London Snoring

A tale of missed opportunity
This paper seeks to change awareness by highlighting what's happening elsewhere. In 2000 North America had just four major home ports serving as starting points for cruises: Los Angeles, Miami, Fort Lauderdale and Vancouver. In 2005 there were more than twenty.

Port Canaveral, in Florida, now has six terminals in operation, and two more on the drawing board. Seattle, in the Pacific Northwest, had just six sailings in 1999; in 2006 it had almost 200 departures carrying an estimated 370,000 passengers.

The number of cruise ships calling at San Diego, in California, tripled in the five years to 2005, bringing the number of passengers expected that year to 648,000, or twice what it was in 2003.

Galveston, on the Gulf of Mexico, has seen one of the largest increases in passengers, rising from 32,000 in 2001 to an expected 600,000 in 2006, or 1,777 per cent.

New York is yet another growth point, which it is instructive to look at in more detail. For New York is not only a port of embarkation, like the above, but like London a destination in its own right.

The city had been losing business after several cruise lines transferred to Bayonne, New Jersey, from the outmoded New York Passenger Ship Terminal on Manhattan's Upper West Side. The authorities fought back by investing $200 million of public money: not only to upgrade the existing Manhattan terminal but also to create a completely new berth at Red Hook on the Brooklyn waterfront.

To offset this investment Mayor Michael Bloomberg cut a long-term deal with two of the world's largest cruise companies, Norwegian Cruise Lines and Carnival Corporation, requiring them to bring in at least 13 million passengers by 2017 and pay the city more than $200 million in port charges. In return the city gave the cruise lines preferential berths on specific piers and offered them incentives in the form of fee reductions in exchange for volume and revenue guarantees.

The city also offered Carnival, which owns the Cunard and Princess lines, the option of moving some of its berths to Brooklyn. Carnival accepted, with the result that Red Hook, tough, gritty and in decline since the days of On The Waterfront (1954) with young Marlon Brando, has become home port to some of the world's largest and most elegant ships, including the QM2 and theQE2.
New York

The terminal opened in April 2006. In his speech Mayor Bloomberg said:

"Thanks to the spectacular Brooklyn Cruise Terminal, we expect more than a million passengers coming through city cruise facilities this year for the first time ever."

In the 1990s the numbers were less than half that.

Bloomberg estimated that in 2004 the economic impact of the cruise industry on New York City was $600 million. As a result of the city's increased boat-berthing capacity, he expected the figure to reach $900 million by 2011.

Standing alongside the Mayor, the Borough President of Brooklyn, Marty Markowitz, said:

"The new cruise ship terminal not only creates jobs for Red Hook and Brooklyn residents and revitalizes our waterfront, it also proves that Brooklyn's future is today, right here. Our tourism kiosk will help passengers discover Brooklyn, and our businesses will benefit from new opportunities with the cruise-ship industry."

As part of a tourist-friendly makeover, Kate Ascher, of the NYC Economic Development Corporation, suggested the area's commercial strip could be converted into a mixed-use space with a maritime museum, a public school, a café or a brew-pub run by a relocated Brooklyn brewery. The narrow streetscape could be smarterened up with historic plaques, and the streets repaved and widened.

On the ground in Red Hook realistic traders reportedly had their sights not on the passengers, who would be spirited away by cab or bus during their stay; but on the 900 or so crew members aboard each vessel. Cooks, porters, deckhands, housekeepers, waiters and other service personnel would they hoped spill ashore looking for toothpaste, CDs, long-distance call centres and other staples that were six times the price on board.

"The idea is to capture whatever business we can," said Borough President Markowitz. It's a sentiment shared at all levels, from the Mayor down to the owner of the 99-cent store on Van Brunt Street.

Equally striking is the "can-do" attitude of the civic authorities who, having conceived the vision then made that vision into reality. The 180,000 square foot terminal, containing a terminal building capable of holding 4,000 passengers and costing $52 million, was built in little over a year. 1

Let us now turn to London

Within the UK the capital is by far the biggest magnet for overseas visitors. An estimated 14.8 million came here in 2006.


A small number of cruise liners, it is true, do come to central London (18 in 2006). But whether off Greenwich or in the Pool of London they have to moor in mid-river. Passengers disembark on to a floating dock from which they are transferred ashore by small boat. Good fun in fine weather, but there's also something slightly amateurish about the arrangement.

Yet the ideal site exists, minutes by water from the Tower and City Hall, somewhere with water deep enough to permit alongside docking, and with no need for routine dredging.

From this site passengers would awake to a panoramic view of the capital, from Tower Bridge and the City to Docklands, Canary Wharf and Maritime Greenwich. What an arrival! It would certainly beat trundling in from Dover or Tilbury by coach and train.

Just as important perhaps, these giants of the sea would be seen from the financial and media businesses of Canary Wharf.

1 Reporting by The Brooklyn Papers.
The place in question is Convoys Wharf, Deptford. Once it was the King’s Yard, founded by Henry VIII, a powerhouse of Britain’s dominance of the oceans. Now it is the last remaining wharf to offer deep-water potential so close to central London. Half of its 42 acres are safeguarded in planning terms for marine use.

According to the community vision worked up by local activists and stakeholders, the missing liner terminal would form the heart of a marine enterprise cluster providing boat repair and support facilities desperately needed on the Thames. Beyond that: other forms of employment and indeed housing. The site is large enough.

Most of the wharfage and infrastructure needed for a terminal are already in place or would need little adaptation. The Port of London threw its weight early on behind the cruise liner element of the vision. Their River Engineer was confident that after a one-off, or capital dredge, the alongside berth would maintain its depth with regular use.

Research they commissioned in 2003/4 calculated that a terminal in Deptford would attract 46 cruise calls in the first year of operation, building up 124 calls a year after five years. It put the cost of building a terminal at £17.5 million. (The Liverpool terminal, incidentally, cost £16 million, of which £14 million came from public funds.)

Building on these figures in 2004, an impact assessment by consultants SQW found that the potential economic benefits, both to London and the immediate locality, would be substantial. It concluded that, taking into account passenger and crew spending, fuel, stores and port fees and the effects of multipliers, each cruise passenger would generate something over £400 of expenditure.

(It’s true the very big liners now being built cannot come this far up river, but ships of up to 240m length can do so, and such vessels are not going to become obsolete.)

The Olympic argument

The case for a cruise terminal at Convoys is made more compelling by the award to London of the 2012 Olympics. The Sydney and Athens Games each used nine cruise liners for VIP accommodation. It is clear that cruise liners will also have to be brought in for 2012. They could use the mid-stream moorings at Greenwich and Tower Bridge and there could be temporary moorings downstream at Silvertown and beyond.

However the considerable interest that will be generated in London as a cruise destination will only be of benefit if there is a proper facility in place. A purpose-built terminal would provide the legacy south of the Thames that the main Olympic project is bringing to the Stratford area.

On tourism generally, the London Plan admits that the historic growth in numbers from overseas has not been maintained, and action is required to “rejuvenate London’s visitor offer and competitiveness.” A cruise terminal would do just that.

At the same time, plans to develop passenger services on the Thames signal the relevance of a marine enterprise zone on Convoys. Last autumn Lord Sterling of Plaistow, the former chairman of P&O, set out his vision for a major expansion of ferry services between Putney and the Barrier. Within days Philip Anschutz, owner of the Dome, was reported as having purchased the commuter ferry firm Thames Clippers. Based at Rotherhithe, the clippers currently run between Savoy Pier and Woolwich. Anschutz planned to buy six more new vessels and improve the service.

The point about these developments is that the boats will require repair and maintenance – facilities that are in such short supply on the Thames that vessels already have to travel up the coast or across the Channel to find them. Convoys Wharf is almost the only place where they can be provided.

A further argument is that a cruise terminal in Deptford will give both the Port and London’s international shipping business a visible focus that is currently lacking.
If that’s the opportunity, what’s the problem?

Let's try and answer that question.

Convoys is owned by News International who up to 2000 used the wharf to ship in newsprint. An outline planning application submitted on their behalf proposes a mainly residential development, alongside commercial, leisure and cultural uses. It is distinguished only by three, gratuitously high, ‘landmark’ towers, the tallest being 148 metres.

It proposes 3,500-plus flats, which would bring some 10,000 people on to the site: an unsustainable prospect that would place intolerable strain on local services and impossible pressure on already congested roads.

The application seeks to offset the 25 acres that currently enjoy safeguarded status by creating an 8-acre, 3-storey complex on the eastern corner of the site that would accommodate a waste remanufacturing plant, or “sustainable business park.” This fragment of “river use” would, it is claimed, compensate for the loss of the other 17 acres to more lucrative forms of development.

However research commissioned by ourselves in 2005 from logistics consultants Baker Rose concludes that the proposal has no commercial or practical logic. In other words, the planning application has lost one of its wheels, the one marked “river use.” We conclude that, if it were ever built, the facility would prove a white elephant, and be replaced after a few years by more housing.

Despite all the arguments against, Lewisham, the planning authority, resolved to approve the News application in May 2005. This, of course, was before London unexpectedly won the 2012 Olympics. The application still has a long way to go – first to the Mayor of London and then to the Secretary of State – before it gets planning permission, if it does.

Permission would trigger a sale agreement between News International and the Hong Kong businessman Li Ka-shing. His many companies include the conglomerate Hutchison Whampoa, which operates in 45 ports across the world. However the sale agreement anticipates that he will apply to put even more housing on the site.

Since May 2005 the planning application has come to an unexpected standstill. Instead of being referred briskly to the Mayor of London it has, for reasons obscure, still not made the journey between Lewisham and City Hall.

The Plan has a lot to say, in the section on the Blue Ribbon Network, about the Thames and the rest of London’s waterspace. There we read:

**Policy 4C.15**
The Mayor will, and the boroughs should, protect safeguarded wharves for cargo handling uses such as inter-port or trans-shipment movements and freight related purposes.

**Paragraph 4.106** elaborates
*If a wharf is no longer viable, redevelopment proposals must incorporate water based transport, leisure and recreation facilities and water transport facilities first, before non-river related uses that do not require a riverside location. (Our emphasis)*

This is a sequential test and it is clear that a cruise terminal and marine cluster would fully meet it. It is also clear that the News proposal to shrink the safeguarded wharf to a token remnant is in direct conflict with policy 4C.15.

One would therefore expect the Mayor, to use his power to direct refusal when the News application eventually reaches him. However in January 2005 he said he was minded to support the application. In an initial opinion he concluded that redevelopment of the site to accommodate a liner terminal as well as a recycling facility would make the scheme financially unviable. He did so, in part, on the basis of a hasty and defective report commissioned by the London Development Agency.
Shortly afterwards Mayor Livingstone gave some revealing answers at a “People’s Question Time” held in Goldsmiths College. Asked why he was so negative towards a cruise liner terminal on Convoys, he said he was not opposed to it, but he did not own the land, and the economics had to stack up. Then apparently forgetting where he was (in Deptford) he added that because it was short on black cabs and without a tube line, Deptford was not the sort of place where well-heeled cruise passengers would want to disembark.

Compare this with the stance of Mayor Bloomberg and Borough President Markowitz towards Red Hook. But let’s not be too sarcastic. We have lobbied Livingstone hard since the award of the Olympics. It may be that he is fending off the News application in order to give himself space for a rethink. Let’s hope so.

The response of the Olympic Delivery Authority itself has been unenthusiastic. In autumn 2006 they said that while there were ongoing discussions with the Port of London about using cruise ships as temporary accommodation, they did not feel there was a convincing argument to support the terminal project as part of the infrastructure arrangements for 2012.

The Port of London may also be going cool on the project. Under their new chief executive they have been concentrating on freight issues and recently won a famous victory to prevent Peruvian, a safeguarded wharf in Newham, being built over. It is to be hoped they will now turn their attention back to Convoys, whose safeguarding for marine use is strengthened by the Peruvian decision.

News International have never shown any interest in the marine vision. Li Ka-shing has been equally unresponsive.

In other words: while the argument for a cruise terminal and marine cluster on Convoys is as powerful as ever, the cause still lacks a champion and can-doer. Perhaps Lord Sterling is that man. Or perhaps we should bring Marty Markowitz across to make the case.

As Lloyd’s List put it in an editorial wake-up call (7 Sept 06):

One thinks of other ports which, with a 10th of London’s attractions, have built first class cruise facilities. It is also worth considering some of the brilliant architectural statements made by cruise terminals in Amsterdam, Barcelona or Genoa, and the ingenious auxiliary uses to which these are put.

Convoys deserves something better than the dreary façade of condominiums and lumpish blocks of flats that disfigure too many waterside developments. Something wonderful, even iconic, could be built that would generate wealth, bring glamour to the river and add to the general flavour of the capital in good time for the Olympics. It is time to think more adventurously.

Yes indeed.

Are you persuaded?

Then help us make the case. You can

- Write to Ken Livingstone, at City Hall, London SE1 2AA
- Invite us to speak to your organisation
- Circulate this document

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