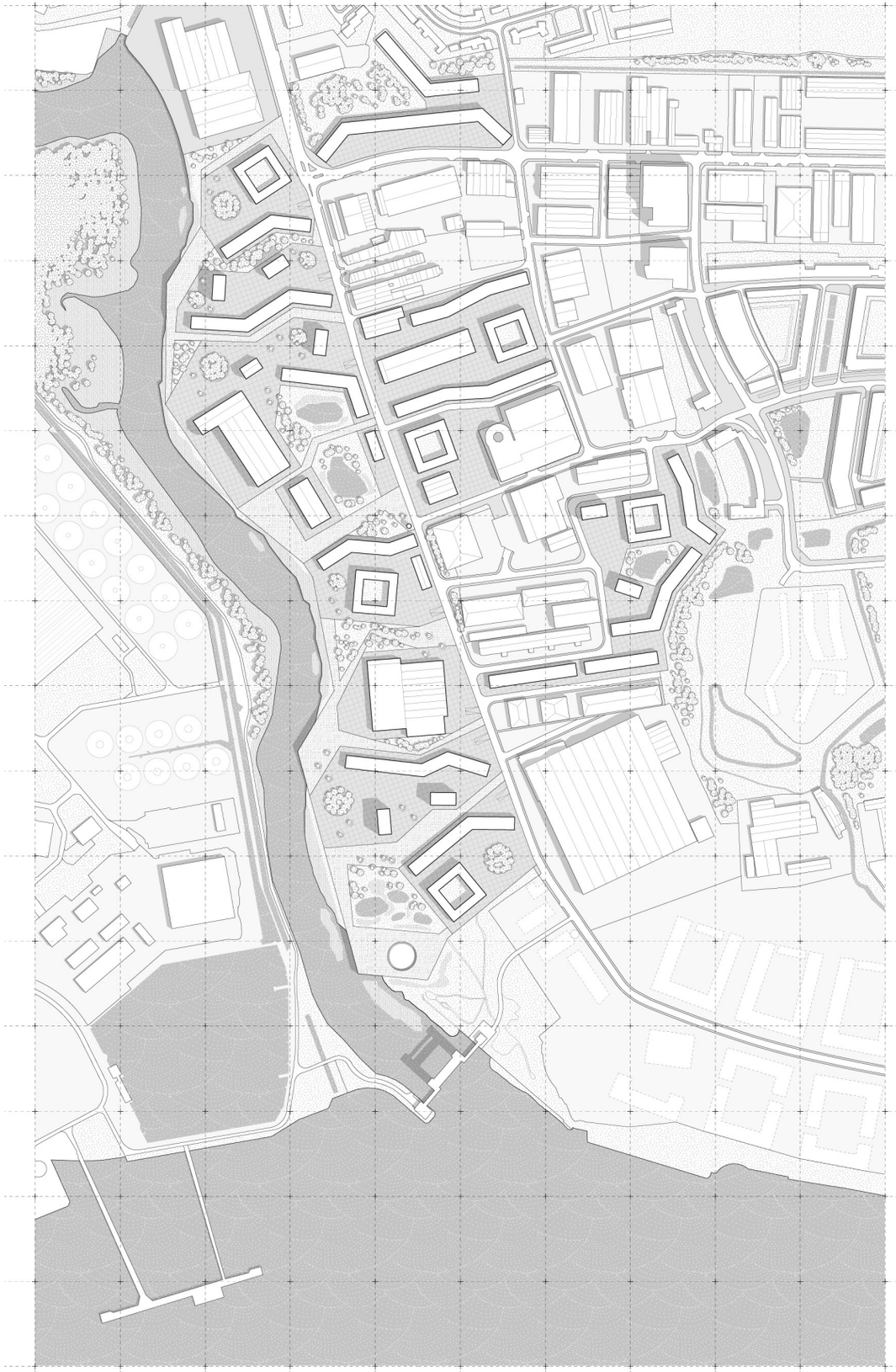
Coworking

Wood Spots

The Gathering Space

Barking Creek Barrier

Architectural and urban elements.



Program

The program consists in the infiltration of diverse residential volumes into the existing urban fabric, which currently hosts a complex ecology of creative and community-oriented uses, including tattoo studios, photography sets, film stages, and informal religious spaces such as churches and mosques. These “hidden” activities are not interpreted as nuisances to be cleared, but rather as a latent social infrastructure capable of supporting the emergence of a future neighbourhood.

At the same time, the project acknowledges that not all existing uses are compatible with domestic life. This is particularly the case for waste treatment facilities, which generate noise, odours and hygiene-related issues. For this reason, several existing buildings are treated as formal containers: while their physical structures are retained, their internal programmes are reconfigured to host essential community facilities when the original uses are incompatible with residential proximity.

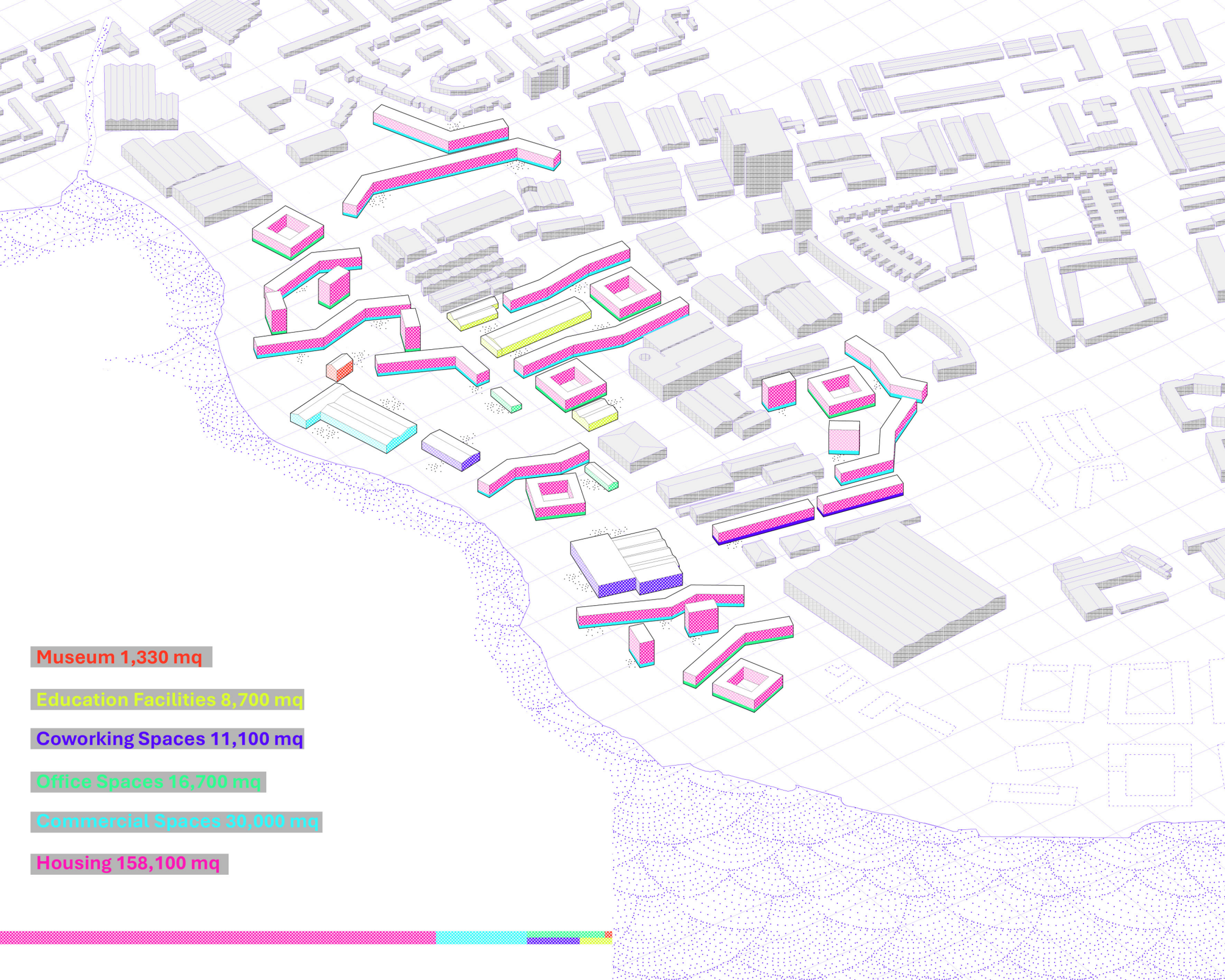
The design specifically focuses on the urban fabric located along River Roding, without directly redefining the functions of the surrounding buildings, while still recognising the broader productive context in which the intervention is embedded. In addition to the introduction of new residential volumes, the project therefore relies on the adaptive reuse of the existing built fabric.

Two coworking spaces, dedicated to light manufacturing activities, are introduced within selected existing buildings and integrated into the linear park, alongside a large commercial space, also derived from the reuse of an existing structure. These buildings are characterised by a generous scale, which allows for a high degree of spatial flexibility and freedom of movement. For this reason, the proposed programmes should not be understood as definitive, but rather as opened to future transformations and potential changes of use over time.

Within the same system of the linear park, a museum function is also introduced through the adaptive reuse of a multi-storey warehouse, likely dating back to the late nineteenth century. The existing structure is retained and reprogrammed as a cultural anchor within the new neighbourhood, reinforcing its role as a place of collective memory and public engagement. Additional retail and office functions are distributed across the site.

Particular importance is also given to the educational dimension of the project: moving away from the riverfront, three educational volumes are accommodated within existing shed structures and conceived as a sequence that supports continuity across generations. These buildings may host different levels of education, such as primary schools, colleges and trade schools, which reflect the productive character of the area.

Finally, the ground floors of all residential buildings are systematically occupied by public-oriented functions. Depending on their position within the site, these include coworking spaces, offices and commercial activities, ensuring a heterogeneous and active public realm throughout the entire area of intervention.


Museum 1,330 mq
Education Facilities 8,700 mq
Coworking Spaces 11,100 mq
Office Spaces 16,700 mq
Commercial Spaces 30,000 mq
Housing 158,100 mq

4.2 Residential Typologies

The design project involves the introduction of three distinct residential typologies, conceived as complementary elements within the new settlement rather than as isolated housing models. Each typology responds to specific spatial, morphological and social conditions of the site, contributing in different ways to the construction of an articulated urban fabric.

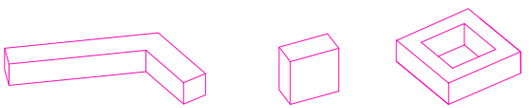
Linear blocks play a structuring role within the new settlement: rather than acting as a simple residential frontage, they contribute to the definition of a clear and legible urban order, delineating a sequence of blocks and giving rhythm, geometry and rigor to the overall layout.

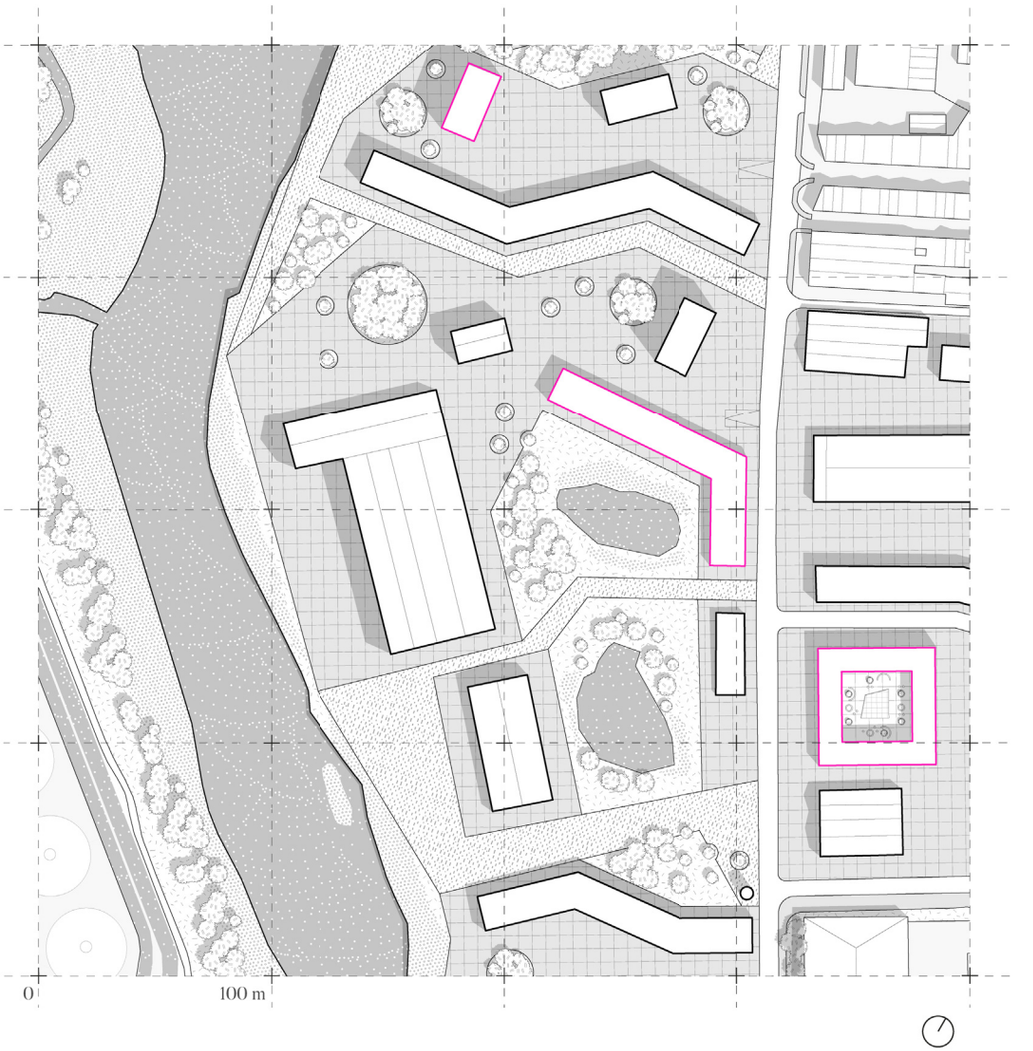
Towers are introduced to generate a deliberate vertical discontinuity within an otherwise predominantly horizontal landscape, acting as points of orientation at the territorial scale.

Courtyard volumes, finally, represent a more introverted residential typology, conceived as co-housing or social-housing models and characterized by the presence of a shared internal open space, intended as a collective environment for everyday social interaction among residents.

While the thesis does not aim at a fully developed architectural definition of the buildings in terms of detailed façade articulation or formal refinement, the project deliberately engages with the architectural scale through volumetric studies and spatial configurations.

3D views presented at the next pages are intended to convey architectural intentions rather than finished solutions, relying on elementary and essential volumes to emphasize their urban role. At the same time, the internal distribution of the buildings has been defined in order to provide a realistic assessment of density, inhabitation capacity, and the diversity of apartments units typologies, which are conceived as a fundamental component of the project's spatial and social structure.




0
100 m

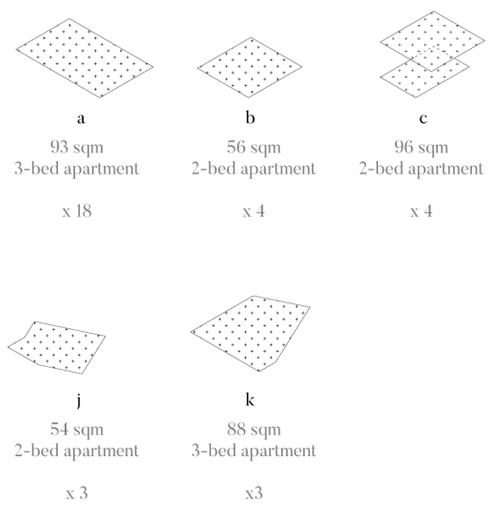
4.2.1 *The Linear Block*

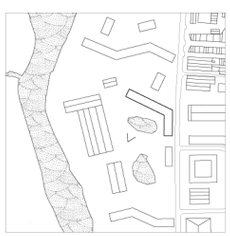
Fourteen linear blocks are introduced within the new residential settlement. Each linear block rises four storeys, with the ground floor allocated to non-residential uses depending on its position within the settlement, allowing the block to adapt to different urban conditions and to interact with surrounding public or semi-public spaces.

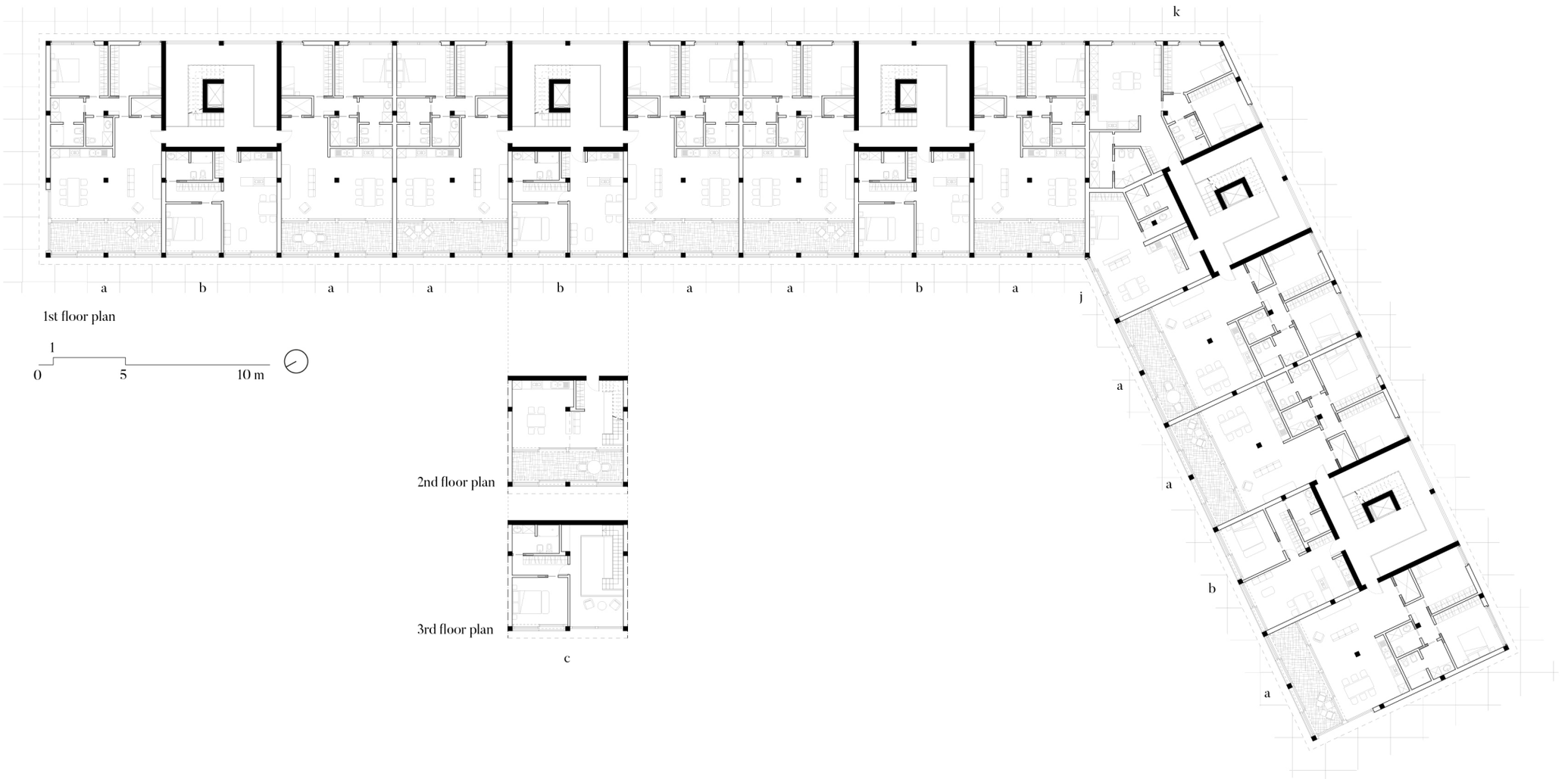
The internal layout is organized around a rhythmic sequence of stair cores, which structure the distribution of the apartments along the length of the building.

For the linear block three standard apartment units are defined (a, b, c), in order to provide a varied residential offer and respond to different household configurations. Moreover, as the linear blocks bend and adapt to different orientations within the settlement layout, the building corners are consistently resolved through specific corner or flexible units. These units (j, k) function as adaptable forms, allowing the typology to maintain continuity and coherence while accommodating geometric variations within the overall layout.

Apartment units typologyes





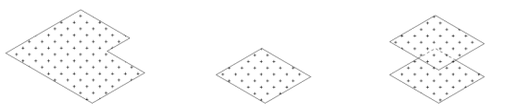

k
a
b
a
a
b
a
a
b
a
j
1st floor plan
1
0
5
10 m
2nd floor plan
3rd floor plan
c
a
a
b
a

4.2.2 *The Residential Tower*

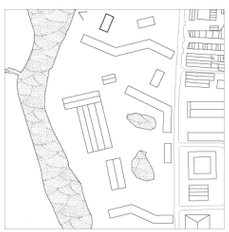
The tower typology concentrates housing in height, reinforcing its role as a vertical marker within the settlement while contributing to the overall residential capacity of the project. Six buildings of ten storeys high are introduced across the new residential settlement.

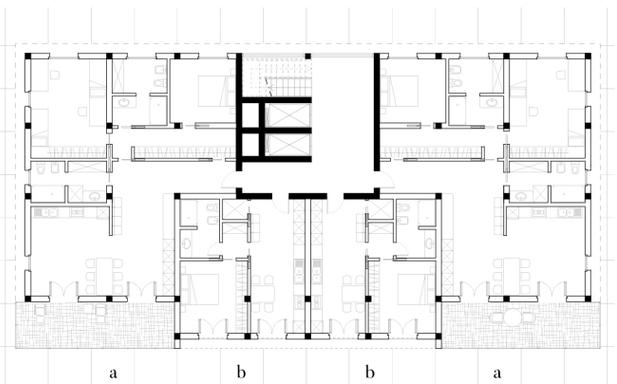
Here too, the ground floor allocates to non-residential uses that vary according to the tower's position within the settlement layout. Above the ground floor, the residential levels are organized to host three different apartment typologies (a, b, c), ensuring a degree of diversity within the vertical distribution of apartment units.

Apartment units typologyes

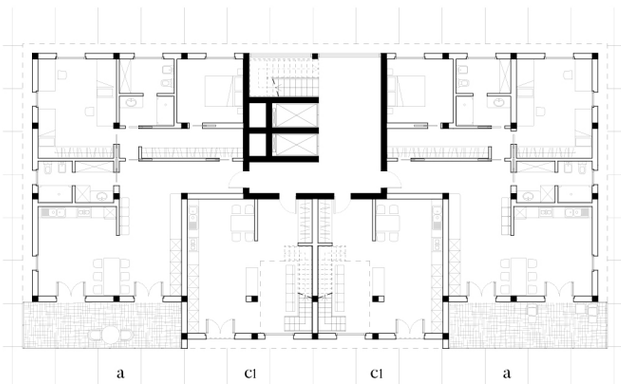


a	b	c
116 sqm 4-bed apartment	46 sqm 2-bed apartment	92 sqm 2-bed apartment
x 18	x 14	x2

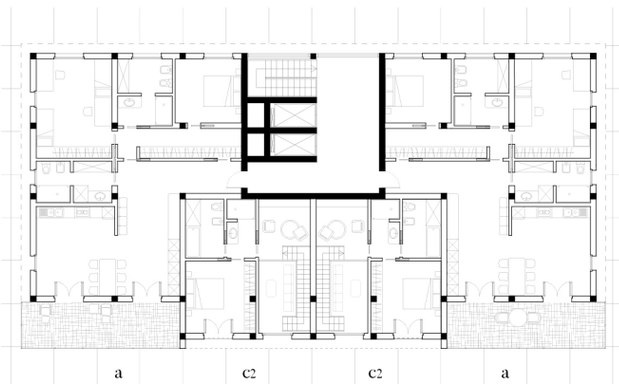




1st to 7th floor plan



8th floor plan

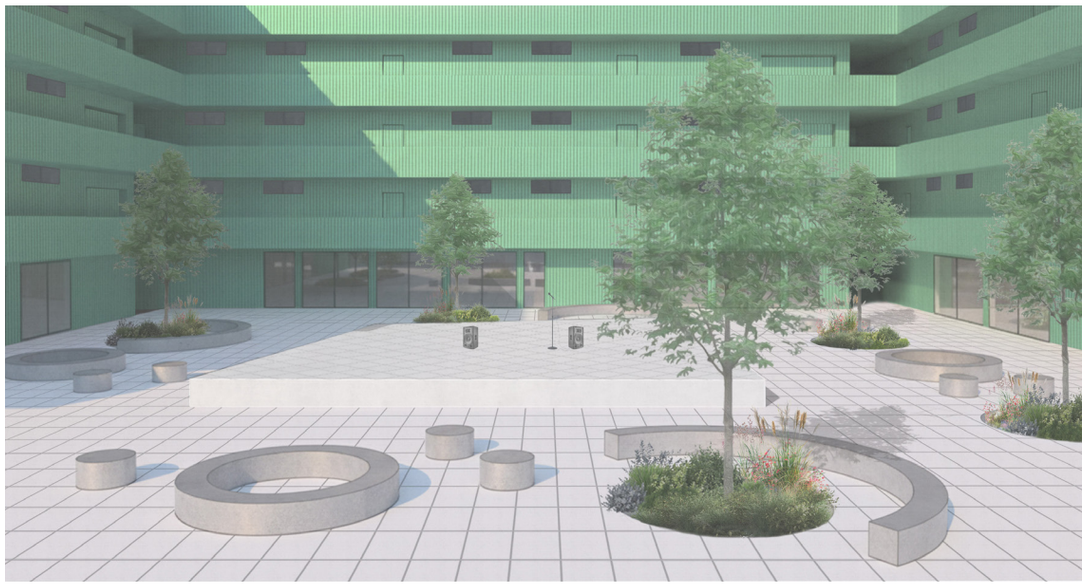


9th floor plan

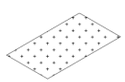
4.2.3 *The Courtyard*

The courtyard block rises five floors and is conceived as a co-housing or social-housing model, characterized by a stronger collective dimension. Within this typology, residential units are organized through the repetition of a single apartment layout, reinforcing both spatial clarity and a shared mode of living. Six buildings of this type are introduced within the overall settlement.

The defining element is the internal courtyard, conceived as a shared open space accessible exclusively to the residents; this space functions as a place of gathering and everyday social interaction, providing a protected outdoor environment within the block itself. The architectural logic prioritizes shared use and community-oriented living, making it particularly suited to flexible and collective forms of habitation.

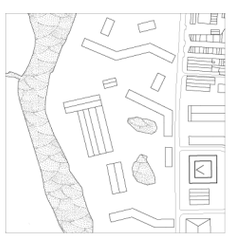


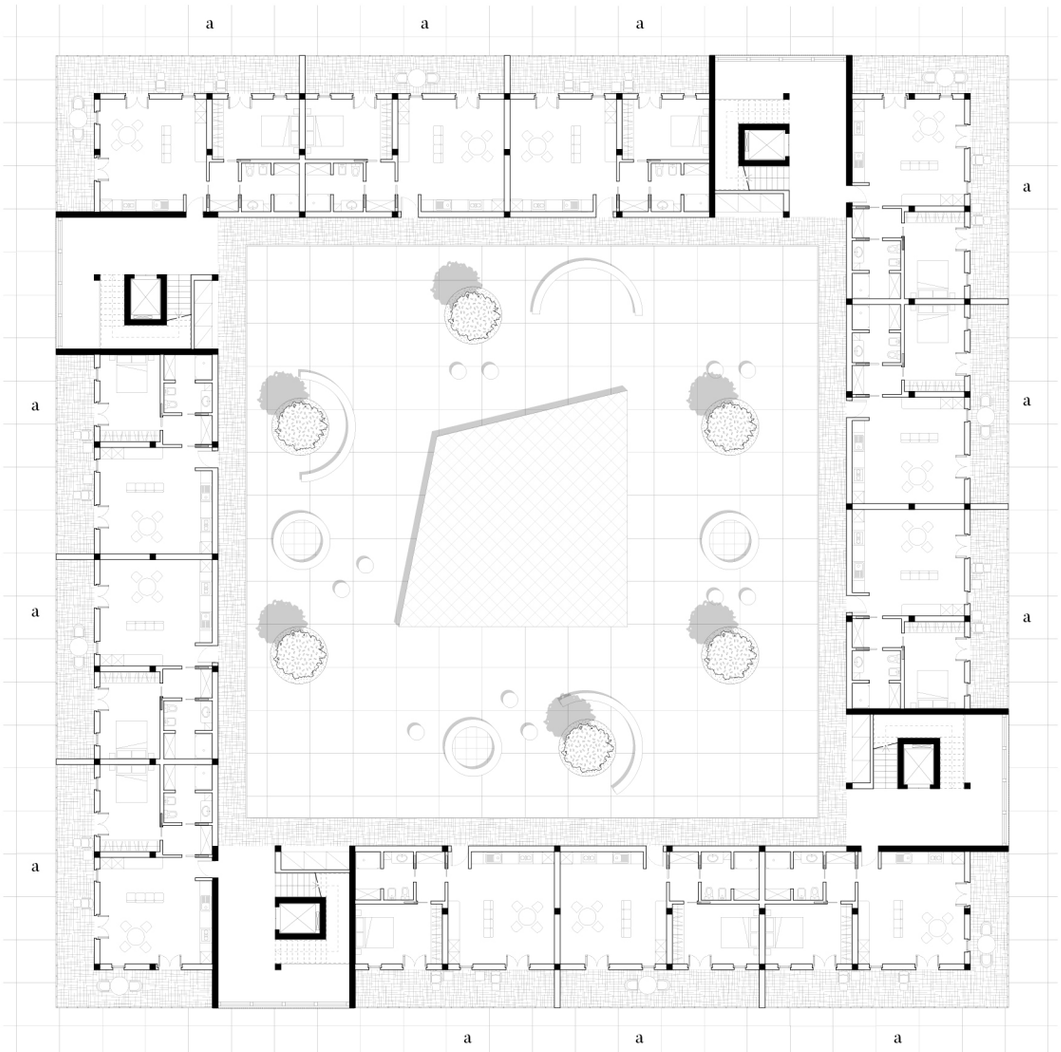
Apartment unit typology



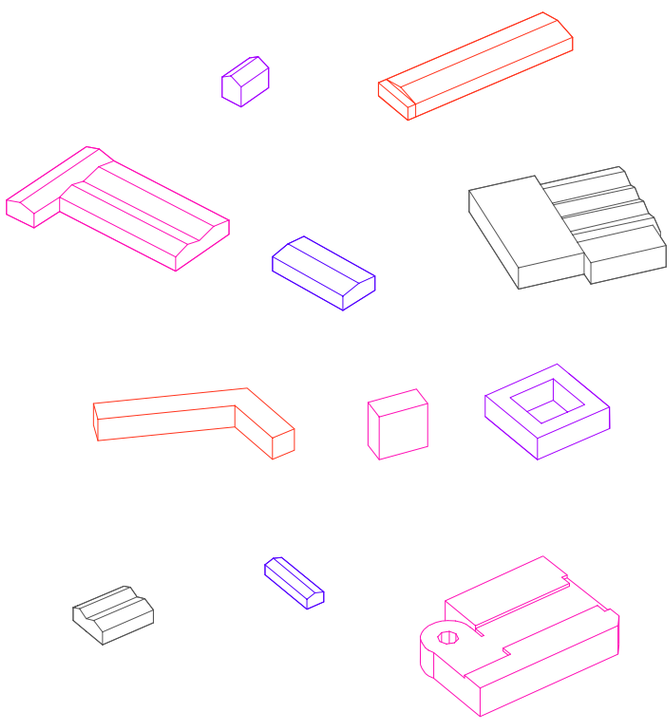
a

60 sqm
2-bed apartment





1st to 4th floor plan



Landscape 4.3

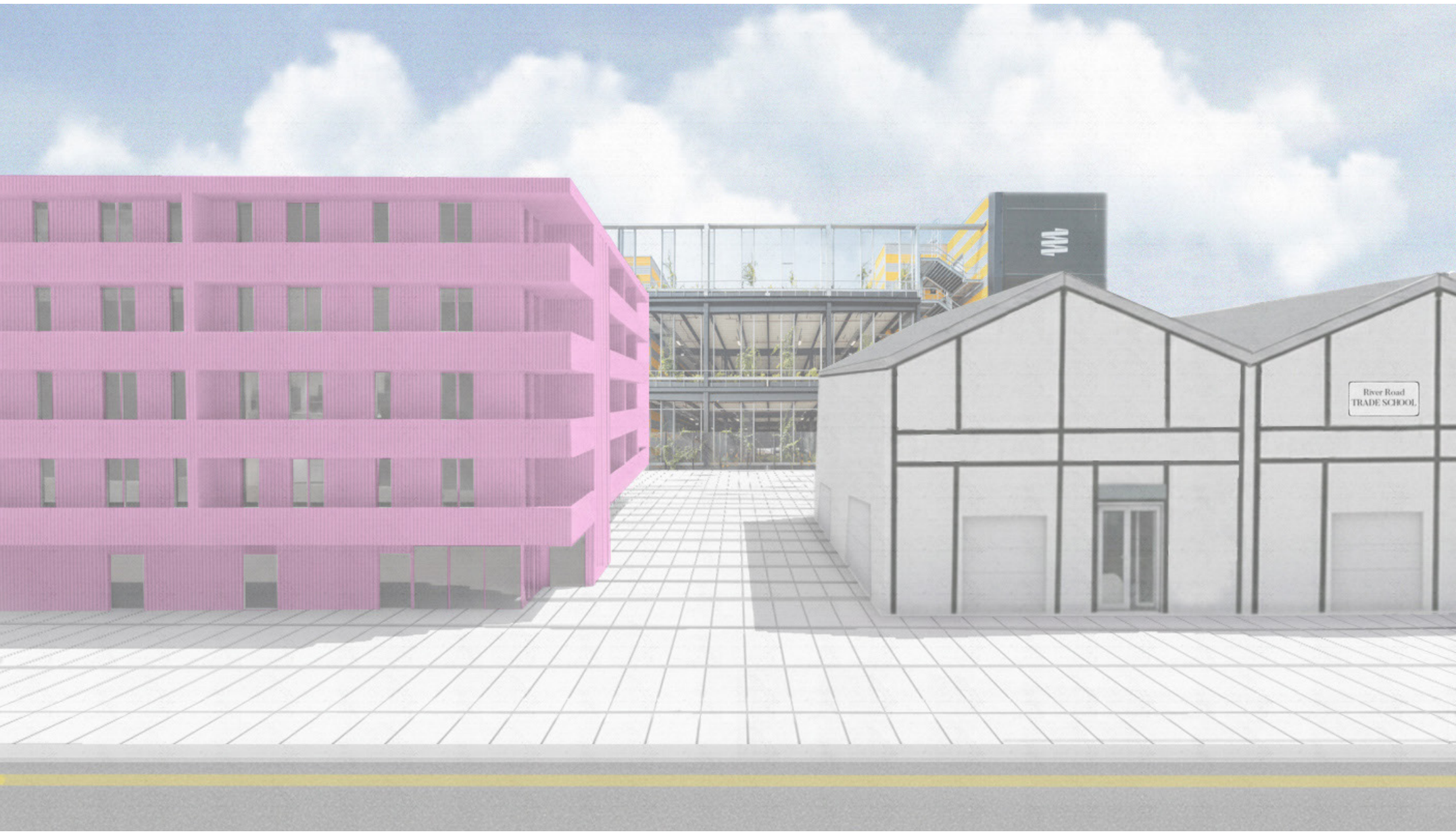
The new settlement is inserted within an already stratified landscape, composed of natural systems, industrial infrastructures, and existing built forms. By introducing an additional layer of complexity, the project does not aim to resolve or simplify these conditions, but rather to clarify them.

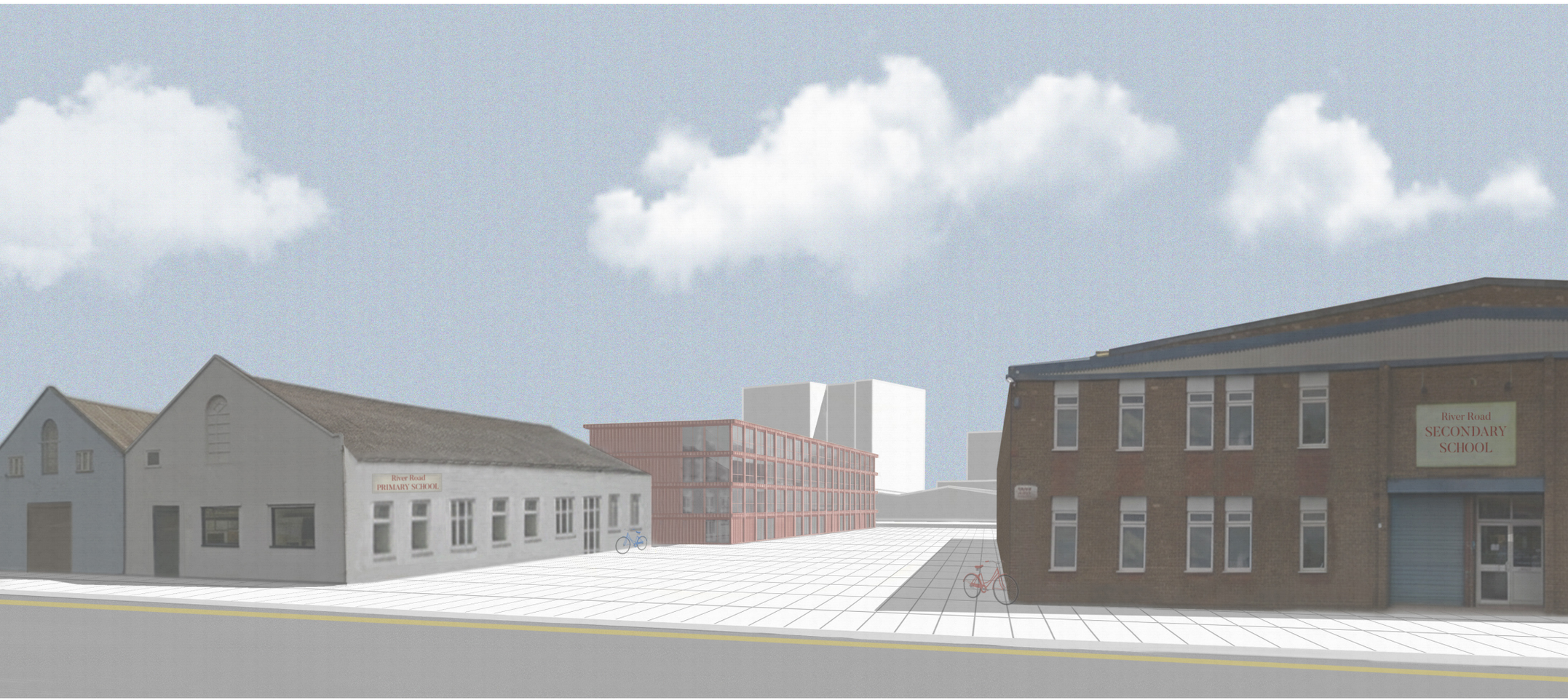
Through contrast and differentiation, the new architectural volumes enhance the legibility of the existing landscape, allowing pre-existing structures, industrial legacy, and ecological elements to be read more clearly within the overall spatial composition.

The intervention does not seek to blend in or dissolve into its context, but remains intentionally distinct and recognizable.

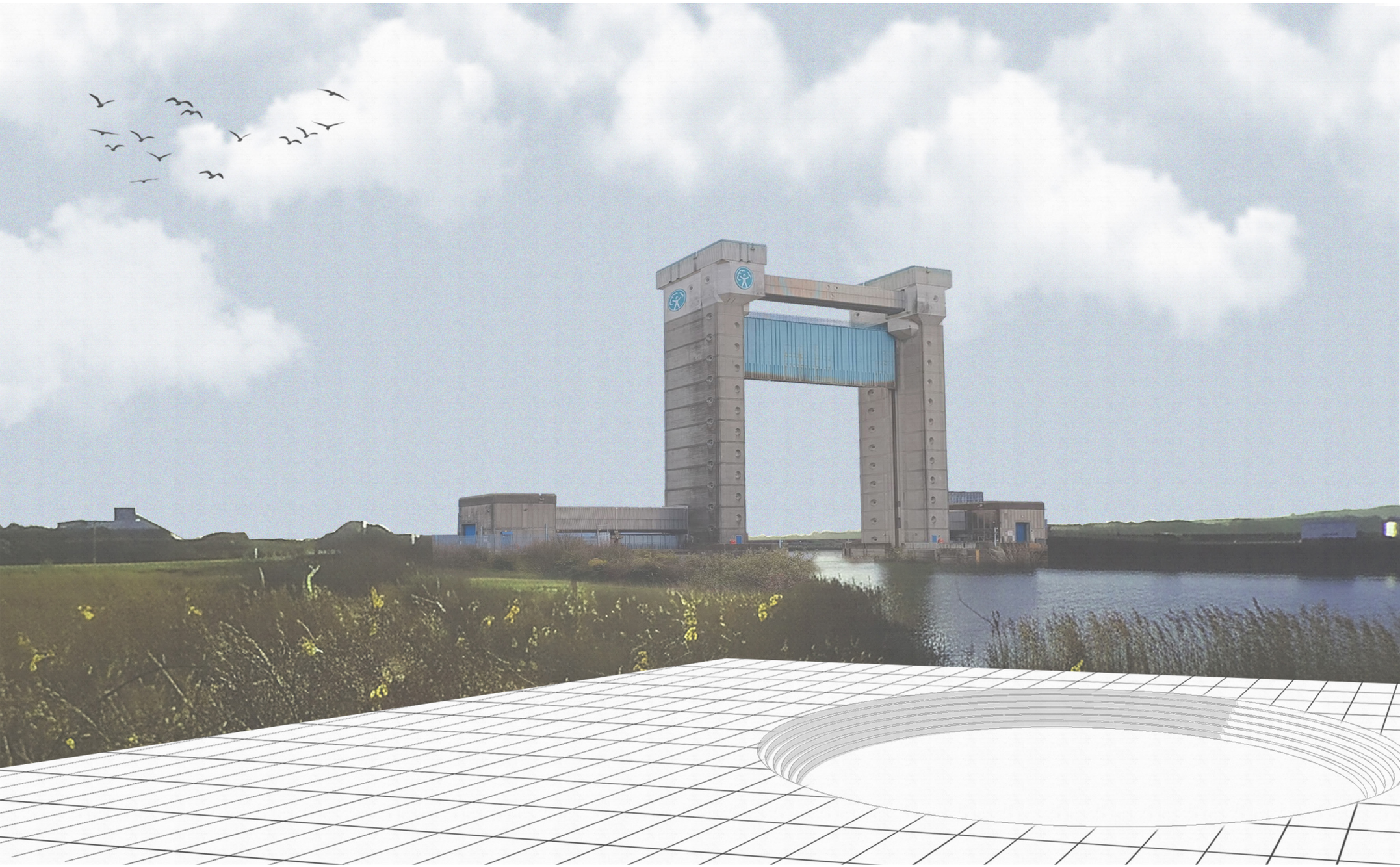
In this sense, infiltration is conceived not as continuity, but as a spatial strategy based on proximity and juxtaposition. The new settlement establishes itself as a contemporary insertion, at times alien, whose presence reinforces the layered character of the site.

The overall landscape thus emerges as a field of tension and reciprocity between different elements: the river and its riparian vegetation, the industrial legacy and the new residential volumes.


River Road
TRADE SCHOOL


River Road
PRIMARY SCHOOL
River Road
SECONDARY
SCHOOL


MARKET
COWOR



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Credits

All figures include source information in their captions. Where not otherwise specified, pictures, maps and drawings are produced by the author.

Un grande ringraziamento è dovuto
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Alla mia famiglia.

Within the wider redevelopment of the London Thames Estuary, the Barking & Dagenham territory represents a critical threshold where the city's industrial past is being rapidly overwritten by an aggressive residential future. Large-scale strategies often operate through a *tabula rasa* logic, treating the existing industrial fabric as a mere void to be filled. This process raises a necessary question: can we design this transition, or are we destined only to manage its erasure?

This thesis project does not seek a permanent equilibrium between industrial legacy and living form, rather, it captures a spatial snapshot of the transitional process toward a new residential neighbourhood. It acknowledges that the total displacement of working spaces, which still live in the territory, may be inevitable, yet it refuses to accept a silent disappearance.

Starting from a critical reading of current planning narratives along the Thames Estuary, the proposal urban form fits as a "Residential Seed", a strategic infiltration that manages the coexistence, albeit transitory, between working and living spaces.

The design explores a radical urban strategy along River Road, within Barking & Dagenham territory, where mass-driven volumes accommodate domestic life in a state of deliberate friction with industrial fabric. A transitional landscape, delineated by the linear park along the riverfront, acts as a connective tool, mediating between productive uses and domestic life. However, as the volumes move deeper into the existing fabric, the housing settlement begins to fade, ending in an unfinished edge. This blur represents the "question mark" of the intervention: a point where the residential seed and the industrial legacy merge, left open to the uncertainty of future urban transition.

Ultimately, the thesis argues for an architecture that documents the "already there" rather than just facilitating its replacement; by challenging the logic of mono-functional zoning, the project proposes a model where the temporary friction between "working" and "living" becomes a tool to witness, and perhaps delay, the final transition of the riverfront.