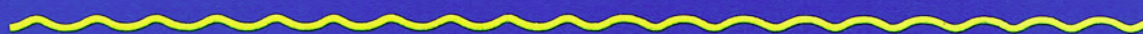


THE
LIMEHOUSE



Petition

FOR A FUTURE INNER CITY

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Rae Hoffenberg**Charles Knevitt**

Limehouse Parish Church (St Anne's)

Ian McKellen

Ian Ritchie Architects

Tower Hamlets Environment Trust

Wates Built Homes

THE LIMEHOUSE



The British Waterways Board is poised to commit one of the gravest errors of judgement in its history. It is about to squander a priceless national asset and add to the tension and stress which is tearing apart our inner cities.

At Limehouse in London's East End, the Board owns a historic and strategic dock basin which is crying out for development.

Plans drawn up by leading experts in urban renewal in partnership with local people have shown how the Limehouse Basin could become a thriving urban harbour, breathing new life into the desolate neighbourhoods nearby and rejuvenating the entire London canal system.

Instead, the British Waterways Board intends to fill in almost half the water and box in what is left with a badly planned scheme costing £70 million. With apparent disregard to the surrounding neighbourhood, the scheme proposes offices and luxury housing which will have to be protected by a special private security force.

The overwhelming evidence against this proposal – designed by R. Seifert and Partners for developers Hunting Gate Homes – cannot be ignored.

After a lengthy public inquiry in 1983, the Government Inspector strongly urged that planning permission be refused. Incredibly, the Inspector's recommendation was overruled by the then Secretary of State for the Environment, Patrick Jenkin, who gave the go ahead for the scheme in August 1985 – during his last week in office.

If the British Waterways Board proceeds with this utterly discredited development when there is so clearly a far better way, it will ruin Limehouse. It will also waste public land and public money, cast a shadow over the democratic planning and public inquiry systems, and expose the tragic inability of the British development industry to address the vital task of turning our decaying urban areas into civilised places in which to live and work.

We appeal to all of you with any influence to study the evidence on the following pages, sign and circulate the petition on page 28 and do anything else you can to help us avert a local and national tragedy.

C O N T E N T S

Preface: REFLECTING ON THE INNER CITY	2	BRINGING LIMEHOUSE TO LIFE	12
		A viable strategy is ready and waiting	
A JUST INQUIRY AND A FAIR ASSESSMENT	4	A FRESH START	15
Conclusions of the public inquiry into the British Waterways Board's scheme for Limehouse Basin.		What should happen next	
WHAT THE PAPERS SAY	6	Appendix 1: IN THE DOCK	16
		The detailed evidence against the British Waterways Board's scheme	
LIMEHOUSE AND ITS POTENTIAL	8	Appendix 2: WORKING IT OUT	24
Why Limehouse Basin is so important		The Limehouse Development Group explained	
GREAT EXPECTATIONS	10	Appendix 3: NOTES AND SOURCES	26
What Limehouse should become – a living city for the twenty first century		THE PETITION	28

“What, then, can we do to convince public and private institutions of the tremendous capacity of ordinary people to solve their own environmental problems – to gain confidence, skills and a sense of worth in the process – and thereby to make the business of urban and economic renewal a self-generating exercise and not simply an institutional one?”

“There is no doubt that directors of public and nationalised companies have a . . . vital role; British Rail and the British Waterways Board have large areas of derelict land or water at their disposal. These could be used for a variety of purposes including new villages with balanced communities and essential open spaces.”

“Apart from any other considerations, private, public and nationalised businesses should all have a vested interest in building up socially and financially stable communities who will eventually become customers. Otherwise the potential long term problems of social unrest, if companies continue to avoid the fundamental issues of inner city areas, will be to their detriment.”

HRH Prince of Wales

Speech to the Institute of Directors, 26 February 1985



“Local communities should be more fully involved in the decisions which affect them. A ‘top down’ approach to regeneration does not seem to have worked. Local communities must be fully and effectively involved in planning, in the provision of local services, and in the managing and financing of specific projects.”

“It is essential that people are encouraged to secure a stake in, feel a pride in, and have a sense of responsibility for their own area.”

The Rt Hon Lord Scarman OBE

The Brixton Disorders, Report on Inquiry into the Causes of the 1981 Riots in Brixton

THE INNER CITY

Limehouse Basin, formerly known as the Regents Canal Dock, vividly reflecting the tower blocks of the neighbouring Barley Mow Estate.



"As you will appreciate I cannot comment on the relative merits of the various schemes for (the Limehouse) area . . . I do, however, welcome the concept of community based schemes and of development trusts to bring together all those concerned with, and affected by, redevelopment proposals. Major developments, particularly in inner city areas, will not act as the catalyst for the community revitalisation which we are seeking unless they are acceptable both to the local planning authority and to those who live and work in the area."

Tom King, *Minister for Local Government and Environmental Services* Letter to Limehouse Development Group consultants, URBED 24 February 1982



"What we are trying to do is involve the people in the inner cities in a positive way."

Kenneth Baker, *Secretary of State for the Environment* BBC Television News, 1 December 1985

After spending nine weeks hearing evidence at a public inquiry into the British Waterways Board's scheme for Limehouse Basin, two Government appointed inspectors strongly urged that it be

Peter Gibbs
Architectural Assessor



The scheme would change the whole character of the Basin, causing the buildings to dominate the water area. It would make the Basin more like a relatively small ornamental lake in the centre of a mainly residential development, instead of a broad expanse of water, with characteristic quaysides and simple dockland buildings."

"The development of the site is so intensive and the residential density so high, that the views experienced by pedestrians, except immediately around the Basin edge, will generally be of batteries of garage doors or parked vehicles."

"Along the northern side of the Basin . . . the (public) walkway . . . would not be attractive to visitors to the site and would be likely to bring them into conflict with residents . . . Towards the south west corner . . . its amenity value for those wishing to linger along the waterside appears to be very limited . . . **Much more quayside space ought to be provided for the public to enjoy.**"

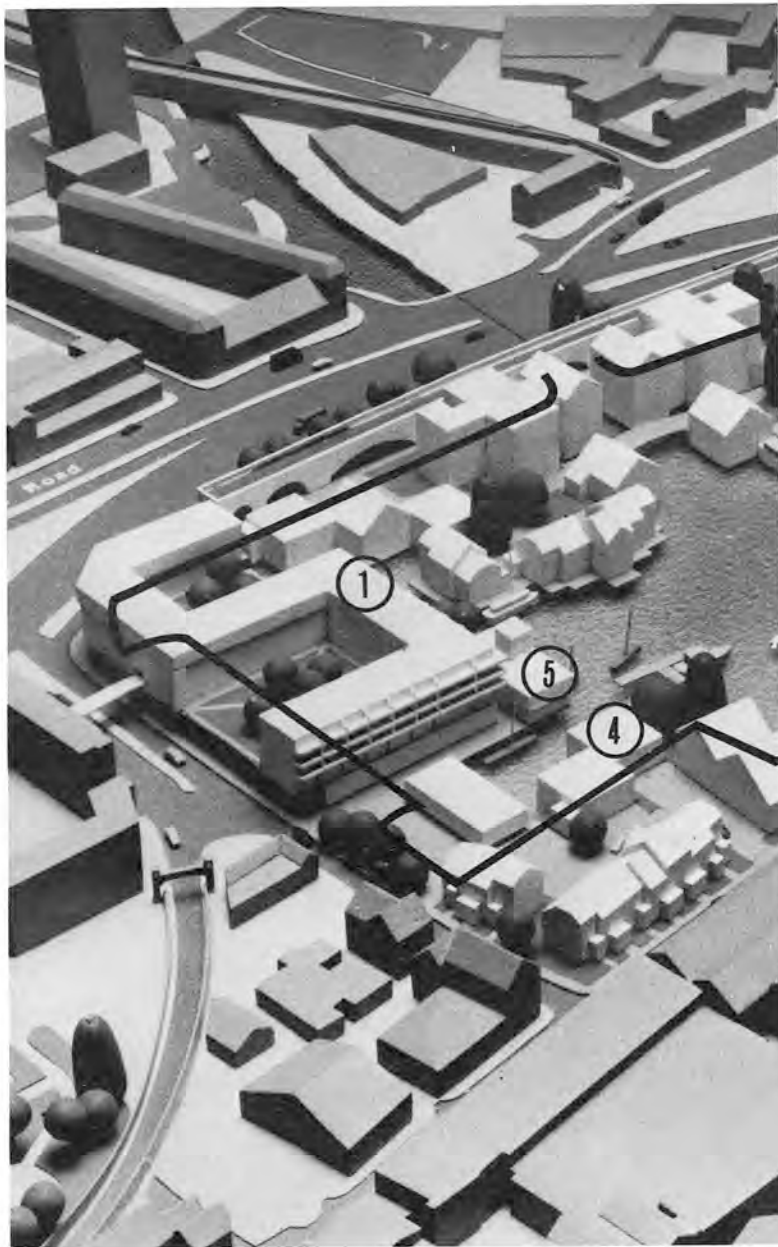
"The residential density . . . greatly exceeds the normal maximum . . . The tall blocks, the lack of space for generous public walkways and broad public amenity areas around the Basin edge, the dominating effect of garaging, and above all the loss of water area, all flow from this over-development of the site."

"The Listed railway viaduct . . . forms a magnificent back-drop to the northern side of the Basin. The Seifert proposals would virtually obliterate views of the viaduct . . . The simple Dockland character of the northern quay would be changed beyond recognition, and the splendid contribution of the Listed structures would be lost."

"The development would result in the loss of one of the best panoramic views available to travellers using the proposed Docklands Light Railway."

" . . . a design approach which completely ignores the existing setting, and which would in fact destroy it."¹

Peter Gibbs, MA (Cantab), AA Dip, RIBA
Architectural Assessor for the Limehouse Basin Public Inquiry
Report to the Secretary of State for the Environment, June 1984



The British Waterways Board's scheme for Limehouse Basin.

Developers: Hunting Gate Homes.
Architects: R Seifert & Partners.

KEY

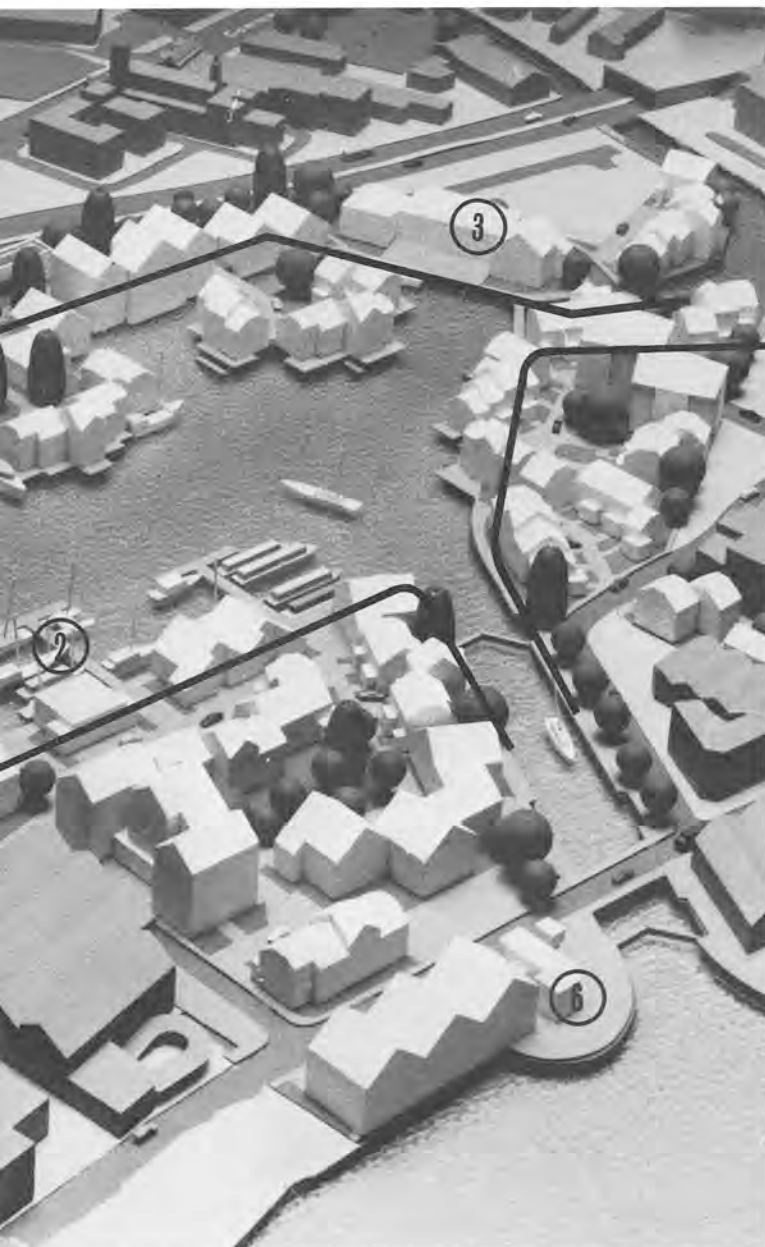
. . . Existing edge of the Basin.

1. Six-storey office block (100,000 square feet) over shopping (20,000 square feet) and parking.
2. Marina for 110 small boats.
3. Sports and boat club.
4. Pub.
5. Restaurant.
6. Pub with restaurant.

The rest of the buildings shown would contain 436 flats or houses with garaging at ground and/or basement level. There would be:
- 143 flats in three seven-storey blocks;
- 48 flats in a six-storey block;
- 30 flats in a five-storey blocks;

A F A I R A S S E S S M E N T

refused planning permission. Their recommendation was overruled by the then Secretary of state for the Environment without any significant reasons being given.²⁹



- 66 flats in eleven three-storey blocks;
 - 14 flats above the sports club;
 - 4 flats in converted cottages;
 - 131 three storey houses;
- All the flats and houses would be for sale.

There would be parking spaces for 490 residents' cars and 370 for visitors to the commercial facilities.
Total cost of the scheme: £70 million.

(Note: The proposed dual carriageway, seen sweeping across the top of the picture truncating the railway viaduct, was abandoned in 1982. Partially as a result, the position and shape of a few buildings have changed slightly. This remains, however, the official photograph of the scheme.)

The intention is to spend £3 million of public money filling in 42% of the water area in order to "provide a residential area around the Basin, maximising the views and vistas created by the Basin, canals and River Thames".²



Shane Reese
Inspector

The congested appearance presented . . . reflects a **serious degree of over-development.**

"The result (of filling in 42% of the Basin) would be **seriously to damage, even to destroy, the Basin's general amenity value** which has been planned to be available to be enjoyed by the public."

"The loss of more than a quarter of the Basin's surface area would significantly decrease the space available for water-based recreational uses."

"The unique location and character of Limehouse Basin make it particularly suitable for public recreational use, and any significant loss of water there is the more objectionable because of the inhibiting effect so much housing so close to this enclosed water area would have on its use by the public . . . **There would appear to be little long term prospect of the two uses here existing harmoniously side by side.**"

"The views into and out of (the Basin) which are such an attractive feature of the present scene would be gone, and . . . one would be left with a much smaller Basin closely hedged in by multi-storeyed development dominating alike much of what would be left of the original water area and of the public walkway about it. The operational development of each scheme covers so much of the limited space around the docksides as to **preclude the possibility of any extensive recreational activities.**"

"A major contributing factor in the over-crowding . . . is the introduction of such large areas of office floor space. Their demands on space create pressures elsewhere which find expression in **density figures that are unacceptably high.**"

"**This is not an area well suited for the major office development that is now proposed.** Its establishment would be likely to attract a significant amount of car commuting, thus undesirably increasing congestion and introducing on-street parking problems."

"**The scheme would not integrate into the surrounding area but would reduce the overall integration of that area.**"

"**I am convinced that the scheme would not properly advance the regeneration of this particular part of Docklands. I would recommend that it be refused.**"³

Shane Reese, LLB LMRTPI Solicitor
Inspector for the Limehouse Basin Public Inquiry
Report to the Secretary of State for the Environment,
June 1984

The Spectator

10 December 1983

75p

Rowan Moore

Colonel Seifert's village

To glance through Richard Seifert's publicity brochure is a curious experience. Nestling among the granite and mirror glass, colossal banks in Alexandria and Cairo, Centre Point, the 'Singapore Theme Park', is a section called 'Villages'. A water colour perspective shows steeply pitched and hipped roofs, contented residents, bricks, tiles, mature trees, and yachts rocking gently at their moorings. The accompanying text explains: 'the tranquil harmony of traditional village life will be recreated in the various dockland hamlets which the practice has recently designed . . . Throughout there will be a feeling of natural growth, a freedom of movement and a sense of complete community'. One of these 'hamlets', designed for Limehouse in the East End, is currently the subject of a public inquiry.

Those who associate Seifert and his practice with much of the devastation of the City and other parts of London may ask whether the firm has undergone a sudden enlightenment. The answer, regrettably but unsurprisingly, is no.

In their statement to the inquiry the practice emphasise the extent of the public spaces in the scheme (largely imposed on them after months of discussion with the London Docklands Development Corporation). Under the heading 'scheme concept' they talk of 'sequence of townscapes from water into feature areas and courtyards' and elsewhere in the statement of 'feature courts and focal areas'. The architecture described by this meaningless jargon is accordingly pointless and empty. Moreover, in arrangement at least, it differs very little from the developments of the sixties we have come to hate so much: clusters of blocks (containing luxury homes and offices) are set more or less randomly in a shapeless landscape of car parks, limp planting and trashy lamp standards. For all the appeal to tradition, there is no attempt to understand the qualities of traditional town planning: in particular, through the use of streets, squares, terraces and gardens, the ordering of public and private places, and of the diverse life of a city, into a rich and intelligible hierarchy. Villages have been no better understood by the architects, nor even suburbia, which would seem to be the main inspiration. How many villages can boast 107,000 square feet of offices?

It should also be obvious that nothing could be more inappropriate to London's docks than a slice of East Anglian fishing village inhabited by City workers. Limehouse basin is a noble expanse of water overlooked by one of the most remarkable buildings in England, Hawksmoor's church of St Anne,

as well as some impressive 18th- and 19th-century industrial buildings. The architects are very proud that they are not demolishing these although, as listed, there is no real alternative. They have also failed to establish any sort of relationship between the new building and the old (much of which is obscured from view), other than through 'views and vistas' of St Anne's. It would, in fact, be a work of rare genius to obscure the church's enormous tower. Much of the basin is actually built over; what remains is trivialised by the banal and pretentious architecture.

'The materials', to quote the architects again, 'will be of an indigenous nature, hand-made bricks, clay roof tiles, timber verandahs . . .' Indigenous to where? One would be hard put to find either clay tiles or timber verandahs among Limehouse's surviving Georgian and Victorian buildings.

All this would matter less if Limehouse was not an area with its own traditions and historical associations. (The more picturesque of these include graphic descriptions in Dickens, a stint as London's red light district and the inauguration of the Social Democratic Party). Limehouse suffered badly during and after the war and is now one of the deprived inner city areas about which everyone is so concerned. Until its closure as a commercial dock in 1969, the basin and the nearby churchyard constituted the centre of Limehouse, and its redevelopment offers the best, probably the only chance of reversing the area's progressive loss of identity and character.

Although luxury homes and offices may not be intrinsically bad things, they can never constitute the centre of a district. The architects say that the proposed sports club, 'Marina facilities', restaurants, pubs, supermarket and 'community youth water activity' will give new life to the area, and that the development as a whole will generate local employment. However, the scheme is too large to be handled by any local contractor, while the offices are placed obsessively close to a railway station, to facilitate instant escape. The various 'recreational facilities' would have been a generous gesture, had they not largely been imposed by outside agencies. In any case they bear little relation to local needs or wishes - the emphasis is rather on holiday use by outsiders - and are situated as far as possible from the existing centre of Limehouse (by the church), thus establishing a rival rather than a complementary zone. The pubs and restaurants seem to be primarily oriented towards tourists arriving in Greenwich-bound

boats.

Not all the weaknesses of the scheme are entirely the fault of the architects. Presumably its content was primarily determined by Seifert's clients, the developers Hunting Gate. The fascination with car parking and the belief that listed buildings alone constitute the character of an area is shared by many architects and planners. Perhaps, however, the greatest portion of blame attaches to the British Waterways Board, who own the land, and to their profoundly unimaginative handling of the site. For ten years following the closure of the site the BWB made no attempt to develop it. All local initiatives and suggestions were ignored, sound buildings were allowed to decay and the dereliction spread to surrounding areas. Eventually, after a competition pockmarked with irregularities, Hunting Gate and Seifert were announced the winners. Their scheme was said to be 'successful visually, architecturally and from a community point of view', though, as both local opinion and professional advice, including that of the BWB's own architect, were spurned, one wonders how this was known. Oddly enough, Richard Seifert was once a member of the BWB board; this has led to some unpleasant remarks.

There is yet another organisation involved, London Docklands Development Corporation. This is a quango created under Michael Heseltine to ensure, *inter alia*, 'a lasting regeneration of the docklands' and 'high architectural and design standards'. It has often been argued that the Corporation's aims are excessively limited in view of the size of its responsibility. At Limehouse it has failed even to stand by these aims: there is no reason to suppose that the development (which the LDDC is supporting before the inquiry) will lead to 'lasting regeneration'. 'High architectural and design standards' have clearly not been attained . . .

There is a way out of this nightmare. It involves some understanding of the peculiarities of each area, attention to public opinion, and the commissioning of architects capable of decent and sensitive work. (Such architects do exist.) It would also help if an area as important and as large as Limehouse basin (nearly a quarter of a mile long) was not entrusted to a single developer. These points were made three years ago by the Limehouse Development Group, an intelligent and articulate local body. Had they been listened to at the time, there would have been no need for a long and expensive inquiry.

AJ

Limehouse Basin is destined to become a rich ghetto in the heart of docklands, cut off from the people already living in Limehouse.

The scheme's inventive talent is confined within the boundaries of the site and its own preoccupations, turning its back on Limehouse. It asks no other question than how to solve the narrow problems within the perimeter of its limited brief and concerns, regardless of the consequences its presence may have

on the surrounding area or population. It marks the abandonment of planning. . .

What superficially may seem the expression of a rich creative architectural culture is in fact indistinguishable from the voice of commerce and advertising. The phrases are almost interchangeable with those used in the video Seifert's commissioned to market its Limehouse proposal. Interspersed with photographs of Venice, Amsterdam and shots of the model of the scheme is a hard sell. 'A waterside hamlet on the threshold of the City . . . a complete *community* . . . a real *community* with individual identity . . . intimate clusters . . . focusing spaces . . . attractive, distinctive . . . variety is the keynote . . . individual identity . . . attracting people from all walks of life . . . sensitive proposals . . . commercially right . . . a waterside hamlet on the threshold of the City . . .'

Clearly Hunting Gate's scheme is really for a rich hamlet in the heart of a poor hamlet on the threshold of the City.

Barriers, delusions and contradictions grow together. The Hunting Gate approach results in an architecture isolated behind physical and philosophical walls, an architecture isolated from reality. Locked into its own world it builds dreams, theories and concepts that are isolated from reality too. Like a magpie it is attracted by bright phrases which it steals and removes to another kingdom. It steals their meaning; stripped of their proper context they become clichés that build an imposing cultural facade in which appearances become reality. So glittering, so distorting and so impenetrable does this conceptual barrier become that those inside rarely recognise themselves as prisoners of mystification.

Mike Fleetwood

THE TIMES FRIDAY FEBRUARY 5 1982

Seifert design picked for docks

By Hugh Clayton, Environment Correspondent

The competition for the £70m Limehouse Basin development in London's dockland has been won by the Hunting Gate housing company, which retained the Seifert partnership as architects.

Mr Richard Seifert, the senior partner, was, in the early 1970s, a part-time member of the British Waterways Board, which judged the competition.

Sir Frankk Price, the board chairman, said yesterday: "Richard will not be embarrassed. He is too long in the tooth." Sir Frank

believed that Mr Seifert had never drawn salary or expenses from the board. "I

was sorry to see him go. Hunting Gate chose Richard Seifert. I think they were very lucky to get him."

Sir Frank said board members had voted unanimously for Hunting Gate although the company had only just beaten the scheme proposed by the Limehouse Development Group, which was supported by many local community organizations in east London.

New Statesman

Vol 109

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11 January 1985

Seifert's concept is so brutally unimaginative that one cannot imagine it taking him more than two minutes. By the standards of some commercial property developers, who have produced sensitive schemes in co-operation with community groups, Seifert's scheme is rock bottom . . . a back-of-an-envelope hamfisted botch."

Jules Lubbock

TimeOut

LONDON'S WEEKLY GUIDE APRIL 16-22 1986 No. 817

The six-year battle over the future of Limehouse Basin, points up all the key elements in the issue of what is to become of London's Docklands: manipulation, greed and collaboration between public bodies and private developers; short-term gain over long-term regeneration; and the shape of things to come in an area which presents London with the greatest chance to rebuild from scratch since the Blitz.

There are few schemes for

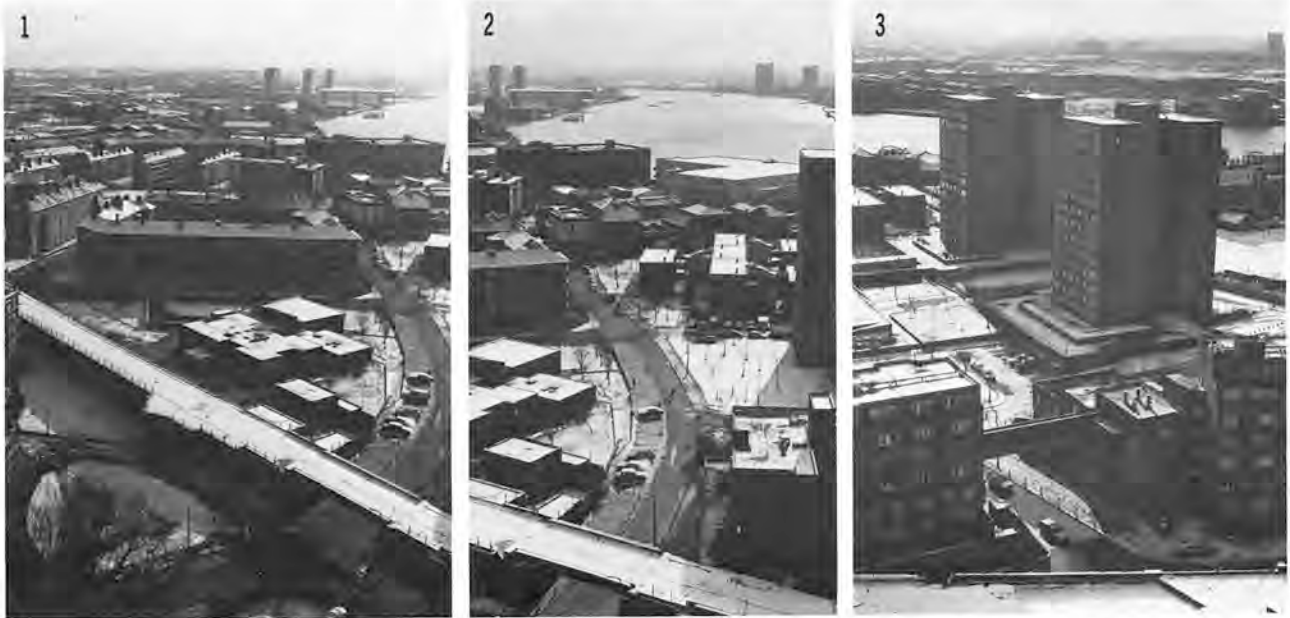
redevelopment in London which have promoted such outrage and concern as the BWB/Seifert plan for Limehouse, an outrage deepened by the fact that the developers intend to apply for £5 million worth of public money under the Derelict Land Grants scheme to develop what will become an exclusive private domain for the privileged.

All that can save Limehouse now are the last-minute high-level appeals being made by the LDG in its Limehouse Petition.

With a new chairman in Sir Leslie Young after Sir Frank

Price's retirement to his Cornish retreat, Limehouse's only hope is that pressure can be brought via the LDDC, the Government, Tower Hamlets and through simple common sense, to persuade the British Waterways Board to halt their self-interested Seifert. "The terrible problem however,' says Nick Falk of URBED, 'is that people get stuck into positions which they feel they have to defend or risk a loss of face. It's like the Americans in Vietnam. We can but hope that the Board will learn from the mistakes of others.'

Paul Charman



PRESENT PROBLEMS

Ten minutes drive from the City of London there is a unique opportunity to transform a decaying inner city area into a thriving neighbourhood.

Centred around an old dock basin, Limehouse is a predominantly poor, multi-racial community. Over 3,000 inhabitants and 100 businesses survive in an environment blitzed first by the *Luftwaffe*, then by misguided planning, and finally by the decline of the London docks.⁴

Limehouse is a prime example of the kind of area causing deep concern to the Prince of Wales, church leaders and politicians of all parties.

Here are some of the facts about Limehouse in 1986.

- 1 Unemployment levels are amongst the highest in London and are steadily increasing. 34% of men and 51% of women are out of work.⁵
- 2 94% of the population is housed in badly designed and hopelessly managed blocks of council flats. Most fall in the sink estate, hard-to-let category.⁶
- 3 Half the households have an annual income of less than £5,000.⁷
- 4 More than 80% of households do not own a car.⁸
- 5 The proportions of single parent families and young children are higher than average.⁹
- 6 More than 95% of the inhabitants do not have a garden.
- 7 There is a desperate shortage of safe play areas, recreational space and community facilities.
- 8 Dilapidated buildings, derelict sites, lack of trees and parks, open spaces strewn with rubbish and badly laid out roads and footpaths make an unwelcoming environment.
- 9 There is no legal public access whatsoever to the river or the canals which surround the area or to the Limehouse Basin.
- 10 Rape, racial assault and muggings are facilitated by a poorly structured arrangement of buildings, streets and footpaths.
- 11 Petty theft, vandalism and arson have caused underground car parks to be sealed off. Cars

12 parked on the streets are frequently broken into. Security is costly and traumatic for residents and businesses alike.

13 Three sound blocks of flats have been wastefully demolished since 1980 because the local authority could no longer cope with their management. Their sites lie vacant surrounded by corrugated iron. Ironically, the most prominent building in the area is a large hostel for the homeless.

14 All the public toilets in the area and the recently completed tennis courts are permanently padlocked due to local authority staff outs.

15 Glue sniffing, alcoholism, heroin addiction, truancy and depression are increasing among teenagers.

16 There is no proper shopping centre or market area. Existing shops are scattered and reaching them involves crossing one of the busiest roads in London.

17 There is no focus to the neighbourhood and few opportunities for social interaction apart from in pubs. There is no high street, no community centre, no cinema, no venue for live music, no theatre.

18 There is little or no opportunity for people to set up new enterprises.

The area lacks stability. There is a high turnover of population as most people leave when they can.

Attempts by local people to improve these desperate conditions are continually frustrated by bureaucracy. Although over 90% of the land is publicly owned, the authorities appear remote and paralysed. Planning blight has prevented any effective action for years. People feel impotent and powerless. Real local government has broken down.

Despite all these problems Limehouse has a proud and distinguished history, a strong community spirit, a distinctive character and some exceptionally fine buildings and natural features (including 2 conservation areas). Most inhabitants feel strongly attached to the area and many outsiders are keen to move in. With the right encouragement Limehouse could be restored to health and become a thriving, stimulating area for all present and future inhabitants and business interests.

View of Limehouse from the top of St. Anne's Church.
1. Inter and post war housing estates (Joseph Irwin, Roche, Padstow, St. Vincent). The railway under construction will run from the City of London to Poplar and the Isle of Dogs, where a major office complex is proposed at Canary Wharf. Greenwich is in the distance.



2 & 3. 1970's housing estates (Oast and Kiln Court – foreground). The River Thames and Surrey Docks lie beyond.
 4. The Limehouse Cut waterway which leads to the Lea Valley; Limehouse Paperboard Mills and Limehouse Basin's entrance to the Thames.
 5. Limehouse Basin (upper centre) with the City of London in the background.
 6. The Commercial Road (A13) and Stepney.

OPPORTUNITIES

The crucial ingredient for the regeneration of Limehouse is the proper development of the Limehouse Basin. It is the largest undeveloped area (22 acres) and lies at the very heart of the neighbourhood. As planner Tom Hancock stated at the Public Inquiry: "If the potential of the water were used, then the area would become a very pleasant place to live."

"(Limehouse Basin) is the **key** development opportunity in Limehouse in that **its development is the means by which, and a prerequisite for, the regeneration of the area. The Basin must play its part in this wider process and it is not an acceptable option for it not to do so.**"¹⁰

Or as Father Peter Day, former priest of Limehouse Catholic Church put it:

"The development of the Limehouse Basin could develop the people's lives here. It could even improve their health."¹¹

The London Docklands Development Corporation – the special development control authority set up by the government to "secure the regeneration" of the area – is also quite clear on the importance of the Basin to the rest of Limehouse. Its Area Development Strategy states:

"Limehouse Basin and its quays make possible major development which is likely to have considerable impact on Limehouse."

"This site is too important to become the preserve of a limited group and should be seen as providing, amongst other things, **an exciting opportunity to provide a new range of facilities for local people.**"

"(New development) should not turn its back on the rest of Limehouse, which is particularly a danger with a predominantly residential scheme."

"The Corporation is determined to see an integrated redevelopment of the area."¹²

Limehouse Basin is not only the key to regenerating the whole Limehouse area – it also has vital metropolitan significance. It was opened in 1820 to "unite all the canals and navigable rivers of the country with the River Thames"¹³ and remains **London's principal canal dock and the gateway to the 2,000 mile English canal system.** It is also the nearest sizeable

sheltered waterspace to central London still available for development.

The opportunities were forcefully stressed by several witnesses at the Public Inquiry in 1983.

● "Limehouse Basin is not just a run down dock basin, but a very important resource which, if developed in the right way, can lead to **the revitalisation of the whole canal system in this part of London.**"¹⁴

R A Chenery, Manager, Resource Development, London Tourist Board

● "Limehouse Basin is not just another water area in London's Docklands; it is **an irreplaceable asset to the whole London canal system** . . . Preservation of Limehouse Basin is critical to the future of the Grand Union Canal if it is to continue as a cruising waterway."¹⁵

Dr John Parker, Head of Central Area Environmental Management Team, Greater London Council

● "Limehouse Basin is not only a site suitable for a major leisure and recreational development on the grounds of its location and access and physical attributes . . . It (also) represents **the best opportunity for such a scheme currently available in this part of London.**"¹⁶

Michael Ryan, Chairman Leisure & Recreation Consultants, Consultants to the London Docklands Development Corporation.

● "Limehouse Basin could be developed as a **gateway to Britain** and be promoted as a **tourist and recreation attraction of national significance**"¹⁷

Greater London and Regional Sports Council

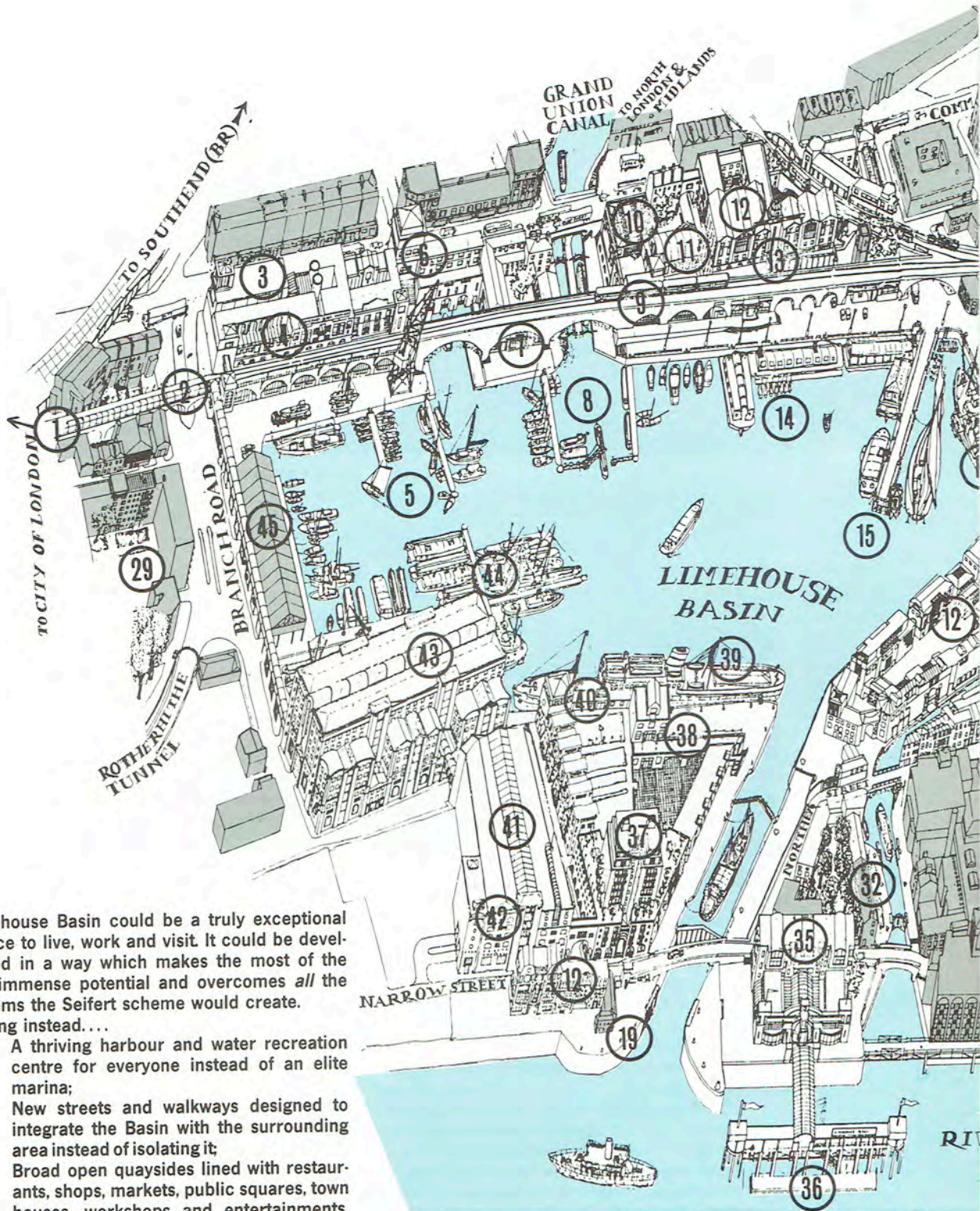
● "The development of Limehouse is a **unique opportunity to create an important centre of urban life**, not only for the area of Docklands, but also for the East End of London."¹⁸

Dr Dalibor Vesely, Lecturer in Architecture, University of Cambridge

It is in measuring up to all these varied and quite spectacular opportunities that any scheme for Limehouse Basin must be judged. The Seifert scheme being promoted by the British Waterways Board fails even to reach the starting line.

G R E A T E X P E C T A T I O N S

What Limehouse could be like if the Limehouse Basin were developed imaginatively. This bird's eye perspective is not a fixed 'scheme' or the only solution but was drawn up for the Limehouse Development Group in 1981 as a starting point for discussion by landowners, authorities, would-be developers and local people. It is based on exhaustive surveys of local needs and aspirations, consultation with over 50 organisations concerned with docklands and the waterways, detailed knowledge of the Limehouse area and extensive experience of urban regeneration. In contrast to the Seifert scheme (pages 4 & 5) the proposals cover all vacant and underused land around the Basin, not just that owned by the British Waterways Board (map page 27). None of the water area is filled in. Indeed the Limehouse Cut canal's direct connection with the Thames is reopened and flanked with new housing like in Venice or Amsterdam. Existing buildings are shown tinted.



Limehouse Basin could be a truly exceptional place to live, work and visit. It could be developed in a way which makes the most of the site's immense potential and overcomes *all* the problems the Seifert scheme would create. Creating instead...

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 A thriving harbour and water recreation centre for everyone instead of an elite marina; 2 New streets and walkways designed to integrate the Basin with the surrounding area instead of isolating it; 3 Broad open quaysides lined with restaurants, shops, markets, public squares, town houses, workshops and entertainments, instead of intimidating and potentially dangerous alleys flanked by garage doors; 4 New housing for people of all income groups instead of just the very rich; 5 Varied work and job opportunities instead of solely office work; 6 New shopping which complements rather than competes with that already existing; 7 A rich mix of architectural styles instead of acres of the same; | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8 An immediate start to development instead of yet more years of blight; 9 A development based on a considered and correct planning process instead of the reverse; <p>It would involve:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 10 Participation of all affected parties instead of confrontation; 11 Harnessing local skills, experience and resources instead of rejecting them; |
|--|---|



What Limehouse should become – a living city for the twenty first century



KEY TO NEW FACILITIES AND IMPROVEMENTS

1. Docklands light railway station.
2. Elevated walkway from station.
3. Light industry and commerce.
4. Chandlery shop and housing
5. Boatyard and boat mart with moorings for visitors, houseboats and vintage boats.
6. Water sports club and offices.
7. Maritime museum.
8. Canal narrowboat terminal.
9. Docklands light railway.
10. Swimming pool.
11. Gymnasium/concert and dance hall.
12. Housing. New housing in the area would provide homes for over 1,500 people at a range of tenures and prices. There would be family housing for rent and for sale, serviced flats for rent and for sale, co-operative housing, starter homes and shell and self-build homes.
13. Cinema
14. Boat hire and youth boating club.
15. End-of-jetty tea pavilion.
16. Floating pub.
17. Open market.
18. Enclosed market.
19. Pub.
20. Public square with a range of general and specialist shops, restaurants and cafes, nursery, pensioners club, health centre, community information service, technical aid centre, adult education centre, employment bureau and arts and crafts centre.
21. Housing over workshops and small office units.
22. Garden centre.
23. Landscaping for gardens, small parks and play space.
24. Bridge.
25. Housing and workshops.
26. Community centre.
27. Church of St Anne's restoration.
28. Theatre club and flats.
29. Refurbishment of flats. Disused basement car parks and ground floor flats converted to shops, workshops and community facilities.
30. Ropemakers Fields park extension with festival ground.
31. Workshops and studios.
32. Limehouse Cut canal reopened.
33. Warehousing.
34. Public jetty.
35. Housing over arcade with shops and cafes.
36. Riverboat terminal.
37. Luxury apartment block.
38. Quayside arcade and public square.
39. Floating conference centre and hotel.
40. Theatre.
41. Workshops over parking.
42. Riverside studios.
43. Light industrial workshops and studio flats.
44. Industrial quay.
45. Technology centre and offices.

Honourable
Mention 1986
Patron: HRH The
Prince of Wales
KG KT GCB

- 12 Stimulating and educating local children instead of increasing their resentment by excluding them;
- 13 Encouraging community enterprise of all kinds instead of quashing it;
- 14 Allowing evolutionary development, as in all successful urban areas, instead of an inflexible monolith;
- 15 Safeguarding and celebrating historic and aesthetic features instead of disregarding

- 16 and obliterating them;
- 16 Keeping or relocating locally the area's 40 firms employing some 600 people instead of sending them packing;
- 17 A sense of common purpose instead of social strife.

In short, Limehouse Basin would become:

- 18 An exciting, flexible, welcoming, diverse, creative and balanced urban neighbourhood and port instead of a soulless housing estate and yacht park.
- 19 A celebration of the gateway to the English canal system instead of its denigration.
- 20 The pride of Docklands and the East End instead of yet another lost opportunity.
- 21 A prototype for how to regenerate inner cities instead of yet another case study on how not to.

And, of course, there would be no need for a private security force.

A STRATEGY

Making Limehouse come alive demands an unconventional, yet simple strategy.

The starting point is to ensure that in any new plans, *all* vacant and underused land around the Basin is given careful consideration. Not just land owned by the British Waterways Board as in the Seifert scheme. Most of this land is owned by other public authorities (see map on page 27) so this need not present any difficulties.

The London Docklands Development Corporation recognised the vital importance of taking a broader approach as early as 1982, but has yet to act on it. The Corporation's Limehouse Area Development Strategy states:

"If British Waterways Board land is developed in isolation it will be difficult to avoid the proposals becoming inward looking and turning their back on the rest of Limehouse."

"It would not be necessary to build into the water and build at high density if other sites in the area were added to the development area."¹⁹

The point was stressed by the Government's Public Inquiry Inspector who added:

"(The) lack of integration of (the Seifert scheme with the Limehouse area) ... is a failing that might have been avoided had (it) not been prepared and presented before a more comprehensive area for re-development could be assembled."²⁰

It follows that any new development plans must also take into account the needs of the neighbouring business and residential areas, as well as derelict land.

The best known formula for co-ordinating such a complex development is to set up a special trust (a company limited by guarantee, possibly with charitable status). Its membership would include delegates from the London Docklands Development Corporation, Tower Hamlets Council (as the local authority), the Limehouse community, waterways users, and preferably the British Waterways Board and other land owners.

Future occupants of the development would also be represented when identified.

By including **all** the affected parties within one single-minded organisation, the normal time wasting conflicts will be avoided.

The 'Limehouse Trust' would:

- 1 Acquire all under-used land in the area, using the London Docklands Development Corporation's compulsory powers if necessary.
- 2 Attract grants and loans from public, private and charitable sources.
- 3 Appoint a multi-disciplinary team of expert consultants to work from an "open door" on-site office.
- 4 Draw up a comprehensive development strategy with the full participation of all interested parties.
- 5 Construct new infrastructure and public facilities and arrange for their management in perpetuity.
- 6 Sell and lease individual sites to a wide range of different developers, housing associations and other enterprises – often using competitions to attract the best ideas and designs.
- 7 Monitor the development, constantly adjusting the strategy to suit changing circumstances.

In other words, **the Trust would act like a mini development corporation, yet would be responsive to local needs.** It would combine in one partnership the strengths of the public, private and voluntary sectors.

To enable the new community to evolve successfully and to secure maximum long-term revenue, development would be phased over a number of years, starting with a massive environmental facelift to restore confidence and generate enthusiasm.

Development profits would mostly be reinvested in the area for community and recreational facilities and to assist the regeneration of the whole neighbourhood.

Limehouse Basin
lifeless, February
1986.





WOULD IT WORK?

The benefits of such an approach have been clearly demonstrated by pioneering projects throughout Europe and the United States. Its viability for Limehouse has been confirmed by studies conducted from 1979-86 by the Limehouse Development Group (see page 24) with assistance from leading experts in architecture, planning, recreation, waterways management, urban regeneration and development economics.²¹

Proposals for a £60 million mixed development were drawn up after extensive consultation with local residents and businesses as well as a wide range of commercial, voluntary, educational and boating organisations. A vision of how Limehouse could look one day is illustrated on the previous page. Much of it is not speculative but based on facilities that established local builders, developers, housing associations and other enterprises want to build and are prepared to finance and manage.²²

The Public Inquiry Inspector concluded that the Limehouse Development Group's scheme would integrate with the rest of Limehouse better than the Seifert scheme, even though it was not part of his remit to comment on alternative solutions (see page 17).

The scheme's financial viability was confirmed as early as 1981 by one of the country's largest house builders, Bovis Homes, which offered to back it with hard cash.

No subsequent evidence has suggested that the Limehouse Development Group's proposals would be any less profitable for the British Waterways Board than the Seifert scheme (financial details of which have not

been released). All the indications are that it would be financially more secure.

WHY NOT

Institutional inertia, myopic vision and lack of leadership from those in positions of authority are all that have prevented – and continue to prevent – the proper regeneration of Limehouse.

All those who know Limehouse well have become convinced of the need for an approach along the lines proposed by the Limehouse Development Group. They include: the Public Inquiry Inspector; Tower Hamlets Council; the London Docklands Development Corporation; people living and working locally; and those British Waterways Board officers most closely involved (including Chief Architect, Peter White).

The recent history of the Limehouse Basin makes depressing reading (see next page). Many millions of pounds of public money have been wasted; on lost revenue from land, water and buildings lying derelict and decaying; on preparing planning reports which have been ignored; on a lengthy public inquiry the conclusions of which have been tossed aside.

The social costs of the enforced and continuing blight are immeasurable, as are the lost opportunity costs to the private and public sectors.

Yet at no time have the public authorities responsible ever sat down together (with or without private interests or members of the Limehouse community) in order to achieve what they know – and as all the evidence so conclusively proves – should, and can, be done.

Those looking for the causes of Britain's inner city malaise need look no further than Limehouse.

Fleeting glimpse of the future? Narrowboats pass through Limehouse Basin for the 1982 Canalway Festival.

1969	Limehouse Basin closed as a commercial dock. 'Planning blight' sets in.		
1975	Tower Hamlets Council starts putting pressure on British Waterways Board to prepare proposals. No progress is made. Blight increases. People wanting to rent empty property or gain mooring rights are turned down. Many buildings demolished. ²³		
1979	Limehouse Development Group formed by local people in desperation. Proposals for how Limehouse Basin might be regenerated presented to the British Waterways Board "as the initial stage of an essential exploratory dialogue". ²⁴ A local developer, Rae Hoffenberg, also submits proposals. Both initiatives ignored.		
1980	British Waterways Board officers preparing proposals similar to those of the Limehouse Development Group ordered to stop work. Instead several commercial development companies with no experience or track record in urban regeneration are invited to submit proposals in a highly irregular limited competition. The Limehouse Development Group and Rae Hoffenberg are specifically excluded, but submit proposals anyway. ²⁵	Jan 1983	Office space is up 260% and shopping down 75% compared with the competition winning version of only 2 months previously. Grosvenor Estates and Wates Built Homes, critical of the British Waterways Board's selection process, submit their joint scheme too for planning permission, in order "to secure a wider debate on the merits of the various schemes". ²⁷ Tower Hamlets Council expresses "great disappointment" at the "unacceptable" proposals which "bear little resemblance to the council's requirements for the site", and recommends that planning permission should not be granted. ²⁸ After 9 months of abrasive negotiations with Seiferts, the London Docklands Development Corporation is "minded to grant outline consent "subject to many conditions and safeguards. Secretary of State for the Environment, Tom King, calls in the proposals for a public inquiry.
		Feb 1983	Public Inquiry. Inquiry Inspector submits his report to the new Secretary of State for the Environment, Patrick Jenkin, recommending refusal of planning permission.
		Oct-Dec 1983 June 1984	Jenkin overrules his Inspector and grants outline planning permission. No significant reasons are given. ²⁹ It is Jenkin's last week of office before being demoted and widely rumoured that there is an internal disagreement on the Limehouse issue between him and the incoming Secretary of State, Kenneth Baker who was Jenkin's deputy at the time. Limehouse Petition launched.
Feb 1982	British Waterways Board selects the Seifert scheme on the grounds that it is thought to be successful " visually, architecturally and from a community point of view ". No financial details are released, but the Board states that it has " not gone for the most financially productive scheme ". ²⁶	Aug 1985	
April 1982	Seifert applies for planning permission.	June 1986	



Fortunately construction has not yet started and there is still time to avert a tragedy. The Seifert scheme has yet to obtain **detailed** planning permission. Circumstances in Docklands have changed with emphasis now on the quality, rather than the quantity of development. The gigantic office complex now planned for neighbouring Canary Wharf puts new pressures on Limehouse but also presents new opportunities. Nationally there is growing interest in the environment and a determination to avoid the continual eruptions of violence in our cities by learning from past mistakes and developing sensitively by co-operation instead of conflict.

In the light of the overwhelming evidence now available, the British Waterways Board must abandon its insensitive and discredited proposals. Any compensation which might be claimed by the developers will be well worth the price.

The London Docklands Development Corporation must start using the extensive powers granted to it by Parliament for achieving lasting regeneration.

Both organisations must sit down together in partnership with other affected parties and plan the next steps.

The direction they should take has been clearly signposted by the Department of the Environment's Public Inquiry Inspector.

Local people and waterways enthusiasts are ready to play their part. So, too, are those with finance and technical expertise.

There is no need for any further delay. Limehouse Basin could come alive again within months of the go-ahead being given.

For the future of our inner cities, a fresh start must be made at Limehouse.

As recently as March 1986, the British Waterways Board felt able to describe the Seifert scheme for Limehouse Basin as "an imaginative major re-development programme". Publicity material explained how the scheme "provides for a carefully planned mix of uses and features fully the water area for recreation, public access and amenity and visual pleasure."⁶²

These statements appear to completely contradict the results of the public inquiry held by the Department of the Environment in Limehouse Town Hall at the end of 1983. The inquiry lasted 45 days. Eighteen expert witnesses gave evidence against the Seifert scheme on behalf of Tower Hamlets Council, the Greater London Council, the Limehouse Development Group, the Inland Waterways Association, the Docklands Forum of voluntary organisations and the Joint Docklands Action Group. Many individuals also made objections.

Apart from the applicants themselves and, somewhat reluctantly, the London Docklands Development Corporation, no-one supported the scheme.

The outcome of the Inquiry is the most detailed and devastating indictment of a major inner city development in recent years.

Some conclusions of the Government's Inspector and Architectural Assessor are on pages 4 and 5. But it must be pointed out that the Inspector was unable to comment on many aspects of the proposals raised by witnesses – such as housing tenure and pricing, and the existence of better alternatives – since these issues are not deemed to fall within the ambit of planning law.

The details of the arguments can be found in the many reports, containing over one million words and hundreds of drawings and photographs, submitted to the Public Inquiry.

On the following pages we present some extracts.

NO GO AREA

Townscape

The Seifert proposal turns its back on the community by introducing an alien layout." "In spite of occupying the geometrical heart of the area ... the Seifert scheme in fact succeeds in creating a substantial new segregated zone around the Basin."

"Research, experience and computer simulation of movement of people in the area strongly suggest that a large part of the newly designed (public) spaces will tend to be under-used causing whole new zones of severe under-occupation normally associated with the 'urban desert' effect."

"On the whole the only people who will use the spaces will be those on their way to and from the dwellings. This is never enough to create a sense of safety that comes from the presence of other people."

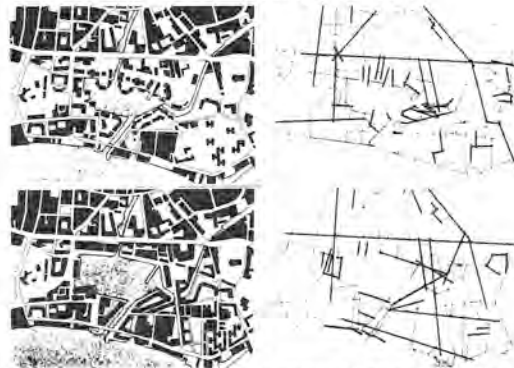
"The problem is exacerbated by the ... great multiplicity of route choices ... a series of largely empty routes providing means of access and escape to persons who may not be well-meaning."

"(The layout) will make it more difficult and tortuous for the existing community to reach the waterfront and use any of the facilities provided by the scheme."

"Despite the designers' stated intentions, the architecture of the scheme is not such as to integrate the new development into the surrounding area. Indeed it will:

1. Create a discontinuity with the surrounding area in terms of its built forms;
2. Create an even stronger discontinuity in terms of its spatial structure that is likely to act as an effective bar against through movement and lead to serious under-occupation of the area;
3. Have no beneficial effect in improving the spatial and movement structure of the area as a whole."

"(The Seifert scheme) will have the effect of turning this prime site on the Thames waterfront into an even more secluded and isolated zone ... **(It is) the wrong kind of architectural development for the Limehouse area ... With all its problems, Limehouse is better integrated with the undeveloped basin than with the Seifert scheme**".³⁰
Bill Hillier BA Director, Unit for Architectural Studies, Bartlett School, University College, London.



'Space syntax' analysis of plans shows how the proposed Seifert scheme (above) turns its back on the community, whereas the Limehouse Development Group scheme (below) reinforces it by reconstituting the urban fabric and providing direct links across the site.

Note: Bill Hillier's evidence was based on a new method of analysis called 'space syntax' pioneered at London University's Unit for Architectural Studies – the most advanced architectural research unit in the country. This shows that the use and occupation of urban areas – and thus their success – is affected by spatial organisation and can be predicted accurately by computer simulation of the plans. The schemes of the two developers and the Limehouse Development Group were each analysed in this way, and the findings formed the basis of Hillier's evidence. **After intensive cross-examination, the Public Inquiry Inspector adopted Hillier's conclusions as Findings of Fact.** The Inspector stated in his report:

"The (Seifert) scheme would not integrate into the surrounding area, but would reduce the overall integration of that area; a **third party's scheme (the Limehouse Development Group's) would improve matters.**"³¹

Evidence based on space syntax analysis has now been adopted by Inspectors at several public inquiries, most notably Mansion House Square and Coin Street. Hillier's conclusion on the Limehouse Development Group scheme (page 10) is as follows:

"The Limehouse Development Group's proposal demonstrates that Limehouse can be improved ... (it) creates a positive structure for the area which should play an important role in using everyday patterns of movement to bring life to a dead urban area ... The global organisation of space has been well solved."³²

RICH GHETTO

Housing

At the selling prices required to make the Seifert scheme viable, **the Basin will become the exclusive domain of the privileged, the second home owner or merely a pied-a-terre for the visiting company executive.** The promise of 10 per cent allocation for first time buyers is merely a sop to placate the local community and is unlikely to materialise until the latter phases of the project."

"The development will make no significant contribution towards an increase in local home ownership statistics."³³

John Desmond, BSc (Bldg Econ) ARICS ACI Arb AMBIM Chartered Surveyor and Building Economist, Partner of Bernard Williams Associates

"There can be no doubt that the private housing provided will be well out of reach of the vast majority of Tower Hamlets' residents. More than 90 per cent of the borough's households have annual incomes of less than £10,000."³⁴

Clive Playford, BA (Hons) Researcher, Docklands Forum

"The size and type of housing which is proposed is in danger of introducing a new elite, rather than providing for at least three groups of people who could claim some priority in terms of their need as well as what they have to offer within the community."

"First, and most important, are the young couples who marry locally, some in St Anne's church, but who are then forced to move well away from the area because they want to buy their own homes."

"Second, there are people of moderate means who would like to move into this neighbourhood, where they have a valuable contribution to make to the community – in education, health services, social services, local government, church life, care of the elderly, community groups, or a mixture of more than one of these."

"Third is the growing number of elderly people with strong local links who want to stay here, but again are forced out if they want to buy their own property."

"The new population which could arrive around the Basin would provide a **stark contrast rather than an integrated enrichment**"³⁵

Reverend Christopher Idle
St Anne's Church, Limehouse

"If houses are built primarily for people who have no links with the area, and who have totally different tastes and lifestyles, the newcomers will do little to help achieve 'lasting regeneration', which is what the Government wants. The opportunity will be lost to raise the standard of local schools. Nor is there likely to be an increase in the amount of money flowing through local shops and services, which would generally upgrade the quality of life for all. Instead, newcomers will be resented because of the glaring differences between the 'haves' and the 'have nots'."

"It is not hard to imagine the problems that will stem from islands of affluence amid seas of poverty ... **What is proposed will be a kind of social time bomb ... and will undoubtedly lead to excessive levels of crime.**"

"I am not arguing against the general idea of housing surrounding a marina, but against two proposals that will be like unsuccessful transplants."³⁶

Dr Nicholas Falk BA (Oxon) MBA (Stanford)
Urban Development Consultant, Director, **URBED** (Urban and Economic Development) Ltd

Note: Chartered Surveyor and Building Economist John Desmond calculates that **the average selling price of a house or flat in the Seifert scheme would have to be over £125,000** to make the scheme viable. The **public** subsidy, in the form of Derelict Land Grant, averages out at **over £15,000 per dwelling for each unit built in the Basin** (total £3 million). In addition, mortgage relief would mean **a continuing annual public subsidy of, on average, £2,250 per dwelling or over £1 million annually for the entire scheme.** It was admitted by witnesses for the developers, under cross-examination, that **a permanent private security force would be necessary to maintain public order.**



Although officially prohibited, anglers are the only local people now able to enjoy Limehouse Basin. Will it be any different in the future?



DAMNING THE BASIN

Recreation

Residential development is, by its very nature, bound to curtail the full extent to which the water resources can be exploited to the benefit of a wider public."

"The Seifert proposals provide few attractions and facilities for water-related leisure and recreation. Furthermore, they reduce the size and availability of this valuable amenity."

"Research has shown that the greatest deterrent to use of waterspace is poor access. The Seifert scheme is particularly weak in this respect."

"Development schemes which make the maximum use of the water area will be more attractive and more profitable."

"It may be assumed that (the British Waterways Board's) short term anxiety for cash overcame their longer term objectives when ... they accepted the Seifert scheme."³⁷

Leisure & Recreation Consultants

Report on Water Recreation Aspects of Planning Proposals for Limehouse Basin, commissioned by the London Docklands Development Corporation, 1982.

"The proposals for infilling the water space leaves insufficient room for the full range of water recreation activities we consider appropriate and necessary for the proper development of this unique basin."

"The incursions of housing into the water space appear to be a hazard to commercial and pleasure navigation of Limehouse Cut and the Dock."

"The development does not provide flexibility for the future use of the water space."³⁸

Steven Yates *Member of the London Branch Planning and Navigation Sub-Committee of the Inland Waterways Association.*

"The outstanding under-utilised resource is the water ... It is surely folly to fill in a fine dock to create land for building when all around there is derelict and under-utilised land."³⁹

Dr Nicholas Falk *BA (Oxon) MBA (Standford) Development Consultant Director, URBED (Urban and Economic Development) Ltd*

ALL THE USUAL OFFICES

Work

There can be no question that office development at Limehouse Basin does not comply with the policies in the London Docklands Strategic Plan, nor the revised Tower Hamlets Borough Plan ... the statutory plan for the area produced by the plan-making authority."

"There is potential in nearby Greater London Development Plan office locations close to Limehouse Basin for massive expansion to the stock of offices."

"There is no overriding need to provide this scale of office development outside a preferred office location."

"Serious problems for local communities are likely to arise where ad hoc pressure for office development outside established office areas occurs."

"The continuation of blight at Limehouse is a very real threat. The site and the area generally have never functioned as an office employment area, have no history of development proposals for major speculative offices and from my knowledge of current market conditions are not competitive with existing office centres."⁴⁰

Norman Vickery *MRTPI*

Senior Group Planner, Department of Transportation and Development, Greater London Council

"So long as it appears that the local planning authority is prepared to grant planning permission for office schemes in a particular area, hope value is created. Land then changes hands at a higher price than would otherwise be the case, and developers need the office permission in order to show a return. Then, more desirable development in planning terms is much more difficult to achieve as the market is against it."

"The drastic proposals for filling a third or more of the dock area with its consequent effects on the use of the water and the character of the Basin cannot possibly be justified merely in order to provide land upon which to build an office block where it does not belong."⁴¹

Nick Banks *MPTPI Acting Chief Planner, London Borough of Tower Hamlets*

PARKING LOTS

Transport

The Seifert scheme proposes a level of non-residential parking in excess of Greater London Development Plan standards."

"The scheme ... (contains) a total of 400 non-residential parking spaces ... Based upon a reasonable interpretation of the Greater London Development Plan parking policy and standards ... the maximum number of non-residential car parking spaces should be in the order of 139."

"It is clear that excess standards are only required because fundamentally the site should not be developed for office use. It is an attempt to make the site suitable in market terms for such a use although it can only be done if parking policy is wholly disregarded."⁴²

Norman Vickery *MRTPI*

Senior Group Planner, Department of Transportation and Development, Greater London Council



The parking facilities available for residents of Oast Court, the most recent Limehouse housing estate, February 1986.

BAD FORM

Design

Traditional arrangements of streets made a clear distinction between the private realm of the residents, back gardens and mews, and the public realm of street and square which linked the city together as a whole, retaining its integrity."

"Modern architecture, which is designed as a series of separate problems, blocks of flats, groups of houses and roads for car access, does not add up to an environment in this sense. This is the basic difficulty with the Seifert scheme."

"It is fragmentary. The buildings are conceived separately as short terraces or blocks of flats which do not combine together to form streets or squares defining public routes."

"There is much ... 'space left over after planning'; residual areas of tarmac, car parking and grass, which result from the lack of an overall design idea to which

individual buildings effectively contribute."

"The public walkways through the scheme are faced with batteries of garages, which will give a bleak effect."

"The 'block' form of the scheme is likely to create a turbulent local climate in winter ... which will be uncomfortable for pedestrians."

"The character of the scheme is rather 'exotic' and looks more like a Mediterranean holiday village than part of London."

"The apparent variety which it offers ... is more than offset by the lack of convivial and sheltered promenades."⁴³

Richard MacCormac BA (Cantab) MA (London) RIBA Member of the Royal Fine Art Commission, Partner, MacCormac Jamieson and Pritchard

"The building form is that of staggered clusters of housing units as a hybrid of the urban terrace and a scattered suburban configuration, but with the advantages of neither... In no way can this random disposition of houses and roads in the creation of 'visual effect' compensate or substitute for the richness of the urban situation."

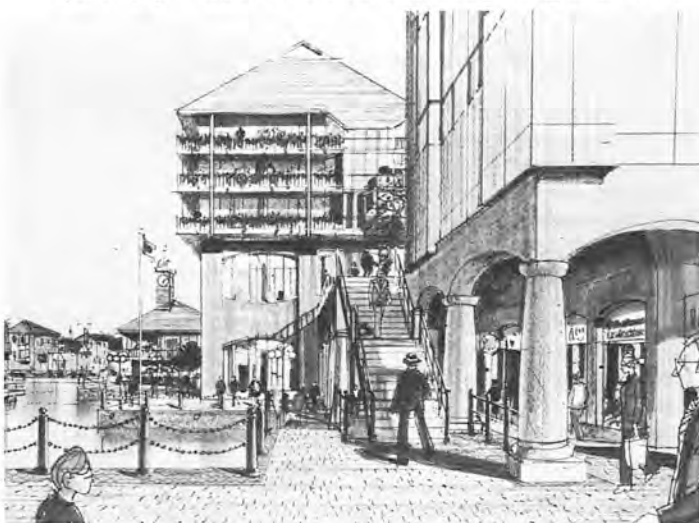
"No attempt has been made to relate this scheme to the rich context of Limehouse today ... (It) effectively privatises the one asset which could transform and revitalise the locality of Limehouse, whilst creating something of worth for all Londoners to come and enjoy."

"It is important to realise the depth of the gap which separates these two proposals from contemporary urban thinking."

"How little this kind of development contributes to the life of the city and how much, instead, it serves to deepen the conflict between private interests is well known from much accumulated and rather bitter experience."⁴⁴

Dr Dalibor Vesely Dip ING ARCH MA (Cantab) Lecturer in Architecture, University of Cambridge

The country's best known townscape illustrator, Gordon Cullen, has made the Seifert scheme look seductive enough, but the sketches failed to convince a public inquiry.



BLOTTING OUT THE PAST

History

The Seifert scheme pays absolutely no regard to the historical significance of the Basin, entirely destroys its integrity and utterly diminishes the uninterrupted views of the Viaduct (a monument of supreme international importance in the history of railway and electrical engineering – Grade 2 Listed), the hydraulic accumulator tower (the oldest surviving in the world) and the tower of St Anne's (one of the five finest 18th century churches in England)."

"The London and Blackwall Railway Viaduct ... carried the world's first rapid transit urban railway and the world's first complete railway telegraph system and was built by the most renowned railway bridge builders of the Victorian age in a style and on a scale so magnificent and technically superb that it remains the longest and finest section of early railway viaduct in the central London area."⁴⁵

Tom Ridge MSc
Local Historian

"In the Seifert scheme the historic character of the Limehouse area, and the special nature of the Basin, would be sacrificed ... This scheme fails to use to best advantage the Basin's water asset, its orientation and links with the river and canal system, and its relationship with the railway viaduct and local environs."⁴⁶

Dr John Parker, Dip Arch, Dip TP, RIBA, ARTPI, FRSA, MCIT

Head of Central Area Environmental Management Team, Department of Transportation and Development, Greater London Council

MINOR PROBLEMS?

Children

One to three year olds ... require safe, small, sheltered, sunny play spaces away from roads and traffic fumes, noise and rough, older children. They like gardens, trees, flowers, small animals, birds, ducks, water, sandpits, slides, swings, trampolines, climbing, jumping, swimming, paddling, music, books, toys and other very young children ... **The Seifert scheme does not address the needs of these very young children.** No playgrounds are indicated; walkways are very narrow; and parents' facilities are limited to a pub and restaurant, both of which are likely to be unwelcoming to toddlers."

"Three to seven year olds need all these amenities plus additional space for movement and exploration ... The Limehouse Basin offers excellent possibilities as a venue for all the lacking facilities, (but) **the Seifert scheme makes no provision for children in this age group.**"

"Older children need more club based and independent activities, but with supervision. They need their own space which they may control ... They also enjoy many adult amenities such as discos, films, billiards, darts, chess, angling, sailing, canoeing, etc ... **The present Seifert scheme offers none of these amenities** other than the youth boat club, for which no details are available ... Vandalism and petty crime will be a

major problem for residents in the (new) development unless local children feel that they benefit."

"Also, the Seifert scheme does not address any of the leisure and recreational needs of the wide range of ethnic groups and cultures whose children attend our school and whose communities have formed a significant part of the indigenous population of Limehouse and East London for many decades."

"A traditional saying to be heard locally is 'the family that plays together, stays together'. The Seifert scheme makes no provision for joint leisure and recreation of family groups other than the limited boating facilities offered ... (it) turns its back on the local community and it's children who could benefit so greatly by a considered and appropriate development."⁴⁷

Caroline Lwin, BSc RIBA Chair, Board of Governors, Cyril Jackson School, Limehouse and Limehouse resident



Playtime on Limehouse's St. Vincent Estate.

LOCAL ANAESTHETIC

There are considerable unmet needs in Tower Hamlets: needs for low priced housing (to buy and to rent), needs for recreation facilities available to local people, needs for jobs local people can compete for. The Seifert scheme will meet none of these needs."

"The Seifert scheme would harm rather than help the local area."⁴⁸

Ines Newman, M Phil MRTPI
Researcher, Joint Docklands Action Group

"The developers are not catering in any way for the existing local population – local people don't need luxury flats and marinas, and they couldn't afford them even if they did. Instead people whose own lives and those of their parents have been spent building the wealth of Britain's trade and industry, are now left facing an apparently hopeless future with unemployment, decaying housing and poor health care in their old age."⁴⁹

Tower Hamlets Trades Council

"The Seifert scheme is a wholly inadequate response to the Borough's agreed approach to the de-

Community

velopment of the Limehouse Basin . . . Too much emphasis is placed on exploiting the Basin for the comparatively few people (who will be) living around it, rather than establishing a public amenity capable of generating business, employment and visitors to the area."⁵⁰

Nick Banks MRTPI
Acting Chief Planner, London Borough of Tower Hamlets

IMPROPERLY ADDRESSED

Planning

There are four crucial common elements in all the relevant statutory and non-statutory local authority plans for the Limehouse area. None of these plans see the primary use of Limehouse Basin as being for housing development; none of the plans see Limehouse as appropriate for office development; all the plans argue for the retention of the water area . . . and all the plans envisage much lower density development than that proposed . . . The Seifert scheme ignores all these points."⁵¹

Ines Newman, M Phil MRTPI
Researcher, Joint Docklands Action Group

"The Seifert scheme does not conform to the policy and aims of the statutory and non-statutory plans applicable to the Limehouse Basin area."

"The scheme is contrary to the overall objective of the London Docklands Strategic Plan . . . and the policies on employment, housing, shopping, recreation, open space and the river, conservation and the environment."

"The scheme would frustrate the achievement of the strategy of the draft Tower Hamlets Borough Plan, and would be contrary to the Plan's proposed use for the Basin, and . . . to the Plan's proposals on office development, new housing development, shopping, transport, leisure and recreation, urban landscape and conservation."

"Furthermore, what the scheme does propose cannot justify on any basis such a departure from the planning policies relating to the Basin, because the desirability of upholding these policies has not been shown to be wrong in principle or impractical as a

Sniffing glue on the Basin's quayside.



How will future generations judge the British Waterways Board's development? Dr John Robson MSc MRCP of Poplar Health Centre writes: "As a local general practitioner, I can only say that the Seifert scheme is yet another example of indifferent and poorly informed planning. I see the casualties of such schemes every day in my surgery. For children, the damage may be irremedial. Tower Hamlets has more children in care than any other Borough in Britain." (5 April 1986)

matter of fact, and because even if one were to look at the scheme on its merits, irrespective and independently of any planning considerations, the scheme does not represent the best use of the land in that it does not allow for and will actually prevent the comprehensive development of the wider Basin area, and because the mix and type of uses proposed are inappropriate."

"(Also), the scheme is contrary to the statutory objective of the London Docklands Development Corporation in that it will hinder regeneration because:

1. It is not addressed to the problems of the Limehouse area, nor have essential local interests been involved in its preparation.
2. It does not build on the characteristics and the potential of Docklands.
3. It is predominantly for luxury housing.
4. The office component and recreation component are not adequate to maximise job creation at Limehouse Basin.
5. The proposal is based on a risky market, it may fail to materialise, or may be curtailed, or may require renegotiation at some stage."⁵²

Tom Hancock, FRIBA
Consultant Architect Planner Chair, Policy Development Group, Town & Country Planning Association

Note: the Inquiry Inspector found that the two most relevant and up to date planning statements were the London Docklands Development Corporation's Limehouse Area Development Strategy and the draft Tower Hamlets Borough Plan. He stated:

"Their relevance is undeniable and the persuasiveness of their combined force considerable. This all the more so because each of them deals in detail with this Basin . . . **For any scheme to be acceptable it is considered that it should, at least, be in general conformity with such guidelines as are common to these two important documents.**"⁵³

He concluded that the Seifert application scheme was **not** in conformity with either document.

In his justification for overruling the Inspector, the Secretary of State effectively jettisoned any concept of planning, even by the Development Corporation. He said:

"(The Secretary of State) does not accept the Inspector's view that for any scheme to be acceptable it must be in general conformity with such guidelines as are common to the two most recent documents – the draft Local Plan and the Limehouse Area Development Strategy. **It is the Secretary of State's view that every application needs to be considered on its own merits.**"⁵⁴



Limehouse 1986: Can we allow the same mistakes to be made again?

DELUSIONS OF GRANDEUR

Concept

The Seifert scheme is a monolithic development. A monolithic development means: large capital outlay; high speculative risk; poor adaptability over time; insensitive to the innate physical qualities of a given site and the integration of old and new; insensitive to water interests; incompatible with a wide range of uses; insensitive to the existing resources and uses of the area; high security risk."

"Our recent heritage of city centre monolithic developments is ample evidence."⁵⁵

Ian Ritchie *Dip Arch RIBA MSIAD*
Local resident & Consultant Architect, Director of Rice Francis Ritchie

"Time and time again . . . grand schemes have been found to fail. Even when they have been implemented, like the Barbican or on a more modest scale in Brentford Dock, the results have been disappointing. In contrast, people have 'voted with their feet' for places that have developed organically; like Covent Garden and Camden Lock – and for less cost than the kind of schemes which are under consideration.

"Grand schemes, involving single developers are inherently vulnerable to upset in situations like the Docklands. Thus, in the Surrey Docks two major schemes, one involving . . . a consortium led by Seiferts as architects, failed to get off the ground despite the planning authority's support . . . It is not just bad luck or the fault of the local authority . . . It is because they follow an inappropriate development strategy . . ."

"A conventional developer, who simply wants to put up buildings and sell them, is not appropriate . . . Limehouse is an inner city area, which is very different from the kind of greenfield sites with which (the developers) are most familiar. Special skills are needed, to deal with the problems which go far beyond the experience of such conventional developers."

"Neither of the schemes appreciates the

area's true commercial potential."⁵⁶

Dr Nicholas Falk *BA (Oxon) MBA (Stanford)*
Development Consultant, Director, *URBED (Urban and Economic Development) Ltd*

"The Seifert scheme does not contain a viable development strategy for the regeneration of the Limehouse Basin."

"The monolithic and inflexible nature of the design approach will limit the available phasing options, fails to exploit the full advantages of possible integration with the surrounding areas, and may well have the effect of blighting adjacent pockets of development land."

"The scheme is unlikely to be implemented in its present form because of the underlying financial vulnerability of the blockbuster approach . . . **It would require substantial modifications in design and concept if it was ever to be treated as a viable development proposal.**"

"The likeliest scenario, if planning permission is granted, is that the project will never come to fruition as currently outlined and that the British Waterways Board will end up in a few years time with little in the way of development profits, a totally unviable stretch of water in its slimmed down version and will end up having to foot the bill for uncompleted section 52 agreements (which safeguard public amenity) with an ever increasing liability for the day to day running and maintenance of the Basin."

"The likely result will be a general relaxation of the current section 52 agreements, a further increase in public subsidy in the form of a renegotiated Derelict Land Grant, an increase in the commercial content of the scheme and finally a renegotiated deal with the British Waterways Board; an all too familiar scenario which should not be played out on the quaysides of Limehouse."⁵⁷

John Desmond *BSc (Bldg Econ) ARICS ACI Arb AMBIM*
Chartered Surveyor and Building Economist
Partner of Bernard Williams Associates

CONDUCT UNBECOMING

Process

The process by which development is generated is vitally important to the success – or failure – of that development. **The generation of the Seifert scheme has been a fiasco. It was designed without an adequate analysis of the area's problems and potential, without an adequate planning and design brief and without consultation at the right time with the appropriate parties.**

"The competition held by the British Waterways Board to select a design was . . . a complete farce; there were no proper rules or procedures to define who was eligible to enter . . . the developers were not given any brief and no detailed guidance was given as to what criteria would be used to judge the entries."

"The London Docklands Development Corporation has not used (its) powers effectively in Limehouse and instead has done no more (some would say less) than act as a normal planning authority. Despite the Seifert scheme not meeting the criticisms of . . . its own recreation consultants, or complying with its own required modifications or its own strategy recommendation, it was finally minded to grant planning permission because it had wasted almost one year, was being criticised for causing delays and thought that granting planning permission would put an end to the troublesome matter."

"The Corporation's role is to use its powers, land holdings and financial resources to 'lever' from the private sector the form, scale and rate of industrial and commercial development which leads to the lasting regeneration of Docklands. It has not done so in Limehouse."

"The Corporation should also use its powers as landlord and development control authority to ensure that developments in Docklands conform to high architectural and design standards. Again it has not done so."

"As a result the scheme fails in a great many fundamental ways."⁵⁸

Nick Wates BSc Dip (Dev Plan)
Architectural journalist and Limehouse resident

"Large scale urban schemes imposed from above on an uninformed and uninvolved locality, like the Seifert scheme, are prone to failure. They fail because basic information about the particular area is missing; detailed information which is quite often only known locally . . . The real underlying attributes of areas – the skills and qualities of the local people, their needs and aspirations, their energies – are not brought into the scheme of things."

"It is obviously important in management and organisation terms to have a broad local consensus and concurrence for a scheme which, because of large scale and the likely development programme, could span many years."

"The best way of reaching this concurrence is by a participatory process. It is therefore disconcerting to find that no effort had been made to actually involve local interest groups and voluntary organisations, local government, regional government or central government."

"Nor was there the essential series of ad hoc meetings held to bring out the necessary information on local history, skills and needs."

"By virtue of its scale and the fact that it will be imposed on the locality, the Seifert scheme will create problems. These include an underlying risk of day-to-day problems, confrontations, unhelpfulness and general dilatoriness. This can destroy effective management of a large scale scheme, and has a magnified effect on expenditure."⁵⁹

Tom Hancock Dip Arch FRIBA
Consultant Architect Planner, Chair, Policy Development Group, Town & Country Planning Association

"This is one of the most blatant examples of top down pressure being exerted to impose on the bottom . . . Not only do the Seifert proposals lack merit, but they would be an arrogant imposition on a fragile inner city area . . . An interesting array of positive local initiatives will have been stamped on and that energy will be lost or converted into active opposition."⁶⁰

Roger Matland
Director, North Kensington Amenity Trust



Cartoon by Barry Fantoni after riots at Broadwater Farm in north London, The Times, 5th October 1985.

"It is an absolute scandal that a public authority such as the British Waterways Board can proceed in a way that is so detrimental both to the immediate community and to the commercial and leisure users of the canal system."⁶¹

Peter Polish BA
Community Liaison Officer, London Docklands Development Corporation and first Chairman of the Limehouse Development Group.



The Limehouse Development Group is a non-party political, democratic, charitable organisation. Its aim is to make Limehouse a better neighbourhood in which to live and work. Its motto is "Let's build Limehouse together". Membership is open to all who live and work in the area. Policy is decided by a steering committee elected by the membership annually.

It has a full time director and part time research officer funded by the London Docklands Development Corporation.

Since its formation in 1979, the Limehouse Development Group has:

- 1 Undertaken **surveys** and arranged many **public meetings** to establish local needs and encourage public participation.
- 2 Prepared **transport proposals** which proved instrumental in stopping a road scheme which would have demolished the Blackwall Railway viaduct thereby making the construction of Docklands Light Railway an impossibility.
- 3 Co-ordinated the preparation of a **development strategy** for Limehouse Basin based on extensive participation of all affected parties.
- 4 Submitted extensive **evidence at public inquiries** into schemes for the Free Trade Wharf⁶³ (two witnesses) and Limehouse Basin (ten witnesses).
- 5 Set up a **youth club** in two disused railway arches and organised a £179,000 refurbishment scheme with the Manpower Services Commission and London Docklands Development corporation employing 32 unemployed

local people.

Assisted 2,600 council tenants on the 1960s Barley Mow Estate and the pre-war walk-up St Vincent Estate to set up **tenants associations**.

Opened a **resource centre** in a flat on the St Vincent Estate with office facilities, a meetings room, a weekly housing welfare surgery, and daily Koran classes for young Moslems.

Secured a lease on a half acre of derelict land for a **summer playscheme** and venue for community facilities.

Supported arrangements for a double decker bus converted into a **children's play palace** to visit the St Vincent Estate once a week.

Helped found the Ragged School Museum Trust which is converting a disused warehouse into the only **museum** in the East End about the East End, and will shortly be publishing "Ben's Limehouse"; memoirs of everyday life in the area more than half a century ago, when local people still enjoyed access to the River and the "most popular place was Limehouse Pier" (long since demolished).

Assisted with starting a **community forum** to improve communication between agencies operating in the area including schools, social services and the police.

Secured **traffic management improvements** on roads in the area (eg. the Limehouse Causeway).

Published a set of 32 **postcards** of historic

Left to right: A 1980 poster remains; St. Valentine's day disco, 1986; the Group's office in a council flat;





youth club under construction in railway arches; a weekly visit of the playbus.



- 14 Limehouse scenes. Prepared "Limehouse Threads", a study showing how the area could be improved for pedestrians by **careful landscaping**.
- 15 Printed and circulated regular **news bulletins** ("Limehouse in Print") to keep people informed of developments in the area.
- 16 Organised many successful barbecues, discos, bonfire celebrations, jumble sales and other **social and fund raising events**.
- 17 Planned, secured finance and obtained all approvals for the £875,000 conversion of a former ship chandlers in West India Dock Road for a **multi-purpose community facility** with space for ten community groups, training workshops, theatre, cafe, library and a Community Professional Advisory Service. Established the **Limehouse Amenity Trust**, a locally controlled company with charitable status to run the centre. Project fell through at eleventh hour because of Department of the Environment refusal to allow the Greater London Council to release the building. Other premises now being sought.
- 18 Set up Docklands Community Development Ltd as a **managing agency** for the Manpower Services Commission, to provide window cleaning, painting, gardening and security services for the elderly and infirm, and managing the construction projects mentioned above. Work for over 200 unemployed local people is being created in this way and a

- lease has been taken out on the old Poplar railway station to provide a base.
- Projects currently in hand include:
 - 19 Liaising with the Canary Wharf developers and the Development Corporation on the impact of this neighbouring massive development on the Limehouse area.
 - 20 Preparing detailed feasibility studies for major **environmental improvements** to council housing estates in the area, in some cases involving forming co-operatives with rights to buy options.
 - 21 Investigating the possibility of setting up **training schemes** and an **urban studies centre** to help people become better equipped to deal with their environmental and other problems.

Annual membership rates for the Limehouse Development Group are as follows:

Individuals – standard rate	50p
– pensioners, unemployed and under 18	25p
Families	£1
Organizations	£5

Those not eligible to become members may become "Friends of Limehouse" for £5 per year.

Membership applications, offers of assistance and requests for further information to:
Limehouse Development Group
 10 Garford House, St Vincent Estate, London E14
 8AL Telephone 01 515 1480



Limehouse Basin, 1986: the next project?

NOTES AND SOURCES

The Free Trade Wharf, foolishly demolished in 1985 (see note 63).



Copies of the evidence submitted to the 1983 public inquiry on Limehouse Basin, as well as a wealth of other information on the Limehouse area can be found at:

Tower Hamlets Local History Library

Central Library, Bancroft Road, London E1 4DQ Tel 01 980 4366 ext. 47
The scheme chosen by the British Waterways Board for Limehouse Basin is by developer Hunting Gate Homes Limited with architects R Seifert & Partners. For the sake of clarity and consistency, this scheme has generally been referred to throughout this document as "the Seifert scheme", the term most commonly used in the press. References in the quotations to "the Hunting Gate scheme", "the British Waterways Board scheme", "the application scheme" or "the developer's scheme" have been changed accordingly. References to "both schemes" or "neither scheme" have also been edited out since they referred to the rival scheme submitted by Grosvenor Estates and Wates Built Homes which was also examined at the same Inquiry. Although of some interest, the Grosvenor Wates scheme has not been dealt with at any length to avoid confusion. Many of the criticisms of the Seifert scheme apply equally to the Grosvenor/Wates scheme. The Inspector recommended that it too should be refused outline planning permission but was again overruled by the Secretary of State.

Phrases in quotations such as "in my opinion" have also been edited out. All emphasis in the quotations is that of the editor.

All references in the notes below relate to written Proofs of Evidence submitted to the Public Inquiry, unless otherwise stated.

- 1 Report to the Secretary of State for the Environment, paras 64, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 76, 77.
- 2 The "architectural concept of the development" according to Lawrence Winter of R. Seijert & Partners. Para 6.01.
- 3 Report to the Secretary of State for the Environment, paras 210/43, 217, 220, 221, 224 and Report on Free Trade Wharf Public Inquiry para 172 (the Inspector found that his findings on office development at the Free Trade Wharf applied also to Limehouse Basin).
- 4 Like most London neighbourhoods, 'Limehouse' has no precise boundaries. The population figures quoted are based on the area defined in the London Docklands Development Corporation Area Development Strategy: between Commercial Road and the River Thames from Rotherhithe Tunnel to West Ferry Road. Many local people consider Limehouse stretches north of Commercial Road. Ethnic groups include people originating from Pakistan, Bangladesh, China, Vietnam, Africa, Turkey, Cyprus and the West Indies. No detailed breakdown is available but on the largest estate - St Vincents - 48% of the population is from the New Commonwealth or Pakistan ('Revitalise St Vincents', Community Land Use, 1986).
- 5 1981 Census, Blackwall and Shadwell polling districts and Greater London Quarterly Unemployment Reports.
- 6 London Docklands Development Corporation Area Development Strategy, 1982.
- 7 Greater London Transportation Survey, 1981 (Tower Hamlets figures).
- 8 Greater London Transportation Survey, 1981 (Tower Hamlets figures).
- 9 'Revitalise St Vincents', Community Land Use, 1986.
- 10 Paras 2.14, 2.4.
- 11 Video 'What future for Limehouse?', Limehouse Development Group, 1983.
- 12 Limehouse Area Development Strategy, 1982, paras 7.8, 7.9, 7.11, 7.31.
- 13 Morning Chronicle, 2 Aug 1820.
- 14 Letter to Tower Hamlets Council, 8 Aug 1983. See Nick Banks Appendix.

- 15 Paras 3.23, 4.7.
- 16 Para 3.3.1.
- 17 Regional Recreation Strategy, November 1982. See Nick Banks para 10.12
- 18 Para 8.1.
- 19 Paras 7.12, 7.21.
- 20 Para 221.
- 21 The Limehouse Development Group's development strategy for the Limehouse Basin has been co-ordinated by UR BED (Urban and Economic Development) Ltd with Ian Ritchie Architects. The team which submitted the 1981 submission to the British Waterways Board included Bernard Williams Associates (chartered surveyors), J T Developments Ltd (developers), Savills (estate agents), Peter Rice in association with Ove Arup & Partners (civil and structural engineers), Land Use Consultants (landscape architects), the Cambridge School of Architecture, Caroline Lwin Architect and Bovis Homes (housebuilders). Subsequent studies were carried out by Tom Hancock (Consultant Architect Planner), the London Business School and London University's Unit for Architectural Studies.
- 22 Firms committed to specific projects in 1981 included J & R Roof Ltd, Manuden Ltd, Abbey National Housing Association, Circle 33 Housing Association and Bovis Homes. Details of the Proposals can be found in the following Limehouse Development Group reports: 'An Appraisal and Development Strategy for Limehouse Basin', October 1979; 'What we need', May 1980; 'Draft Brief', May 1980; 'A Strategy for Limehouse', June 1981 (in 3 parts - 'Report', 'Initial Design Proposals', 'Appendices' - subsequently produced in summary version); 'Technical Appendix', October 1981; 'Outline Planning Proposal Limehouse - First Draft', September 1983; 'Limehouse Threads', March 1984.



The British Waterways Board's lockside cottages in Narrow Street, empty for eighteen years despite many offers to buy or rent.

- 23 See Nick Banks' Inquiry evidence for history of Tower Hamlets negotiations.
- 24 Covering letter enclosing "An appraisal and development strategy for Limehouse Basin", 10 Oct 1979.
- 25 See Nick Wates' Inquiry evidence for history of Limehouse Development Group negotiations.
- 26 Architects' Journal, 10 Feb 1982. Letter from former Chairman to Town & Country Planning Association, 4 Feb 1982.
- 27 Wates Limited, Press Release 29 April 1982. See intro to notes for explanation of Grosvenor/Wates involvement.
- 28 Nick Banks para 6.2 and Appendix 2.
- 29 The Secretary of State's reasons for overruling his Inspector are contained in his 11-page Decision Letter to the British Waterways Board dated 23 August 1985 (DOE reference GLP/5031/219/46 and GLP/5031/21/99). It appears to have taken 14 months to draft. The logic of his argument is hard to follow, but it seems that he simply "disagrees" with the Inspector on any issue critical of the scheme, and that he thinks "the benefits to be derived from these proposals outweigh any disadvantages". **The "benefits", however, are not considered in relation to any possible alternative but to the current derelict state of the area.**

St. Anne's Limehouse, designed by Nicholas Hawksmoor and consecrated in 1730. Restoration programme well underway with funds from the London Docklands Development Corporation amongst others. Over quarter of a million pounds still needed.



For example, on the design and public access issue he says: "The Secretary of State is of the opinion that nothing in the adjoining or nearby developments establishes a pattern of heights or forms to which the proposed schemes might be expected to relate. Similarly, the rundown state of the area and the lack of any consistent scale of buildings in surrounding areas suggest to the Secretary of State that either scheme could be carried out without detrimentally affecting either the character of the area or the listed buildings therein. The Secretary of State notes the advantage the proposals would bring of giving public access to a site where none now exists and of providing access to the riverside. The Secretary of State considers that the Basin's development in the way proposed, by the applicants - would in this respect enhance the amenity of the area".

Is the Secretary of State for the Environment saying that, in a rundown area, any development is acceptable?

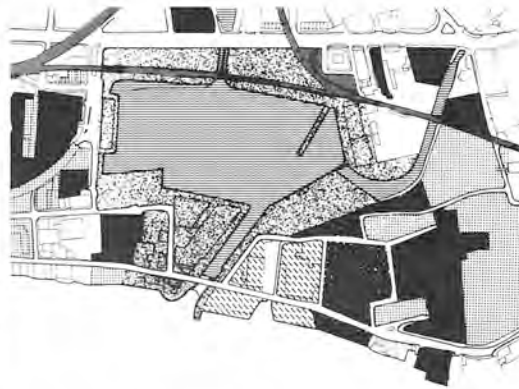
- 30 Paras 2.23, 2.24, 2.25, 2.29, 4.4, 4.5, 4.7, 4.10. Appendix 3.
- 31 Para 4.3.
- 32 Appendix 3.
- 33 Para 4.2.
- 34 Para 6.4.
- 35 Paras 5, 6, 7, 8, 9.
- 36 Paras 2.2, 2.3, 3.7, 3.8.
- 37 Page 6.
- 38 Para 10.1 and 'Objections to the Hunting Gate Proposals' paras 2, 7.
- 39 Para 2.14.
- 40 Paras 10.08, 15.01, 15.03, 15.04.

The Barley Mow Estate, constructed by the Greater London Council in the 1960's using the same concrete panel system as at Ronan Point.



One of Limehouse's six Chinese restaurants. The area was once the heart of London's Chinese community.

- 41 Paras 14.1, 14.25, 14.26.
- 42 Paras 7.07, 7.08, 7.15, 15.05.
- 43 Paras 2.3, 2.5, 2.6, 2.7, 2.12, 2.17, 2.20, 2.21.
- 44 Paras 6.1, 6.2, 6.13, 7.10, 8.3, 8.5.
- 45 Paras 6.15, 7.5, 7.6, 7.8.
- 46 Para 5.26.
- 47 Paras 3.3, 3.6, 3.7, 3.8, 3.9, 3.10, 3.11, 3.12, 4.3, 4.5, 5.7.
- 48 Paras 7.1, 7.2, 7.5.
- 49 Page 12.
- 50 Page 15.10.
- 51 Para 2.17.
- 52 Paras 2.21, 2.22, 2.26, 2.54, 5.1.
- 53 Para 2.14.
- 54 Decision letter para 10.
- 55 Para 6.1.
- 56 Paras 2.6, 2.8, 3.5, 3.13, 4.8, 4.9.
- 57 Paras 3.3, 5.7, 6.2, 7.1, 7.5, 7.6.
- 58 Paras 3.4, 7.1, 7.2, 8.2, 8.15, 8.16, 8.17, 9.1.
- 59 Paras 3.16, 3.18, 3.19, 3.20, 3.22.
- 60 Letter to Inspector, 16 Dec 1983
- 61 Para 3.9.
- 62 Circular letter from Graham Avory, Senior Press and Publicity Officer, 20.3.1986.



Land ownership. Coordination of publicly owned land, much of it derelict or under-used, is the first step in turning vision into reality.

KEY (Data 1984)

- 1 British Waterways Board (Water)
- 2 British Waterways Board (land)
- 3 Tower Hamlets Council
- 4 Greater London Council
- 5 Central Electricity Generating Board
- 6 Limehouse Paper Board Mills
- 7 British Rail

63 The Free Trade Wharf is another example of how the development of Limehouse is going badly wrong. Until recently, a unique enclave of docklands warehouses stood on this 5½ acre, publicly owned, riverside site. Proposals by local developer Rae Hoffenberg for restoring them for a wide range of residential and commercial uses were ignored and the site was sold unconditionally in 1981 to developers Gablecross Projects Ltd for less than £1 million. After falling out with RIBA Gold Medalist, Richard Rogers (the architects recommended by the Development Corporation), Gablecross appointed the small Banbury practice of Robert Atkins Howard Gatling. They then applied for planning permission for an office block (100,000 square feet) and two structures shaped somewhat like ziggurats, or terraced pyramids, 11 storeys high and containing 418 luxury flats for sale. Tower Hamlets Council, the Greater London Council, the Limehouse Development Group and many others objected. A public inquiry was held in 1983 and, in one of the most damning reports since 1947, the Inspector strongly urged that planning permission be refused. **He concluded that it was the wrong place for offices, that a broader mix of uses would be more desirable; that the design was "totally out of sympathy with the character of the development along the river frontage"; that the housing blocks were of "excessive height" and "unsympathetic shape"; they showed "blatant disregard" to nearby buildings; and they would "overpower and dominate" an adjacent park "seriously detracting from its present quality and character and from its enjoyment by the public".**

As at Limehouse Basin the Inspector was overruled by Environment Secretary Patrick Jenkin. Attempts to challenge the legality of Jenkin's decision failed in the High Court and Court of Appeal, although Lord Justice Oliver made it clear that the outcome would have been different had he been able to rule on the merits of the case. The site has now changed hands several times and is worth over £5 million, even though no construction has yet taken place. Evidence and experience elsewhere has shown that the renovated warehouses could have provided a far more stimulating, attractive and socially relevant urban environment for almost half the cost. They have been demolished.

T H E
L I M E H O U S E

Petition



In view of the overwhelming evidence that:

- A the development currently proposed for Limehouse Basin in London's docklands will prevent the proper regeneration both of that area and of London's waterways, and that
- B there are far better viable alternatives.

We urge the British Waterways Board to abandon the scheme by Hunting Gate Homes Limited and R Seifert & Partners and to start working in partnership with all interested parties to make Limehouse a national showpiece of inner city regeneration.

NAME

ADDRESS

NAME	ADDRESS

Please circulate this form. Make photocopies if necessary. Completed forms and requests for more copies should be sent to: The Limehouse Development Group, 10 Garford House, St Vincent Estate, London E14 8AL Telephone 01 515 1480

The Limehouse Development Group is a voluntary organisation with slender resources. Contributions of any kind would be greatly appreciated.

M A N Y T H A N K S

The Limehouse Development Group would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who have so generously given their time to help the Group.

Special thanks to these organisations:

ADG (Property Services) Ltd, Abbey Housing Association, Abbey National Building Society, Albany Video, Alpha Grove, Association of Island Communities, Barley Mow Estate Old People's Club, Barley Mow Tenants Assn, Bernard Williams Associates, Bovis Homes, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation Cambridge School of Architecture, Care for St Anne's, Causeway Youth Project, Chinese Welfare Project, Chrysalis Architects, Circle 33 Housing Association, Community Land Use, Community Transport, Cyril Jackson Community Group, Cyril Jackson School, Docklands Forum, Duffy Eley Giffone Worthington, East London Marine Venture, Eastern City Canal Ferries, Terry Farrell Partnership, Fun Runner, Greater London Council, Greater London Industrial Archaeology and Narrow Boat Trust, Hawksmoor Housing Co-operative, Joint Docklands Action Group, Inland Waterways Association, Isle of Dogs Youth Club, J T Developments Ltd, Land Use Consultants, Limehouse Club, Limehouse Paperboard Mills, Limehouse & Ratcliffe Road Action Group, London Business School, MacCormac Jamieson and Pritchard Architects, Manuden Limited, North East London Polytechnic School of Architecture, North Kensington Amenity Trust, Ove Arup and Partners, Ragged School Museum Trust, Regents Canal Group, Ian Ritchie Architects, J & R Roof Ltd, Safe Neighbourhood Unit, St Vincent Tenants Association (especially Barbara, Rose, Smella, Martin & Paddy), Savills, Shadwell Basin Project, Shell Better Britain Campaign Tower Hamlets Council, Tower Hamlets Environment Trust, Town & Country Planning Association, Transport on Water, URBED (Urban & Economic Development) Limited, University of London.

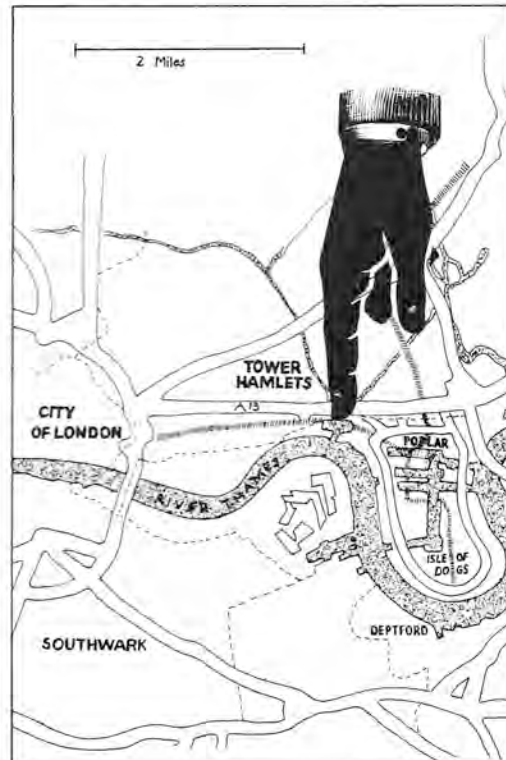
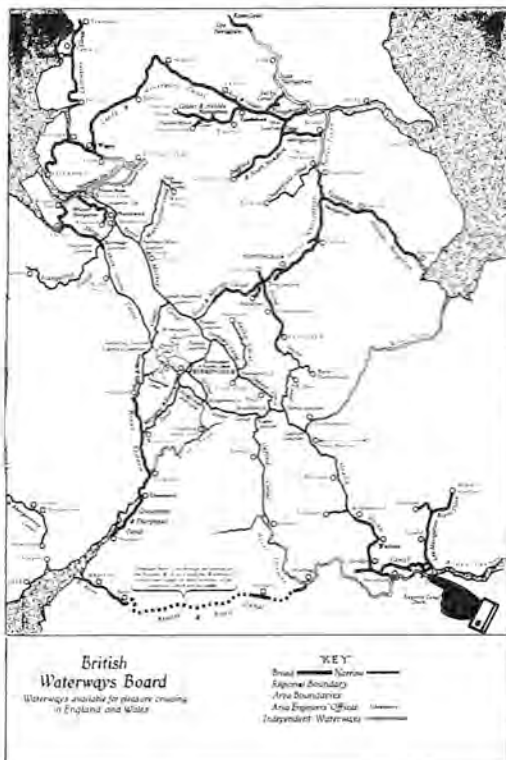
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PHOTOGRAPH CREDITS

Doug Firth: p4 (Peter Gibbs), p5 (Shane Reese); Charles Knevitt: p2 Prince of Wales; Caroline Lwin: p14; Network: p2 (Lord Scarman), p3 (Tom King, Kenneth Baker); R Seifert & Partners: p4 (model); Nick Wates: p2 (background), p13, p20, p21 (top), p24 (top left), p26. All others are by Mark Edwards.

Limehouse Basin: the gateway to England's canal system.



THE
LIMEHOUSE

Petition

THE LIMEHOUSE DEVELOPMENT GROUP

in association with the
TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ASSOCIATION