

## Inner and outer London: a tale of two cities?

Outer London is important to the future success of the wider city; 60% of Londoners live there and 40% of the London's jobs are there. It is the location of key infrastructure for London and the nation. Outer London cannot be considered in isolation from the centre but the relationship is multifaceted.

There are common issues across outer London; congestion, the quality of public transport and other public services and the health of local High Streets but there is a danger in focusing on the need for intervention without fully understanding what already works in the different places. London's mayoral candidates cannot afford to ignore outer London but there are no obvious policy prescriptions.

Many people continue to commute from outer to central London but many more journeys take place within outer London. These complex patterns of commuting are hard to satisfy through public transport. Some parts of outer London remain white and wealthy, other parts are now home to successful ethnic groups - with some neighbourhoods having 'majority-minority' populations. In other areas communities are either under some stress or perceive themselves to be so. Some parts of outer London have adapted successfully to considerable change but in other areas change is feared.

### Policy implications

- Suburbia may not be fashionable but it is often successful and adaptable; 'people like living there'.
- A fine grain response is needed that recognizes the variety of outer London.
- Some outer London neighbourhoods have successfully adapted to significant demographic change; some feel threatened by their proximity to central London, others derive much direct benefit from their closeness.
- Outer London offers an adaptable, flexible but poorly understood built form.
- The economic relationship between outer and central London is variable.
- The London Plan should allow for locally distinct solutions; outer London needs nurturing not prescription from the Mayor.
- Local authorities have an important role to play in providing a fine grain analysis but they must also recognise the important role of outer London as part of the wider city.

### This briefing

This briefing has been prepared by Alan Mace, lecturer in Urban Planning Studies, LSE, drawing on contributions made at a joint LSE London/Centre for London at Demos event. The speakers included Will McKee, chair of the Outer London Commission, Paul Hildreth, Centre for London at Demos, Mark Lucas, head of inward investment and enterprise, London Borough of Redbridge, Alan Mace, Andrew Barry-Pursell, head of the London Plan Team, GLA and Laura Vaughan, leader of the Adaptable Suburbs Project at University College, London.



## Inner and outer London: a tale of two cities?

The pressures of globalisation and city marketing have tended to focus attention away from suburban areas – Mayors across the world have been accused of being ‘zone one’ leaders, but addressing the concerns of the suburbs is no easy task. Outer London encompasses a huge variety of place specific and community specific issues and opportunities. Despite this variety, there are some relatively common issues. Access to public transport, congestion, the health of local High Streets and the quality of new buildings tend to transcend particular places but each will have a local flavour. The work of the Mayor’s Outer London Commission is pertinent including its focus on how to secure employment opportunities in outer London and its questions about building density and parking standards. It is seeking to build on what is already happening as people shop, work and socialize across multiple sub-centres within and beyond Greater London.

### ● Understanding outer London

Nevertheless, outer London is not well understood. The setting up of the Outer London Commission may suggest that the Mayor believes that outer London feels ignored by policy but some parts of outer London may actually want less intervention. There is a need to go beyond the work of the Commission to understand outer London at a fine grain and to avoid assuming that suburbia is a problem. A better starting point is that in many respects outer London is a success story and that it could provide lessons on successful adaptation to change. This success is often based on ‘invisible’ spaces, such as garages and backlands and ‘invisible’ uses such as small business, workshops and offices .

There are examples where successful strategies have been adopted which recognise the importance of the individuality of different suburbs. These include areas providing a high quality environment such as Wanstead, those that had undergone renovation (and arguably gentrification) as in Willesden Green. Colindale is an area that successfully included a range of functions from museums and major employment to high density urban housing renewal. There are still areas under some stress, especially where traffic dominates such as in Seven King’s.

### ● Outer London’s communities

An understanding of the communities in outer London is however important in drawing up strategies. Many have a strong sense of belonging to their neighbourhoods which is based on their history. Research in three study areas, Beckenham, Queensbury and Collier Row shows how each area’s own history feeds through into the present day. By understanding how people develop and maintain a sense of belonging in their neighbourhood helps us to understand both what is valued and how change can be successfully accommodated. Queensbury is now home to a successful and well integrated British/Asian population who have developed an extensive community infrastructure (including places of worship and specialist services). Many of this new generation of suburbanites are also some of its most loyal – intending to stay in the area over the longer term so further securing residential stability in outer London - see table below.

Length of time resided in present home compared to England: questionnaire responses				
	Beckenham	Collier Row	Queensbury	England*
Less than 1 year	7%	5%	1%	7%
1-10 years	33%	29%	31%	39%
More than 10 years	59%	65%	67%	54%

\*England data: Survey of English Housing

## ● The role of transport links

Transport connections have been very important for the development of suburbs and they still have a profound influence on the perceptions and lifestyle of their residents. Beckenham is still connected by some of the first suburban rail services to the City and to work in the financial sector and supporting services. Collier Row is dominated by the road network and, now, links to the M25. How people relate to central London and the City varies greatly from location to location. In some instances the centre is an asset while in others the centre is seen more as a threat. For some access to international 'high' culture and well paid City careers enhances their experience of outer London. In other areas central London is used less for social and work purposes and, moreover, represents the threat of change.

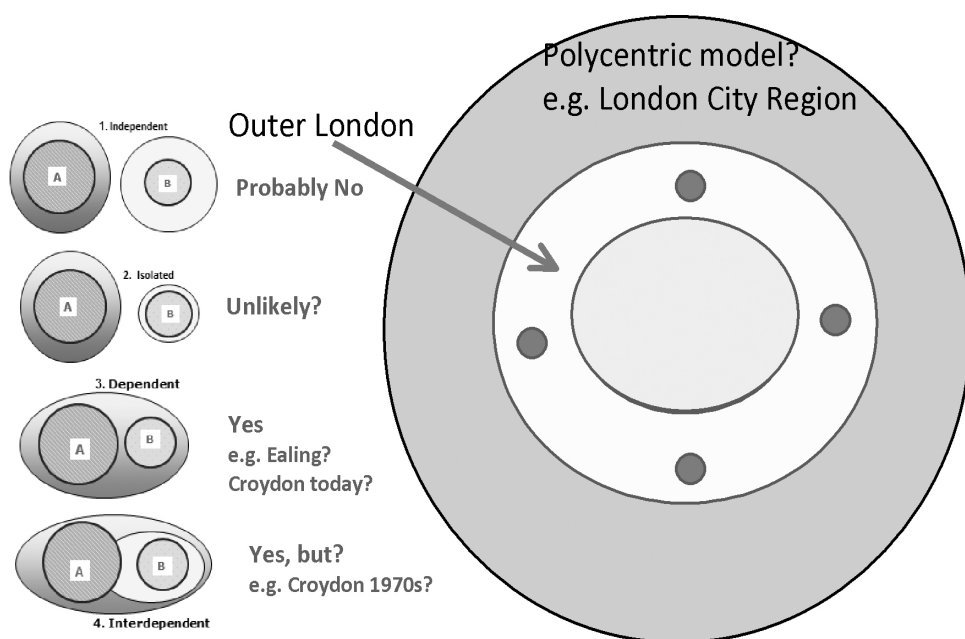
## ● Economic relationships – dependency v independency

The economic relationship between the neighbourhoods of outer London and the centre is complex. Building on his work in other city regions with the Centre for Cities and the Work Foundation as part of their City Relationships project for the Northern Way, Paul Hildreth shows that while outer London is part of the Greater London area, London's housing and economic reach stretches far beyond its borders. London is at the heart of a 'mega-region' covering much of the south and south-east of England. Centres within the mega-region relate differently to central London. Hildreth has identified three possible relationships which could apply to outer London neighbourhoods in their relationships with inner London:

- independent - strong separate commuting patterns into respective centres
- isolated - limited separate commuting into respective centres
- dependent - commuting into respective centres and between centres

In contrast to Manchester which demonstrates a relatively mono centric pattern, London is a mega city region which displays complex patterns of interaction between multiple centres. The economic relationship between outer and central London varies from one suburb to another – and over time, the level of dependency has changed. Areas such as Ealing and modern day Croydon may now have a dependent relationship while previously Croydon may have once been more self-sustaining with an interdependent relationship; see chart below. With this complex and variable picture, policy makers need to develop a better understanding of who is moving where, the flows between different centres and the economic forces driving centralisation and dispersal.

### Outer London - dependency versus independence is it being squeezed between the city core and rest of city-region?



## ● **Conclusions**

Outer London has sometimes been seen as at worst a rejection of the city and at best as semi-detached from the centre. The suburbs have been depicted as problematic, unsustainable and socially exclusive, and as static places worthy of little attention. However outer London plays an important part in the overall success of London; it is home to numerous employment and retail sub-centres, it houses much of Greater London's population and is home to key infrastructure. Much of outer London is successful because it is flexible and adaptable; this applies to both its fabric and its communities. Often unremarkable, the built form has shown an ability to be adapted over time to new uses and changing economic circumstances. Much can be learnt from outer London's suburbs. Considerable changes in the demographic of communities have been successfully accommodated. Some areas are successful others are under stress.

There are considerable differences across outer London making it difficult to speak of a single outer London. If there is a tale of two cities to be told it is as much about the differences between the various parts of outer London as it is between the centre and the edge.

## **Sources and further reading**

The presentations which formed the basis for this briefing can be found at <http://www2.lse.ac.uk/geographyAndEnvironment/research/london/events/londonDevWorkshops/newlondonenvironment/outerLondon/Home.aspx>

The event is also reported on by Demos <http://www.demos.co.uk/events/the-bigsuburbansocietycommunityidentity-and-amenity-in-outer-london>

Adaptable Suburbs Project	<a href="http://www.ucl.ac.uk/adaptablesuburbs/">http://www.ucl.ac.uk/adaptablesuburbs/</a>
Centre for London at Demos	<a href="http://www.demos.co.uk/projects/thecentreforlondon">http://www.demos.co.uk/projects/thecentreforlondon</a>
City Relationships	<a href="http://www.centreforcities.org/cityrelationships">http://www.centreforcities.org/cityrelationships</a>
City - Suburbs Barnet	<a href="http://www.barnet.gov.uk/city-suburbs">http://www.barnet.gov.uk/city-suburbs</a>
GLA London Plan	<a href="http://www.london.gov.uk/thelondonplan/">http://www.london.gov.uk/thelondonplan/</a>
JRF sustainable suburbs	<a href="http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/F219.pdf">http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/F219.pdf</a>
Outer London Commission	<a href="http://www.london.gov.uk/olc/">http://www.london.gov.uk/olc/</a>
Urbed sustainable suburbs	<a href="http://www.urbed.com/pp/06Sustainable_Suburbs.pdf">http://www.urbed.com/pp/06Sustainable_Suburbs.pdf</a>
Over the Edge: Town Centres and the London Economy	
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