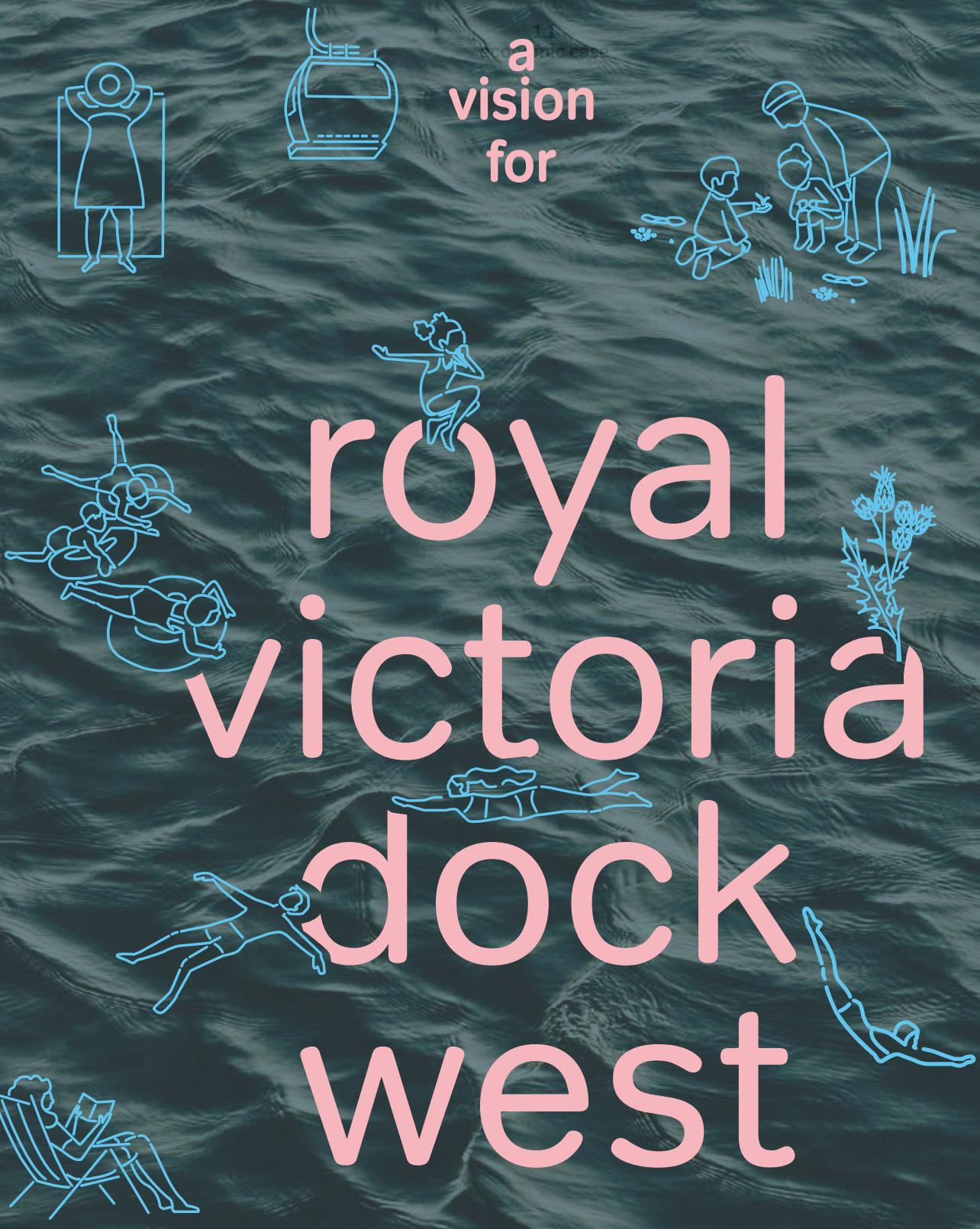
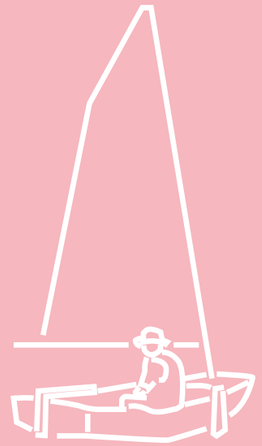
a vision for

royal victoria dock west



Royal Docks Waterways

January 2026



Executive Summary

Perspectives of the future RVDW, floating wellness, floating park and floating residential design concepts.

This report sets out a deliverable Vision for the future of Royal Victoria Dock West (RVDW) as a piece of social infrastructure and a public destination. It builds on extensive preliminary work already undertaken by Royal Docks Waterways, the Royal Docks Team and the London Borough of Newham.

Delivery of the Vision will make a significant impact to quality of life in the Royal Docks and the London Borough of Newham, as well as supporting Royal Docks Waterways' activities and enhancing the place as a visitor destination.

The 12 hectares of RVDW, properly activated, would add 5% to Newham's current publicly accessible open space total, effectively transforming the Dock into a waterborne park for the city. Added to this, there is a real opportunity to support the delivery of new homes in the borough and to make a significant positive impact in terms of biodiversity.

RVDW is the most visible and accessible part of the Royal Docks area, and is the ideal location for more intense and lively public life in the Docks. Proposals to enhance public life and improve access to the water - for all - need to be of exceptional quality, carefully designed to create a lively but coherent public space, and to balance operational, economic, social and environmental needs. This document sets out a vision and framework, built on extensive stakeholder dialogue, for how this should be achieved.

After the Vision is established, the document then shows how an evaluation process led to choosing three Priority Projects.
A long list of projects were assessed against alignment with the economic, social and environmental cases for the vision, as well as local and regional policy alignment.
The Priority Projects receive further analysis and recommendations regarding design and delivery, for Royal Docks Waterways and its partners to develop further.

The Priority Projects are:

Floating wellness - a wellness centre, including lido-style swimming facilities and complementary uses, which will help get everybody into the water safely.

Floating park - a programme to enhance biodiversity and public water access across Royal Victoria Dock West.

Floating residential - an area for high quality mooring infrastructure and facilities to create a long-term residential environment.

The Local Planning Authority, London Borough of Newham, has been engaged and it is supportive of the high-level Vision for RVDW. It has encouraged Royal Docks Waterways to set up formal pre-application advice meetings as the Priority Projects develop.

The Priority Projects have been considered and conceived together as part of a masterplan approach to ensure that the individual projects relate to each other and the rest of the water as part of a considered overall approach. In total these interventions would occupy around 4.6% of the waterspace of the Royal Docks, dramatically enhancing access whilst maintaining openness and preserving the docks' capacity to host large-scale cultural and sporting events.

The Vision ends with a practical sequence of Next Steps to move these projects, and the overarching Vision, towards delivery subject to ongoing dialogue and consultation. The ambition is for people to benefit from the Vision before 2030.

Introduction

This Vision for RVDW has been commissioned by Royal Docks Waterways as the next step in activating the dock's waterspace and surrounding landscapes to create the most welcoming and democratic public space in London.

Part of the wider regeneration of the Royal Docks, Royal Victoria Dock is at an exciting moment in its history. A marvel of Victorian engineering, when it opened in 1855 as Victoria Dock, it was the first London dock to be specifically designed to accommodate large-scale steam ships, the first to use hydraulic power and the first to be directly connected to the national rail network. Today, it is home to City Hall and surrounded by substantial growth and regeneration, from the river-side masterplan of Thameside West, the new Silvertown Tunnel and the ongoing development at Silvertown. Thanks to new and improved transport connections, notably the arrival of the Elizabeth Line at Custom House and the IFS Cable Car, which delivers travellers to the edge of the dock, Royal Victoria Dock is ripe for enhanced public uses.

The focus of this Vision is on Royal Victoria Dock West (RVDW), defined as the water body from the western end of the dock to the Royal Victoria Dock high-level footbridge. For the foreseeable future, this is the most publicly accessible and visible part of the Royal Docks water and – as set out in the Royal Docks Placemaking Strategy – is the ideal location for public-facing, family-friendly and leisure-orientated uses.

This Vision represents the next step in delivering upon this commitment. The document aims to present a coherent series of proposals and recommendations which will build consensus around the 'way forward' for RVDW and allow Royal Docks Waterways and its array of stakeholders and partners to work in a collaborative way to enhance RVDW for all. The Vision has been authored by consultants DK-CM and Fourth Street, working closely with the development team at Royal Docks Waterways who have commissioned the report, and with the support and insight of colleagues at the Royal Docks Team.

A place with a growing reputation for leisure, focused upon City Hall. (Image: Emma Nathan and Royal Docks Team)

An engine room of culture - and a unique body of water for cultural programming. (Image: Milo Robinson and Royal Docks Team)

A place of innovation where new ideas are prototyped. (Image: Kiron Ponnath and the Royal Docks Team)

Part of the Royal Docks' London-wide unique sports offer, and a place of major sporting events. (Image: Kiron Ponnath and the Royal Docks Team)

1

Context

This section sets out the context for change in RVDW, setting out constraints and opportunities in the present and immediate future.

WHO'S WHO

Royal Docks Waterways

The water within the docks, and some small parcels of land at key points, is part of a long lease to Royal Docks Waterways (the new trading name for the Royal Docks Management Authority, or RoDMA). Royal Docks Waterways is a not-for-profit organisation, and is responsible for the management of the water and its supporting infrastructure. Royal Docks Waterways works closely with local landowners, stakeholders, water-users and the Royal Docks Team to encourage and support the use of the Royal Docks. This Vision has been commissioned by Royal Docks Waterways.

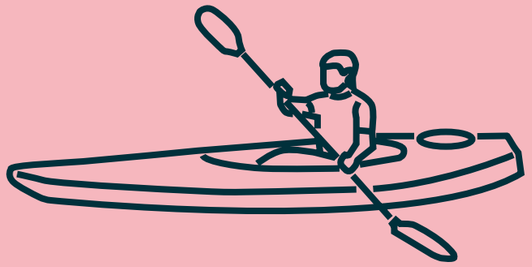
The Royal Docks Team

The freehold of the Royal Docks is owned by the Greater London Authority (GLA) and this is overseen by the Royal Docks Team. The Royal Docks Team is a partnership between the Mayor of London and the Mayor of Newham. The team is responsible for steering the regeneration of the Royal Docks, driving significant levels of inward investment, and supporting the delivery of 36,000 new homes and 55,000 new jobs across the area.

London Borough of Newham

The wider Royal Docks regeneration area and therefore the entirety of RVDW is within the London Borough of Newham. This means that it is the Local Planning Authority, whose policies will govern future planning applications. Its strategies and priorities around public health, economic development and a just climate transition are also highly relevant for RVDW.

1.1
The Royal Docks



Once London’s gateway to world trade, the Royal Docks in the London Borough of Newham is one of the UK’s most important regeneration stories.

Today the Royal Docks - focused upon 210 acres of open water in the London Borough Newham - is re-emerging as a commercial and cultural hub of global significance, a growing home for business and culture in East London, and an exciting new waterfront place for London and the south east.

As London’s only enterprise zone and home to the Mayor of London, Excel London, and the University of East London, the Docks present a unique offer for business and a rapidly growing ecosystem for industry and innovation. A key development in recent years has been a dramatic increase in connectivity, thanks to a new Elizabeth Line station at Custom House plus London’s only cable car, the new Silvertown tunnel, and a new Thames Clipper pier. Since the late 1980s London City Airport has brought international connections back to the Docks’ doorstep.

In the context of the wider Royal Docks, Royal Victoria is home to City Hall, Excel London, the IFS Cloud Cable Car, Expressway, Good Hotel and Sunborn London.
The neighbourhood enjoys riverside views towards the O2, Canary Wharf and the City, and has become a focal point for London’s shift east. It is undergoing transformative and exciting change. The following are some highlights:

- 7,000 homes in the pipeline, a new DLR station, new primary school & nursery, and a new 4-acre Thames-side park.
- A growing waterfront and cultural offer, and better connections to the Thames & River Lea.
- Increased watersports and recreational facilities.
- A growing creative workspace community.
- The Silvertown Tunnel, which opened in 2025.
- Excel London contributes £4.6bn to the London economy and welcomes 4m+ visitors a year.
- Excel London has recently completed a 25,000m2 extension to the venue, including new public realm.
- Excel London is completing the Immerse London development, associated public activation along the dock edge, and improved public realm. This will increase visitors to the area by circa 2-3m annually, on top of existing visitor numbers.

Transformation in the Royal Docks is guided by the Royal Docks Team's Delivery Plan, available here: www.royaldocks.london/media/RDDeliveryPlan.pdf

Visualisations of emerging development.

Top: Thameside West
Bottom: Silvertown

London Borough of Newham

The Royal Docks form a large part of the south of the London Borough of Newham, in East London.

Newham is one of London's youngest, most diverse and fastest growing boroughs:

- The population is 351,000 in the latest 2021 census, 14% growth over the preceding decade, with 37% of residents 0-25 years old.
- It is the most ethnically diverse borough in London, with 70% of its residents belonging to Black, Asian, or other ethnically diverse communities
- It is a nationally-significant growth story, with a 21% increase in jobs since 2018 (4th highest in London)
- Its London Plan target is to deliver 47,000 homes over the 2019 to 2028 period and 10,000 jobs in the office and industrial sector by 2038

As with many other London boroughs, Newham faces economic and environmental challenges, some more acutely than other parts of the city:

- More than 30% of residents are paid below the London Living Wage, with the average pay in 2022 £578 / week, compared to a London average of £645
- Green space only covers 10 per cent of Newham, compared with 39 per cent for London as a whole
- Newham residents are exposed to higher particulate pollution than in any other London borough. Newham has the highest death rate attributable to air pollution in England.

For more information about Newham and the council's economic, social and environmental plans:

- Newham Growth Plan (https://www.newham.gov.uk/downloads/file/9922/newham-growth-plan)
- Newham's Cultural Strategy (https://www.newham.gov.uk/downloads/file/7117/building-newhams-creative-future)
- Community Wealth Building Agenda (https://www.newham.gov.uk/downloads/file/536/communitywealthbuilding)

1.2
Royal Victoria Dock West

RVDW is the most public, accessible and visible part of the Royal Docks, and it is ready for improvements on the water.

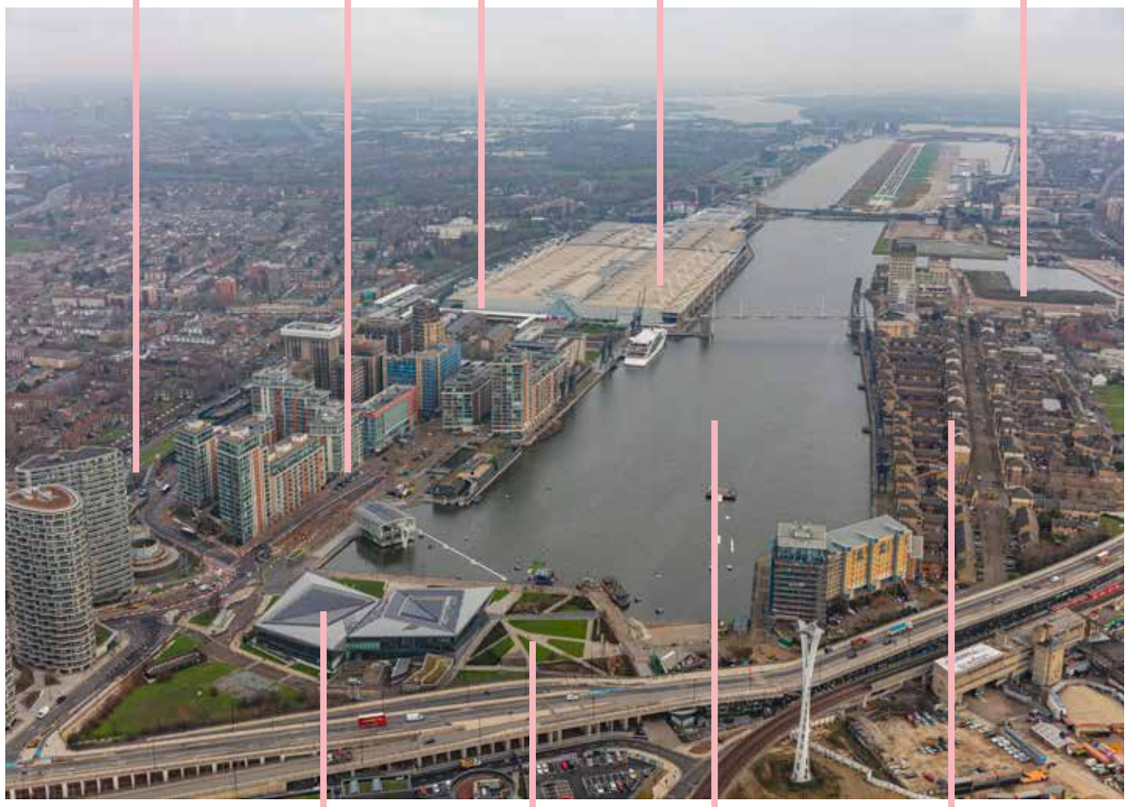
A moment's walk from Royal Victoria DLR station.

Central London within easy reach thanks to new Elizabeth Line connection.

Development at Silvertown will see thousands of new homes.

An array of hospitality uses associated with Excel London and other activity.

Excel London, an international exhibition and conference centre. now including 25,000 m^2 expansion to the east.



Public landscapes ready for activation and greater public use.

Britannia Village, an established residential community.

City Hall: a new home for the Mayor of London, the GLA and the Greater London Assembly.

More than 12 hectares of largely uninterrupted and inaccessible water.

Aerial view taken 2026.

1.3 Policy

The Vision for RVDW is designed to align with the particular policy context in which the Royal Docks sit.

This Vision for RVDW has been produced in alignment with wider policy objectives set out by the Mayor of London and the London Borough of Newham, in particular:

London Plan (Mayor of London, 2021)

The 2021 London Plan includes policies (SI14, SI16, SI17, G1, G4, G5, G6 and G7) that provide a stronger steer than previous versions of the plan for on-water and waterside development, emphasising that waterways should not be used as an extension of developable land and should only support water-related uses.

London Growth Plan (Mayor of London and London Councils, 2025)

This aims to restore productivity growth to an average of two per cent a year over the next decade, making London's economy £107bn larger in 2035, and to help create over 150,000 good jobs by 2028. Royal Docks is featured in the plan as a key place for London's growth.

Local Plan (London Borough of Newham [LBN])

At the time of writing, the London Borough of Newham's Local Plan is undergoing a 'refresh' process.

Of particular note are emerging plan priorities regarding 'Green and Water Spaces' (GWS2-3) and protecting and enhancing the water for cultural, sporting, educational and community related uses.

Supporting Newham's priorities

Newham benefits from a suite of policies that clearly set out an ambitious framework for social change in the borough. Among them are the Newham Growth Plan, the Just Transition Plan and the Community Wealth Building Strategy.

Royal Docks and Beckton Riverside Opportunity Area Planning Framework (OAPF, GLA+LBN, 2023)

The Royal Docks and Beckton OAPF was adopted in 2023. It aims to support the Royal Docks and Beckton Riverside in becoming:

- a lively, healthy place.
- a connected, resilient place.
- an enabled, innovative place.
- an empowered, diverse place.

The OAPF seeks to support the area's "change to a more 'mixed- use' area", aiming to use good growth to create a more diverse, complex series of places, whilst maintaining and enhancing what is good about retained industry, industrial heritage, and the major employers that will continue to be 'anchors' of the place. The OAPF encourages water related uses, enhancing and protecting existing provision, and demonstrating appropriate design quality.

The OAPF notes that 'Royal Victoria should be a destination for the whole of London, highly accessible and showcasing the cultural heritage and future vision for the Royal Docks' and the document proposes 'accessible dock with active water uses' for RVDW.

A proposed response to this policy context is included in section 2.7, and each Priority Project included in section 3 sets out the bespoke planning approach.

Overall, whilst presenting quite a stringent context in terms of ensuring good quality and appropriate uses on the water, the policy context for enhancing RVDW is encouraging.

1.4
Engagement

The Vision needs to have the support of local stakeholders if it is to be delivered successfully.

The project team has engaged extensively during this commission with stakeholder organisations, whose views have affected the conclusions of this work.

Royal Docks Community Design Principles

Since its establishment in 2019, the Royal Docks Team has led a series of community engagement initiatives to help shape a consistent approach to designing and delivering inclusive public spaces - on both land and on the water.

These exercises culminated in a set of draft Community Design Principles, incorporated into the Royal Docks Design Guides and summarised overleaf (p21). These are principles that apply across the Royal Docks and engagement for RVDW should conform with these wherever relevant.

One of the cross-cutting themes is **Diversity & Inclusivity**. Young people wanted places where they felt welcome and safe, elderly people wanted places to sit and rest, whilst families and those with special needs wanted interventions to support accessibility, safety and sensory play.

Another principle, **Hyper-local networks** highlighted the need for more spaces that enable community connection and cohesion. All these principles can be developed further to consider the unique qualities and community aspirations for the water.

Prior engagement

Maximising use of the water for recreation, leisure and well-being has been consistently raised by communities in various consultation and engagement exercises since 2019.

A summary of all key consultation exercises is outlined in the ‘Royal Docks Community Engagement Toolkit’ (royaldocks.london/engagementtoolkit - pp28-33). Understanding this data and how communities currently enjoy the water provides a starting point for understanding community priorities which Royal Docks Waterways and its partners can build on.

Water sports and leisure activities are enjoyed across the Royal Docks by local communities, young people, and visitors. This includes Royal Docks Summer Splash, a popular pop-up lido that has been running annually for over 8 years, offering free, inclusive swimming sessions, Swim Safe lessons and recreational activities. The water is also enjoyed by residents, walkers and running groups using the dockside, while the Floating Garden, installed in 2021, provides both ecological benefits and a shared community space.

Vision Engagement

Local stakeholders who have contributed to this project:

- Britannia Village General
- Excel London
- General Projects
- Good Hotel
- Greater London Authority
- London Borough of Newham
- London City Airport
- Love Open Water
- Sunborn London
- Transport for London
- WakeUp Docklands

The project team met with stakeholders early in the process to learn about their aspirations for RVDW and to feed their ideas into emerging work. Many also attended a workshop, generating a “Theory of Change” (see overleaf) which is being used to guide ongoing work at RVDW.

For water activators who do not have the security of a long lease, Royal Docks Waterways made pledges to them around good engagement and fair treatment.

Towards the end of the project, the team landed the overall conclusions with the same people, so there was also an opportunity to make final adjustments where appropriate.

In parallel, the project team has continued soft market testing with a range of potential suppliers and collaborators relating to the Priority Projects.

Impact of engagement

Local stakeholders significantly influenced the process and conclusions of the project team. Some examples include:

- The terms used to describe how the vision will look and feel (section 2.5).
- The strengths and weaknesses of different project ideas (section 2.6).
- The proposed locations and client requirements of the Priority Projects (section 3).
- The soft market testing has influenced the proposed delivery strategy for all Priority Projects.

Next steps

Wider public engagement and formal consultations will be undertaken as part of each Priority Project.

See also section 4 for more on next steps.

1.4
engagement

Royal Docks Community Design Principles

Ecology
Promote nature-based solutions and low-carbon communities that reduce pollution and waste. Encourage biodiversity, be climate change adaptive, promote people-nature connections.

Play and active design
Integrate play and physical activity opportunities into the public realm for people of all ages with formal, informal and creative measures. Support active travel, to ensure accessibility and awareness.

Sensory design
Incorporate pleasant sensory experiences (sight, sound, smell, touch) throughout the public realm, including art and creative elements to enhance tranquillity, attractiveness, imagination and interconnection with the surroundings.

Living heritage
Bring the area’s industrial, maritime and socio-cultural history and infrastructure into play in the public realm to inspire curiosity and feelings of belonging at a human scale by creating inviting spaces and learning opportunities.

Water connection
Consider water as public space, enhancing access for different users with different needs. Encourage views and wayfinding, and support its role in ecology and climate resilience.

Flexible use: multi-functional and adaptive
Maximise opportunities to enable the free use of space by the public. Consider the increased and multiple use of space for social and livelihood activities at diff erent times of day by building in adaptivity across strategies.

High streets and amenity centres
Multiply civic links to local centres with accessible high streets which support daily needs and livelihoods and provide opportunities to meet, talk and celebrate.

Hyper-local networks
Enable and enhance existing networks of care, socio-spatial connections, local mobility, and the exchanges of goods, services, support and knowledge.

Community stewardship
Emphasise and encourage community knowledge and action to maintain and curate public and green space; to drive low carbon solutions, ecological stewardship and local strategies for community resilience.

Source: Royal Docks Team

Theory of Change

Inputs

mobilise data analytics team

identify key stakeholder counterparts opportunity to make final adjustments where appropriate

Process

establish open-source database

establish baseline data for:

- origin/destination of visitors
- demographic profile of visitors
- media mentions
- __# night-time activities
- __# independent businesses
- __# visitors to RDEZ
- __# repeat visitors to RDEZ
- average visitor/user dwell time
- spend per capita
- OpEx per venue
- public engagement w/water
- environmental assets
- perceived ‘pride-of-place’ (i.e. co-ownership/agency)
- __# ASBOs
- youth training programs

support/grow USP of LCY

support/grow USP of Excel

prepare parameters for investors

undertake masterplanning

Outputs (short-term KPIs)

%__ increase in brand recognition

%__ increase in positive media mentions

__% increase of night-time activities

__% increase in independent businesses

__% increase in visitors to RDEZ

__% increase in repeat visitors to RDEZ

__% increase in dwell time

__% increase spend per capita

__% decrease in OpEx per venue

__% increase of demographic diversity

__# people getting ‘wet’ (inc. on boats)

__% enviromental improvement

__% increase of perceived ‘pride-of-place’

__% decrease in ASBOs

__% increase in youth training participation

Outcomes (long-term KPIs)

%__ increase of (Newham) GVA/ capita

%__ growth of investment into RDEZ

%__ increased private co-investment (in Newham)

%__ increase in Royal Docks Waterways revenues

%__ increase in RDEZ revenues

%__ growth of RDEZ business rates

%__ decrease in (Newham) NHS/ GP costs

__% improvement of perceived security at RDEZ

%__ increase in (Newham) jobs

%__ increase in (Newham) youth retention

induced growth of LCY

induced growth of Excel

Impacts

pride of place

interesting and welcoming

known internationally

value for locals

economically viable

resilient to climate change

prosperity for London

1.5
Analysis of uses, constraints and opportunities

RVDW is not a blank canvas; as well as planning policy constraints it is a complex environment of logistics and human life. Here a summary of key themes is presented which must be balanced within any delivery of the Vision, followed by a series of maps which set out the full picture.

Dock operations
As part of the Royal Docks, RVDW remains a ‘working’ dock. Royal Docks Waterways is responsible for maintaining the water level, movement and de-confliction of vessels and maintenance of the infrastructure. In terms of RVDW, a key slipway is provided next to Dock Beach which allows vessels and other objects in and out of the water, and access to and use of this must be preserved in any wider transformation.

Ownership
There is clear control over plans for the water, with Royal Docks Waterways as long-leaseholder and the GLA as freeholder. The Royal Docks Waterways estate is primarily occupied by the water bodies of the Docks themselves, though there is enough land in the Royal Docks Waterways lease to allow for a useful integration of land and water uses. This land also represents opportunities to enhance connections, improve urban design and ‘placemake’ in a way that benefits land and water users alike.

Third parties
RVDW is not empty and hosts various exciting uses, including wakeboarding, open water swimming and significant cultural programming. Balancing new and existing uses is both a constraint on the Vision and an exciting opportunity.

Safety
Today, usage of the water is effectively trespassing if the person involved is not taking part in an organised or managed activity. Improving access to the docks looks likely to involve ‘loosening’ this status somewhat in a way that promotes access and also safety.

Security & civic life
The relocation of City Hall, home of the Mayor of London and the Greater London Authority, is an exciting development for RVDW and the Vision takes due account of the role City Hall can play in creating and supporting public life at RVDW. This presence also increases the scrutiny design proposals receive in terms of their impact on public safety and the security of GLA personnel and visitors. Other elements such as the IFS Cable Car also bring their own security requirements.

Air safety and airport operations
London City Airport is an important ingredient in how the Royal Docks ‘work’ and how the place is perceived, contributing to the Royal Docks’ status as a gateway to London. Like any major transport infrastructure it brings operational requirements and restrictions to its locality.

Change
Again, this theme is both an opportunity and a challenge. This part of the Royal Docks is seeing, and will continue to see, significant change. This will include new development at scale (for example Thameside West) as well as new programmes and connections, perhaps most excitingly a future urban park and connection to the Thames. Managing this process so that change is experienced positively will be key to the success of the Vision.

Culture & events
RVDW is already a popular space for cultural events programming and also major sporting events such as Dock2Dock. These are expected to continue to thrive here and new interventions must enable and support these uses.

Map: Ownership

CORNICHE

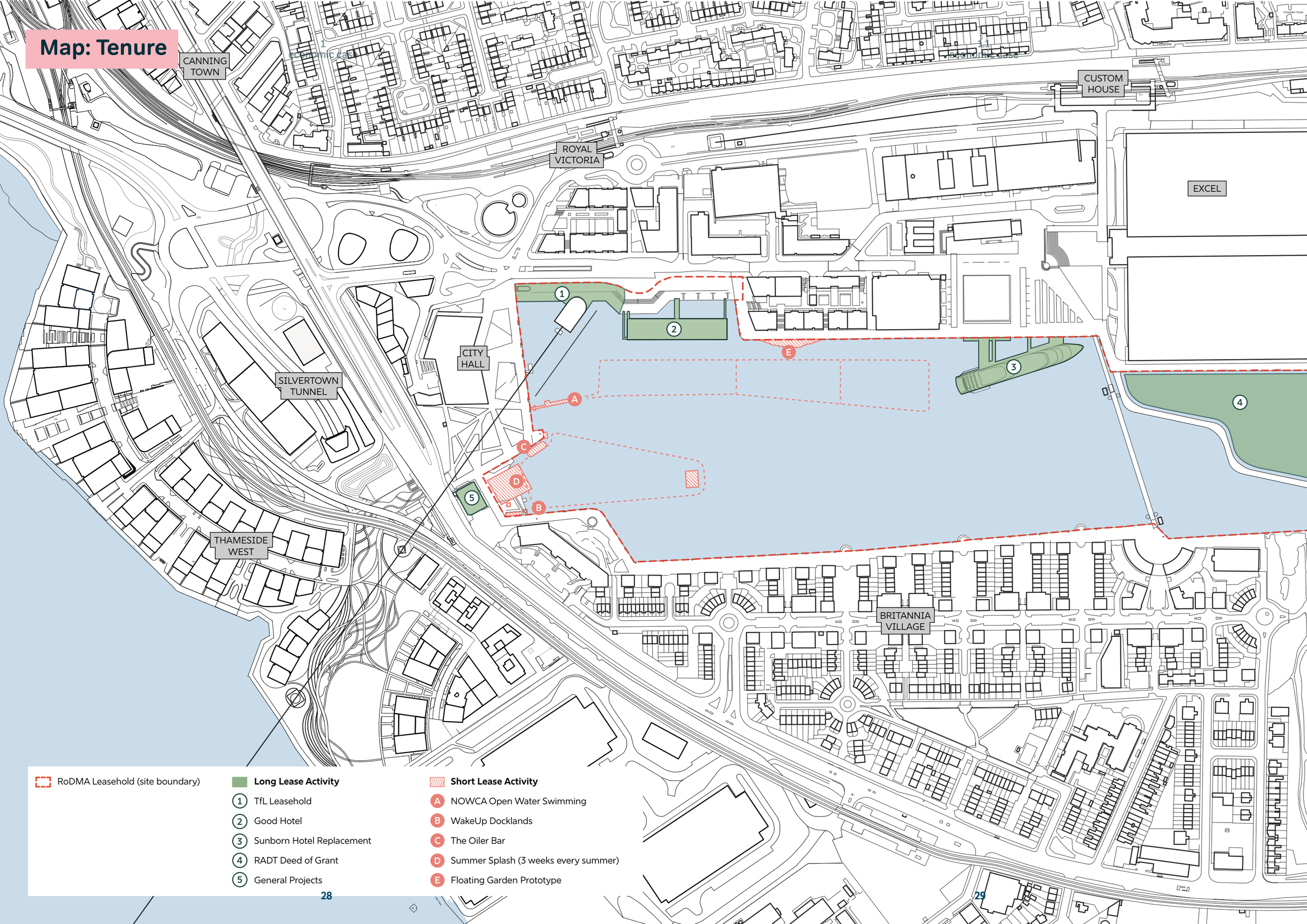
ROYAL VICTORIA DOCK WEST

DOCK BEACH

- RoDMA Leasehold (site boundary)
- RoDMA Land Leasehold
- GLA Leasehold
- DLR Freehold
- DLR Leasehold
- TfL Freehold
- TfL Leasehold
- Peabody Trust Freehold
- Peabody Trust Leasehold
- LB Newham Freehold
- LB Newham Leasehold
- Silvertown Homes Ltd Freehold
- Silvertown Homes Ltd Leasehold
- Strawberry Star London Freehold
- Thames Water Ltd Freehold
- Excel London Leasehold
- Britannia Village Management Leasehold
- Sunborn International PLC Leasehold
- Good Hospitality Hotel Leasehold
- General Projects Re Limited Leasehold

GLA Freehold

Map: Tenure



RoDMA Leasehold (site boundary)

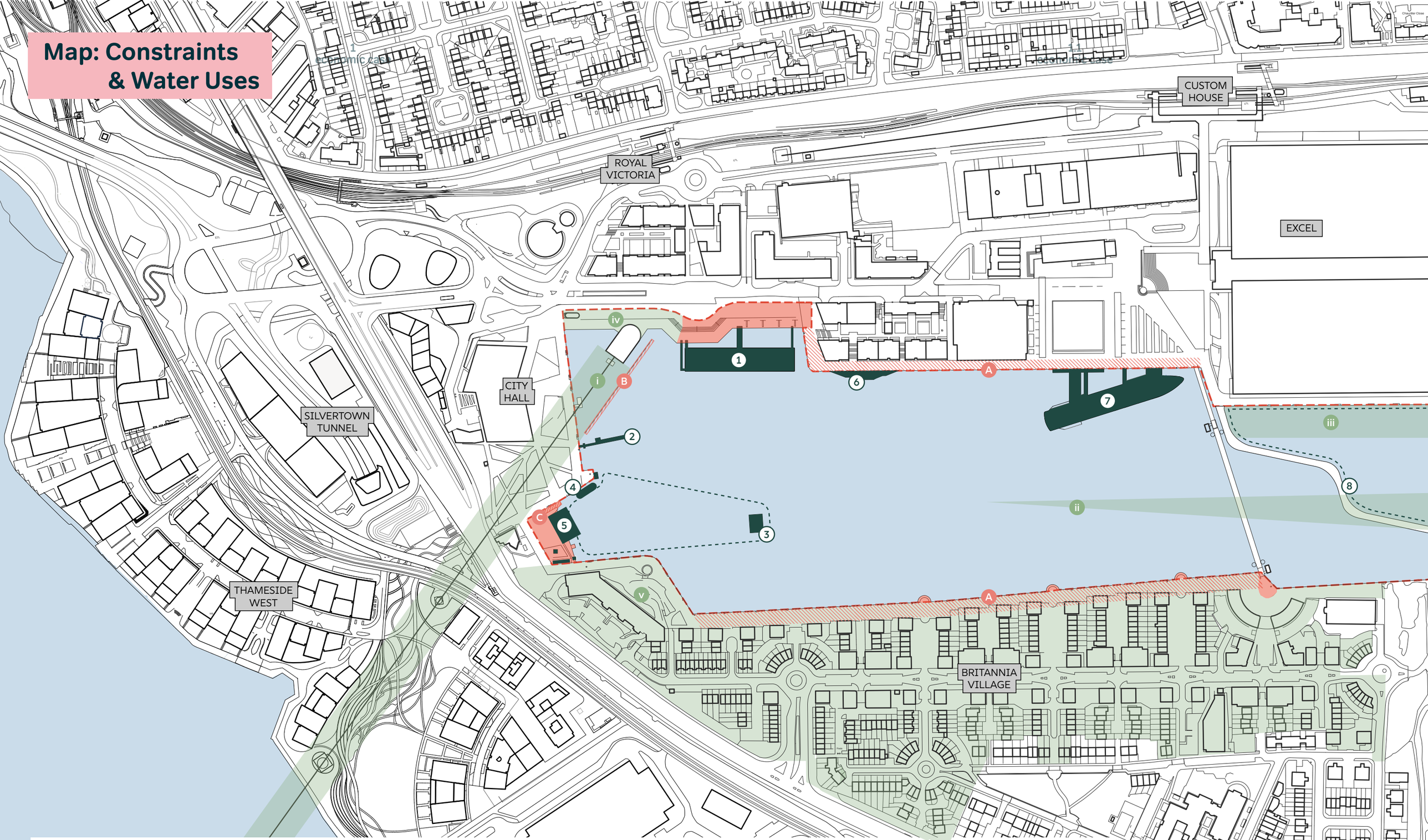
Long Lease Activity

1. TfL Leasehold
2. Good Hotel
3. Sunborn Hotel Replacement
4. RADT Deed of Grant
5. General Projects

Short Lease Activity

- A. NOWCA Open Water Swimming
- B. WakeUp Docklands
- C. The Oiler Bar
- D. Summer Splash (3 weeks every summer)
- E. Floating Garden Prototype

Map: Constraints & Water Uses



- RoDMA Leasehold (site boundary)
- RoDMA Land Leasehold

Legislative Constraints

- i Cable Car Safety Zone
- ii London C ity Airport's Public Safety Zone
- iii Excel Buffer (30m)
- iv TfL Leasehold
- v Britannia Village Leasehold

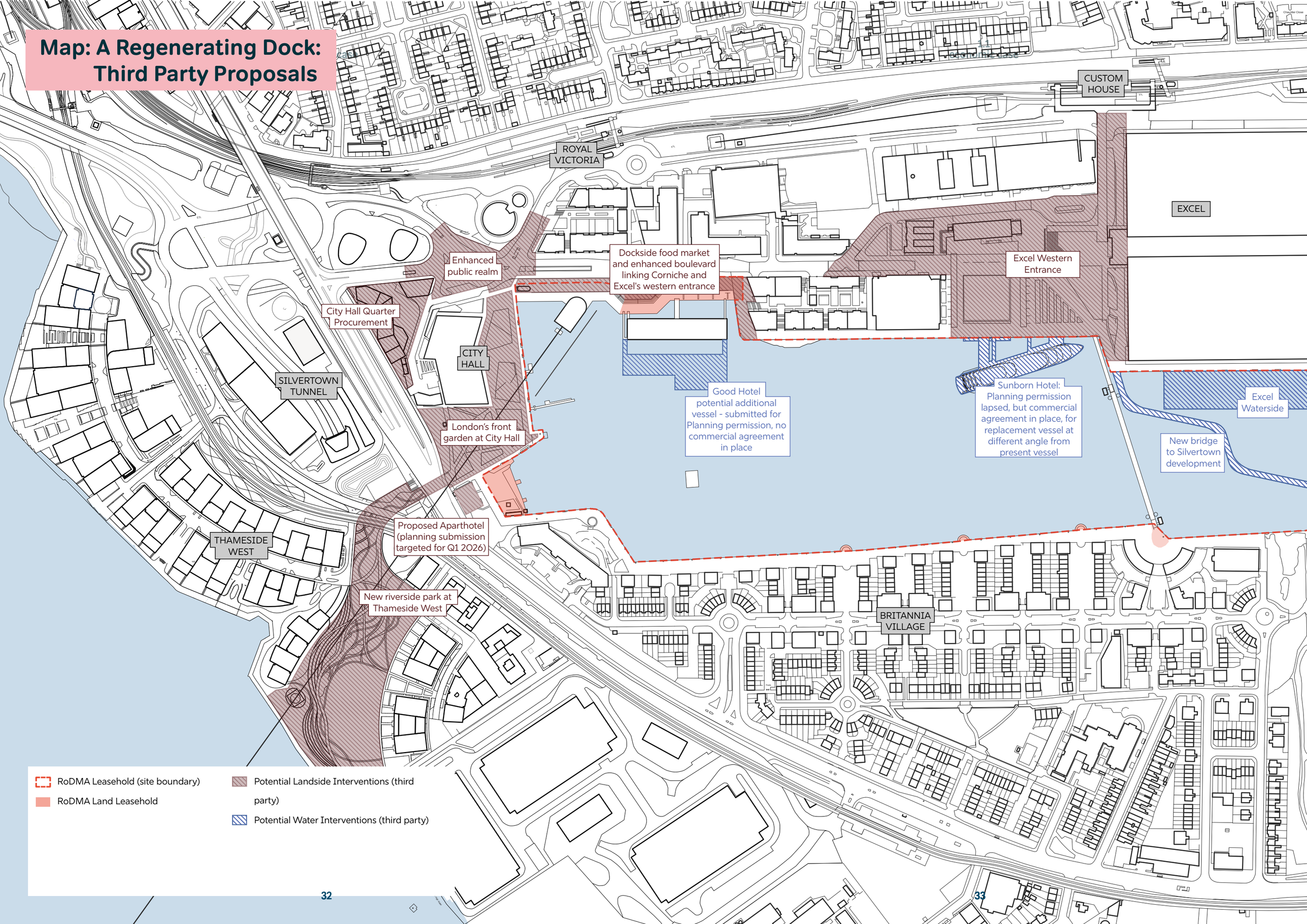
Physical Constraints

- A False Quay (safety issues)
- B IFS Safety Barrier
- C RoDMA Dock Access

Existing Water Uses (2025)

1. Good Hotel
2. NOWCA Open Water Swimming
3. WakeUp Docklands
4. The Oiler Bar
5. Summer Splash
6. Floating Garden Prototype
7. Sunborn Hotel Replacement
8. RADT Deed of Grant

Map: A Regenerating Dock: Third Party Proposals



2

Vision

This section sets out a deliverable, compelling Vision for RVDW.

It outlines the three ‘cases’ – economic, social and environmental – that create the impetus and urgency for this Vision.

A wide array of projects and uses were considered and balanced against the three ‘cases’ and their conformity with wider strategic goals and ambitions of Royal Docks Waterways, the Royal Docks team and the London Borough of Newham. Then there is a rationale for selecting the Priority Projects for additional development work.

2.1
The Vision

RVDW will be the most welcoming and democratic public space in London.

A destination – a mix of uses encourages more people to visit and spend more time here.

A neighbourhood – a range of options and price points makes it somewhere where residents and workers feel comfortable.

Success is more people getting wet every day!

Visualisation showing potential realisation of Vision.

RVDW will be accessible to all – an egalitarian place where everyone can experience water for leisure, sport or wellness, with City Hall as the backdrop for a lively public space.

It will make an important contribution to the economic and social success of the Royal Docks, and will serve as the area's public heart.

It will be a sustainable, biodiverse place to live and to visit, utilising pioneering low-carbon technologies and future-proof design to make a place which is a pleasure to live, work and play in.

2.2
The Economic Case

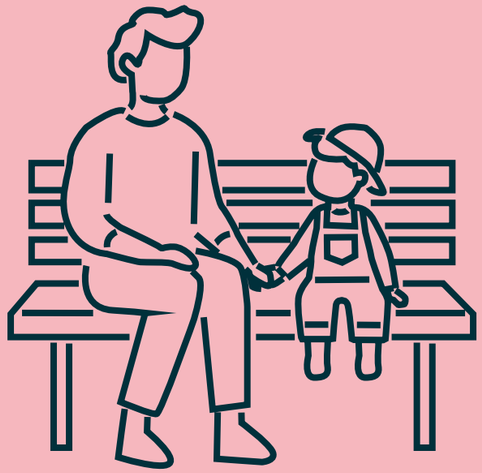
Visualisation: Thameside West connecting RVDW to the Thames

- **Revenue growth is vital to Royal Docks Waterways' capacity to maintain the Docks and supporting infrastructure.**
- **RVDW is the key site for highly visible public life on the Royal Docks, thanks to its balance of visibility, transport connections, and the proximity of vital public buildings like City Hall.**
- **With the right mix of interventions, the water could be a year-round attraction for the visitor economy. This is already the defining economic identity of the area and it has potential to be so much more.**
- **The Vision will seek to work with existing providers of leisure in RVDW, as well as new providers, spreading economic benefit and building confidence.**

Looking at the Royal Docks area as a whole, RVDW is the key opportunity to host expanded and enhanced leisure and wellness facilities and to generate a critical mass of these facilities such that a coherent yet exciting mix of uses is provided. Given the opportunities of this location, this mix must prioritise income-generating public uses and freely accessible public space, combined with more 'private' uses (such as moorings) in locations where the liveliness of new public uses is less desirable, due to the needs of local residents.

There is already income-generating sports and leisure activity in this place. Providers of these facilities are part of the narrative of this place and should either be supported in existing locations or helped to co-locate within the Royal Docks, in a way that builds long-term 'buy-in' to the Docks and ensures the vision is embedded in existing qualities.

2.3
The Social Case



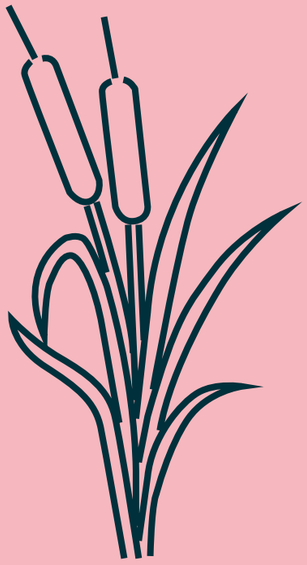
- **Newham is one of the youngest and most diverse boroughs in London – 34.5% of residents are under 25.**
- **Newham faces inequalities of opportunity and access to leisure and wellbeing provision.**
- **The Royal Docks has the potential to play a key role in the social lives and wellbeing of Newham residents.**

There is an opportunity here – one of few at the scale of Newham – to provide facilities which are family friendly, targeting local communities and which place water and active lifestyles centrally in the lives of residents. It is rare that a 'new' park, with all the human benefits it entails, and including free-at-the-point-of-use amenities, can be provided to a local community, and if RVDW were offered in this way the social benefits would be widespread.

Accordingly it is vital that all viability planning and business modelling is developed with an eye on local benefit, local investment and community wealth building.

Royal Docks Summer Splash.
(Image: Emma Nathan and the Royal Docks Team)

2.4
The Environmental Case

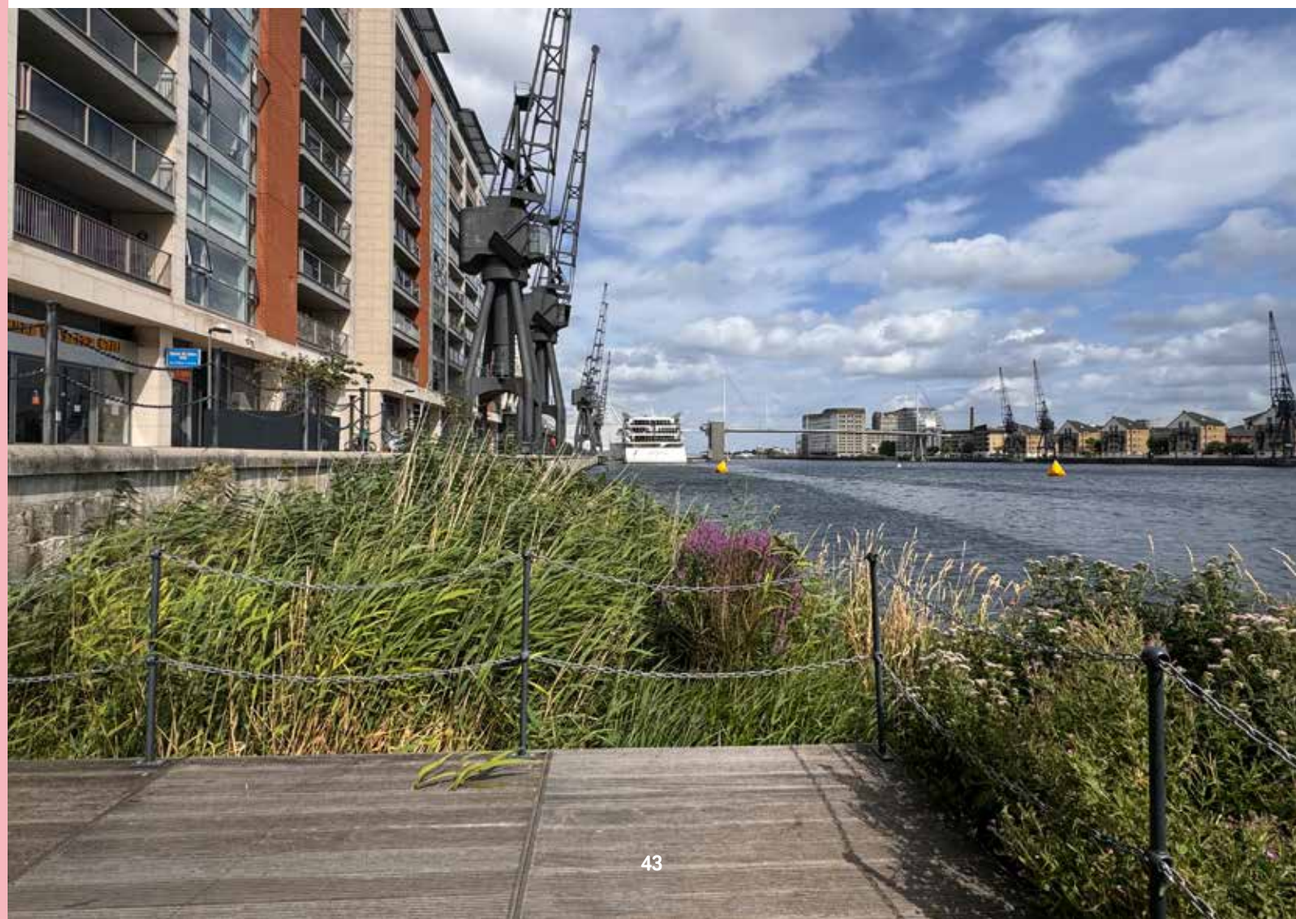


Floating Garden. (Image: DK-CM)

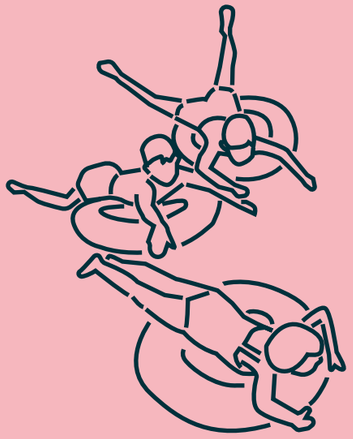
- **The Royal Docks Team have placed sustainability and wellbeing at the heart of their Delivery Plan.**
- **The water is an opportunity to deliver non-statutory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) commitments for nearby developments.**
- **Experience from the Floating Garden pilot project and the larger Eden Dock suggests there is a general appetite for a greener, more sheltered docklands.**
- **The Royal Docks are essential for Newham's Just Transition. The area is already cooler than the rest of the borough, making the Docks a potentially vital refuge during hotter periods.**
- **The docks should pre-empt known risks of a changing climate and adapt through the use of nature-based solutions.**

The environmental case acknowledges that the Royal Docks are already an invaluable part of Newham's public open space network – and indeed a large percentage of its open space overall. With that in mind, its biodiversity credentials are fairly poor and in places the absence of shade, shelter and protection from the elements has a negative impact. There is a chance through this Vision to preserve the openness of RVDW whilst radically enriching its biodiversity and making it easier for people to access its many benefits, including proven economic impacts on, for instance, consumer spend. Measuring the real-world carbon and financial benefits would be very useful.

According to GLA research, LB Newham is 32 out of the 33 London boroughs in terms of publicly-accessible greenspace, and there are only 262 hectares of such space in all of Newham. RVDW is approximately 12 hectares, so if it is activated to its potential then it could add 5% publicly-accessible blue space to the green space total, whilst diversifying habitats.



2.5
How will the Vision look and feel?



This section captures key design attributes, qualities and principles that should apply to all elements of the RVDW Vision.

Immersive
The ‘new’ RVDW will allow the public close to the water, into the water, and immerse them in the waterspace. For those who don’t want to jump in, the facilities will still allow visitors to get into the heart of the waterspace. The scale of the dock is so vast that one does not need to get fully into the ‘middle of the dock’ to feel immersed in the water.

Open
It is vital that any interventions in RVDW preserve it as an open, expansive and uncluttered body of water. This is partly because this quality of openness is highly valued by local residents and visitors alike, and vital to the docks' historic character.
It is also partly because an ‘open’ dock, like a public park, is a space that allows for multiple uses - some happening all the time, some happening in daily or seasonal cycles, and some significant ‘special’ events such as sporting or cultural activities.

Biodiverse
Biodiversity will be a key component of all designed elements and infrastructure, such that everything delivered will be softened and enriched by planting and nature. This will include both on-land and in-water planting. Green infrastructure will help to embed new interventions and create a a wilder and friendlier dockland environment. Biodiversity will benefit people through gains in health and wellbeing, as well as for nature's sake, with clear targets identified for each priority project.

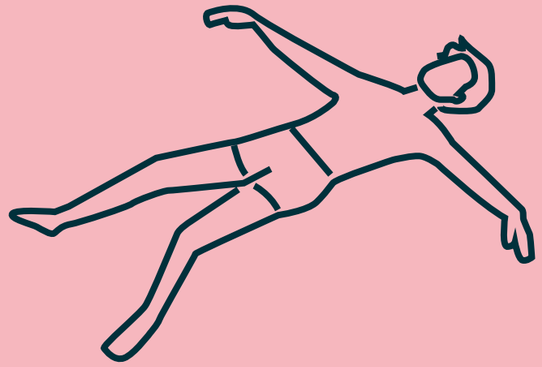
Authentic
The delivery team is keen to work with the world’s most experienced practitioners and creators of floating facilities. No to the ersatz or replicas; yes to high-quality, world-class facilities based upon internationally-renowned expertise.

Safe & accessible to all
Today, the water of the dock is out of reach and perceived as off-limits to all but the most experienced experts or professionals. This will change to make a waterspace for everyone. The combination of existing amenities and complementary new ones will create a waterborne park where people of all abilities, cultures and water confidence feel safe engaging with the water. This will be embodied in the way that facilities are run and managed but also how they are designed. Access infrastructure will in time provide managed water-level access. Safety and security are also about high quality management and responsible, proportionate risk controls.

Comfortable
The expansive nature of the Royal Docks is such that the visitor experience can feel windswept and exposed to the elements – the design of new interventions at RVDW will offer shelter, shade and protection. The design of schemes will provide much-needed comfortable space for relaxation and materials will be selected which are warm, tactile, textured and crafted.

Designed to adapt & endure
The Royal Victoria Dock opened in 1855 as a pioneering work of industrial design. New interventions in the dock will also be designed to endure – high quality, beautiful architecture, landscape and infrastructure that will serve visitors long into the future – partly through durability and partly through adaptability. Use of reclaimed materials should be encouraged in order to support circular economy principles.

2.6 Generating Priority Projects



A longlist of possible uses has been evaluated according to the three ‘cases’ for activity in RVDW (economic, social & environmental) as well as compliance with overarching strategic documents (including planning policy). The case for each use was explored and a Venn diagram shows how a set of Priority Projects emerged.

A wide range of potential projects for activating the water have been proposed and considered through market research, previous work and strategies, and a Theory of Change workshop involving major stakeholders in the Royal Docks. To sift, prioritise and sequence these ideas in a structured and transparent way, a simple scoring matrix was used to assess each project against a set of criteria.

<u>Economic</u>

- Scale of capital cost.
- Ongoing profitability / sustainability.
- Exposure to development, market or financial risk.

<u>Social</u>

- Its appeal / affordability, especially to nearby residents.
- Level of identifiable need / demand or whether there is an apparent deficit in the area.
- Its appeal / usability across all seasons.

<u>Environmental</u>

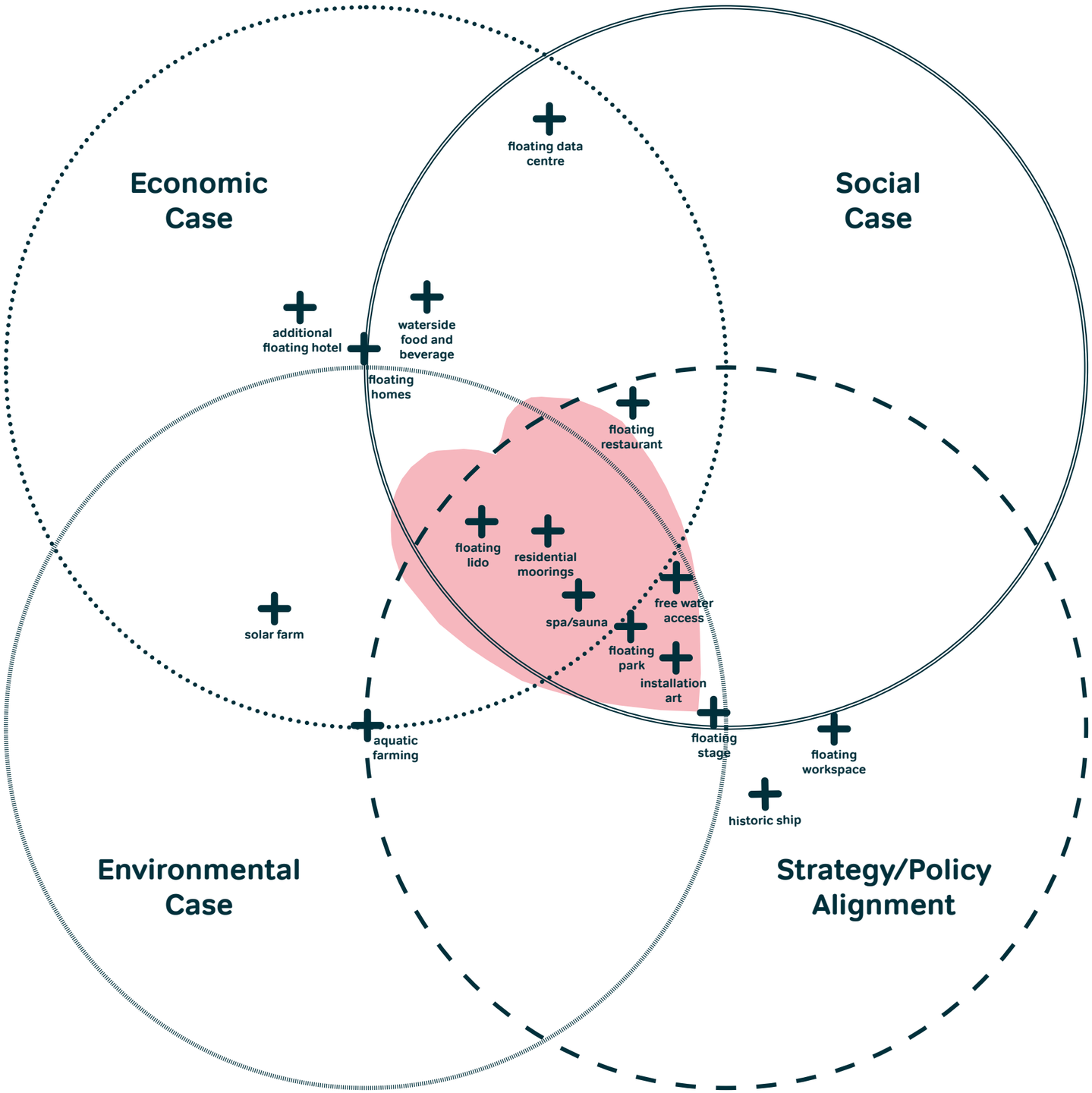
- Potential for nature to deliver benefits for people.
- Ecological resilience.
- Positive impact on water quality.

<u>Alignment with:</u>

- Royal Docks Placemaking Strategy.
- Royal Docks and Beckton Riverside OAPF.
- London Borough of Newham Local Plan.
- London Plan.

Initial scoring was done independently by multiple consultants at Fourth Street and DK-CM and then iterated based on discussion with and feedback from the client team.

Projects have therefore been discounted and others prioritised based on how successfully they deliver against economic, social, environmental or policy objectives. The outcome of this exercise is shown on the next page.



Taking all evaluation topics into account, six key projects emerge as priorities, contained within the pink 'heart' at the centre of the diagram: floating lido, spa/sauna, residential moorings, floating park, installation art and free water access. In design terms these six priority uses coalesce into three Priority Projects:

- **3.1 floating wellness - combining the floating lido and spa/sauna projects whilst promoting and supporting free water access and open water swimming.**
- **3.2 floating park - incorporating free water access and installation art projects, and allowing for future expansion of park spaces and other uses.**
- **3.3 floating residential - focuses upon delivery of residential moorings and with due consideration of floating homes.**

2.7
Planning Strategy

This Vision for RVDW sits in a supportive planning policy context with strong ambitions for positive change on the water.

The high-level Vision has the support of LB Newham's planning team, with formal pre-apps required as the proposals develop. In this section, a number of overarching moves are set out, to provide strategic direction for the RVDW project. Detailed project-by-project planning notes for the next stages are provided in sections 3.1-3.3.

Water activation
Regional and local planning policy encourage water activation whilst discouraging development on water that could take place on land. Accordingly it is vital that all projects to be delivered as part of the RVDW Vision are clear in how they enhance the waterspace, provide water-appropriate uses and do not limit the water's sense of openness. The Priority Projects explored in this Vision occupy 4.6% of the total waterspace of the Royal Docks and they are proposed at a key location for activation, retaining the vast majority of the docks' waterspace in its current open form. This Vision document sets out the gross total of proposed development/activation in the RVDW waterspace, such that individual projects can be evaluated in the context of wider change.

Housing and affordable housing
The Vision's ambition to deliver affordable places for people to live, may serve to boost the local authority's capacity to deliver upon housing targets. Ongoing pre-application discussions with the local planning authority should explore whether and how Floating Residential can play a role in housing delivery and affordable housing, without threatening the viability of the wider Floating Residential project.

Green and blue open space
The Vision, taken as a whole, will bring RVDW into use as a waterborne park, dramatically increasing the accessibility of the water as a place of leisure and public life. In this way the project will make a substantial positive contribution to Newham's need for new and enhanced open spaces, and is likely to be the largest single opportunity to boost access and provide new space across the borough as a whole during the next local plan period.

Strategy and masterplanning
It will be important to demonstrate to the Local Planning Authority that Royal Docks Waterways' intentions for RVDW are a means of achieving a coherent design whole in the coming years and decades, steering both decision-making regarding potential uses and also overall design quality. The Vision represents a key document in this story, setting out clear design ambitions and proposals, and also benefits from the Royal Docks Team's Water Activation Design Guide, which sets out clear design principles for water activation in the area. In the circumstances it is not considered useful to add an additional layer of guidance - such as a design code - given the degree of Royal Docks Waterways control over the waterspace. It is anticipated that this Vision serves as a reassuring presence in ongoing dialogue, both formal and informal, with the Local Planning Authority. It will be a shared reference point for all parties to reference during future planning applications.

Additionally, the Royal Docks Placemaking Strategy (Royal Docks team, 2021) sets out a strategic approach to uses and activity across the Royal Docks area. It is based on the principle that the various water bodies that collectively make up the Royal Docks are each particularly appropriate for specific uses related to context, constraints and policy. This spatial framework is set out for reference on the following spread.

ROYAL VICTORIA DOCK WEST

Building on existing and emerging strengths, RVDW is the gateway and public hub for the Royal Docks and wider area. In placemaking terms, this is accordingly the place for family, leisure, tourism and related uses, taking advantage of the arrival of London government at City Hall, the location of the IFS Cloud Cable Car, and other established uses. Activation will continue to be driven by leisure, tourism and F&B with a greater potential for a night economy, longer dwell times and public culture appealing to local, national and international audiences. Public-facing uses should be clustered around City Hall and existing commercial and public uses on the north bank of the dock, with the south bank of the dock more suitable for quiet uses to best respond to the established residential population.

ROYAL VICTORIA DOCK EAST

East of the existing and new crossings, water activation at Royal Victoria Dock will be orientated around existing and emerging uses, namely Silvertown, Excel London, and the Royal Docks Watersports Centre. This is the right place to put pro or keen amateur watersports activities, aligned with and potentially co-located with the Watersports Centre.

PONTOON DOCK

Delivered primarily through the ongoing development of Silvertown, a reimagined Pontoon Dock will be a key public space within the Silvertown development, with an intensity of public-facing uses.

2.7
planning strategy

ROYAL ALBERT DOCK

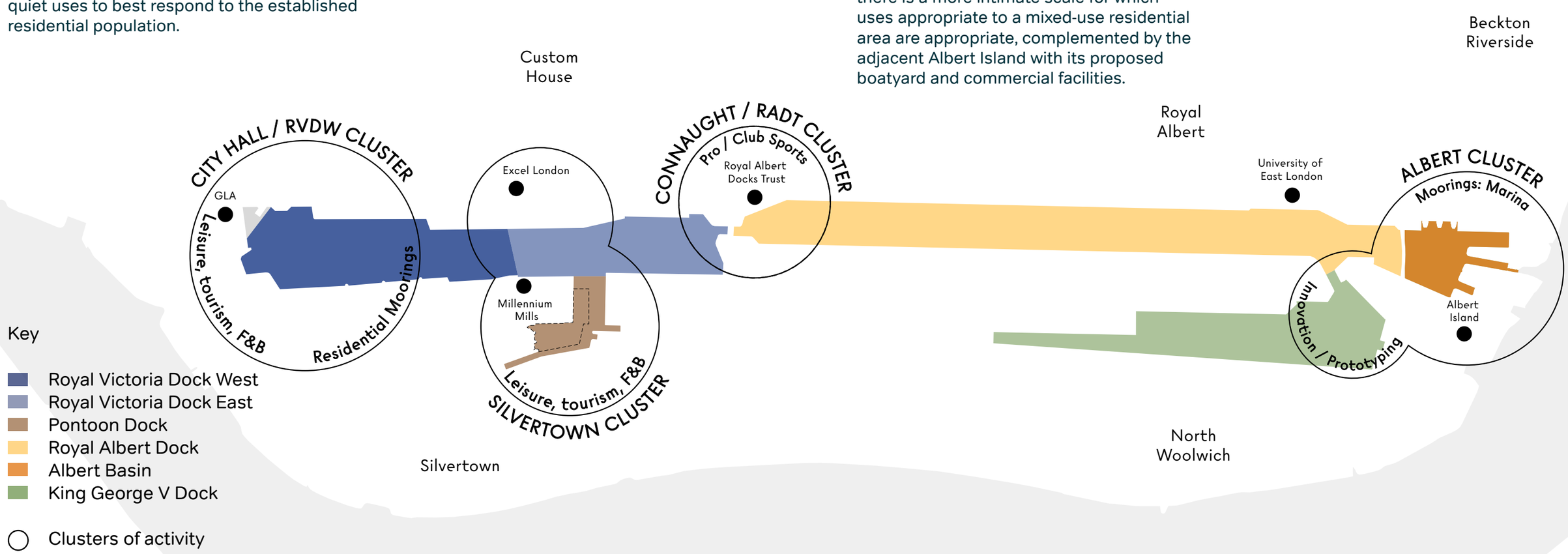
The activation of Royal Albert Dock, will build on its long-standing reputation for professional and club membership water sports for three decades. The Royal Albert Dock Trust hosts multiple charities and clubs, focusing on outreach as well as professionalised users. Investment and support here could further unlock and maximise the programming and use of the water to its full potential, with a particular focus on these more demanding pro/club sports uses and increasing affordable access to them.

ALBERT BASIN

At the dock's eastern limit, at Albert Basin, there is a more intimate scale for which uses appropriate to a mixed-use residential area are appropriate, complemented by the adjacent Albert Island with its proposed boatyard and commercial facilities.

KING GEORGE V

King George V Dock acts as a much needed 'back of house' for the operational logistics of these water bodies, and with limited public access for the foreseeable future it should also be approached as an ideal place for innovation in technology, prototyping and the environment.



2.8
Third Party Proposals

The Priority Projects that will collectively deliver upon the Vision are set out in section 3. These are Royal Docks Waterways' priorities for delivery, but the Vision has also been designed to embrace and allow for the integration of third party proposals, including ones that might not be expected at present. Royal Docks Waterways will continue to welcome proposals, especially where there is a strong economic, social and environmental basis.

This section presents a series of potential types of proposal and how they might best be integrated with the overall Vision.

Waterside development

There are relatively few undeveloped sites immediately adjacent to the RVDW waterspace. Where these are present, and where development comes forward, in general public-facing uses will be supported where they present a positive, active frontage and do not have a negative impact on that waterspace. Issues to look out for include overshadowing and inactive ground floor frontages facing the waterspace. Waterside development also presents opportunities for BNG and other funding to be channelled toward contributing to the floating park (3.2). There may also be opportunities to include some facilities (e.g. toilets and / or changing) for water-based activities within waterside developments.

On-water development

In general, and in line with regional and local policy, development on the water that does not depend upon the water or which could not easily be located on land is not considered appropriate. Third party proposals for on-water development will need to clearly and convincingly set out why they are appropriate for the Royal Victoria Dock West waterspace over and above other locations.

New sports uses

The Vision for RVDW includes an exciting expansion of in-water sports uses to complement existing ones, primarily swimming of various kinds. In general, sports uses that require specialist equipment, including extreme sports, are to be more encouraged in Royal Victoria Dock East (RVDE), to the east of the footbridge, and in Royal Albert Dock. This reduces risks to more general public leisure sports uses at RVDW and has the potential to benefit from shared amenities and longer tenures with other providers.

New leisure uses

In general, new on-water leisure uses can be supported if they fulfil the high standards for the waterspace set out in the Vision. Any potential new leisure use, for example a floating sauna provider, should be evaluated in relation to existing provision, especially the Priority Projects, to ensure it supports and enriches (rather than challenges) this provision. Any new leisure use in the water should also carefully integrate with, and ideally support and expand, the floating park, and fulfil the core design principles of increasing biodiversity and enhancing access to the water.

Cultural and events programming

RVDW is already a lively and popular space for events programming, including cultural/ arts series like Royal Docks Originals and large-scale sports events like Dock2Dock and triathlon. The Vision is designed such that this programming can continue to thrive. New floating park interventions should be designed to support these kinds of events programming, for example by expanding the area of space from which a performance can be viewed or experienced. Or it should provide supportive technical infrastructure or public amenity.

2.9
Phasing and Timescales

This Vision envisages a coherent, well-balanced suite of interventions but it is not expected that these will happen in one single gesture.

The expectation is that by following the principles established in this Vision a strategic, long-term development programme can be established.
The ambition is that this Vision forms a gathering point for local stakeholders and prospective delivery partners so that residents and visitors are able to benefit from changes before 2030.

Projects will require decision-making and governance at Royal Docks Waterways, the Greater London Authority, LB Newham and in some cases other organisations too.

As set out in section 4, the next steps for delivery of the Priority Projects should be undertaken immediately and in parallel.

In terms of coordination with the floating park project, it may be that a stretch of floating park connecting the wellness amenity with the 'corniche' would work well as a packaged project, with a single delivery partner delivering this section as a suite and negotiating naming rights accordingly.

The primary constraint on working in parallel will be resident and visitor disruption due to too much physical change and construction taking place at the same time. While the detailed scheduling of this is not possible at the present time, the biggest asset in this process is likely to be off-site manufacture and prefabrication, with only more minor elements relying on on-site construction. The nature of the water body is such that large elements of the overall Vision could be 'delivered' on site more or less in their final form.

The case for focussing interventions on RVDW has been established by the Royal Docks team (see Section 2.7), but can be summarised as follows:

- RVDW is already the most publicly accessible part of the Royal Docks area and has a strong concentration and mix of existing programmes and uses
- It allows initial enhancements to public use of the water to spread east at a later date as development comes forward on key easterly sites.

3

Priority Projects

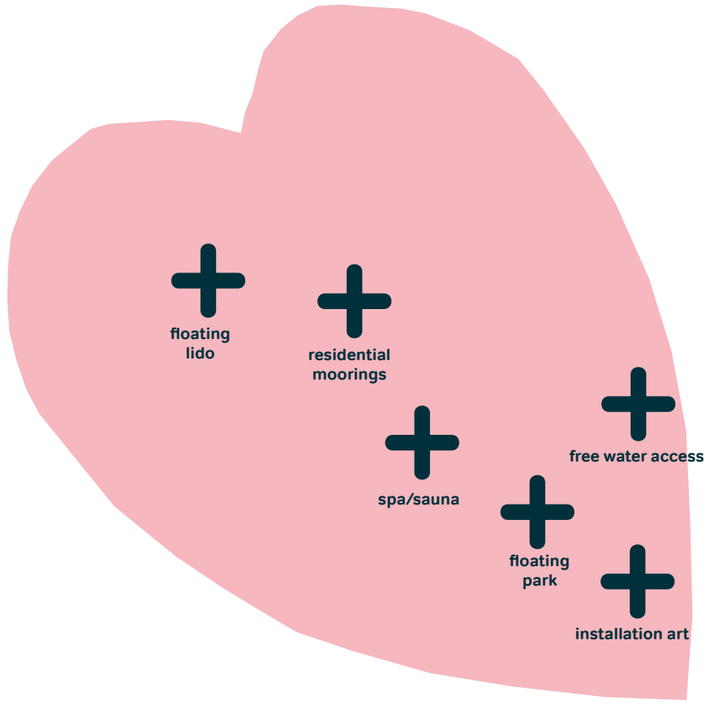
This section develops interlinked concept design proposals for each of the three Priority Projects identified in section 2.6, setting out a clear design ambition, recommendations around process and an extensive delivery section for each of the three elements.

- **3.1 Floating Wellness - combining the floating lido and spa/ sauna projects whilst promoting and supporting free water access and open water swimming.**

- **3.2 Floating Park - incorporating free water access and installation art projects, and allowing for future expansion of park spaces and other uses.**

- **3.3 Floating Residential - focuses upon delivery of residential moorings and with due consideration of floating homes.**

The Priority Projects have been considered and conceived together as part of a masterplan approach to ensure that the individual projects relate to each other and the rest of the water as part of a considered overall approach.



Priority Projects established through analysis in section 2.6.

Situating Priority Projects

Custom House DLR & Elizabeth Line Station

Excel London

Royal Victoria Dock East

Silvertown Quays

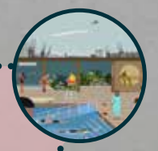
Royal Victoria DLR Station

Royal Victoria Dock West

Britannia Village

IFS Cloud Cable Car

Floating Park



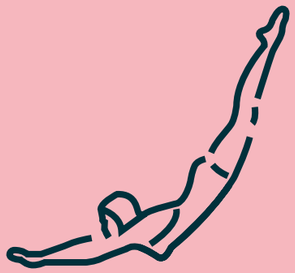
Floating Wellness

Floating Residential

City Hall

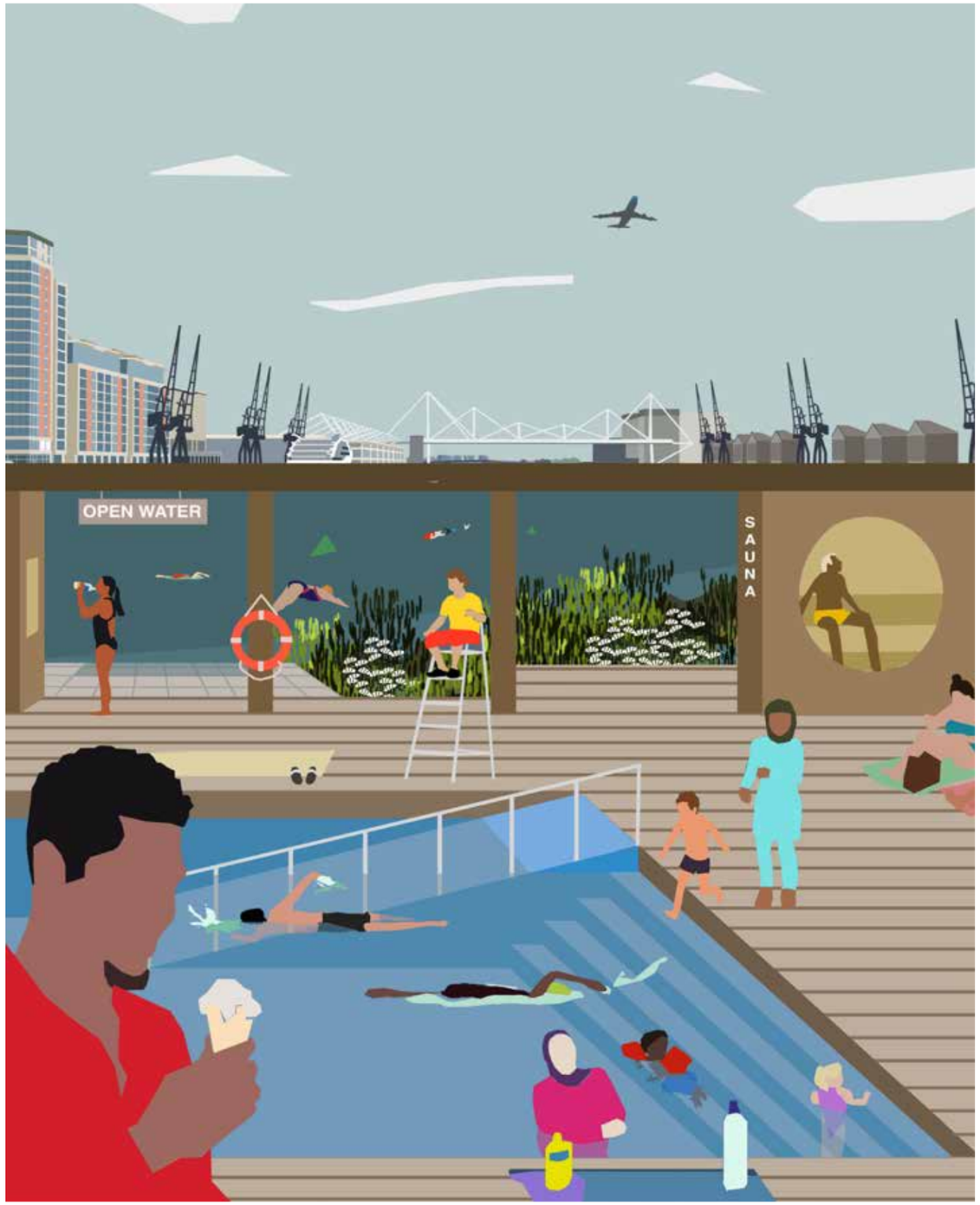
Thameside West

3.1
Floating Wellness



A vital stepping stone, getting everybody into the water.

A wellness centre, including lido-style swimming facilities and complementary uses.



View across pool area showing dedicated open water swimming hub and sauna facility.

FLOATING WELLNESS: CLIENT REQUIREMENTS

Essential

- High quality facilities that successfully provide a 'stepping stone' for novice water users into active leisure usage of the water, responsive to the needs of Newham's communities.
- At least 25m heated pool to enable lane swimming and better provide for local schools - could also manifest as smaller pool heated to higher temperature and longer secondary pool at lower temperature.
- A heated splash or training or teaching pool to allow the pool to better provide for local community, young people and school users, meeting local need.
- A balance of wellbeing-orientated other uses to enhance the pool's 'offer' and achieve economic viability, for example sauna provision.
- The siting of the amenity radically improves the environmental and visual quality of RVDW, especially in relation to City Hall and its landscapes.
- Clear offer to the local community in terms of priority booking, discounts and dedicated programming.
- A good amount of well-designed 'dry space' - poolside - that will turn a simple pool into a destination. This is to include F&B offering sensitively incorporated as part of overall operation, to activate the site, draw a wider demographic and support viability.
- Improved landscape, infrastructure facilities and operations to support improved free access to dock water for splashing and swimming, for all ages and abilities.

Highly Desirable

- The siting of the amenity successfully promotes a more intense and public usage of the public spaces around City Hall.
- The design of the amenity forms a well-integrated part of the 'floating park' concept, using landscaping to make it easier for the public to reach water level and access the water and to improve biodiversity. This includes providing public amenities like toilets and drinking water to wider RVDW users.
- Design ensures that security and safety related issues do not visually dominate.
- Exceptional quality of design that will attract the attention of design, architecture and lifestyle press, at London, national and international scale, thereby boosting awareness.
- Shared amenities to provide for third party programmes and uses, for example open water swimming.
- Design employs use of sustainable heating and cooling systems adapted to floating uses, for example water source heat pumps. A combination of these two technologies can (as a minimum) deliver a low-carbon and energy efficient method of seasonal water heating.
- Planted spaces form an integrated part of wellness provision, increasing its USP.
- Internal community space provided within the facility to accommodate events, meetings etc.
- Material palette selected on basis of durability but also to achieve a warm, crafted feeling, with timber a strong visual preference.

Desirable

- The wellness provision offers cultural and events programming alongside its more typical facilities, on water and Dock Beach, and occasionally on the land outside City Hall. This would ideally be engaged with and supported by the Royal Docks' culture team.
- Wellness programming located in facility located as far as possible into the waterspace to increase the 'specialness' of the experience and contribute to RVDW as a destination.

DESIGN STRATEGY

3.1.1 Design Principles

The centrepiece is a highly functional heated open air lido/pool of either teaching pool size or 25m length, this to ensure that the pool is of use to local schools, communities and lane swimmers. This might manifest as a single 25m heated length or as two pools, one smaller pool heated to a higher temperature and one 25m at a lower temperature to provide for lane swimmers.

Framing this pool will be amenities and wellbeing-orientated provision, occupying carefully-integrated, permanent-feeling floating buildings that celebrate the water. This might include spa/sauna, wellness provision, and a limited food and drink concession to support the main uses.

The space should embody wellness and wellbeing in its character – creating a nurturing and protective space in its context.

In the spirit of creating 'stepping stones' to promote water access, opportunities should be explored to share facilities (e.g. changing rooms) with adjacent or co-located uses, for example open water swimming. Lido users and open water swimmers should feel that they are sharing a facility.

Whilst a detailed design brief will be worked up in collaboration with an appointed operator, it will need to respond to the following considerations:

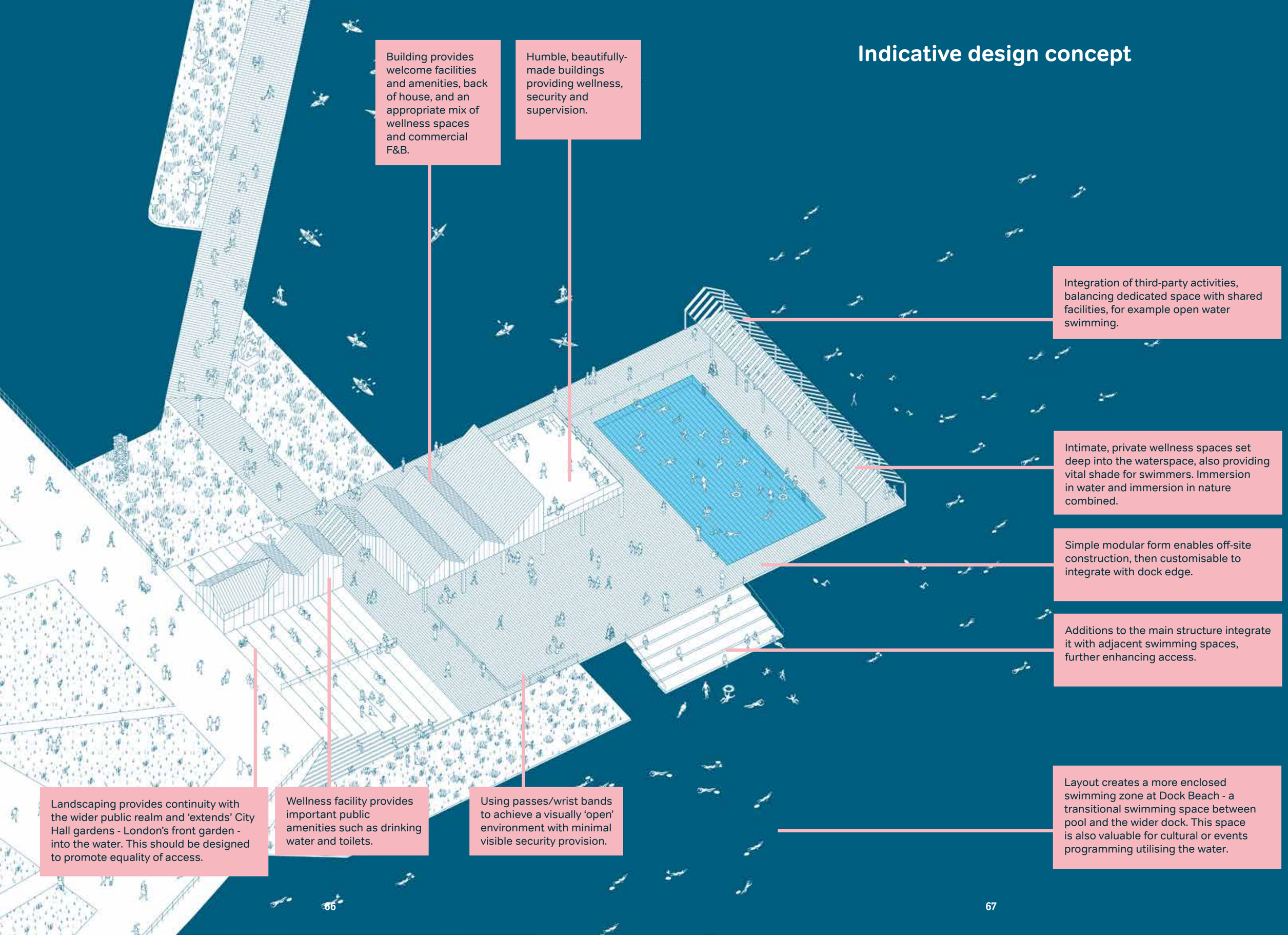
- The facility should have a positive visual impact on the context, including to those who are not directly using the facility. The design will need to demonstrate how the activities within are showcased intelligently and sensitively.
- The facility must feel like an amenity not an overtly commercial space, therefore branding should be kept to a minimum and otherwise as integrated as possible.
- An 'off the peg' solution is not wholly appropriate, given the need to integrate with wider floating park proposals, third party operations and the very special context of the proposition. This will also help differentiate the facility from others both in London and worldwide.
- The design will need to carefully balance swimming areas with other complementary wellness and income-generating uses.
- The design should respond positively to all live design guidance already produced.

3.1.2 Planning

Local authority engagement suggests that the proposed location alongside City Hall is uncontentious in planning terms, at least in principle. There is a lack of swimming facilities in the London Borough of Newham as identified in the borough's assessment of leisure need. As a minimum, a teaching pool sized-facility which offered classes to children in a facility which could be secured as affordable and accessible to the community would likely be supported.

It is likely that conditions would be put in place limiting hours of operation, in line with the borough's Evening and Night Time Economy policies. Also, food and beverage uses, as not 'water dependent', are resisted in this location. However policies are in place that allow for a limited amount of such uses subject to reasoned argument and assessment of need. Evidence from similar facilities elsewhere strongly suggests that supporting/ancillary facilities and commercial offer are vital to the long-term economic viability of leisure water uses, whilst also creating the opportunity (through the wellness agenda) to enhance the USP of the project and enhancing its public appeal; it will be crucial to make this case at the planning stage.

Indicative design concept



Building provides welcome facilities and amenities, back of house, and an appropriate mix of wellness spaces and commercial F&B.

Humble, beautifully-made buildings providing wellness, security and supervision.

Integration of third-party activities, balancing dedicated space with shared facilities, for example open water swimming.

Intimate, private wellness spaces set deep into the waterspace, also providing vital shade for swimmers. Immersion in water and immersion in nature combined.

Simple modular form enables off-site construction, then customisable to integrate with dock edge.

Additions to the main structure integrate it with adjacent swimming spaces, further enhancing access.

Landscaping provides continuity with the wider public realm and ‘extends’ City Hall gardens - London’s front garden - into the water. This should be designed to promote equality of access.

Wellness facility provides important public amenities such as drinking water and toilets.

Using passes/wrist bands to achieve a visually ‘open’ environment with minimal visible security provision.

Layout creates a more enclosed swimming zone at Dock Beach - a transitional swimming space between pool and the wider dock. This space is also valuable for cultural or events programming utilising the water.

Siting of Floating Wellness

As the dock edge close to City Hall is the most visible and accessible part of the dock edge for many residents and visitors (which will increase when the Thameside West connection to the river Thames is delivered), this is considered the ideal location for an ambitious public facility of this nature. This is in line with Royal Docks team's placemaking strategy for the waterspace as a whole. Under this reasoning, locations close to City Hall or more-closely associated with Dock Beach would work satisfactorily, though in each case a well-designed connection with the wider floating park would be vital.

The siting and design will likely also be influenced by emerging proposals (which do not yet have planning permission) for a new aparthotel on the site of the Nakhon Thai restaurant, immediately south-west to Dock Beach. Increased public and commercial activity at this location is desirable – and will likely be provided by the hotel – but its likely scale may impact upon wellness proposals at this location.

3.1
floating wellness

Aarhus Harbour Baths, BIG, 2018. The design communicates its programme effectively from a distance. The form of the building is nurturing and contains the swimming area whilst also offering views out and a sense of place.

Kultuurisauna, Helsinki, Tuomas Toivonen´s and Nene Tsuboi, 2013. This is a remarkable example of creating a comfortable, private feeling space for sauna and cultural activities in the midst of large-scale harbour operations.

Floating saunas, Zurich. An example of adding complementary modular elements - this would suit an approach whereby a common design language is established across multiple uses/programmes. Similar things have been achieved in Oslo harbour.

Allas Sea Pool, Huttunen-Lipasti-Pakkanen Architects, 2019. Adjacent wellness uses are carefully integrated into the wider proposal through stepped landscaping.

DELIVERY STRATEGY

3.1.3 Viability

A floating wellness offer is consistent with the overall strategy of diversifying the Dock offer and strengthening its identity as a place of wellness and leisure.

The concept is assumed to combine two complementary elements: a heated swimming pool and a floating sauna. Together these create a distinctive wellness destination with year-round appeal, balancing family and fitness-led swimming use with higher-yield, adult-orientated wellness sessions.

Other sites in East London, such as Canary Wharf, may pursue swimming pool proposals. RVDW can avoid direct competition and market dilution with an offer that caters to a broader audience and a more diverse range of uses, including sport and fitness, fun and relaxation.

Case studies point to the credibility of this approach. One in Helsinki integrates heated pools, a sea-water pool and multiple saunas alongside restaurants, meeting rooms and concert spaces, attracting some 800,000 visits in its first full year of operation. Of these, roughly half used the pool and sauna and half visited for other reasons, including F&B, meeting rooms or special events. Similar ventures are being pursued in Cardiff Bay, as well as Stockholm, New York and other international locations. In the UK, smaller-scale models have shown the strength of the market for dock-based sauna experiences. Across Scandinavia, operators have demonstrated the commercial resilience of combining heat and cold immersion, supported by food, drink and event income.

Previous financial modelling for a floating lido at RVDW (November 2023) projected a healthy operating surplus from c300,000 swimming admissions (including but not limited to PAYG swimmers, members, and courses/classes). The addition of sauna / wellness facilities – not included in the 2023 projection – would broaden the income base, improve the membership inventory and spread the market more evenly through the day and through the year, with average yields above those for swimming alone.

Further confidence in the demand for this use follows from the uptick in committed development activity locally (see plan on p32-33). Floating Wellness would be part of a wider ecosystem of transformation around RVDW and will therefore benefit from the footfall and activation of others not included in previous modelling.

However, capital costs can be substantial and operating income alone is frequently insufficient to generate an ROI that satisfies private investors or debt providers. It is therefore typical for these facilities to be funded through some combination of grant, sponsorship, philanthropic support or planning gain.

The proposal is ideally suited to the location. RVDW offers the required water space, proximity to existing attractions, and the ability to integrate with established dockside activity and new initiatives like the Floating Park. It also benefits from growing public interest in outdoor swimming, cold-water immersion and wellness, which have seen rapid growth in participation and media coverage in recent years.

Overall, the floating wellness offer presents a viable operating model and a highly distinctive landmark for the Dock. There is also merit in combining two sympathetic and proven uses – swimming and sauna – to maximise both attendance and yield.

3.1
floating wellness

3.1.4 Alignment with Vision

A floating wellness concept would arguably be the ‘landmark’ signature project that defines RVDW as a premier leisure destination in London.

It is no coincidence that floating lidos and open air swimming in major cities like Copenhagen, Helsinki, Oslo and Berlin are so well known – these are highly captivating, ‘instagrammable’ images that circulate widely on social media and travel press.

This proposal emphasises leisure, wellness and social use. Accordingly, the lido should be heated and as large as practicable within capital funding constraints.

Affordability is also a key requirement and the eventual price points and promotions should aim to balance broad access with commercial return. This can be further enhanced by ensuring that both the physical infrastructure (edge conditions, water access, life-saving equipment, etc.) and operations (e.g. lifeguarding) also supports free and safe swimming in part of the Dock water itself.”A sauna complements this by offering a contemplative, restorative experience, reinforcing the ‘wellness’ ethos of the wider destination.

The design should provide not only swimming infrastructure but also generous deck and terrace areas for lounging, socialising and hosting events. It is the ‘dry’ space that turns a pool into a destination, encouraging longer dwell times, higher spend and more repeat visits.

Together, the lido and sauna would underpin the Dock’s identity as a place where residents, workers and visitors can immerse themselves – literally – in water-based activity. They would sit comfortably alongside paddleboarding, sailing and open-water swimming, diversifying the Dock’s offer and strengthening its year-round appeal.

3.1.5 Delivery

Floating lidos and saunas are proven to be commercially sustainable once operational, with ample precedent and case studies from across Northern Europe and the UK demonstrating that they can attract strong levels of attendance and generate reliable operating surpluses.

It is, however, a highly specialist asset in design, delivery and operation. This points to a delivery approach where the core commercial risk is transferred to an experienced operator who will take on the design, build and operational responsibility. There are a number of credible players in the market, both domestic and international, with the requisite expertise in design, financing and operation of floating wellness infrastructure. The unique location at RVDW is likely to generate significant interest amongst established operators, and potentially some more speculative organisations looking to enter this space. Soft-market testing and soft approaches to potential operators should be prioritised and, subject to the findings of this exercise, it is appropriate to invite Expressions of Interest (EOI), to formally determine the market appetite in this location.

The procurement exercise, informed by set parameters and objectives, will help determine the preferred design, business model and delivery route. These operators are best placed to define the optimum scale, configuration and phasing of the facilities, and to demonstrate how they would achieve a stable commercial position.

While the delivery responsibility would transfer to an incoming operator, public promoters need to create a framework that makes delivery feasible.

Demonstrating ample market interest through the EOI process will help with early approaches to potential funders or investors which, in turn, will help inform later stages of procurement and negotiations with the incoming operator.

3.1.6 Operations and Management

Operating a floating lido and sauna requires a more intensive management model than either the Floating Park or Residential Moorings, but there is a clear body of precedent. International examples demonstrate that these facilities can be successfully run by specialist leisure operators, often with a mix of public access, memberships and commercial income streams.

Core operational requirements include:

- Safe management of pools with qualified lifeguards.
- Maintenance of water quality and filtration systems.
- Regular inspection of pontoons, anchoring and utilities.
- Robust visitor services including changing rooms, showers, lockers and first aid.

Earlier feasibility studies also highlighted the need for dedicated staff facilities, offices, storage, and security measures alongside visitor-facing amenities such as cafés, bars and sun decks. The lido and its lounging areas should also be considered part of a wider RVDW portfolio of hireable event spaces, which brings further activity, energy and spend to the area.

The most successful case studies combine swimming and sauna / wellness use with food and beverage, events and fitness programming. Allas Pool in Helsinki operates year-round with 800,000 visits per annum, sustained by memberships, restaurant leases and ticketed classes. Berlin's Badeschiff adapts to the seasons by switching between open-air pool and covered sauna, with events and nightlife providing additional revenue . These examples underline the importance of a flexible operating model, able to balance daily swimming and sauna use with higher yield activities, events and private hires.

Management is best outsourced through a specialist, experienced operator. Neither Royal Docks Waterways nor the GLA would be expected to run the facility directly. Instead, a lease or concession arrangement with an experienced operator would place responsibility for day-to-day operations, marketing, staffing and compliance in professional hands. The operator would also be tasked with maximising secondary revenues – food and beverage, sponsorship, memberships and events – to sustain the business model.

The operational focus for RVDW should therefore be on securing the right partner and creating a framework that commercially sustainable use. They should be judged against their experience and track record of safe, commercially viable operation and their alignment to the wider Vision of making RVDW a fun and vibrant leisure destination for the widest possible audience.

3.1
floating wellness

3.1.7 Funding

Case studies confirm that most lidos and outdoor pools rely on mixed funding models: direct grants, sponsorship, philanthropic or Lottery support, and/or cross-subsidy from associated commercial activity. The Scandinavia models suggest that a private developer / operator can raise finance against long leases, but even there public partners provided site access on highly favourable terms.

The Floating Wellness project needs to be delivered using private capital, with a path to commercial return for Royal Docks Waterways and the investor. Nevertheless, there is a recognition that other sources of funding or flexibilities may be required

The exact mix will depend on the delivery model put forward by an operator and the ultimate capital cost of their proposal.

3.1.8 Partners and Stakeholders

Delivery of a floating wellness offer will most likely come through formal partnership and commercial agreements between Royal Docks Waterways, the GLA, and a future development partner/operator (to be competitively procured). The operator will be central not only to the design and business model but also to long-term management and programming.

Alongside the core partners, a broader set of stakeholders have a role to play. Swim England and Sport England are national bodies with an obvious interest in promoting participation in swimming and aquatic activity, and their involvement may strengthen funding and policy alignment. Local schools, community organisations and health bodies could be engaged to ensure that the facilities deliver clear wellbeing outcomes for residents as well as visitors.

On the funding side, potential partners include regeneration or cultural funding bodies, Lottery distributors, and private sponsors with an interest in wellness, sport or placemaking. Developer contributions through S.106 or CIL may also be relevant, reflecting the scheme's contribution to public realm and community health.

Finally, stakeholders in and around Royal Victoria Dock will need to be engaged to secure buy-in, manage impacts and explore opportunities for collaboration.

3.1.9 Procurement

The procurement of a floating wellness offer is more complex than for other water projects. Whereas the Floating Park is a relatively straightforward direct delivery, and Residential Moorings would be sensibly led by Royal Docks Waterways, the wellness offer will require a competitive process to identify and secure the right development and operational partner.

There are established operators in both the sauna and lido markets, and a small number with expertise across both. The preferred route would be to procure the pool and sauna as a combined wellness offer as a complete package, recognising that different bidders may approach this in different ways: some will be able to deliver the full offer directly, others may need to expand their service model, and some may combine as part of a consortium. While it is important to define key parameters, objectives and deliverables, it is also vital to build in some flexibility to allow the operator to define their own proposals. This will include the proposed makeup of the offer (i.e. the balance between pool space, saunas, any other wellness offers, and complementary facilities), key design decisions and proposed lease arrangements.

A multi-stage procurement process should be undertaken to identify the preferred operator for this facility. This process may be refined and tailored to the information and/or interest received at each stage; it should remain subject to review throughout. At each stage, the client should reduce the number of hurdles as far as reasonably practicable. This will keep interested parties engaged throughout and inspire confidence in the promoter's motivation to deliver.

Key steps for the procurement process include:

1) Soft-market testing

This is already underway and ongoing through direct dialogue with a number of fit-for-purpose operators of extant facilities in both the UK and overseas.

2) Expressions of Interest

Formal Expressions of Interest can be invited when the promoter is comfortable that the Vision and objectives for RVDW are clear and well-defined.

This would benefit from being openly tendered as it may generate interest from unanticipated sources not involved in early soft-market testing. The Expression of Interest should not be overly onerous for operators, as this can be off-putting. Interested parties would be expected to meet mandatory requirements and submit outline proposals informed by the key objectives and parameters set by the client. Proposals should include their vision for the space, a high-level business model and evidence of their credentials and experience.

This process should result in a short-list of operators who would be invited to proceed to the next stage.

3) Detailed proposals

The shortlisted operators (anticipated 3 parties) should be invited to submit detailed proposals. This would include a full assessment of the brief and response to key objectives and deliverables, a design and operations concept, the proposed delivery method and outline programme, cost plan and funding status, business plan, team overview, and commercial offer to Royal Docks Waterways including proposed lease terms, expected landlord obligations, and any assumptions or exclusions.

3.1
floating wellness

The procurement exercise will be underpinned by the overarching Vision for RVDW, as well as key parameters, objectives and deliverables. These will include, but not be limited to, the following points.

Parameters:

- Location.
- Available water area and land area.
- Lease length (minimum and maximum).
- Planning constraints (informed by an pre-app advice, this may remain TBC in early stages of procurement).
- Timescales for delivery.

Objectives:

- Year-round leisure and wellness offer that is commercially sound and is appropriate to the needs of its local communities.
- Increased footfall and dwell time at RVDW consistently throughout the year.
- Wide target audience, achieved through varying price points and access options.
- Sustainability – in materials and operations (electricity, heating and waste).
- Social value – Engagement with local community including collaboration with schools and cultural events programming.
- Commercially beneficial for Royal Docks Waterways.

Deliverables:

- High-quality, architectural design.
- At least 1 x heated pool.
- Additional wellness facilities, notably sauna(s).
- Seasonal "beach" / improved access to surrounding water.
- Complementary spaces including relaxation areas, F&B, and events spaces with the potential to incorporate community and cultural programmes and activities.

3.2
Floating Park

Enhancing biodiversity and public water access across Royal Victoria Dock West.

Delivery, by Royal Docks Waterways and third parties, will happen in phases.

View across RVDW looking through typical floating park condition looking toward floating wellness & City Hall.

FLOATING PARK: CLIENT REQUIREMENTS

Essential

- A paradigm shift in how the water at RVDW is accessed; the new norm will be a stepped and ramped access route down to the water line.
- New infrastructure future-proofed to enable integration of later 'additions' to the programme, including from third parties.
- Integration of safety facilities and equipment.
- Park interventions do not restrict emergency access to the waterspace, restrict views of the water, or damage perception of the dock as 'open' water.
- All opportunities are taken to provide shelter from wind, rain and sun, in a way that is both durable (i.e. not temporary or off-the-shelf) and is not an undue maintenance liability. There should be a variety of sizes and types of space to boost equality of access.
- Retention of provision for minimum 600m open water swimming course within RVDW. Openness also retained to allow for cultural programming and events.

Highly Desirable

- All permanent floating additions (including by third party or currently unforeseen collaborators) conform to the principle of enhancing access and increasing biodiversity.
- Design avoids blind corners and spaces that might present a threat or risk in terms of personal safety or perception of personal safety, e.g. hiding places.
- Park infrastructure designed to support and provide amenities to support large-scale events programming in Royal Victoria Dock.
- Park delivers a range of programmes, uses and spaces, carefully distributed such that single demographics do not dominate.
- Material palette selected on the basis of durability but also to achieve a warm, crafted feeling, with timber a strong visual preference and minimal use of steel.

Desirable

- Cultural programming to support and enhance park life, including events programming, permanent and temporary art commissions, trails.
- Interventions located such that they uniformly reduce safety risks representing by the 'false quay' conditions to the north and south.
- Design of infrastructure to be 'future proofed' in relation to the regeneration of Silvertown, including the upcoming bridge project, in order to build an integrated series of pedestrian connections beyond the immediate RVDW site area.
- Leisure / F&B uses located within or adjacent to the floating residential community in order to provide amenity for floating and land-side residents; this might include existing providers within the Royal Docks.

DESIGN STRATEGY

3.2.1 Design Principles/Brief

Interventions contributing to the 'floating park' will be defined by these key principles:

- The principle of enhancing the biodiversity of the dock, in the spirit of (but not limited to) the popular and successful delivery of the Floating Garden project by the Royal Docks team.
- The principle of increasing access to the waterspace of the Dock by providing a more continuous, accessible platform close to the water edge, enhancing access, views and public safety.
- A mix of direct delivery of floating park elements and delivery through the floating wellness and residential priority projects, resulting in the 'floating park' concept permeating RVDW as a whole, authored by many hands but cohering.

Building on the theme of access, the floating park to be successful must allow the public closer access to, and immersion in, the waterspace. (Immersion defined as both literal immersion in water but also a more general immersion in the feeling of the body of water as a place). Successful delivery of enhanced access is dependent on a shift in management and culture at RVDW toward wider public access.

As infrastructure, the design will need to be future-proofed wherever possible so it can support later interventions currently unforeseen, including discounted projects from section 2.6 of this vision. Wherever possible capacity for additional servicing and access should be provided such that additional elements can be effectively added later without compromising design integrity. The intervention should function akin to a necklace or charm bracelet of distinct interventions united by infrastructure.

The design should incorporate sound thinking around wind corridors and any mitigation required by new structures.

3.2.2 Planning

The two key considerations in relation to planning are around:

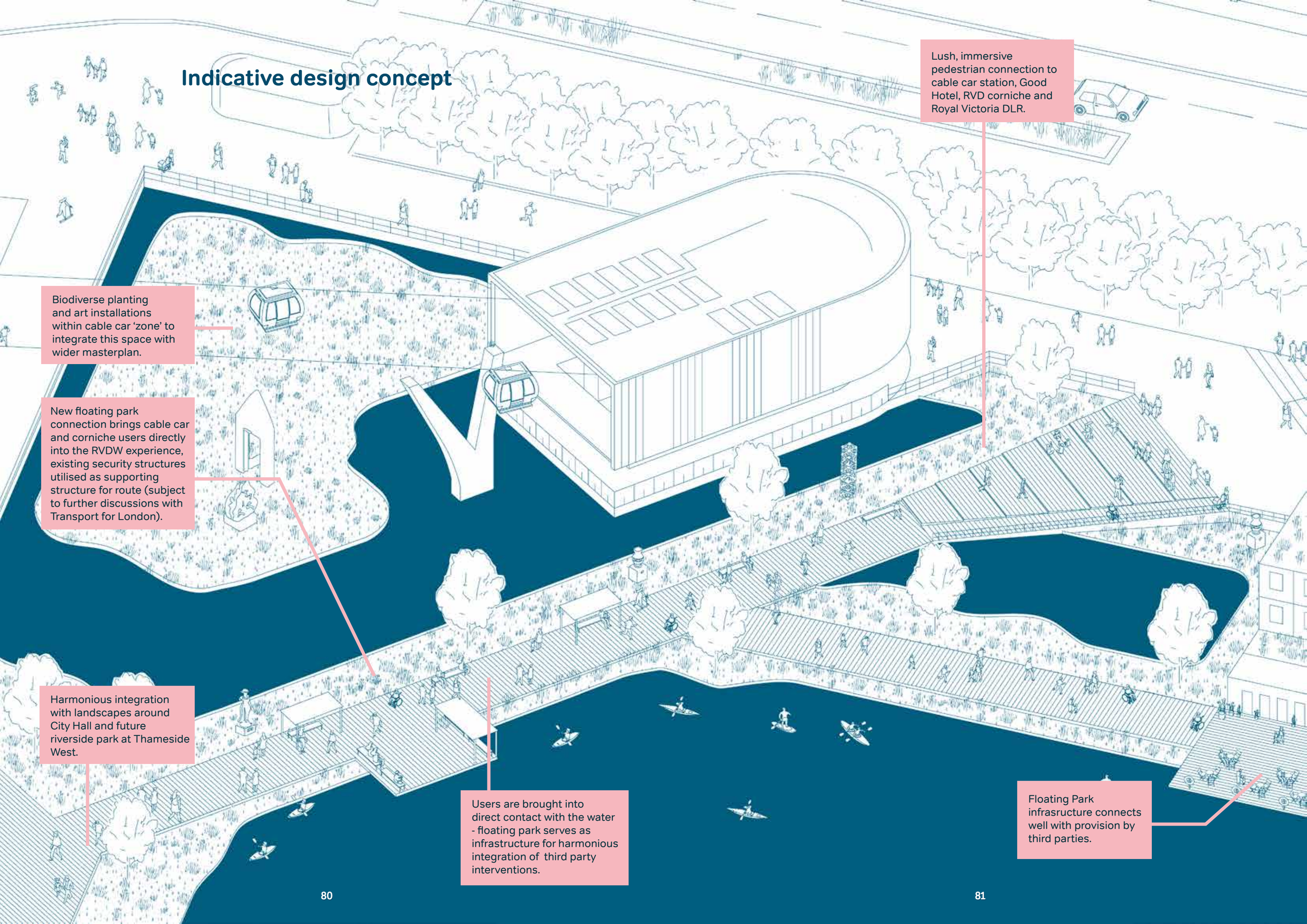
- addressing concerns around inappropriate commercialisation.
- addressing concerns around enhanced biodiversity, especially from local stakeholder London City Airport.

It will be important to demonstrate that the floating park project is about improving access to the water and increased biodiversity, and not about easing the way for increased commercial activity, which is not the intention of the project. Conditions may be proposed that are responsive to this whilst also allowing for events and cultural programming.

With any ecological enrichment in this area sensitivity to the concerns of nearby London City Airport in relation to bird strike will be required, although it should be noted that the airport's area of interest for this concern is a 13km radius, an area that covers most of central London.

Future phases of work will require close engagement with London City Airport during the creation of a a Wildlife Management Plan or similar document.

Indicative design concept



3.2
floating park

Paddington Basin

Ladies Pond (Hampstead)

St Katherine's Dock

Shadwell Basin

Millwall Docks

West Reservoir (Hackney)

The Serpentine (Hyde Park)

RVDW

Brent Reservoir (Welsh Harp, Brent/ Barnet)

Central Park
Newham
(4)

RVDW
Newham
(6)

Green Park
Westminster
(10)

West Ham Park
Newham
(14)

St. James' Park
Newham
(3+lake)

Beckton Park
Newham
(11+lake)

Greenwich Park
Greenwich
(51)

Hackney Marshes
Hackney
(45)

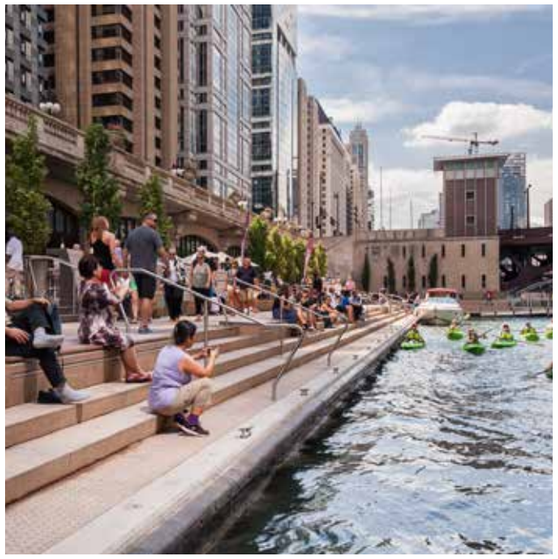
Victoria Park
Tower Hamlets
(38+lakes)

RVDW as a waterborne park

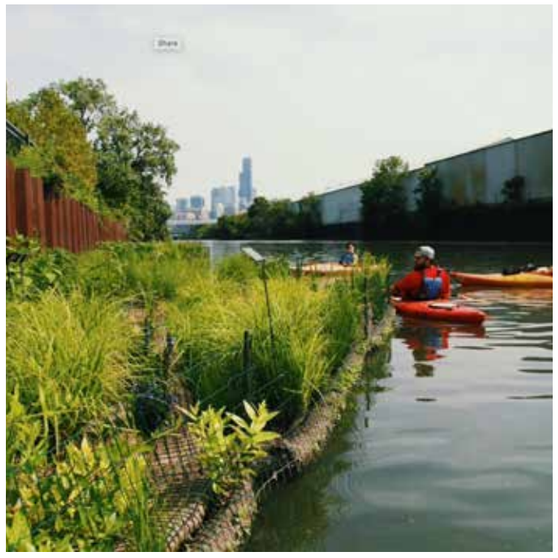
These scale tests compare RVDW to other bodies of water used for leisure and similar uses in London, and then to comparable parks and open spaces, with the latter using regulation football pitches to give an indicator of size.

This makes the case for RVDW as a waterborne park. Sometimes, say for a special event, it might be full of or dominated by a single activity, and it should have the capacity to be occupied in this way (examples might be a regatta or a music festival). But just as important are the more everyday and shared uses - a walk, a little informal sport, a rest, a swim. Infrastructure in RVDW needs to enable both these types of use.

There are only 262 hectares of publicly-accessible green space in all of LB Newham. RVDW is approximately 12 hectares, so if it is activated to its potential then it could add 5% publicly-accessible blue space to the green space total.



Chicago Riverwalk, designed in multiple phases, provides a stepped and easy transition between the established street level of the city and the waterside, using this as a device to locate an array of commercial and leisure uses.



Wild Mile, Chicago, Omni Eco-systems, 2021, has achieved stage one of a multi-stage greening and public activation of the river.

Rijnhaven, Rotterdam, Barcode Architects et al., ongoing- a striking example of a diverse set of programmes held together by landscape.

Eden Dock, Howells, 2024. A recent example of non-commercial foating infrastructure in East London.

3.2
floating park

DELIVERY STRATEGY

3.2.3 Viability

The business model for a floating park follows one of two broad patterns. In some cases, it is delivered as a public asset or philanthropic 'gift' – funded through grants, corporate giving, or charitable donations, and justified as an investment in ecology, public realm, and civic identity. In others, it is driven by a private landowner or developer, where the uplift in surrounding land and property values provides the return on investment. In both models, the floating park itself does not generate sufficient revenue to cover its costs; it is sustained either by subsidy or by indirect value capture.

There is relatively little hard financial data available on existing schemes. Where projects are embedded within large public authorities or private developers, income and expenditure are absorbed into broader budgets and not reported separately. More transparent evidence comes from independently operated initiatives such as Urban Rivers' Wild Mile in Chicago, which publishes annual accounts. These show reliance on a mix of corporate sponsorship, foundation grants, and government funding, with expenditure dominated by infrastructure and horticultural maintenance. It is also possible to infer the main cost and income categories by examining the assets and activities of comparable projects such as Eden Dock in Canary Wharf or floating gardens in Rotterdam and Copenhagen.

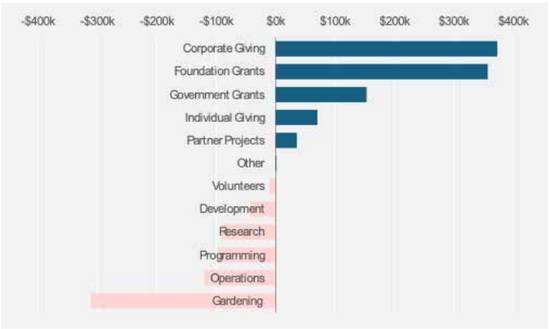
Revenue

- Government grant-in-aid.
- Corporate sponsorship and philanthropy.
- Developer/landowner contributions.
- Special events and cultural programming.
- Small concessions (cafés, kiosks, pop-ups).

Expenditure

- Garden infrastructure and horticultural upkeep.
- General operations (insurance, utilities, waste, compliance).
- Programming and public art commissions.
- Research, education, and community engagement.
- Security and staffing.

As a broad guide and benchmark, the Wild Mile in Chicago had the income and expenditure profile shown in the chart below.



Wild Mile, Chicago, Income and Expenditure, 1994

3.2.4 Alignment with Vision

A floating park is a near perfect physical expression of the Vision, creating free-to-access connection to the water for residents, tourists and workers alike. It has obvious environmental and biodiversity gains, and creates new platforms for cultural programming and art installations.

This is especially true if the park itself also affords opportunity for a managed “beach season” model, with lifeguards present during endorsed summer periods and supported by modest infrastructure (toilets, signage, gradual water access, demarcation of safe water zones). This could offer immediate opportunities for safe open water access, which underpins the idea of a fun, democratic and affordable swimming destination for London.

3.2.5 Delivery

Based on precedent elsewhere, there are several viable delivery routes for a floating park, each with different implications for funding, governance, and long-term stewardship.

1. Direct delivery by local authority, where the city treats the floating park as a public realm asset. The clearest precedent is Paris, where the municipality created and now maintains the Floating Gardens near the Pont de l’Alma as part of its riverside regeneration programme. Lille has taken a similar path at a smaller scale, funding floating garden structures through its municipal budget. In these cases the city provides both capital and operating support, with the park integrated into wider parks and public space portfolios. The advantage is clear lines of accountability and secure maintenance budgets, though this model can be slower-moving and more bureaucratic.

2. Direct delivery by a private landowner or developer, where the floating park is built and maintained as placemaking infrastructure to improve surrounding land values. The examples at Canary Wharf (Eden Dock) and Paddington Basin (Merchant Square) show how estate owners can invest in floating landscapes as part of their overall commercial strategy. Here, costs are folded into estate management charges or marketing budgets, and the return is captured indirectly through higher rents and stronger occupier demand in the wider estate. There seems limited scope for this at RVDW, although it allows for extension into Silvertown Quays when that project gathers pace.

3. Delivery by an independent trust or charity in partnership with local authorities. The Wild Mile in Chicago provides the best precedent: an independent non-profit, Urban Rivers, delivers the project, raises philanthropic and grant funding, engages volunteers, and curates education and cultural programmes. While the charity is the visible operator, the city provides permissions, infrastructure support, and sometimes baseline funding. This model offers flexibility, innovation, and strong community involvement, but it depends on a stable institutional partner to backstop essential costs. To our knowledge, there is no obvious third party Trust that is currently interested in delivering this type of project in RVDW. While one can be established and mobilised for this purpose, it may be easier – in that case – to simply consider direct delivery.

4. Last, harbour or dock authorities can take the lead. This is a legitimate option for RVDW, where Royal Docks Waterways already holds responsibility for water-based operations. Adding a floating park would align delivery with existing management structures and regulatory oversight of the Dock. However, there are not credible precedents elsewhere of a dock or harbour authority directly delivering a publicly accessible floating park of this type. Where harbour bodies have invested in floating assets, they have been ecological interventions (Bristol’s Floating Ecosystems) or water management infrastructure (Cardiff Bay Wetlands), rather than accessible civic spaces. While the mechanism is organisationally sound and locally available, it would be a novel approach without a tested comparator.

Eden Dock, Canary Wharf

Rijnhaven Recycled Park, Rotterdam

Wild Mile, Chicago

Any of these mechanisms is feasible for RVDW. The ultimate choice depends less on technical deliverability and more on the alignment of interests: whether the project is positioned as civic infrastructure, a piece of value-generating estate placemaking, a community-led ecological initiative, or part of Royal Docks Waterways’ responsibility for managing and activating the water.

Importantly, a floating park at RVDW could be delivered incrementally, with different segments advanced as adjuncts to other projects. For example, a floating lido could accompany an extension to the park, while residential moorings might add another section. Future developments at Excel London or Silvertown Quays could extend it further. In this way, the park would evolve in a modular format – continuously extended and improved through contributions from multiple partners over time.

Accordingly, it is not essential for public promoters to deliver the whole floating park as a single project in a single phase. They only need to deliver enough of the park to reach a tipping point where ‘network externalities’ set in – i.e. where the cost of not being part of the park outweighs the cost of connecting into it. This could be limited to that part of the floating park which connects the extant and imminent anchors at the western end of RVD – i.e. City Hall, the Cable Car landing, any future lido, and the northern corniche as far as the Good Hotel.

3.2.6 Operations and Management

The operational demands of a floating park differ from conventional public realm and require early planning. Key issues include:

- Physical maintenance – pontoons, anchoring systems, and access points need regular inspection and repair. Movement, weather exposure, and water-level variation introduce risks not present in land-based parks, requiring specialist marine engineering support under a planned maintenance regime.

- Horticultural upkeep – floating planting systems demand tailored soil media, irrigation, and plant selection. Maintenance cycles include pruning, replanting, and pest control, with higher labour intensity in early years. Reliability will depend on a contracted landscape team, though volunteer and educational programmes can supplement routine tasks.

- Safety and security – public access to the water edge brings risks of falls, and unauthorised activity. Non-slip surfacing, life-saving equipment, & regular patrols or CCTV coverage are essential. Insurance & liability frameworks need to be clarified.
- Waste management and utilities – concessions or events will generate waste requiring collection; planting may need irrigation; and lighting requires reliable power connections. These operational requirements must be tied into the dockside service infrastructure.
- Programming and public art – to keep the park active and relevant, there must be a framework for commissioning installations, hosting events, and delivering education programmes.
- Staffing – staffing requirements can be reduced through integration with existing estate management, staff and security arrangements.

Floating Park infrastructure – which, similar to Eden Dock, brings people close to the water – also creates the opportunity to test and pilot 'seasonal swim zones'. These could use light-touch infrastructure (demarcation buoys, hazard removal, clear signage, and easy water access/egress) and trained lifeguards to make the Dock 'swimmable' especially on hot summer days. Experience from Rutland Water's free beach model suggests that this kind of low-friction water access could be hugely popular, accepting that it creates a new staffing requirement and potential issues around over-crowding.

3.2.7 Funding

A floating park is unlikely to be delivered through a single capital funding source. The most realistic route is a cocktail of contributions, drawing on established channels for civic infrastructure.

- Key public sources are Central Government regeneration or biodiversity programmes, the Greater London Authority, and the London Borough of Newham, all of which have mandates to support public realm, climate resilience, and community infrastructure.
- BNG delivery or carbon capture / sequestration can attract funding where the scheme demonstrably enhances local habitats and locks away carbon in vegetation, soils or water.
- Alongside these, developer contributions – secured through Section 106 agreements or the Community Infrastructure Levy – are a standard route for funding improvements of this kind, especially if the project is positioned as part of a wider development pipeline (i.e. additional amenity for Silvertown Quays and Thameside West).
- The Heritage Fund is a potential source, especially where the scheme can be framed in terms of 'natural heritage,' biodiversity, and public engagement with the bigger docklands 'story'. Arts Council England could fund significant public art installations.
- Further capital may come from philanthropic foundations with an interest in urban environment and community wellbeing, such as Esmée Fairbairn or Garfield Weston Foundations.
- Corporate sponsorship is also plausible, especially where the project can be tied to the ESG and biodiversity agendas of large firms with a Docklands presence. Specific features such as art installations or named gardens can be funded through dedicated sponsorship agreements.

3.2
floating park

In practice, a deliverable funding model for RVDW is most likely to combine public grant support for the core infrastructure, developer contributions linked to adjacent or nearby schemes, and targeted Lottery or philanthropic funding for the horticultural and cultural layers.

3.2.8 Partners and Stakeholders

A floating park requires alignment across multiple institutional, commercial, and community stakeholders.

- Royal Docks Waterways – Responsible for water and marine infrastructure. Central to permissions, estate management, and operations.
- Royal Docks Team – Strategic lead on placemaking and delivery of the wider regeneration programme.
- Current occupiers of water space and adjacent landowners - TfL, Good Hotel, Sunborn Hotel, Excel London, General Projects all could be partners in funding and / or delivering elements of floating park.
- Silvertown Quays developers (Lendlease & partners) – Delivering the adjacent mixed-use redevelopment. It is important to coordinate ambitions for water use and management.
- Community and cultural partners – Local actors such as UEL, arts organisations such as The Line sculpture trail, creative studios, and residents' groups with roles in programming, education and stewardship.
- Other funding partners – Philanthropic, heritage, environmental, and cultural funders able to support ecological and artistic components of the project.

3.2.9 Procurement

The project involves a mix of marine engineering, landscape architecture, and public art commissioning, all of which needs to take careful account of downstream stewardship. Several options are plausible.

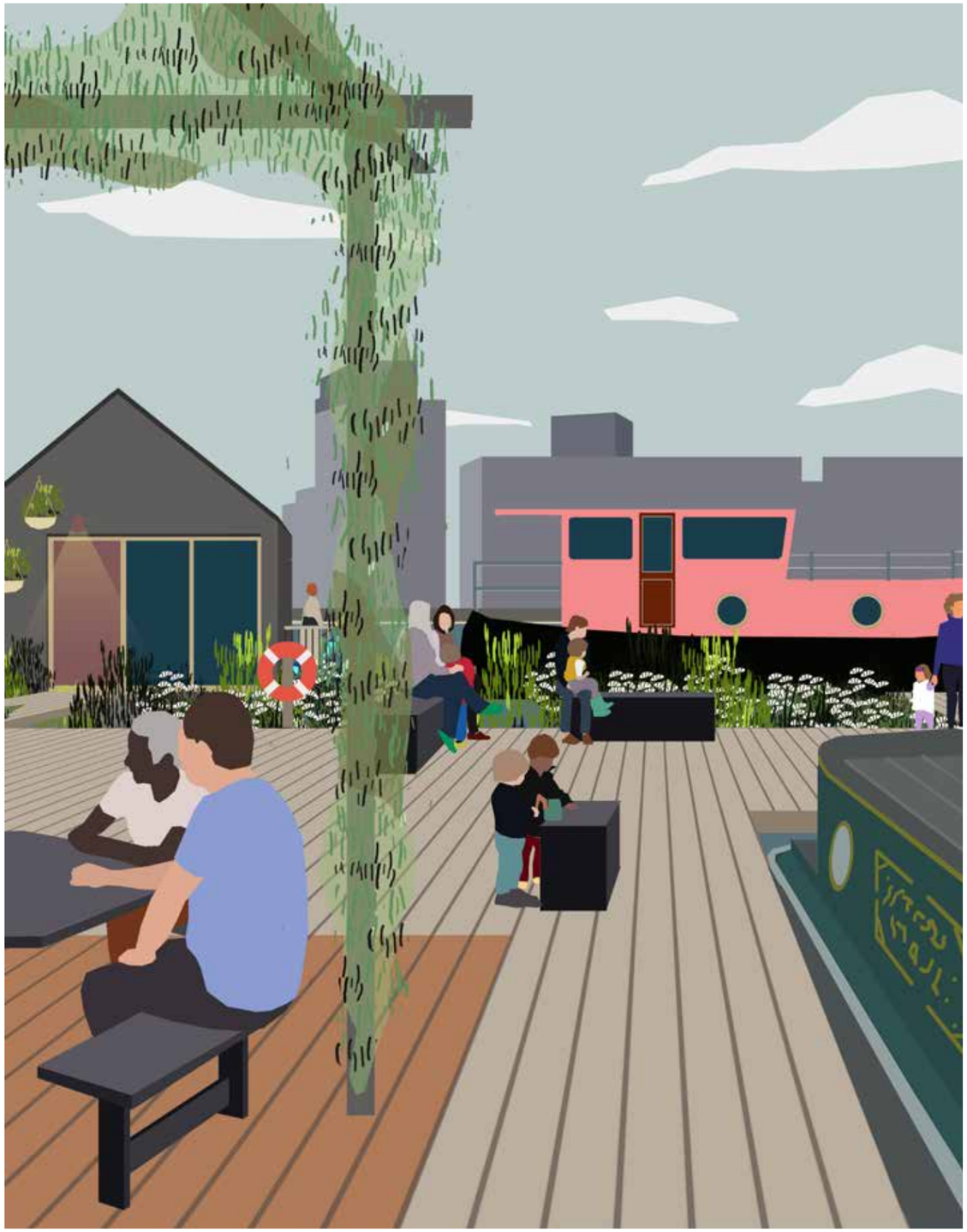
- Single design-and-build contract. The simplest option is to procure a consortium capable of delivering both the engineering and landscape components, with responsibility for design, fabrication, installation, and commissioning resting with a single contractor. This can provide cost certainty and a clear line of accountability, but it prioritises technical delivery over design quality.
- Two-stage design and delivery. An alternative is to commission a specialist design team (landscape architects, marine engineers, public art curators) to develop the scheme to a defined stage, then separately procure a contractor to build it. This affords more control over design quality, though it introduces a longer programme and the risk of cost inflation when moving from design to delivery.
- Existing frameworks. Standing frameworks are in place for the requisite design skills and the next stage can be let through one of these. This constrains the pool of potential bidders to those already accredited, but significantly accelerates procurement.
- Hybrid arrangements. A pragmatic route may be for the Royal Docks Team or Royal Docks Waterways to procure the core engineering and landscape infrastructure, with programming and art commissions separately procured through open calls or in partnership with other stakeholders. This splits procurement into separate packages, ensuring technical robustness while creating room for innovation in design and programming.

3.3
Floating Residential

An area for high quality mooring infrastructure and facilities to create a long-term residential environment.

Creating a new community and enhancing the dock for adjacent communities.

A mixed offering of moorings for vessels and unpowered floating dwellings.



View of residential pontoon showing planted social space and floating homes with views across RVDW.

FLOATING RESIDENTIAL: CLIENT REQUIREMENTS

Essential

- Exceptional quality mooring infrastructure which integrates all necessary services within designed components, for example sewage, broadband, water, electricity, lighting, refuse.
- Clear strategy for waste collection, deliveries, emergency service access, in ways which are not detrimental to adjacent residential premises but also do not reduce the environmental quality and visual amenity of the facility.
- Current trends in London are toward larger and more permanent vessels. A proportion of mooring infrastructure to be ready for larger vessels and a good proportion ready for floating home types.
- A small amenity building or buildings containing basic facilities, including backup facilities (such as a toilet) to provide for residents when facilities aboard fail or need repair.
- Clear code of conduct and by-laws, ideally generated through local engagement, around resident behaviours, particularly concerned with tackling petrol or fossil-fuel based power generation, antisocial behaviour, poor refuse handling and similar concerns.
- Direct involvement of specialist mooring/pontoon designers in early design stages.
- Clear, stringent guidelines on vessel quality, maintenance and storage provision.

Highly Desirable

- Design employs use of sustainable heating and cooling systems adapted to floating uses, for example water source heat pumps. Neither tidal nor wind-based systems are considered appropriate in this location.
- Social spaces, including biodiverse ones, designed to positively echo the design of the floating park and wellness projects are provided. Potential to share with existing residents should be explored also. These are in spaces which are readily overlooked by vessels and/or floating homes and of sufficient size and quality to be of use to the number of residents who might naturally benefit from them.
- Secure boundaries, wherever possible, are architecturally integrated (for example through an entrance pavilion or small amenity building) such that visually disruptive fences and gates are minimised.
- Office premises on site for any required management team, ideally suited adjacent to primary access route.
- Secure storage boxes provided to each resident and well-integrated with mooring infrastructure, alongside strict rules about storing items. This avoids the likely risk of residents storing unsightly large items alongside boats or in shared areas.

Desirable

- Any necessary piling delivered using reused or recycled steel elements.
- Some commercial uses, especially those of direct benefit to adjacent residential areas and to floating residents, provided at the western and most public end of the facility. These might include floating uses on craft themselves: in London at present there are floating cinemas, bookshops, restaurants and churches, to name a few.

DESIGN STRATEGY

3.3.1 Design Principles/Brief

- The intended site has been identifed on the basis of potential to integrate well with the wider public programming of the RVDW area but offering a use more appropriate to the more residential nature of this part of RVD.
- Design and layout must preserve the openness of the dock and avoid the sense of 'filling the water' with craft. This is to preserve the valued sense of openness and also to leave the way clear for future uses, adaptations and events programming.
- Design should provide for a mix of residential boats and floating homes, to future-proof the design and control design quality of overall project.
- Land uses such as parking, access, refuse and deliveries must be focused upon as fundamental to the success of the design.
- Design should properly account for how anti-social behavior and noise can be reduced through design.

ACCESS DECKING

All access decking needs to be designed such that:

- Materials are robust, durable, high quality and attractive.
- Careful integration of lighting and services.
- Access decking should provide communal spaces for residents beyond simple access and amenity.
- All opportunities to contribute to the 'floating park' of RVDW through enhancing biodiversity are explored – this can be in the form of accessible (to residents especially) garden or planted spaces within shared spaces and/or in-water solutions.
- All opportunities to contribute to the 'floating park' of RVDW through boosting access to the water are explored. This might include, as part of an overall strategy, making provision for members of the public to reach the water level, either informally or formally.
- Layout provides a safe and secure space for residents whilst avoiding visually intrusive security barriers etc – hopefully, amenities can provide security rather than fencing or barriers.

DWELLINGS/BOATS

There are two potential routes for this that previous studies and subsequent conversations suggest are desirable. One is permanent residential moorings for private craft, and the other is designed floating homes provided by a third party designer/ builder. The design team has compared two routes and recommends that the best proposal is a carefully-designed mix of the two types. Adding boats' to the visual amenity of RVDW will be a benefit, as will some carefully- designed, bespoke floating homes.

Floating Homes may feature glazing and sound insulation solutions that would make them particularly suitable for proximity to London City Airport. Ensuring adequate sound insulation for more conventional vessels will be an important issue to address.

3.3.2 Planning

LB Newham undertakes to work in partnership with Royal Docks Waterways, the Environment Agency, the GLA and other appropriate authorities and stakeholders, to determine the suitability of residential and visitor moorings. It states that in coming to a decision, they undertake to consider: Navigation, Water quality, Biodiversity, Openness and character of the water space and surrounding area, Surrounding residential amenity, and the adequate provision of supporting uses and facilities, including:

- Waste management (for example rubbish and sewage disposal).
- Supply of adequate electricity including for heating (see Local Plan Policy CE6).
- Supply of fresh water.

LB Newham emerging policy also requires moorings 'on waterways' to include an electrical hook-up at each mooring point.

Each of these topics will need a robust case but this feels reasonable in each case. The topic around neighbouring residential amenity is obviously crucial (see also 1.4 Engagement). Ongoing engagement and collaboration with Britannia Village residents and the overarching management committee will be crucial to the success of the project, in planning but also in overall quality terms - leading to a better and more locally-embedded final project.

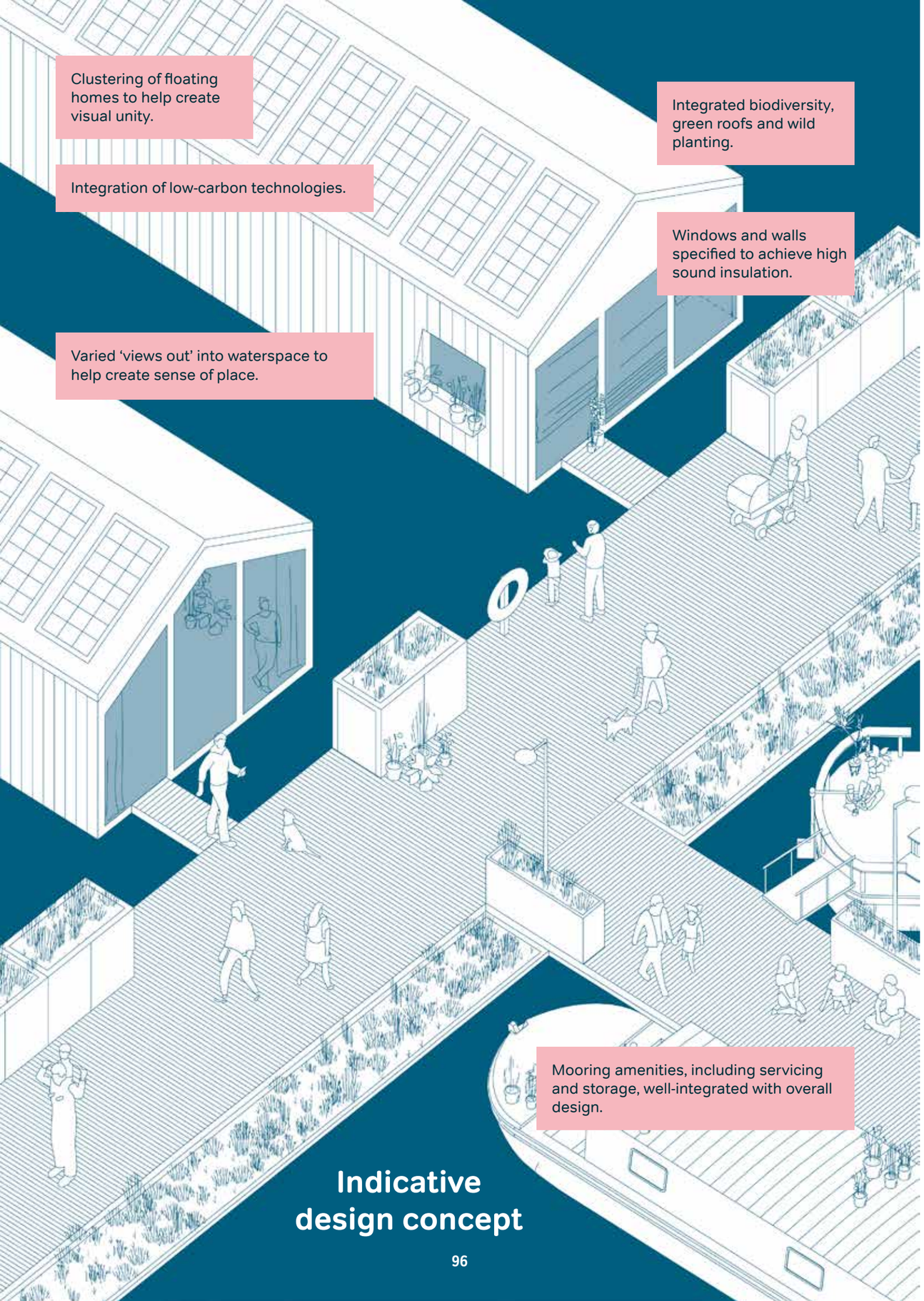
3.3
floating residential

New moorings in Bristol Harbour, delivered by Bristol City Council, have created a popular, leafy alternative to the existing dockside as a space to walk, jog and relax - as well as providing new moorings. The new infrastrucutre is closer to the water level than the dockside.

Canal & River Trust residential moorings with integrated services and biodiversity in-water, Millwall Outer Dock, London – the area of waterspace between the moorings and the existing dock edge is a useful security feature and works visually as well.

Hermitage Community Moorings, London, by Ivanov Versteeg Architecture – amenity facilities to support moorings can also be carefully and sympathetically designed.

Example 'floating homes' planned by Space & Matter for a site in Amsterdam.



Indicative design concept

DELIVERY STRATEGY

3.3.3 Viability

Residential moorings are among the most commercially viable forms of water-based development. Demand for permanent berths in London exceeds supply, and long waiting lists are common. No new moorings have been built on or near the Thames since 2016 – not for lack of demand, but for lack of available space. The nearest marinas for residential moorings are Limehouse (124 berths), Poplar (90) and South Dock (200) – all of which report full occupancy.

Unlike many public realm projects, moorings generate predictable income through licence fees or rents paid by residents. The proposition is therefore closer to housing than leisure: the financial model is based on occupation and service charges rather than discretionary visitor spend or philanthropic support.

Evidence from the Canal & River Trust, private operators, and council-run sites suggests that well-serviced residential berths in London typically command between £600 – £900 per linear metre per year. Premium locations with strong security, reliable utilities, and proximity to services can exceed these levels. Occupancy rates are consistently near capacity with turnover limited to voluntary moves.

Location	Annual Charge	Equivalent £/m/year	
South Dock (LB Southwark)	£13,335 (21m)	**£635**	
Blackwall Basin (CRT Waterside Moorings)	£25,698 (30 m) £33,371 (38 m)	**£857–£878**	
Brentford Island (CRT Waterside Moorings)	£7,868 (12 m)	**£656**	
Limehouse Basin (Aquavista/ BWML)	£16,350 (21 m)	**£779**	

Operating costs are stable and largely controllable: infrastructure maintenance, utilities, insurance, and staffing. The principal risk is long-term renewal of pontoons and services, which requires a sinking fund or staged reinvestment strategy. A minimum scheme of ~70–80 vessels is sufficient to sustain a dedicated management function and deliver a reliable return. RVDW has space to deliver significantly more than this, which could generate a substantial surplus for Royal Docks Waterways to reinvest in other Dock facilities and services.

The main income generators and cost-centres for residential moorings are well-understood:

Revenue

- Berth fees/licences (annual or monthly, based on vessel length or agreed banding).
- Service charges (electricity, water, waste disposal, storage, broadband).
- Visitor moorings (typically short-stay daily charges, unlikely to be viable in this location due bridge/airport navigation and strain on operational resources).
- Small ancillary uses (floating workshops, cafés, or studios integrated into the scheme).

Expenditure

- Pontoon and access infrastructure maintenance and renewal.
- Utilities provision and metering.
- Security systems and staffing.
- Waste management and environmental compliance.
- Insurance and statutory certifications.
- Management overheads (tenancy, billing, enforcement, community liaison).

Floating Homes

Floating homes – purpose-built residences on pontoons rather than vessels – could form an attractive complement to conventional residential moorings, combining reliable rental or sales values with a distinctive architectural character. Beyond financial returns, they offer visual amenity benefits: if well-designed, they enrich the waterfront while adding passive surveillance and activity to the water and waterside. Importantly, infrastructure for floating homes can be designed in tandem with residential moorings, preserving flexibility to introduce them if justified by market appetite, planning policy, and financial modelling.

While the residential moorings concept is well understood and can proceed with relative confidence, the idea of introducing purpose-built floating homes is more complex. They represent a more permanent and spatially consequential use of the water. And the rationale for floating homes fits more with a placemaking agenda – activation, oversight and visual interest – rather than as a material response to housing targets.

Given their relative permanence, high visibility and private character, floating homes need to be tested more carefully than conventional moorings. There are planning, market and operational questions to resolve, including how these dwellings would be classified and serviced, what level of demand and value they command, and their public acceptability.

It remains sensible for the residential moorings design to allow for the possible future accommodation of floating homes. This allows the concept to be advanced without committing prematurely, while retaining the option of delivering a high-quality, place-defining housing product.

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floating residential

3.3.4 Alignment with Vision

While not publicly accessible in a conventional sense, residential moorings transform the water from picturesque backdrop to lived-in neighbourhood. Daily routines – boats lit at night, residents moving about, gardens on decks – create continuous animation. This sense of life on the water underlines RVDW as a lively and authentic urban district, rather than a space that is only occasionally activated by special events.

Well-designed moorings also provide an opportunity to demonstrate high environmental and social standards. Biodiverse edges, reed planting, and floating gardens can soften visual impact and improve ecology. The infrastructure needed to deliver the berths can also contribute towards the parallel objective of creating a ‘floating park’.

3.3.5 Delivery

Residential moorings can be delivered under several models. Options include direct development by a public body, lease to a private operator, estate-led integration, or community management. Each carries different implications for risk, control, and income.

In this case, the likeliest solution is for Royal Docks Waterways to manage delivery and own the completed asset. Moorings are marine infrastructure – pontoons, gangways, service bollards, and supporting facilities – that align with Royal Docks Waterways' existing responsibilities and its field of expertise.

A private operator could, in theory, manage berths under a lease arrangement, but this would divert a large share of income away from the public interest. That model tends to work in settings where moorings are secondary to land-based development – i.e. a private developer or local authority ‘outsourcing’ the responsibility and off-shoring the risk. That seems unnecessary in RVDW, where an extant organisation has the requisite skillset to deliver and manage new moorings.

On balance, there is a strong case for Royal Docks Waterways ownership and management: it consolidates responsibility, retains revenues within the system, and builds on established expertise.

3.3.6 Operations and Management

Whichever delivery model is chosen, day-to-day operations require a high level of care and stewardship. Core functions include:

- Maintenance – inspection and repair of pontoons, gangways, and utilities.
- Services – reliable electricity, water, waste and recycling facilities, and broadband.
- Security – controlled access, CCTV, and liaison with police or security partners.
- Compliance – navigation licences, insurance, fire safety, and environmental obligations.
- Community management – tenancy agreements, visual standards, and resolution of disputes.

Royal Docks Waterways is already structured around these requirements and skillsets. Adding residential moorings would extend existing functions rather than create new ones, with economies of scale in staffing, compliance, and marine maintenance. The key additional task would be tenancy management, which could be incorporated into current estate systems or delivered through a dedicated officer role.

3.3.7 Funding

The capital cost for residential moorings for ~190 berths will be substantial.

Options for funding include:

- Direct capital investment by Royal Docks Waterways.
- Public or regeneration funding – justified by housing and placemaking benefits.
- Forward funding – long leases or advance sale of berths and homes.

Given the predictable revenue stream, a self-financing model is realistic, with berth fees covering operating costs, debt service and a sinking fund for future renewal. Public or developer contributions could reduce the scale of borrowing and improve affordability.

Precedents in Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Seattle, and Portland suggest that floating homes are rarely financed through mainstream residential development or mortgage markets. Funding models are typically bespoke and mixed, combining elements such as public grant or municipal loan support, cohousing or cooperative investment, and specialist or non-mainstream lenders willing to underwrite the risks of an unconventional residential product.

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floating residential

3.3.8 Partners and Stakeholders

Key stakeholders include:

- Navigation authorities (Royal Docks Waterways) – for consents and regulatory compliance.
- Local authority – planning, housing, and regeneration policy.
- GLA and the Royal Docks Team – coordination with regeneration and water activation strategies.
- Residents' associations – ensuring community integration.
- Adjacent landowners / developers / residents.

Royal Docks Waterways is already well-placed to convene and manage these relationships, given its statutory remit and long-standing role in coordinating water-based activity.

3.3.9 Procurement

Procurement options include:

- Design-and-build contract – one consortium delivers pontoons, services, and support facilities.
- Two-stage approach – specialist designers develop the scheme, then tendered to contractors.
- Framework procurement – use any existing marine engineering frameworks for faster delivery.
- Split packages – infrastructure procured separately from tenancy management.

The choice depends on Royal Docks Waterways appetite for control. If they own the scheme, procurement can prioritise technical robustness and lifecycle value rather than short-term cost. This also simplifies downstream stewardship: Royal Docks Waterways collects rents, enforces standards, and reinvests income directly into maintenance and wider water management.

4

Next Steps

The ambition is for people to benefit from the Vision before 2030. The Vision aims to progress the idea of Royal Victoria Dock West as a great place to live and work, and an attractive destination for visitors. Every Priority Project is an attractor that contributes to this overarching purpose. Therefore we divide next steps into sub-categories by project. Ongoing challenges and opportunities around phasing are discussed in section 2.9.

Publishing the Vision

Stakeholders reviewed the draft Vision in late 2025, which contributed to this updated version before Royal Docks Waterways and the GLA endorsed the document and the next steps.

With the Vision in the public domain, Royal Docks Waterways can then use it as a guide for ongoing public and stakeholder engagement and to launch procurement progresses to progress work on the Priority Projects.

Developing frameworks to guide Priority Projects

Royal Docks Waterways is developing a Monitoring and measurement framework, so there is transparency about the trends on economic, social and environmental indicators. It is also commissioning work for overarching RVDW design advice, environmental strategy and community engagement strategy, so that all Priority Projects will be progressed to a high standard, in a coordinated way.

Floating Wellness

For this project, the next step is the selection of delivery partners. With sufficient precedent, a clear operating model, and early soft-market testing already underway, the immediate priority is to move into a structured process to identify and secure the right partner.

Once a credible partner is in place, the scheme can then be co-developed in detail, with design and funding packages shaped around the combined expertise of the partnership.

Floating Park

The Floating Park has been conceived as an important element to be delivered within other Priority Projects, as well as a substantial self-contained project. The funding model for the self-contained project is more complex than Residential or Wellness, so the immediate next step is to progress the Floating Park within the briefs for the other two projects, while the funding strategy for the self-contained project is created.

Floating Residential

Royal Docks Waterways has undertaken some outline financial modelling around residential moorings, but the concept still requires structured design and financial feasibility work and ongoing engagement, before moving to delivery. The next steps should focus on consolidating the business case, testing design assumptions, and confirming the delivery pathway.

Date	Rev	Document Issue
20.10.2025	-	Final confidential draft for project board.
29.10.2025	A	Minor corrections and updates.
30.01.2026	B	Final revisions following stakeholder engagement

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