

HUSTLING FOR DOCKLANDS

Nick Wates examines the opportunities open to architects and architecture.

LONDON'S Docklands has long been hailed as a potential bonanza for architects. Billed as Europe's largest development area, the 2,225 hectares of mostly abandoned docks and vacant land within sight of the City provide a gleam of hope for a profession suffering more than most from the ravages of the recession. Whether it remains a gleam or becomes the promised crock of gold for architects and architecture will depend in part on how the profession responds.

In the past year the whole framework for the Docklands development has changed. From being almost entirely the preserve of the public sector, it is now wide open to private sector initiative. The old Docklands Joint Committee, dominated by the local Labour boroughs, has been replaced by the London Docklands Development Corporation controlled by a board of up to 13 people hand-picked by Michael Heseltine. The Corporation's brief is to get development moving as fast as possible by attracting the private sector. To help it in its task, it has given much of the land formerly owned by public bodies — the local authorities, Port of London Authority, Gas Boards etc — and has been armed with extensive planning powers and a pocket full of cash.

After several years of despondency, as public funds available for development dwindled, there is now, once



again, an air of optimism (matched by pessimism from some) that Docklands is poised for take off. Helicopters continually wing their way up and down the river searching out sites and there are almost daily rumours of new schemes for television studios, super-stores, marinas, technology centres and numerous new housing schemes.

Whether any of these

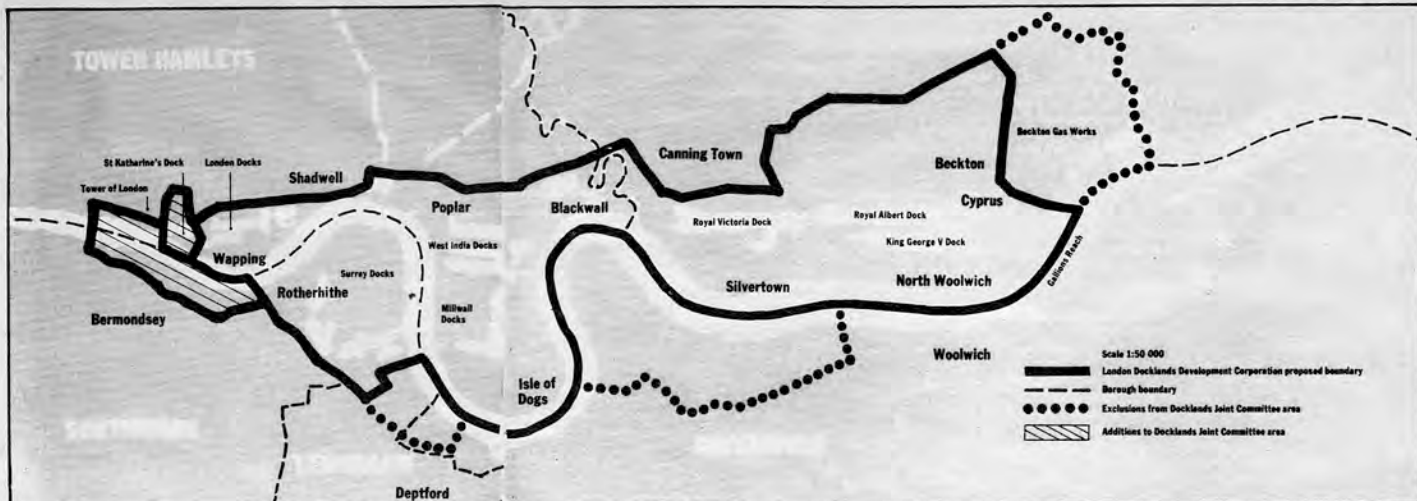
gigantic schemes actually get built is still open to doubt. There have been many such proposals in the past which have come to nothing — like Trammel Crow's international trade mart for the Surrey Docks.

What is certain is that for certain kinds of property, particularly anything on the river, the gold rush is on. An architect who rang to enquire

about a warehouse advertised in the previous day's *Evening Standard* recently was told that the building was already under offer.

The Corporation maintains that it intends to stick to the Strategic Plan formulated by the Docklands Joint Committee in 1976. While this may be broadly accurate in strict land-use terms, there is little doubt that the new Docklands envisaged by the Corporation is very different from that aspired to by the Joint Committee. Virtually all new housing will be for sale with a little rented housing association and no council rented. The emphasis on attracting manufacturing industry has been abandoned and the Corporation will welcome virtually any form of enterprise. As Chief Executive Reg Ward said at a recent public meeting 'If there had been a large supply of manufacturers wanting to come to the area, there wouldn't have been a problem in the first place. You're living in cloud cuckoo land if you think we can restrict ourselves to manufacturing industry. Our job is not to limit the job opportunities but to grab whatever we can get.'

In 1979, the ratio of public to private investment in Docklands anticipated for the early 1980s was 4:1. The Corporation wants that ratio reversed. Instead of public money being used for actual development, in future it will



Above: dockland boundaries. Below: an aerial view of the Lysander/Seifert site at the Surrey Docks.



only be used for pump-priming in order to bring private capital in. Restraints on developers' freedom are being removed, and with intense political pressure for speed the Corporation will, within the broad land-use framework of the Strategic Plan, accept whatever anyone is willing to build.

Not quite anything though, because the Corporation is well aware that people are more likely to want to live and work, and therefore invest, in an attractive environment rather than a drab one. The architectural profession's role is to create that environment. The Corporation has repeatedly stated its intention to encourage sensitive high quality design and the profession is fortunate in that both Chief Executive Reg Ward and Chief Architect and Planner Edward Hollamby have long standing reputations

for doing just that. Equally it must be realised that other members of the board are less concerned with the quality of the environment and that Ward and Hollamby are very much in the hands of investors. If they are given a choice they can choose quality; if not they will have to accept whatever is offered. It is therefore up to the architectural profession to ensure that investors are convinced of the need for a quality environment.

Docklands crystallises with great clarity changes in the political and economic environment within which the profession is increasingly being expected to operate. It is almost completely entrepreneur orientated. Gone are the days when architects could sit back and wait for the phone to ring with a new commission. If architects are going to make any impact on Docklands they must get involved with

developers. They must find sites, think of ideas and find finance to back them. They must become hustlers.

Fortunately there is no single model for the size of architectural practice that is needed in Docklands. Hustlers come in many shapes and forms and a brief examination of architects already involved in Docklands shows that there is a wide spectrum, from the large international practice to the one person show. Although parts of Docklands contain large open sites, there is also vast scope for conservation and infill.

Inevitably it is the multi-million pound schemes on large cleared sites which make the headlines. The common pattern for disposing of such sites, developed before the LDDC took over, is the developer/architect competition. The best known is probably the Surrey Docks

scheme won by Lysander Estates, with Seifert and Partners. The announcement of Seifert as winner was greeted with now familiar outrage from many quarters (though few of those outraged had actually seen the plans), but while many may criticise the firm's architecture, there is little doubt that they have built themselves up into a position of power virtually unrivalled by any other architectural practice.

Whether they be public or private clients, the assessors of developer/architect competitions are concerned primarily with the likely degree to which the entrants will actually be able to do what they promise. Since they do not use crystal balls, and there is no known scientific tool for gauging the likely success of any development proposal, assessors invariably fall back on the track record of the entrant



Brightlingsea Buildings. One of the many blocks of flats which could be given a new lease of life.

The back page of submissions, which lists previous projects and associated firms, are more important than imagination (in fact imaginative ideas are a disadvantage since by definition they are less predicatable). Seiferts have built up an impressive sounding list of respectable completed developments and are highly skilled at linking up with institutional finance. They also have the resources to devote substantial funds towards the preparation of bids which may not lead anywhere.

Seiferts look all set to shape a large proportion of Docklands. With the prestigious Surrey Docks scheme already in the bag, they are also in the running for the Limehouse Basin and have recently submitted a proposal for another massive scheme on the Isle of Dogs.

Other architects are learning fast; if one does not have the right commercial track record, one must team up with those who have. One of the other bidders for the Limehouse site is Shepherd, Epstein & Hunter who have used their longstanding experience of working in Docklands to team up with developers Wates and Grosvenor. Like several other practices, Shepherd, Epstein & Hunter is badly affected by the introduction of the LDDC.



Dereliction is widespread in Docklands.

For years it had been employed by Tower Hamlets Council, drawing up a master plan for Wapping and designing several major housing schemes. Tenders have already been obtained on some of the housing but now the land is being vested by the LDDC and the future is uncertain. If it is built at all, the housing will almost certainly be for sale and the Corporation has indicated that it would like to see the density increased.

Most of Shepherd, Epstein

& Hunter's work has been for the public sector, but with its future role in Wapping still in doubt, the practice has opted to join the free enterprise game. 'Limehouse dropped in by some completely crazy accident' says Gabi Epstein. 'Somebody said, "why don't you put in a scheme?"' Although not having been invited to put in a bid by the landowners, British Waterways Board, and with other developers having a head start, the practice approached the

Board who indicated that they would be happy to consider a proposal from them provided they could team up with someone with resources. Epstein then approached Wates who brought in Grosvenor Estates.

On the other side of the river in Surrey Docks, the John Stedman Design Group find themselves in a similar position, having been employed by Southwark Council to design a master plan for the whole of the Surrey Docks area, and, within it, a major housing scheme for 281 units, landscaping and some light industrial units. The housing and industrial units are already completed or under construction but, as in Wapping, the land has been vested by the LDDC, the plans are being revised and there is little prospect of the Stedman Group being asked to complete more of the plan's housing schemes.

But the Group has developed an intimate knowledge of the area and an expertise in dealing with the complex substructure problems of building in Docklands. They are now taking the initiative and looking at the potential of some smaller sites around the Surrey Docks, particularly along the river front. 'There's no



Michael Barraclough's self-build house on the Isle of Dogs. (See page 6).

continuity as yet, but we're looking into the possibilities of design and construct packages with developers and contractors' says Barry Udall the London partner of the practice. 'We feel we've got a lot to offer any clients who are building in the area'.

An outfit which has benefitted from the new Corporation is the newly formed Conran Roche, 'an architectural, town planning and development organisation' created by the founder of Habitat, Terence Conran and former Chief Executive of Milton Keynes, Fred Roche. Conran Roche have been commissioned by the LDDC to prepare a viable development scheme for the 90-acre Greenland and South Dock areas in the Surrey Docks, an area formerly included in the Stedman Group plan. The work will involve appraising the development opportunities that exist, preparing a planning brief and concept plan supported by commercial appraisals of the markets for the facilities proposed. It will also include an implementation programme. The Corporation has asked them to include the maximum housing, commercial public recreation and entertainment facilities.



Conran Roche is the kind of organisation, already prolific in the United States, which is ideally suited to Docklands work. It is a limited company and offers a comprehensive service. 'The essential skill of Conran Roche' claims its publicity brochure 'is the assembly and management of every component and stage in the development process — on any scale. . . . In managing a project, Conran Roche provides a single point of responsibility for the whole project and undertakes every

aspect from project management, design and contract supervision'. The directors (Stuart Moss crop, Nigel Lane and Lee Shostak as well as Roche and Conran) also have a reputation for good quality architecture and design.

'The traditional pattern of consultancies established over the past 20 years doesn't fit in Docklands because it's too desegregated' says Conran Roche planner David Lock. 'We offer a total service.'

The company has not been

guaranteed that it will be implementing the Greenland Dock scheme but Lock says 'We'd hope we'd get asked to take on a bit of it.' The company is also involved in another project in Docklands which it is not prepared to disclose.

Darbourne and Darke has also been brought in by the Corporation to do a planning study, for the Elephant Lane site on the river at Rotherhithe. 'They're trying to find out what the site demands from an actual physical architectural and landscape point of view' says John Darbourne, 'bearing in mind that it will have to be financed with private money'. It is a complex site with a conservation area running down one boundary. Darbourne and Darke have not previously done work in Docklands and has been selected for its track record of quality housing schemes. It is also involved in a loose consortium of firms — including Terry Farrell, Arups and ABK — which is hoping to get Docklands work. The planning study is a one-off and Darbourne is clear about how architects have to operate. 'You have to get in with a sympathetic developer who doesn't think you are a handicap or a financial risk,' he



Billingsgate Fish Market in Millwall Docks almost completed. Designed by Newman, Levinson and Partners.

says.

As well as having the power to employ consultants directly, another way in which the Corporation can influence the quality of design is by acting as a marriage bureau between architects and developers. The Corporation is reputed to have a list of architects they want to encourage in Docklands, and in addition many architects have written in to the Corporation outlining what they can do. 'We welcome this' said a spokesman 'then when something comes up we can look through and link people to projects'.

Richard Rogers & Partners is one practice to have already benefitted from being well thought of by the Corporation. After discussions with the LDDC, the new owners of the spectacular Free Trade Wharf site between Wapping and Limehouse approached Rogers to draw up a viable scheme for the site. 'I'm sure the LDDC have been a contributing factor in putting our name forward' says partner Marco Goldschmied.

As yet it is too early to say what Rogers's scheme will involve. 'We're looking at the natural qualities of the site and



Workshop conversion and Wapping Sports Centre designed by Shepherd, Epstein and Hunter.

looking at how to make the best of them without any fixed ideas about land use' says Goldschmied. 'We're talking to the LDDC about mutually acceptable mixed uses. It's a very great challenge.'

The Terry Farrell Partnership can likewise thank the Corporation for its commission to prepare a feasibility study for a new television studio on West India Dock.

Many developers of course will bring in their own architects, as the Volume builders are doing in Becton where they have already contracted to build 600 private

houses. Barratts and Wimpeys are using their own in-house architects, Comben are using the Ronald Toone Partnership, and perhaps most interesting, Broseleys are using the Carr, Goldsmith and Fallek Partnership. Neylan & Ungless who were formerly working for a consortium of housing associations in the area have lost their family housing to the Volume builders but are still doing some sheltered housing.

In general, housing association architects may not lose out too much since the Corporation still intends to use housing associations to provide rented housing. A site owned

by the Corporation on the Isle of Dogs has already been allocated for 64 family houses in groups of four, and 32 leasehold flats for the elderly. There is also a great deal of scope for housing associations to convert rundown blocks of flats many of which have been earmarked for demolition by their local authority owners. The Corporation is enthusiastic about the potential of many of the older blocks and the only difficulty is prising them out of the hands of local authorities.

Circle 33 have been refused permission to buy 50 flats called Brightlingsea Buildings in Limehouse from the GLC despite there being no money even to pay for demolition. The block stands empty and derelict. Tower Hamlets even refused an offer from a developer to buy a fine block of 86 flats at Brunton Wharf recently, preferring instead to demolish them at a cost to the ratepayer of over £200,000.

The main losers are of course the local authority departments — Newham, Southwark and Tower Hamlets. Stripped of their land by the Corporation and, with no cash anyway, the prospects



Council housing by the John Stedman Design Group, Surrey Docks.



Light industrial units by the John Stedman Design Group in the Surrey Docks. Low density of jobs per acre.

are bleak. And, despite their experience of local conditions there seems little prospect that they will receive commissions from the Corporation or developers. With a few notable exceptions the departments contain few talented designers and the cumbersome power structures make them unable to compete in the new entrepreneurial climate.

As well as bringing in top architects from outside, The Corporation also claims that it wishes to encourage young architects and up-and-coming small practices. While they are unlikely to be able to compete for the larger sites, the opportunities for smaller firms lie in conversion and infill schemes particularly along the river edge. Once again entrepreneurial skills are likely to be the key factor; and the ability to link up sites with backers.

A few talented young

architects have established themselves in this field. Nicholas Lacey decided 15 years ago that he wanted to live somewhere in the Docks. In 1970, he bought a riverside warehouse in Bermondsey which he converted for his home and office. 'I'm here — right in the area, having the constant opportunity to contemplate riverside. We've become riverside specialists,' he says. Winning the Millbank Competition in 1979 was his first result, and his practice has also obtained work locally. It is currently working on the New Concordia Wharf Project, the conversion of a group of 18th-century warehouses near his own. 'It came about because the developer who bought it knew of my work in Millbank and knew I was based here' he says. The warehouses will be converted into a mixture of flats, studios, workshops, a bar and

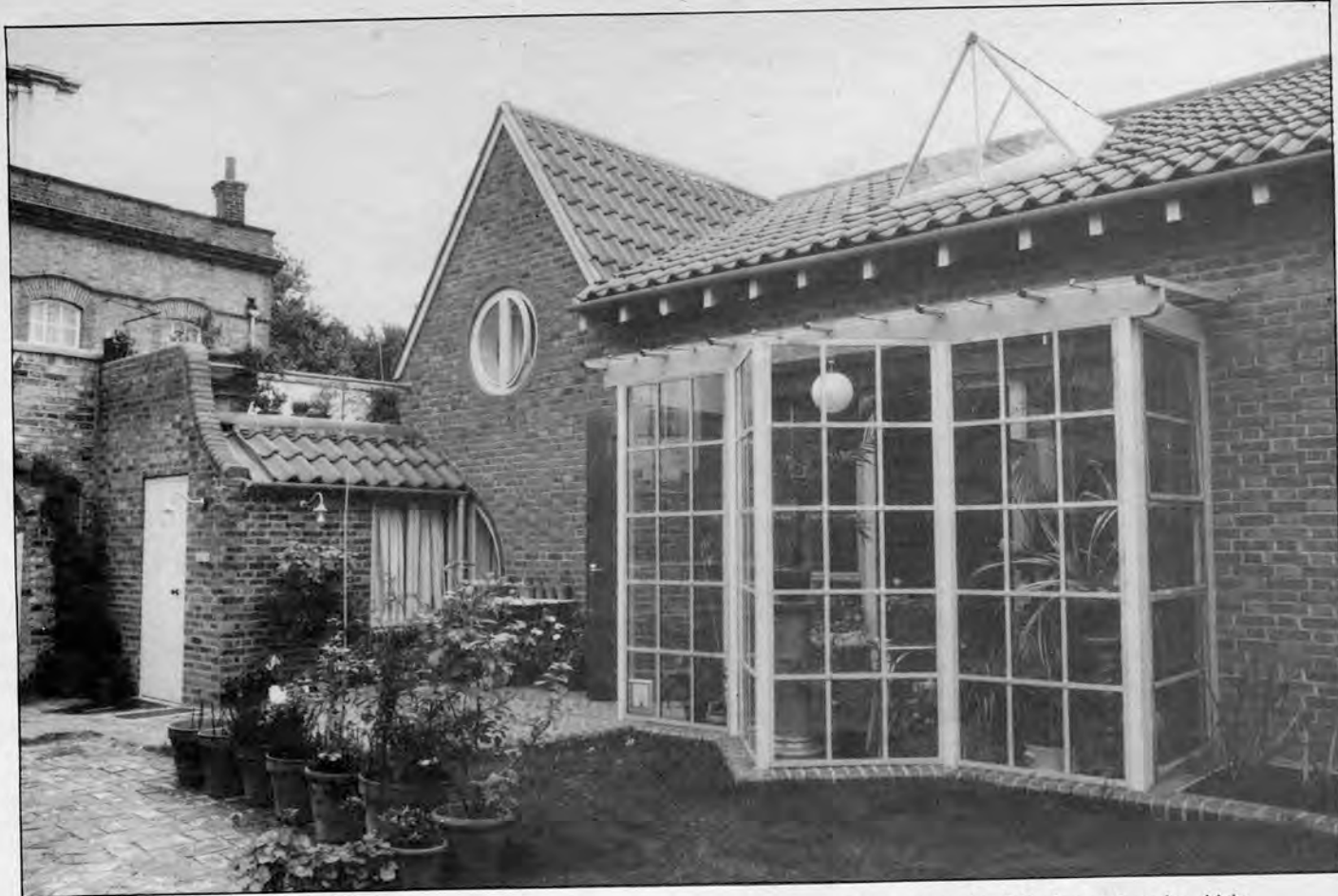
restaurant and a swimming pool. An interesting feature is that the flats will be sold as bare shells with services. Purchasers will determine their own layouts including bathrooms and kitchens.

The prices for shells of varying sizes and aspect will range from £25,000 to £150,000.

Ian Ritchie, formerly of Chrysalis, is another architect who has made his home in Docklands, converting a semi-detached 19th-century house in a backstreet between Limehouse and Poplar in 1978. Recently he has set up his office on the top floor of Metropolitan Wharf in Wapping with views over the River across the Surrey Docks to Greenwich. He has two projects in Docklands: the conversion of the Lavender Dock pumphouse in Rotherhithe for a multi-purpose community centre,

and the Limehouse Development Group submission for the Limehouse Basin.

Both jobs have been generated by his close affinity with the area. 'I think there's a real danger that because development has got to be seen to happen quickly there could be a conflict with what the LDDC say they want to happen — high quality design.' He believes that new developments must be carefully 'knitted' in with the existing social and physical infrastructure. 'There's a hidden layering of history' he says. 'You can't ignore that historical footprint, because the ground isn't ground. Docklands is seen by a lot of designers as an obstacle course. I see it as an enrichment course. My approach is to take the submerged history and layer it upwards to the 20th-century. It's something



Imaginative housing by Tom Brent in the garden of an old seamen's mission in Limehouse. A rare example of individual enterprise and sensitivity.

you can't do without touching. You have to have an emotional and knowledgeable attachment. You can't do it by site visiting.'

At the small-scale level there are far more people beavering away in Docklands than might at first appear. For years architects, designers and artists with an entrepreneurial flair have been carving out homes and studios and workshops for themselves and others in old riverside warehouses. Occasionally obtaining recognition in the Sunday colour supplements, they, more than anyone else have demonstrated that warehouses can be viably renovated for a variety of uses and that people do want to live and work in Docklands. So much so that the prices of warehouses have already soared beyond the reach of most young entrepreneurs who are now seeking out other kinds of property away from the river.

'I don't hold with the importance of the river. It's important but it's not everything' says Tom Brent, a young entrepreneur who successfully combines the designer's creative sensitivity with the developer's hustling ability. 'If a building looks and feels right, it can be made to



work. Docklands requires instinct because there is no track record or logic.'

Brent's instinct has paid off. In 1978, he entered into negotiations with the British Sailors Society for the purchase of a Georgian seamen's mission in Limehouse which was being used as the Society's head offices. Lacking funds himself, he obtained change of use from offices to residential, and arranged the sale of a large part of the building simultaneously with his purchase of the whole site. He used the

proceeds to design two new houses on the remaining part of the site, one of which is to become his own home. The distinctive design and quality of the houses has provided a badly needed boost to the Limehouse area and led many people to question why there is so little opportunity for personally designed housing in Docklands.

Another provocative scheme is Michael Barraclough's self-build home at the tip of the Isle of Dogs. Using the proceeds from the sale of his former

home in Narrow Street, Barraclough has taken two and a half years off from his work as a doctor to build his home, with the help of two or three craftsmen. The external design was by Stout and Lichfield. The inside he has largely crafted himself using recycled timber from the Docklands' many demolition sites.

Barraclough is a passionate advocate of self-build: 'To me, it's the only way you can get good architecture' he says. 'As a society we've lost the ability to do things ourselves. We've neutered Western man. There's a desperate creative desire within people but it's stopped by planners and banks. If you actually liberated people to make things you'd live in a completely different world.'

Local people are fascinated by Barraclough's house and he is hoping to help other people on the Isle of Dogs start self-building schemes. 'There's tremendous opportunity' he says. 'What would be very exciting would be if the Corporation began to support this kind of thing.'

With the stripping of the local authorities' powers in the area, the possibility of architects working for the



The entrance to the Mudchute, Isle of Dogs.

community — as opposed to landowners — would at first sight seem to have diminished. In practice, the local authorities' architects have rarely worked directly with the inhabitants and community architecture has been left to those architects prepared to work for community groups. The Corporation had repeatedly stated its intention to work closer to the ground than most local authorities and it may well be that more funding than in the past will be made available for architects to work with the community.

One architect who has been working at this level for years is Kate Heron who lives on the Isle of Dogs and works full-time for the Association of Island Communities (AIC). Having an architect has been an important factor in enabling the AIC to be more successful than other Docklands community groups in initiating and running projects. Their biggest success has been the transformation of the 50-acre Mudchute from an overgrown rubbish-strewn wasteland into urban farm, allotments, sports facilities, a picnic area and rough grazing.

Local pressure prevented the GLC from building housing on the land and although a part of it has now been taken by a hypermarket, most is now firmly designated as public open space. Other successful projects have included two new purpose-built social centres which are managed and run by



Jacobs sheep and ponies roam free on Mudchute pasture.

the local community.

Heron is terrified that local people will be swamped by the influx of outside developers brought in by the LDDC. 'The most depressing thing is how little knowledge the people working in there have of the area' she says. 'One local person working in there could tell them so much.'

From Seifert's Surrey Docks to Kate Heron's Mudchute; a broad spectrum of roles for the architectural profession.

The RIBA gave its general support to the idea of setting up urban development

corporations for London and Merseyside at the beginning of 1980. Earlier this year outgoing RIBA President Bryan Jefferson spelt out the reasons in a letter to the Secretary of State, Michael Heseltine. 'I would like you to know that the RIBA wish to give you all possible support in launching the Urban Development Corporation for the London Docklands... and in ensuring that the fullest possible benefits can flow from its establishment' wrote Jefferson. 'Docklands UDC would be an important source of work for the construction industry during a period of

recession. It could also provide an exceptional opportunity for Government to demonstrate its commitment to enhancing the quality of the urban environment in this seriously run-down part of London. Architects, as part of the construction industry, have a major contribution to make to this work and look to Government, through the UDC, to play its part in creating the opportunities for imaginative design and for planning to flourish... We believe that (the UDC's) scope for commissioning and encouraging developers to commission the most able talent available could set new standards in London and for urban development throughout the UK.'

It is too early to judge whether the RIBA's optimism in the LDDC is well founded. Certainly those at the helm are saying the right things — high quality design, respect for the Strategic Plan, work with the communities, use the river, no more dock filling, conserve where possible, encourage up-and-coming practices, and so on. Whether they can deliver the goods remains to be seen, and depends on who comes forward.

Docklands has been opened up by the LDDC. It is up for grabs and all offers will be considered. Whether it will turn out to be a good place to live and work in, and for whom, will depend on who gets in there now.



LIMEHOUSE is one part of Docklands that is sufficiently commercially attractive to be sure of being redeveloped sooner or later by someone, no matter what. It has the same attractions that made St Katharine's Dock a success — Thames views, enclosed wharves and Victorian industrial buildings.

But it is also in the heart of one of the capital's most deprived East End areas. Unemployment is high, vandalism and dereliction are rife. The basin, which is owned by the British Waterways Board, forms an interchange between the canal network circling North London, and the Thames. Commercially run-down, with dwindling shipping traffic using it, and a haemorrhage of water from the scant reserves of the canals' decaying reservoirs lost every time the huge lock gates are opened, the basin nevertheless represents a major unrealised property asset for the board. And it is currently examining which of five competing schemes to redevelop the basin to back. With one exception the schemes are all from developers who intend to capitalise on the Thames location to build luxury waterside housing. Among them Richard Seifert's plan for Hunting Gate for a Mediterranean-style yachting marina, complete with houses rising out of the water on piles, looks

Ambitious scheme for Limehouse Basin

Deyan Sudjic reports

like the front-runner.

But these schemes, in effect creating expensive ghettos that turn their back on the surrounding community have not surprisingly attracted a hostile response from the locals.

Rather than simply taking a negative, blocking stance, the community based Limehouse Development Group has put forward its own £60 million proposal for the Basin for the Waterways Board's consideration. Peter Polish, chairman of the LDG, claims that "The long term benefits of developing Limehouse Basin should not be sacrificed by the local authority and the Docklands Development Corporation for short term speculative gains. Our scheme provides an opportunity for a co-operative development which will benefit everyone. We have seen what a mess conventional developers have made of our inner cities, Limehouse calls for something better".

The LDG is in fact only the most ambitious of several schemes by community groups trying to take the development process into their own hands, rather than simply viewing it as an inherent evil. The LDG

development would be carried out by a mixture of public and private funding. If accepted it could, claims the LDG, "provide a model for regenerating inner city areas without the time-wasting conflicts between developers and local inhabitants, or the banal results that are so often associated with public sector development".

The LDG wants to set up a development trust made up of members of Tower Hamlets Council, the new Docklands Development Corporation, the Waterways Board and its own nominees. The Trust would be responsible for both carrying out the redevelopment in accordance with the LDG's overall plan, and for ploughing the potential profits, estimated as high as £15 million, back into the community in the form of environmental improvements, public housing and amenities.

The structure of the Trust has been worked out with advice from Nicholas Falk of Urbed, specialists in community self-help schemes. And architectural and planning advice has come from Ian Ritchie formerly a member of the Chrysalis practice and now living and working in the area.

The LDG scheme differs from all its competitors in that it would not simply stop at the Basin's gates, but would aim to tie the development into a general facelift for the whole area. It would try to create a varied and characterful waterside community, modelled on the charm of Amsterdam or Venice's canals. There would be a mixture of housing types, from expensive owner occupied to rentals, self builds and studios. Other elements would include a boat yard, boat hire centre, light industry, floating pub, community centre, youth club and shops. Funding would come from both housing associations and building societies, some of whom have already expressed a firm interest in the project.

The LDG hopes to see the basin become a showcase for new British architecture, setting a high standard for other Docklands developments which have so far been uniformly mediocre. Development would be carried out in parcels by different developers and architects, but in conformity with the overall plan.

Despite initial reluctance by the British Waterways Board to consider LDG's proposals at all, there is now every indication that they are being taken very seriously. There has even been talk of a takeover bid (rejected) from one of the commercial developers.



Alpha Wharf: des res on The Isle of Dogs

'YOU love your des res' was the headline in the local paper when the first tenants moved into the Alpha Wharf housing scheme built by Tower Hamlets Council on the tip of the Isle of Dogs. The story began with 'A des res with a view, handy to shops and local amenities, with gardens and plenty of parking. . . It all sounds like an advert for an expensive Chelsea penthouse.'

As it turns out, the scheme is one of the few local authority housing schemes to be built before the Development Corporation moved in. No more new council housing will be built in Docklands for the foreseeable future and schemes like Alpha Wharf will stand as monuments to a vision of Docklands' future which died in the late 1970s.

The scheme contains 24 two-person flats and 42 two- and three-storey houses at an overall density of 100ppa. The brief stressed the need for an intimate personalised housing development limited to three storeys which 'should set a new standard for local authority housing in the area'. It was also required to 'set an example to private and other developers for the treatment of the riverside'.

The site is a prime one with an extensive river frontage and magnificent views across the river to Greenwich. The layout was largely determined by this with the maximum possible number of dwellings having good views. 'Looking



straight across the river is boring' says Martin O'Shea, architect for the scheme, explaining the massing of the scheme. 'It's better to look slightly up or down.'

While there was no direct participation of the tenants in the design, O'Shea had several meetings with a residents' association of private tenants and with the Association of Island Communities, a federation of tenants' associations. The scheme is extremely popular with the occupants, but local authority tenants are unlikely to have such opportunities in the

future. Private houses on prime sites such as this are likely to fetch £100,000 or more. The design of future riverside housing is likely to be very different too. 'A developer wouldn't do that kind of thing' says O'Shea 'They'd want much higher densities.'

Tower Hamlet's Architect's Department has been completely clobbered by the combination of housing cuts and the Corporation taking away much of the Council's land. There is little work on the drawing board and many of the staff are helping the valuers' department draw up block

plans related to the sale of council houses. 'It's not really architecture, but it's something to do', one member of the Department told me discontentedly. Fortunately for the staff — though perhaps not for the ratepayers — the Council has a firm policy of no redundancies.

Mike Thomas, the director of planning and architecture, puts on a brave face. 'We're trying to make contingency plans to find new areas of work. We're strenuously looking for alternatives. What must be avoided at all costs is a hiatus.' He is examining the possibilities for energy conservation and is reviewing the Council's building stock.

The department was hoping that the LDDC would come to them on an agency basis, for feasibility studies for the design of buildings. As yet this has not happened and the prospects are bleak.

Like other Docklands boroughs the Department is mostly made up of technicians with few qualified architects or talented designers. Many of the more talented designers have moved on to greener pastures, frustrated by the constant changes in policy and declining workload. The Corporation is more likely to go to prestigious private consultants than to the demoralised local authorities. By doing so, they may waste a quality which the council undoubtedly possesses — a knowledge of the locality.

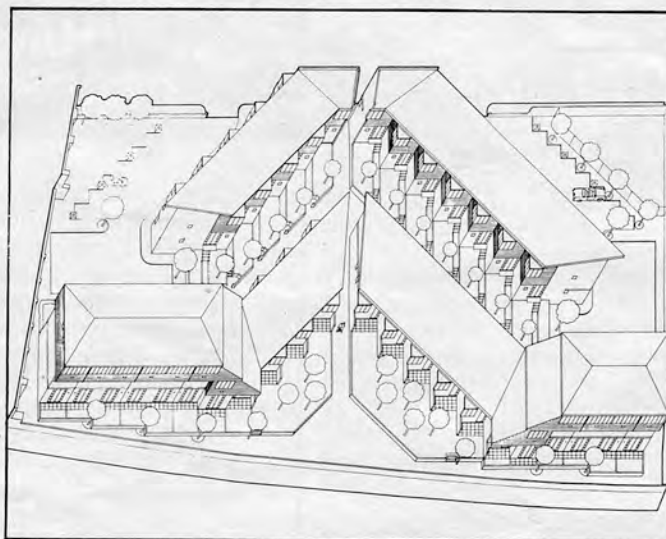


Prized Riverside Site for Circle 33

IT's ironic that just as this country is producing sensitive and thoughtfully designed housing that people really do want to live in and look after, public sector housing is coming to an end. And this after an incredibly painful process of development.

However it is not only lack of public sector finance but also Docklands' economic and political pressures that make a new housing association on the Isle of Dogs probably the last of its kind. It was designed by Levitt Bernstein Associates for the Circle 33 Housing Association some time before the London Docklands Development Corporation arrived on the scene. Given the expense of building on polluted, marshy ground, and the LDDC's commitment to free enterprise, it is hard to imagine such an extraordinary site ever again being handed over to public sector housing for rent.

The site lies between Ferry Street and the Thames, and opposite the Cutty Sark and Greenwich. The view is one of the most splendid in London and it was the view that gave rise to the curious V-shaped, hammerhead form of the



Axonometric of the scheme from the river.

scheme's plan, since it allows each dwelling a sight of the river. For the same reason, dwellings are narrow-fronted and arranged in terraces.

"We had to try to work out a way of distributing the buildings around the site so that they provided a reasonable foil to the river and a streetscape, and also conformed to the other conditions" says David Levitt.

From the riverfront and a short riverside walk running

the width of the site, a triangular open space terminates at the apex in a pathway that runs through the centre of the site on the axis of the Cutty Sark and bisects the central internal street.

Seen from Ferry Street, the scheme, wrapped around by high brick walls, has a defensive air as it turns away from the dreary hinterland. Terraces are layered back from the river, with single storey flats for old people in

front of family housing whose living rooms at first floor level look over roofs to the river beyond. As in traditional London terraces the kitchens are on the ground floor and open onto gardens. The scheme is flanked on either side by three storey pavilions with maisonnettes at the bottom and one bedroom flats for young, single people at the top. These are reached by metal staircases which lead up from the street at the back.

The materials — stock brick, timber weatherboarding and pale green/blue aluminium for the roof — evoke associations with traditional waterside buildings. (A traditional pitched roof would have been too steep.)

This is, as is usual with this practice, an ingeniously worked out scheme and is elegantly detailed. Its staggered geometry when perceived on the ground rather than on the drawing board is constantly intriguing, producing rhythms like those set up by receding mirror images. The intimacy of the internal street, animated by the geometry of the buildings, the metal staircases and galleried upper storeys, is heightened by glimpses of the river and the Cutty Sark.

Ted Hollamby: committed to bringing Docklands back to life

'OUR objective is to get the very best architects appointed' says Edward Hollamby, the LDDC's chief architect and planner. But he recognises that this will be a difficult task and one not totally in his hands. The LDDC will only have a small in-house team with not more than half a dozen qualified architects.

And the Corporation will be commissioning very little directly themselves — limited to a few planning studies and amenity buildings. Initially it was thought that the Corporation would be building some housing itself in order to set a standard and encourage others to follow but the speed with which volume builders have come forward has made this unnecessary. The philosophy of the Corporation is only to step in when private developers will not. The Corporation's role is therefore limited to encouraging developers to strive for quality by persuasion and the use of planning powers.

'If we can get developers to come to us before they approach architects we can point them in the right direction' says Hollamby, although ideally he would like to see architects going to developers first. 'It's something the architectural profession has got to develop. It will be difficult for chaps who are not used to moving out with people with big cigars in their mouths' he concedes, but accepts that there will be no place for those who sit by the phone and wait. Docklands will pass them by. In a way it's a bit like the nineteenth century. Brunel after all had to go out and pull people in.'

The inherent conservatism of investors, particularly institutional investors, is likely to lead to a bias towards established practices, Hollamby admits, though he hopes to be able to counteract this. 'I would like to give opportunities to architects and designers who have not yet emerged' he says. 'It will be very difficult but I would not discount it. The most likely route, he thinks, is through housing associations.

One of the ways that Hollamby hopes to obtain quality is through architect/developer competitions for land in the Corporation's

The chief architect of the LDDC talks to Nick Wates about his vision of dockland development



ownership, though there is some opposition to this from some board members who believe it will waste time, thereby conflicting with the Corporation's brief to get things moving as fast as possible. He also thinks that architects would do well to form consortia with engineers and quantity surveyors. A handful of consortia are already operating in Docklands, some created solely for the purpose of obtaining Docklands' work.

'It's a question of picking horses for courses' he says, a phrase disarmingly used by several Corporation officers to sum up their role.

Aesthetically, Hollamby claims he is not dogmatic. 'I have a very catholic attitude towards other people's architecture' he says. 'Richness of contrast is what I like and strive for — avoiding monotony — however good it is.' He wants to see a

flourishing of many different personal styles; 'the personal style can set off another' he says. 'I certainly wouldn't want to see one style of architecture.'

In broader planning terms Hollamby has clearer visions. 'What I see is a railway on a viaduct running across land and leaping over water — the old docks and the river — somehow pulling all the water into a comprehensive view of what kind of landscape Docklands is.'

'The docks are the greatest potential landscape you can have' he says, emphasising his commitment to stop any more of the docks from being filled in. While their size makes comparisons with Venice and Amsterdam difficult he believes they can 'stimulate forms of enclosure which are unique... and which can show up the quality of building with an emphasis on reflection of light.'

He envisages 'a touch of the South of France; a picturesque and quality of drama of building and water that needs a highly skilled and modelled architecture.'

Bringing the river back to life is one of the Corporation's main goals. But Hollamby believes that rather than reintroducing freight the river will be used for the movement of people and for leisure. The main difficulty is the tidal nature of the river and the fast currents which have so far defeated most attempts to introduce passenger services and which make leisure activities dangerous. 'The dreadful irony' he says 'is that we are building a barrage instead of a barrier'. The concept of a barrier which would have enabled the water to be kept at a constant height was fought by the Port of London Authority because it would have been a deterrent for shipping. But with port activities now virtually all down river at Tilbury, Hollamby thinks this rationale is now dead...

The importance of the water is linked to Hollamby's passion for conservation. He is a member of the Historic Buildings Council, was a founder member of the William Morris Society and lives in Red House, Bexley, which was designed for Morris by Philip Webb. 'Conservation is the single most consistent theory I have' he says, and wants to see more funds put into restoration and renovation of Docklands' rich store of old buildings. He is also starting an inventory of artefacts such as cranes and bollards and dock equipment and a store so that they can be kept and re-used as much as possible. 'They're important images' he says. 'It's what makes the area different from Regents Street or the Old Kent Road.'

Where there is no water, a different treatment will be required. The key he believes lies in tree planting, partly to oxygenate the air and partly as an art form. In Becton the Corporation intends to plant tree belts between areas of private housing, to create 'the illusion of forests'. On the Isle of Dogs, which Hollamby believes has more of a polder quality, trees will be planted in more of a Dutch landscaping style.

ST Katharine Dock was built between 1827 and 1828. It was, says John Pudney, in his book called *London Docks*, the last speculation in dock building for the next quarter of a century.

"Though it looked good, it was quite the greediest, most ruthless and silliest of them all, involving as it did some 23 acres of land, which contained a brewery, a small tidal dock and — not least — the hospital and precinct of St Katharine."

To clear the ground, 1250 houses and tenements were brought and pulled down and 11,300 people were made homeless. Despite the expense and human casualties, the promoters of the new dock company, neglected to take account of the imminence and potential of steamships. They built a small and elegant haven for vessels of less than a thousand tons and "only their warehouses were planned on a scale that could and did accommodate the needs of steamships that were revolutionising maritime trade".

Now, roughly 150 years later, after closure in 1968, the dock has reverted to being a small, elegant haven, this time for yachts, and the enormous buildings or their substitutes have become warehouses for world trading of a different nature; for trading in invisible rather than tangible commodities.

St Katharine's Dock, as everyone knows, is being redeveloped as the World Trade Centre by a Taylor

St Katharine-by-the-Tower



Above: Peter Drew. Below: Model of competition scheme.



Woodrow subsidiary, St Katharine-by-the-Tower, under the direction of the redoubtable Peter Drew. The Centre is ideally situated next to the City and has become hugely successful as a tourist attraction. People flock there day and night to see the marina, for parties and receptions in the old merchants ships or simply to eat at the

riverside restaurant. Still, as Drew is at pains to point out, its function is primarily that of a trading centre.

So far the company has restored the fine Italianate Ivory warehouse and built a large hotel and office block. The latest building nearing completion is International House, an aesthetically dubious recreation by Watkins Gray

Woodgate International of Philip Hardwick's famous building designed for the former dock company in 1928. This will be the company's prestigious headquarters and will also provide 200,000 square feet of office space. The exclusive World Traders Club at roof terrace level has spectacular views of the Tower of London, river and dock. Future plans include private housing and a commodity centre.

Drew is a flamboyant character who appears to cultivate the image of an energetic, plain speaking man, and who takes little trouble to conceal his increasing impatience with ponderous local authority bureaucracies. There have, he points out, been enormous changes in planning practice since he first arrived in St Katharine's twelve years ago.

"The greatest change has been the rise in the rate support grant. It costs us £600,000 a year on International House alone, and is the biggest single drawback to dockland development. It has caused a massive change in the whole investment pattern. I think the whole of docklands should be an enterprise zone" "The attitude of local authorities with endless acres of land should be: "if you want to develop go ahead and develop". Anything is better than the dereliction down the river at the moment. Thank God for the Docklands Development Corporation. It's the only ray of hope."

MANY of us can think of situations where heat generated by people and equipment is allowed to go to waste. Architects and engineers have tended to regard it as being uneconomical to recover small quantities of waste heat, but Fläkt Ltd. have now produced an air-handling unit which should make it worthwhile recovering the smaller quantities of waste heat to be found in offices, workshops, schools and similar premises.

The unit is known as the 'KD2-Mini' and is manufactured in two sizes, one capable of handling between 0.1 and 0.4m³ per second and the other being capable of handling between 0.4 and 0.7m³ per second. Both units incorporate heat recovery facilities. The real attraction of the units being that the heat recovery technique adopted

can be varied to suit specific requirements.

Unlike many air-handling units which are designed to be installed on the roof of a building, these units can be installed within the roof space or some other suitable space within the building. The size of the unit depends upon the type of heat recovery unit used, but, for example, incorporating a liquid-coupled heat exchanger would be 700mm high x 780mm wide x 1365mm long. The units can be mounted either vertically or horizontally and internally wired to terminals ready for connection to the mains supply. The air side connections have been

standardised to further simplify installation. One side of the unit serves as an access panel, allowing filters, fans, heat recovery unit and air heater to be withdrawn for ease of inspection and maintenance.

A fault often associated with air-handling unit is the transmission of fan noise through the ducts. Fläkt's have overcome this problem by separately enclosing the motors for the direct-driven fans from the fan inlets. Another product which makes it possible to utilize surplus heat gains from the sun, people and domestic appliances is the thermostatic radiator valve which adjusts the load to the radiators to maintain a constant

Heating and ventilating

Janet Shepherd reviews some new products.

temperature. One of the longest standing manufacturers of thermostatic radiator valves is Danfoss Ltd.

Their Danfoss S series of thermostatic radiator valves are suitable for fitting to both new and existing systems, and are manufactured in modern colour combinations. To keep fuel wastage to a minimum the valves incorporate a special gas filled bellows which reduce friction in the sensing element, thereby achieving accuracy of control. The sensing element can be either built into the valve or into a remote unit which can be located close to the point most frequently used by the occupants.

One firm, namely Thermal Radiators Ltd. has gone one step further and combined a thermostatic radiator valve with a convector radiator and called it the 'Thermoplus'.