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**THE LEA BRIDGE GATEWAY S.R.B  
FINAL EVALUATION**

**Hywell Dinsdale and Emma Ahmad**

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Centre for Institutional Studies  
University of East London

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## **THE CENTRE FOR INSTITUTIONAL STUDIES**

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The Centre for Institutional Studies (CIS) is a research unit within the University of East London (UEL). Established in 1970, the centre undertakes studies of public policy and public institutions. Its distinctive approach is to identify the problems to which new policy is seen as a solution, and assess the capacity of the institutions to put new policies into practice. The Centre's name, and its approach is derived from the work of Sir Karl Popper and others, and in developing this approach the Centre is unique in this country.

Since 1970 the Centre has completed a range of studies in the fields of education, voluntary organisations, local government, local government finance, and other public services. Current work is focused on higher education, the voluntary sector and urban regeneration in the East of London.

### **THE URBAN REGENERATION TEAM**

The Centre's Urban Regeneration Evaluation team has been involved in the evaluation of a number of regeneration initiatives in East London. These have included Stratford City Challenge programme and the Stratford and Temple Mills SRB. Currently the team is working on evaluation of the South Leytonstone SRB, the Fit for Work SRB in Newham, a youth football project funded through the Thames Gateway SRB, and also a number of projects concerned with young offenders.

The Urban Regeneration Team is multidisciplinary, and consists of researchers from a variety of academic backgrounds, including social sciences, criminology, environmental science, and economics. In this way they are well suited to evaluate urban regeneration programmes which typically cover a wide range of projects, objectives, and focuses.

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

We would like to thank all the residents, partner organisations, businesses and community group representatives who have participated in the interviews used in this evaluation.

We would also like to thank the programme and project managers, and partnership members, who have shared their experiences and opinions of the SRB with us. Our special thanks should go to Steve Pearce for his patience during the numerous drafts that were produced.

Hywell Dinsdale  
Emma Ahmad

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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### **Introduction**

This report reviews the progress of the Lea Bridge 'Gateway to Opportunity' Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) programme from April 1996 for five years, building on CIS evaluation including two business surveys, three project evaluations, and two interim programme evaluations. In the final year an additional business survey, one project evaluation, and interviews with partnership board members, project leaders and partner organisations were carried out. Partnership meetings were attended and baseline data collected. Findings are based on an analysis of project monitoring and output data, statistics relating to the local area, survey results and qualitative interviews.

Lea Bridge includes over 2000 residential properties. Light industry and manufacturing have long been important features of the area. The partnership gained £5.77 million of SRB funding, supplemented by £10.6 million from private finances, and £6.49 million from public sources. £0.89 million had been pledged for unfinished projects at the time of evaluation.

The programme aimed to transform the area into 'a vibrant and sustainable centre of manufacturing and commercial activity', and to 'dramatically improve the employment profile of the area, and the quality of life of the people who live and work' there. It had three primary strategic objectives: Improved economic efficiency, investing in people and providing a safe and sustainable environment. Progress towards achieving each strategic objective is reviewed in turn.

### **Business and employment**

The programme successfully attracted businesses to the area, although further work was needed to achieve targets for occupied industrial floor space. Local business benefited from the reclamation of the contaminated Radio Veneers site, the Estate improvements (including CCTV), the Gateway Business Expansion Programme, and the Argall Avenue access road to the main industrial area. They also benefited from the Customised Training Initiative, the subsidised childcare places, waste recycling schemes and environmental improvements to the area.

Impact appears to be focused on certain companies rather than spread evenly across businesses. New businesses or those which had been aware of and made full use of the projects gained most. The businesses most likely to benefit from the project on

completion of the relief road and the tip site are those served by the Link road. There was generally a low level of awareness about SRB activity amongst businesses.

The expected impact on business is likely to increase with the completion of the two main projects, the Low Hall tip site and the Leyton Relief Road. Decreased traffic on surrounding roads could provide more general improvements in future.

Between March 1996 and March 2000, Waltham Forest has seen a smaller increase in the number of businesses registered for VAT than all surrounding East London boroughs except Redbridge. Comparison of Waltham Forest with surrounding boroughs reveals that the number of new businesses registering in the area is below average and the number of companies de-registering is above average.

Three hundred and eighty businesses were VAT registered in Lea Bridge in March 2000. Also, a number of firms in Lea Bridge are known to operate unregistered, comparing favourably with the 257 businesses reported in the initial delivery plan.

The VAT-registration based estimate suggests there are 123 more businesses in Lea Bridge than were present in 1996, a 48 per cent increase.

The survival rate of new businesses is approximately 68 per cent, above the 40 per cent target set out in the bid document

There was a 15 per cent decrease in the number of vacant industrial units between 1996 and 1999. This is likely to be linked to businesses attracted by the SRB, although in a period of economic growth some decrease in vacant units would be expected.

It is possible that the target, 59 units, a 50 per cent decrease, has been achieved since data was last collected. However this is likely to change when the new units on the tip site come onto the market.

It seems unlikely that the SRB has yet achieved its target of 546,525 square metres of occupied floor space, as the anticipated redevelopment adjacent to the Leyton Relief Road had yet to take place at the time of evaluation. A further 45,000 feet of smaller industrial units was due to become available when the tip site was complete.

Despite the number of vacant units falling and the increase in business numbers, there was a decrease in occupied industrial floor space, suggesting that larger firms within the area were being replaced by smaller operations. The units lying vacant are therefore likely to be older and larger premises, with the new businesses moving into the small starter units.

Projects within this SRB (such as the Low Hall tip site), and from other public funded programmes such as the project to convert Roxwell Studios into a number of small units, appear to be catering for this changing demand for property. If this policy is not

continued the area may be left with a surplus of large premises with low rent per square foot, whilst the new smaller companies will be discouraged from the area by the high rent demanded for the small units.

Long established companies found property costs to be a small problem, due to ownership of buildings, or cheap rents, whilst newer companies felt rents to be too high.

Just under half of the businesses surveyed reported improvements in the area for business

Some explanation is needed for the rise in figures for vacant land. Although the table above shows nearly a 37 per cent increase, this does not accurately reflect what has occurred in the area over this time.

The 1998 figure of 6.48 hectares was made up primarily of two sites, the tip site and the gas works. Additional vacant land for 1999 included the land from the former British Rail goods yard and the Olympus site off Seymour Road. The majority of the vacant land in 1999 was thus vacant to make way for future development. With work underway on the tip site, the BR yard now part of the Relief Road and a new school on the former Olympus site, the 2001 figure for vacant land can be recalculated as 3.75 hectares comprising only the gas works.

There has thus been a decrease of around 40 per cent in the amount of vacant land since the start of the programme. Although this indicates success for the partnership, it is important to note that this reduction is only meaningful if the redeveloped land is made to work to the benefit of local people and business.

Of those businesses surveyed in the final year 48 per cent felt that Lea Bridge had become a better place for business over the past five years and 13 per cent felt the area had deteriorated. Thirty-five per cent said there had been no change in the area as a business location.

Given the high level of support for the new road amongst local business (McInroy 1999), it is likely that once this is open more businesses will report a positive change.

Forty Two per cent reported that their businesses had benefited from the SRB, 32 per cent did not know. Thirty-two per cent had seen an increase in turnover over the past two years, whilst 23 per cent reported a decrease. Twenty-nine per cent had seen no change, and 13 per cent reported turnover had fluctuated. In a climate of general economic growth, these findings suggest little real improvement in turnover.

Of the projects offered under the Lea Bridge Gateway programme, the Relief Road was the best known, with 77 per cent of businesses aware of it. Of these, 66 per cent felt that it was a useful or very useful addition to the area for local business.

The six businesses (19 per cent) which had received SRB grants found these very useful. However, advice received from projects such as the waste minimisation club and the business advice project was perceived to be less useful.

Priorities for local businesses may be more effectively delivered through small scale projects than large scale infrastructure projects.

### **Training and local people**

There was an overall decrease in unemployment in Lea Bridge, closer to borough and London averages. There is evidence that the programme resulted in local jobs creation, as it coincided with a dramatic increase in the number of advertised jobs in the area.

There is also evidence of other factors effecting unemployment in the area, such as accounts of local people finding employment outside of the area, and of local businesses decreasing their work forces.

Work with minority ethnic groups appears to have reinforced the position of the SRB in the local economy. A number of the newly established businesses were owned by people from minority ethnic backgrounds.

### **Environment**

The visual environment in certain areas of Lea Bridge was improved through SRB projects.

After an initial increase in reported crime, the levels of crime in the area started to decline.

Further environmental improvements are likely to have resulted from the project, although suitable tests were beyond the scope of this evaluation.

### **Partnership**

Initial tensions were eventually resolved and a core of committed members from local businesses and the community was established.

The partnership had a good relationship with the council and the experience and ability to manage a programme.



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## 1 INTRODUCTION

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This report reviews the progress of the Lea Bridge 'Gateway to Opportunity', Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) programme which started in April 1996 and has now completed its fifth year.

This summary report builds on work conducted by the CIS over the past five years as evaluators of this project. This includes:

- Two business surveys (Gordon & Sampson 1997, McInroy 1999)
- An evaluation of the Customised Training Initiative (McInroy 1999)
- An evaluation of the Agenda 21 Community forum (Fearnley 2000)
- An evaluation of the Gateway Business Expansion programme (Unpublished)
- Programme evaluations for years three (Sampson 1999) and four (Unpublished)
- An evaluation of the Nursery provision (Dinsdale and Ahmad 2001)

In addition the Urban Regeneration Team have conducted a large number of additional interviews with those involved in the SRB, have attended project appraisals and partnership meetings, and have been collecting baseline data for the duration of the programme.

The work carried out in the final year has included:

- Thirty-one business interviews
- Twenty-one interviews with residents or local employees who used the subsidised childcare scheme
- Interviews with board members
- Interviews with project leaders
- Interviews with partner organisations (Lea Valley Parks, LETEC etc)
- Attendance at Partnership meetings
- Collection of baseline data.

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## **2 THE LEA BRIDGE AREA AND THE SRB PROGRAMME**

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### **2.1 The Lea Bridge area**

The Lea Bridge area has a long history as a centre for industry and manufacturing. In addition the area contains over 2,000 residential properties, housing over 5,000 people. In recent years the area has suffered as the traditional industries declined, large employers moved out, leaving empty commercial premises, closed shops, and high unemployment.

A number of key problems faced the area. Poor road access for local business was identified as a major hurdle, but low quality premises and the poor image for the area were also important factors in this decline. Low levels of training and work experience amongst the local population were also identified as barriers to local business success.

Both residents and businesses alike suffered from high crime rates, a lack of public transport and a shortage of affordable local childcare. The initial bid document also identified 'limited general involvement in community related activities' amongst the local population.

A more comprehensive description of the area covered by the Lea Bridge Gateway SRB is given in Annex One.

### **2.2 The SRB Bid**

In order to tackle these problems a group of business leaders formed a self-help group, ASITA, in 1989. Around the same time the council, having initially been against the idea, accepted a previously proposed plan to improve road access to the main industrial area in Lea Bridge by the construction of a relief road, linking the area to the M11 link road which was under construction. The two bodies formed a partnership and, with the addition of a local resident's representative and other locally active partner organisations, bid for SRB funding.

The work of the partnership was rewarded in the winter of 1996 when SRB funding was secured. As the partnership had no internal expertise in managing projects of this nature, the board enlisted a local regeneration agency with the relevant experience, Stratford Development Partnership Ltd (SDP Ltd), to manage the programme.

Annex two provides greater detail on the history of the partnership and their application for SRB funding.

## 2.3 The vision of the Lea Bridge Gateway SRB

The vision of the Lea Bridge Gateway SRB was that the area would be:

*'...transformed into a vibrant and sustainable centre of manufacturing and commercial activity'.*

It was envisaged that the programme would:

*'...dramatically improve the employment profile of the area and the quality of life of the people who live and work here'.*

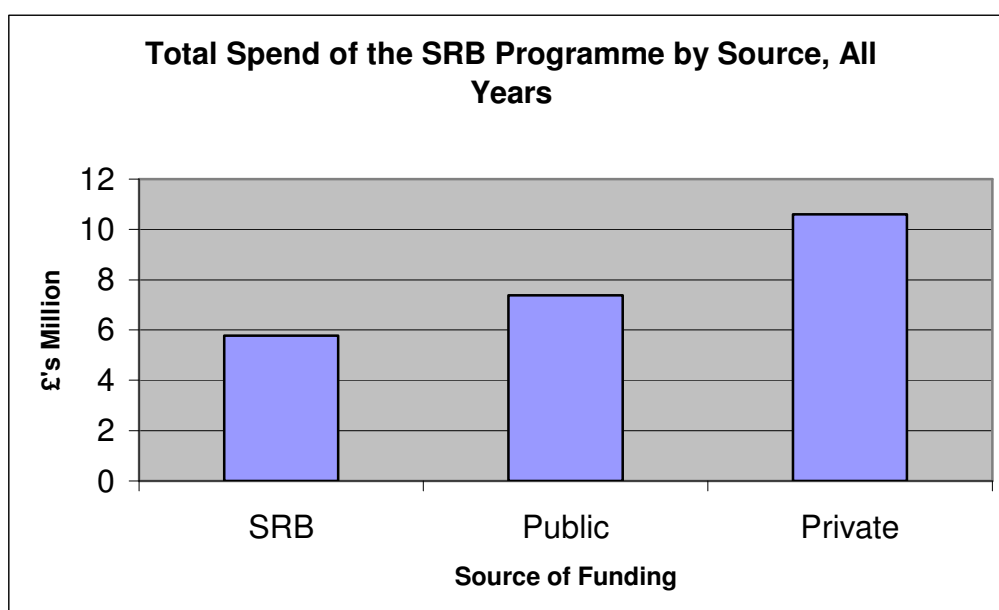
This evaluation will address the extent to which the partnership has achieved these aims.

## 2.4 Spend of the programme

To achieve this vision the partnership was awarded £5.77 million of SRB funding. The programme has achieved a full spend of this money over the five years.

### *Leverage*

The SRB money has been supplemented by £10.6 million from private finances, and £6.49 million from public sources. Another £0.89 million of public sector money is promised to the area for the financial year 2001-02, to assist with projects that have not yet been completed. The breakdown of this money is displayed in the graph below:



In addition to this SRB spend of nearly six million, as a result of matched funding and leverage the SRB attracted over three times this initial investment in funding from other public and private sources and from Europe. In this way individual projects have been able to achieve much more than they could have done with SRB funding alone.

Attracting additional funding is one of the primary objectives of SRB funding, especially encouraging investment from the private sector. This was especially important in Lea Bridge as the area was known to have suffered from a lack of investment in the years prior to the SRB. Additional funding was sought for its own sake - more funds to spend on activities. It was also sought for the 'added value' it could give to the funded activity.

The leverage ratio achieved by the SRB is over 1:3 (SRB: Public and Private), comparing favourably with the overall leverage ratio achieved by all City Challenge (the SRB predecessor) programmes of 1:2.8 (Russell et al. 2000). The final evaluation of all SRB programmes has not yet been conducted, and so no comparison can be made with overall ratios achieved in SRB programmes.

#### *Leverage as new money*

SRB guidance defines leverage as:

*'...funds which are committed to a programme as a result of the programme gaining SRB support and which would not be spent in the area or on that strategy without the influence of the SRB' (DETR 1998).*

It is sometimes difficult to determine to what extent this leverage is 'new' money; i.e. money which would have not been spent in the area without the work of the partnership. In some cases work has been carried out that may have been completed anyway, without the presence of the SRB.

An example of this can be drawn from the 2001 business survey. Of the 31 businesses interviewed for this survey, six reported receiving a grant from the SRB. Of these six businesses, five informed researchers that in time they would have made the same changes even without the SRB funding. The matched funding supplied by these companies will consequently be included as leverage, even though that money may have been spent in the same way. This is because funds that are invested at an earlier date than would otherwise have been the case can be classified, legitimately, as regeneration. As such, these funds can be counted as genuine leverage.

Other funding, such as that obtained from Europe for the Gateway Business Expansion Programme and for the Leyton Relief Road, is clearly new money, attracted to Lea Bridge by the partnership.

Therefore the leverage ascribed to the SRB programme may not all have been genuine 'new money' as the term is generally understood. We can conclude,

however, that the partnership has played an important role in attracting additional funding to the Lea Bridge area. It is undeniable that as a result of the SRB partnership, more money has certainly been spent, and at an earlier date, on improving Lea Bridge than would have been the case without the programme.

## 2.5 The SRB programme and programme areas

To spend this money a programme of projects was decided by an internal competition within the council, in consultation with the partnership and residents. Despite this consultation, the projects that made up the programme were essentially council chosen.

One essential element when choosing projects was that they had to attract their own funding to ensure the project's impact was maximised and the programme's leverage was high. As a result some innovative projects, but without matched funding, were not included on this final list. Projects fall into four main areas:

- *Business and employment*
- *Environment*
- *Training and local people*
- *Partnership.*

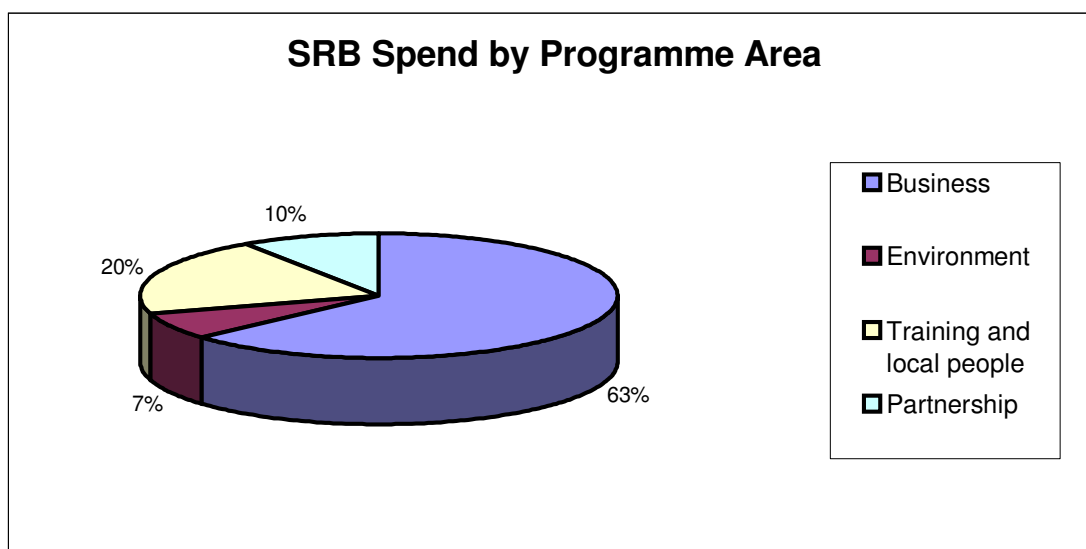
These projects aimed to meet three primary strategic objectives. These were:

- *Investing in people*
- *Improved economic efficiency*
- *A safe and sustainable environment.*

### *Spend by programme area*

The breakdown of SRB spend between these project areas is given below:

Programme area	SRB spend in £000s	% of SRB spend
<i>Business and employment</i>	3658	63%
<i>Environment</i>	404	7%
<i>Training and local people</i>	1157	20%
<i>Partnership</i>	552	10%



As these figures show, the majority of the SRB expenditure was on projects to improve the economic efficiency of the local business community. Such a finding is not surprising given the partnership's historical roots in the ASITA partnership, and as its main thrust was to achieve regeneration primarily through economic growth, job creation, and the multiplier effect this was expected to bring to the local area through the associated projects.

This business and employment focus is emphasised by the breakdown of total spend from all sources. These figures are displayed below:

Programme area	Total spend in £000s	% of total spend
<i>Business and employment</i>	20437	82%
<i>Environment</i>	1282	5%
<i>Training and local people</i>	2319	9%
<i>Partnership</i>	749	3%

This table highlights that the additional spend attracted by the SRB, the leverage discussed earlier, was primarily related to the business and employment projects, with a smaller, but significant, amount for the environmental projects. This is unsurprising given that the principle source of these additional monies was the private sector, which will be most interested in assisting with projects from which they will directly benefit.

Whilst these figures do give some indication of where the Lea Bridge Gateway SRB money was spent, it must be remembered that the distinction between the programme areas is not always clear cut. For example some projects with a business focus could have important community benefits or enhance the environment in addition to helping local commerce. The Leyton Relief Road can be used as an example of such a project. Accounting for a large proportion of the SRB budget, this project was classed as a business and employment project but will bring benefits to both local people and the environment when complete.



## 2.6 Projects within the Lea Bridge Gateway SRB programme

The projects within each category were as follows, with the associated SRB spend given in brackets (£000s):

### *Business and employment (3658)*

- Construction of the Leyton Relief Road (1802)
- Remediation of the contaminated Low Hall Tip Site (743)
- Remediation of the contaminated land around the Radio Veneers Site (150)
- Estate Improvements (car parks, CCTV) (332)
- Gateway Business Expansion Programme (GBEP); business advice and building improvements grants (632).

### *Environment (404)*

- Environmental Improvements (195)
- Non-car access (175)
- School and business waste recycling (34).

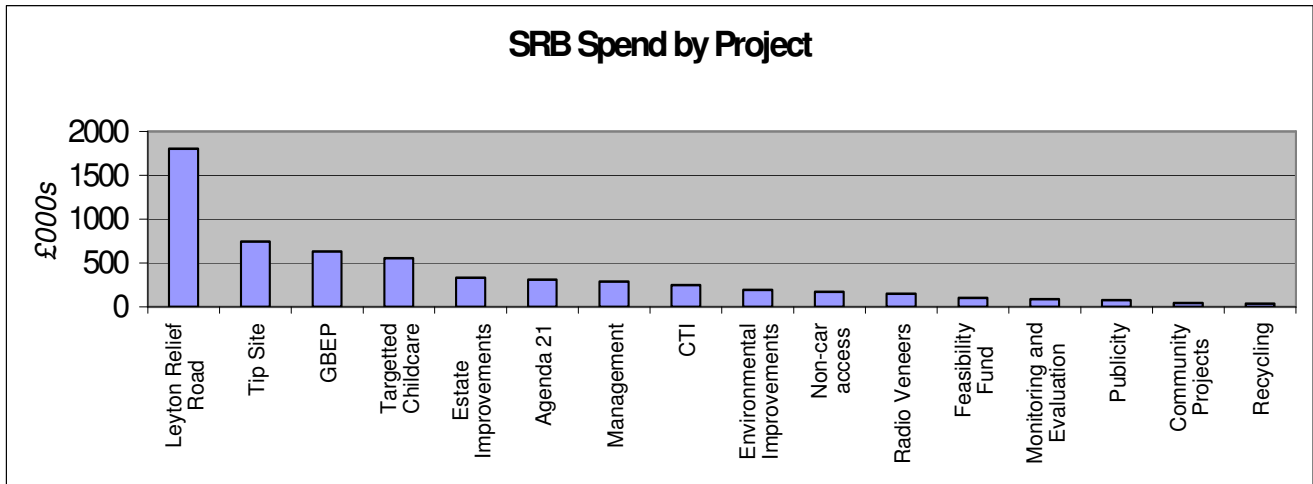
### *Training and local people (1157)*

- Customised Training Initiative (CTI) (249)
- Subsidised childcare (554)
- Agenda 21/Community Forum (312)
- Community projects (42).

### *Partnership (552)*

- Management (289)
- Monitoring and Evaluation (86)
- Publicity (75)
- Feasibility Fund (101).

This expenditure on these projects is displayed in the graph below:



All these projects were put in place, and many have enjoyed success over the past five years. Some projects have been forced to close early due to unfortunate circumstances, for example the targeted childcare initiative. This project ran into difficulties due to problems with the venue (After Schools Club) and the private contractor (nursery childcare), and as a result the remaining funding was transferred to other projects. Some other projects (Leyton Relief Road and Low Hall Tip Site) have yet to be completed, owing to external delays in the construction procedure, outside the partnership's control.

The key projects are described in detail, with analysis of the individual successes and weaknesses over the five years, in annexes three, four and five.

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### 3 PROGRAMME OUTPUTS AND IMPACT

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In line with SRB guidance, the delivery documents laid out a number of targets that the partnership must achieve. At each quarter within the financial year each project made a monitoring return to SDP Ltd, who would report any slippage on the targets to the board, ensuring projects could be kept on track and any problems quickly corrected.

Whilst these outputs give some indication of the work the programme has achieved over the five years, there is a difference between outputs and actual impact. An output can be measured in terms of, for example, the number of jobs created or safeguarded by the SRB programme. To look for the impact of this work we will look at factors such as unemployment rates, job vacancies, or change in reported number of employees in businesses interviewed.

To assist in this process the initial delivery plan provided a number of baseline measurements and the anticipated position after five years. Where possible this baseline data will be produced and compared with these forecasts.

It is important to note that this report provides short-term, rather than long-term, impact measures. Even the most recent data will be insensitive to the impact of projects which have only just finished, or those which are yet to be completed. In addition even where a positive change can be identified, this is only of value if the trend continues or the new position maintained. No long-term impact will have occurred if indicators of change quickly revert back to their 1995 levels soon after the SRB programme has ended.

For ease this discussion has been split into sections relating to the four main project areas, business and employment, training and local people, environment, and partnership.

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## 4 LOCAL BUSINESS

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As the earlier spending analysis shows, the local business community has been the target of the largest percentage of the Lea Bridge Gateway funding, receiving 63 per cent of SRB money and 82 per cent of overall expenditure. This money was primarily allocated under the SRB strategic objective of 'Improving Economic Efficiency'. This objective can be described as:

*'Encourage sustainable economic growth and wealth creation by improving the competitiveness of the local economy, including support for new and existing business' (SRB Strategic Objective Two).*

The local business community has benefited from the reclamation of the contaminated Radio Veneers site, the estate improvements (including CCTV), the Gateway Business Expansion programme and from the opening of the Argall Avenue access road to the main industrial area.

Businesses have also benefited, though less directly, from the Customised Training Initiative, the subsidised childcare places, the waste recycling schemes and the general environmental improvements to the area. This section will assess to what extent these projects have had an impact on the local business community.

Unfortunately the expected impact of the business spend of the SRB is unlikely to have yet fully materialised as the two main projects are not yet finished. The Low Hall site, which will provide new small industrial units and new access for some existing businesses, suffered delays resulting from the need for a Compulsory Purchase Order Inquiry, but is now in its final stages. Although all SRB and Europe-funded work is complete, the main section of the Leyton Relief Road, Orient Way, only opened in Summer 2001 due to delays from the private company responsible for developing the junction at the southern end.

A fuller description of all of the business projects can be found in annex three. Other projects are contained in annexes four and five.

### **Business outputs**

Key outputs for business projects include:

- 3.27km of road has been built, and another 8.88km improved (targets: 2.75km and 5km)
- 10,536 square metres of business floorspace improved (target: 7,723 square metres)
- 1,111 businesses advice sessions (target: 794)
- 181 new business start ups (target: 204)
- 24,000 programme newsletters distributed to local businesses (target: 10,000)

- 16 buildings improved or put back into use (target: 1).

### **Outputs for new business**

The clearest indication of improvements to the attractiveness of an area as a business location is found in the number of new businesses setting up there.

Over the course of the five years the Lea Bridge Gateway SRB outputs show that 181 new businesses have started up in the area over the past five years, compared with the target of 204 new businesses in the delivery plan. Although the programme has fallen on this output short to date, this figure is forecast to rise to 241. Completion of the new units at the Low Hall Tip site should assist in this process.

Most of these new businesses are those advised by the Gateway Business Expansion Programme, and some would have received grants, or advice on where to apply for support, for their business venture. Such projects would hopefully assist these businesses to survive the testing first few years.

Programme outputs show the number of new and incoming business surviving 12 and 18 months to be 89 and 50 respectively, again somewhat under the target of 117 and 116. Even the forecasts for when all SRB activities are complete suggest that these figures will only rise to around 106 and 81 (though these estimates might be exceeded). This is still under the target levels, but it does compare quite well with national averages in this notoriously difficult area. This suggests that, despite not being complete, the Lea Bridge Gateway SRB programme has demonstrated significant success against what were always likely to be very challenging targets.

### **Baseline data**

Useful data to detect impact on local business include the number of businesses in Lea Bridge, and the land use of commercial land in the SRB area. By analysis of this we can get an indication as to whether or not these outputs have resulted in real changes on the ground.

### **Number of businesses in the area**

The only secondary data available relating to new businesses is that on VAT registrations, but this is only available at a borough level prior to 2000. This information is still useful to give an indication of the situation in Waltham Forest relative to other East London boroughs, and to provide local regional trends for comparison.

## VAT Registrations in East London Boroughs March 1996 to March 2000

<b>Borough</b>	<b>Stocks Mar-96</b>	<b>Stocks Mar-00</b>	<b>Overall Change</b>	<b>% new reg.</b>	<b>% de-reg.</b>
<i>Barking and Dagenham</i>	2275	2500	10%	65%	55%
<i>Hackney</i>	5970	7325	23%	77%	54%
<i>Newham</i>	3565	4145	16%	68%	51%
<i>Redbridge</i>	5075	5490	8%	63%	55%
<i>Tower Hamlets</i>	6595	8150	24%	70%	46%
<i>Waltham Forest</i>	4175	4510	8%	63%	54%
<i>Total</i>	35155	40995	17%	68%	51%

Source: NOMIS

As the above data shows, between March 1996 and March 2000, Waltham Forest has seen a smaller increase in the number of businesses registered for VAT than all surrounding East London boroughs except Redbridge. Changes in the number of businesses in a borough is affected by the number of new registrations and de-registrations. Comparison of Waltham Forest with surrounding boroughs reveals that both the number of new businesses registering in the area is below average and the number of companies de-registering is above average. This is, of course, a snap-shot of the borough-wide situation. It does not reveal the situation in Lea Bridge Gateway, which it would be hoped would be more positive as a result of the SRB-funded interventions (see below).

For instance, it is known that 380 businesses were VAT registered in Lea Bridge in March 2000. As a number of firms in Lea Bridge are known to operate unregistered, these figures may not be truly reliable, and is likely to provide an underestimate of the true picture. Reports from project managers within the SRB programme suggest that the true number could be much higher. The GBEP has over 500 business names on their mailing list, which is thought to be up to date as mailshots are distributed with a reply coupon to be returned if that business has moved or closed down.

Both these figures compare favourably with the 257 businesses reported in the initial delivery plan, though it is not known precisely how this was calculated. Even if we take the lower VAT-registration based estimate this suggests there are now 123 more businesses in Lea Bridge than were present in 1996, a 48 per cent increase during the duration of the programme.

This figure is far higher than the increases seen for any East London Borough indicating that despite the shortfall on outputs, it appears that the SRB has had a positive effect on attracting and maintaining business in the area (belying the borough-wide figures shown above).

Comparing this figure of 123 new businesses with the 181 new businesses suggested from programme outputs gives a rough survival rate of 68 per cent. Although an approximation, this does suggest that the survival rate of new and incoming business into Lea Bridge during the past five years is above the 40 per

cent target set out in the bid document, and that the SRB support for incoming business has had a positive impact.

## Land use

In order to measure such developments a baseline was established at the start of the programme to measure the occupied industrial floor space, the number of vacant units and the amount of vacant land within the SRB boundaries. This land use data is shown below:

	1996	1998	1999	2000	Target	Change
<b>Occupied Industrial Floor Space</b>	220,761	209,340	209,714	N/A	546,525	-5.0%
<b>Vacant Industrial Units</b>	92	71	78	N/A	59	-15.2%
<b>Vacant Land</b>	6.13 ha	6.48 ha	8.39 ha	N/A	N/A	36.9%

*Source: LBWF*

Unfortunately, due to short staffing levels within the council's planning department, researchers were told that the data for the 2000 land use survey had been collected, but that it had not yet been processed or entered onto the computer and was not likely to be so for several months.

Some figures have changed though from those given in earlier evaluation reports. The council has supplied recalculated figures for both the amount of occupied industrial floor space and for the area of vacant land. This slightly increases the initial baseline for occupied industrial floor space from 218,175 to the figure of 220,761 square metres given above. The 1996 figure for vacant units fell to 92 from the 118 shown in previous years. These new figures demonstrate that the reduction previously reported for vacant industrial units was slightly overestimated, and the decrease for occupied floor space was in fact more severe.

### *Vacant industrial units*

These figures show the anticipated decrease in number of vacant industrial units, with a 15 per cent drop over the time period 1996 to 1999. This is likely to be linked to the increased number of businesses in the area, but whether this can be linked entirely to the SRB is debatable as this was generally a period of economic growth and so a decrease in vacant units would be expected.

The programme target for vacant units at the end of the programme was 59 (a 50 per cent decrease). It is possible that this target has been achieved since data was last collected, but if so the situation is likely to change when the new units come onto the market for the tip site. Continued monitoring will be required when these

new units are available to determine whether they add to the number of vacant units in the area, or whether they are quickly filled by new business.

### *Occupied Industrial floor space*

On the basis of the data available, it seems unlikely that the SRB has yet achieved its target of 546,525 square metres of occupied floor space, even with the increase in business numbers discussed earlier. This will be primarily because the anticipated redevelopment adjacent to the Leyton relief Road has yet to take place. The drop over the first three years is unlikely to have been reversed and replaced by a substantial increase since data was last collected - though it may be in the near future.

Another 45,000 feet of smaller industrial units will become available when the tip site is complete. These, if filled, will contribute to meeting this target.

It is surprising that over this period, despite the number of vacant units falling and the apparent increase in business numbers, there was a decrease in occupied industrial floor space. This suggests that larger firms within the area were closing down and being replaced by smaller operations, using less floor area. The units lying vacant are therefore likely to be older and larger premises, with the new businesses moving into the small starter units.

Whilst it is important for the area to retain the large employers, the changing nature of business dictates that some of these will be lost and replaced by smaller new businesses. Projects within this SRB (such as the Low Hall tip site), and from other public funded programmes such as the project to convert Roxwell Studios into a number of small units, appear to be catering for this changing demand for property within the property. If this policy is not continued the area may be left with a surplus of large premises with low rent per square foot, whilst the new smaller companies will be discouraged from the area by the high rent demanded for the small units.

This trend is already occurring in the area. Feedback from the 31 business interviews showed that the long established companies found property costs to be a small problem (often owning their building, or renting at cheap rates), whilst newer companies felt rents to be too high in general. Typical rents reported to the researchers were around £3 per square foot per annum for larger properties, but as much as £6-8 per square foot for smaller units.

### *Vacant land*

Some explanation is needed for the rise in figures for vacant land. Although the table above shows nearly a 37 per cent increase, this does not accurately reflect what has occurred in the area over this time.



The 1998 figure of 6.48 hectares was made up primarily of two sites, the tip site and the gas works. Additional vacant land for 1999 included the land from the former British Rail goods yard and the Olympus site off Seymour Road. The majority of the vacant land in 1999 was thus vacant to make way for future development. With work underway on the tip site, the BR yard now part of the Relief Road and a new school on the former Olympus site, the 2001 figure for vacant land can be recalculated as 3.75 hectares comprising only the gas works.

There has thus been a considerable decrease of about 40 per cent in the amount of vacant land since the start of the programme. Although this indicates success for the partnership, it is important to note that this reduction is only meaningful if the redeveloped land is made to work to the benefit of local people and business.

### **2001 Business survey**

Whilst a good deal can be learnt from such secondary data, the opinions of business are of great value when determining impact. As part of the evaluation researchers have conducted a survey of business in 1996, 1998 and early 2001, tracking the same businesses over the five-year period. Opinions from the latest survey give an indication into what has changed for business over the past five years.

These findings relate to existing businesses within Lea Bridge as the survey tracked businesses from 1996 to the present, and so does not include new businesses. It is possible that the fortunes and impressions of these newer businesses may differ from those of pre-existing businesses, and so these findings must be taken with these limits in mind.

Of the 31 businesses interviewed this year, 48 per cent felt that Lea Bridge had become a better place for business over the past five years and 13 per cent felt the area had deteriorated. Thirty-five per cent said there had been no change in the area as a business location. It is encouraging that 82 per cent of businesses do not feel that the area has declined over the past few years, although this does not yet translate to the 'transformation' anticipated in the delivery document.

It is perhaps unsurprising that the transformation has not yet been seen. The main two business projects, the new road and the tip site, are not complete and so have not had an impact, yet it is these projects which would be expected to transform the area. Given the high level of support for the new road amongst local business (McInroy 1999), it is likely that once this is open more businesses will report a positive change.

Again, when asked whether their company had benefited from the SRB programme, 42 per cent reported that they had, whilst 32 per cent felt they did not know. This lack of awareness was highlighted in a few places during the interviews, with a number of companies clearly frustrated to discover what help had been available, just as it was coming to an end.

The benefits of the programme appear to have had little effect on turnover for local business. Of those interviewed, 32 per cent had seen an increase in turnover over the past two years, whilst 23 per cent reported a decrease. Twenty-nine per cent had seen no change, and 13 per cent reported turnover had fluctuated. In a climate of general economic growth, these findings suggest that little real improvement has yet occurred for existing business in Lea Bridge.

Of the projects offered under the Lea Bridge Gateway programme, the relief road was the best known, with 77 per cent of businesses aware of it. Of these, 66 per cent felt that it was a useful or very useful addition to the area for local business.

There was a definite correlation between involvement in one SRB project and awareness of all the business projects in the SRB programme. It appears that some companies have fully utilised the services offered by the partnership, whilst others have had very little involvement. For example within the Customised Training project a small number of organisations tended to use the majority of the training weeks supplied (see annex four), and these same organisations have often benefited from other projects such as the GBEP and the subsidised nursery care for their employees.

The reasons for this could be linked with awareness of projects, for example one project recommending another, or could be linked to the suspicion of other organisations to accept help which is 'council' or 'government' sponsored. Such reluctance was reported by a number of project managers during the course of the interviews. More work may be required in any future business initiatives to sell projects to these excluded companies, ensuring that assistance is more widely distributed and that business in the area is more uniformly assisted.

From the 31 businesses, six had received grants from the SRB, 19 per cent of the sample. A number of other companies had applied for financial assistance of this kind but had been turned down. Those who had received grants tended to find these very useful, but the advice received from projects such as the waste minimisation club and the business advice project was generally perceived to be less useful by the businesses interviewed.

More feedback from the business survey is provided within the project evaluations in annexes three to five.

## **Business conclusions**

Whilst it appears that the programme has been successful in attracting business to the area and in reducing the amount of vacant land, there is still more to be done to reach the targets for occupied industrial floor space.

In addition, although just under half the existing business interviewed report the area to have improved over the past five years, this does not really suggest that the 'transformation' anticipated in the area has occurred. Reported changes in turnover

in recent years also suggests that the vision for a 'vibrant...centre of manufacturing and commercial activity' has not yet been realised, at least for existing business.

Where impact is seen, this appears to be limited to certain companies, not spread across the board. New business and a small proportion of existing business that have fully utilised the SRB projects seem to have benefited most. The 42 per cent of businesses reporting to have benefited from the SRB hints that around half the companies have accessed and profited from the SRB programme, with the other half unaffected.

Although there is potential for this to change when the relief road and tip site open, it is still likely that the businesses to benefit from this will be those on the estates served by the link road (Argall, Staffa, Rigg Approach, Llammas Road/Fairways and Heybridge Way). Businesses on the Church Road Estate, Leyton Business Centre, and the Orient Estate will benefit less, although decrease in traffic on surrounding roads could provide improvements.

The Low Hall Tip Site development will also provide benefits for local business when the development is complete. Existing business who are dissatisfied with their current accommodation will then have a modern alternative, and hopefully the site will also attract new business. Surprisingly only four businesses (13 per cent) in our sample had heard of this development, suggesting that awareness of this should be raised before the units are complete, if existing business are to benefit in this way.

Priorities for future redevelopment in the area, again drawn from the business survey, varied widely. Crime, parking, litter, the state of the environment, drains, poor quality premises and lack of council support were amongst the issues mentioned by companies. This suggests that future projects for the area may benefit existing local business more effectively through small-scale projects, rather than large-scale infrastructure projects.

The Lea Bridge Gateway Partnership Board has responded positively and quickly to this finding. They submitted a bid for 'Neighbourhood Management' funds to the Local Strategic Partnership to address precisely these issues. The bid was successful and a Neighbourhood Manager will commence work in January 2002.

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## 5 TRAINING AND LOCAL PEOPLE

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The Lea Bridge Gateway programme spent 20 per cent of the available SRB funding, and nine per cent of the total spend on projects to invest in local people. This amounted to £1.2 million from SRB funds and £2.3 million overall.

This money was used primarily to achieve the SRB objective 02, to:

*'Enhance the employment prospects and educational skills of local people, particularly the young and those at disadvantage, and promote equality of opportunity'.*

In addition the programme aimed to meet the demands of the SRB objective 06 to:

*'Promote Initiatives of benefit to ethnic minorities'.*

Although work towards this objective was carried out under all four of the programme areas, in terms of discussing impact the discussion of this objective sits best within this section.

### **Programme outputs**

Key outputs achieved towards these aims have included:

- 4,040 training weeks supplied (target: 1396)
- 150 local people achieving qualifications after training (target: 120)
- 13 local people have been trained to NVQ level 2
- 2186 young people benefiting from the programme (target: 1240)
- 194 new childcare places provided (target: 147)
- 59 trained individuals obtaining jobs (target: 68)
- 52 unemployed local people obtaining jobs (target: 59)
- 71 unemployed people have been helped into self-employment (target: 169)
- 228 residents have accessed employment (target: 246).

As these outputs show, the programme has been very successful in terms of the provision of assistance, but has fallen slightly short of meeting the proposed outputs for actually getting these people into jobs. It should be noted that evidence from many other programmes that UEL has knowledge of suggests that these outputs are getting increasingly difficult to achieve in a more buoyant economy. The programme has also provided assistance from the other side, with projects actively creating jobs for these trained individuals to fill. Outputs in terms of job creation include:

- 586 jobs created (target: 626)
- 2,578 jobs safeguarded (target: 2597)

- 22,159 construction jobs resulting from the SRB programme (target: 35,997).

There is potential for these to increase when the relief road and tip site are complete, resulting in a greater impact. For example the programme monitoring returns predict that the number of jobs created will rise to 715 by the time all programme work is complete, exceeding the original target.

To see whether these outputs translate to any real impact on employment we must firstly look at the unemployment figures for the area.

## Unemployment

### Unemployment rates for Lea Bridge, April 1996 to February 2001

	<b>Apr-96</b>	<b>Apr-97</b>	<b>Apr-98</b>	<b>Apr-99</b>	<b>Apr-00</b>	<b>Feb-01</b>	<b>% change</b>
<b>Lea Bridge</b>	16.1	12.6	10.2	9.5	9.4	7.2	-55.0%
<b>Waltham Forest</b>	12.7	9.5	7.3	6.7	5.8	5.3	-58.3%
<b>London East</b>	12.4	9.5	7.7	7.3	6.8	----	----
<b>Inner London</b>	14.8	12	10.1	9.2	8.0	7.0	-52.7%
<b>Greater London</b>	9.2	8.4	6.8	6.2	5.3	4.7	-49.3%

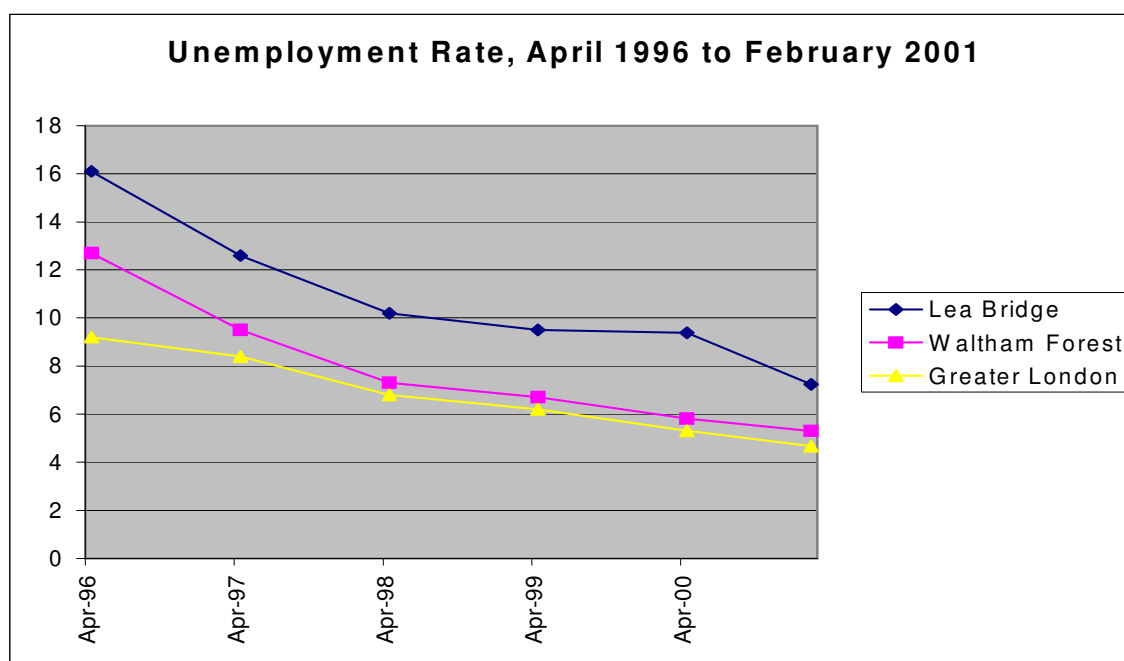
*Source: London Resource Centre*

*Data unavailable for London East for Feb 2001*

The table above shows that the overall unemployment in Lea Bridge has fallen by 55 per cent since the start of the programme. Whilst this is not as great as the decrease for Waltham Forest as a whole, it shows a slightly larger decline than that experienced throughout Inner and Greater London.

The comparison with Waltham Forest initially appears to suggest that the localised impact of the SRB on unemployment has had little effect. Although the borough as a whole has experienced a larger decline in unemployment, this must be viewed in light of the other regeneration projects active both in the borough and in surrounding areas during these five years. As a result we would not necessarily expect a greater decline in Lea Bridge than in the borough as a whole, despite the localised SRB assistance. If the SRB had not been secured it is possible that Lea Bridge ward would have been left behind in this regeneration, resulting in a wider gap between the current unemployment rate for this ward and the borough average.

These figures are represented in the graph below:



This chart shows that the overall unemployment rate for Lea Bridge has dropped noticeably since April 2000, bringing it closer to the rate for Greater London and Waltham Forest. The projects run by the programme to support economic activity in the area and to help local people into jobs have run fairly consistently over the five years and have not undergone any great change in the past 12 months. If this sudden drop is to be linked to the programme this can only really be accounted for by the opening of the Argall Avenue Extension, which seems to have had a positive effect on business for the estates it effects. The road opened in September 2000, making it a possible cause for the fall in unemployment seen in the February 2001 figures.

Although the outputs given previously suggest that over 228 people have found their way into jobs as a result of training received from the partnership, only 120 of these are thought to have been previously unemployed. The other 100 are likely to have moved to better jobs as a result of the SRB assistance and so, although they have benefited, this will have had little direct effect on unemployment figures (unless, of course, their previous job was then filled by a local resident - which is possible, although our research has not considered this).

### Determining the 'SRB-Effect'

One issue concerns the linking of this decrease in unemployment with the SRB programme. Evidence from the programme outputs, childcare projects, Customised Training Initiative, and business support programmes (see annex three and five) do show that individual local people have been helped through the programme. As the project reports discuss, this help was often accessed through an employer and was often given to people who were already working.

As a result the effects of these projects on unemployment may be more limited than it initially appears. In addition little feedback has been collected to illustrate whether the training has helped long term employment prospects, and so individual case studies showing the impact of relevant projects are unobtainable.

The findings of the subsidised nursery provision evaluation have provided some evidence of positive impact of this kind. Of the 21 people interviewed, the majority had seen both their employment situation and earnings improve. Most attributed this directly to the childcare subsidy. This information demonstrates that the SRB can help at an individual level, but can say little about overall impact on factors such as unemployment in the area as a whole.

Although the decline in unemployment within Lea Bridge does show that local people have found new jobs, these may not necessarily be within Lea Bridge. Finding a job outside the area still constitutes a positive outcome for residents. An increase in the number of people working in the Lea Bridge Gateway area (no matter where they live) also constitutes a positive outcome for the area. What this picture does reveal is that it is very difficult to produce a direct correlation between SRB programmes and local economic effects.

Evidence from the Nursery evaluation illustrates this point. Fifteen of the 21 parents interviewed were now working, compared to 12 before using the subsidy. Interestingly only two of these currently worked in Lea Bridge, whereas eight had worked in the area prior to using the nursery scheme. As these individuals gained work experience and training (with the help of the SRB subsidised place), they have tended to look outside of Lea Bridge in search of better jobs.

This finding suggests that the fall in unemployment in Lea Bridge ward may not be as a result of the job creation work of the SRB. If extrapolated to the whole population of Lea Bridge (and it is a very small sample, so should be treated with some caution), the childcare survey results suggest that the fall in unemployment may result more from positive changes in the national economic situation, which has enabled many residents to obtain jobs outside the area. Lea Bridge is well situated to commute to jobs within Inner London and Essex, and it may be that the greater number of jobs available in these areas has contributed greatly to the local decline in unemployment seen over the past five years.

It should be remembered, however, that the SRB programme has directly contributed towards the creation of 586 new jobs. These will have provided valuable employment opportunities for other individuals, even if some of them live outside the SRB area.

## **Job creation**

Monitoring data shows the SRB has created over 560 jobs in the area. Despite this, the 2001 business survey found little evidence of job creation amongst the companies interviewed. The 31 firms in the sample covered a total workforce of 843 employees. Of these 473 (56 per cent) were unskilled manual jobs. In the past two years the total workforce had decreased by 174 employees (a 17 per cent decrease).

The vast majority of this fall was in unskilled manual posts, and one large firm contributed over half this decline. If this business is removed from the calculation the underlying decrease is still large at just over 12 per cent.

If we analyse this data further, again without the one large company whom had dramatically trimmed their workforce, our study shows that around 70 jobs had been lost from a starting workforce of 563. If the net change in the workforce is known to be a decrease of 70 from 31 firms over the past two years, it seems likely that a greater decrease has occurred over the past five years. If this observation were extrapolated to the whole business community of Lea Bridge, it would suggest that the workforce has decreased significantly. If this is the case it is possible that the 560 jobs created may not have compensated for the simultaneous decrease in the workforce of existing businesses over this time. As a result the SRB's work in job creation may not necessarily have been rewarded with a larger local workforce.

As discussed previously, the business survey followed a sample of businesses through the five years, and so only contained firms operational in 1996 when the SRB began. It may be that newer businesses have been much more successful than existing businesses in the past two years, and that local job creation has occurred primarily in these. This is supported by the good increase discussed previously for numbers of new businesses in the area.

In addition the future looks more positive even for existing businesses. Despite the inconclusive performance over the past two years, the business survey shows that 21 of the 31 businesses (68 per cent) believed that their turnover would improve over the coming two years. This finding suggests that the future prospects of the area are recognised by local business, and a growth in the workforce should result if this predicted upturn occurs.

### **Local people and employment**

In other cases it is hard to determine whether new jobs created through business expansion have been given to local people, thus having an effect on unemployment statistics for Lea Bridge. Programme monitoring data suggests that of the 585 new jobs created around 228 (39 per cent) have gone to local people. This proportion suggests that local people have benefited from these jobs, though such figures are difficult to validate or confirm in any way.

Findings from the business survey do suggest that the numbers of local people employed by firms in Lea Bridge is high. Of the 843 employees covered by our survey, 401 (47 per cent) were reported to be local to the Lea Bridge area. Notably, one large firm made up a substantial proportion of these, with this employer excluded this proportion reduces to only 20 per cent.



## Youth unemployment; trends, and age and gender differences.

These unemployment figures can be broken down to give the youth unemployment rate by both age and gender. These are displayed below:

### Youth Unemployment Rates, April 1996 to February 2001

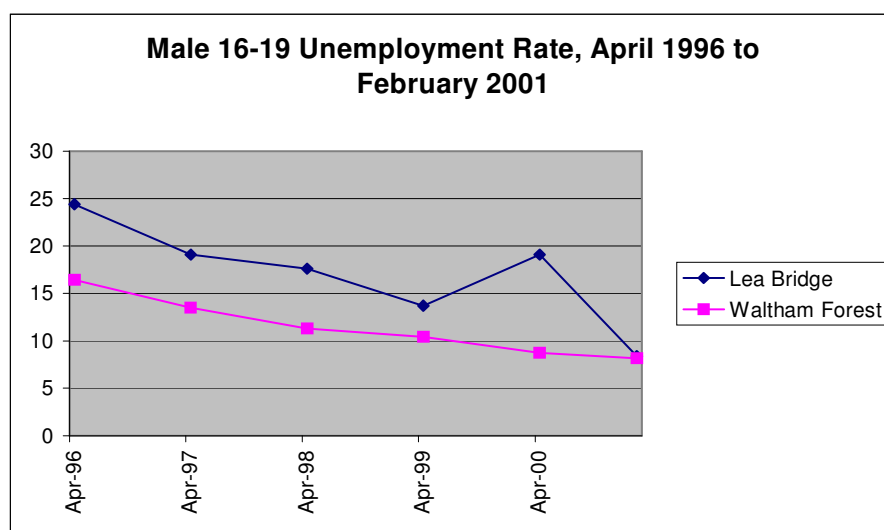
<b>Males 16-19</b>	<i>Apr-96</i>	<i>Apr-97</i>	<i>Apr-98</i>	<i>Apr-99</i>	<i>Apr-00</i>	<i>Feb-01</i>	<i>% change</i>
<i>Lea Bridge</i>	24.4	19.1	17.6	13.7	19.1	8.4	-65.6%
<i>Waltham Forest</i>	16.4	13.5	11.3	10.4	8.7	8.2	-50.2%

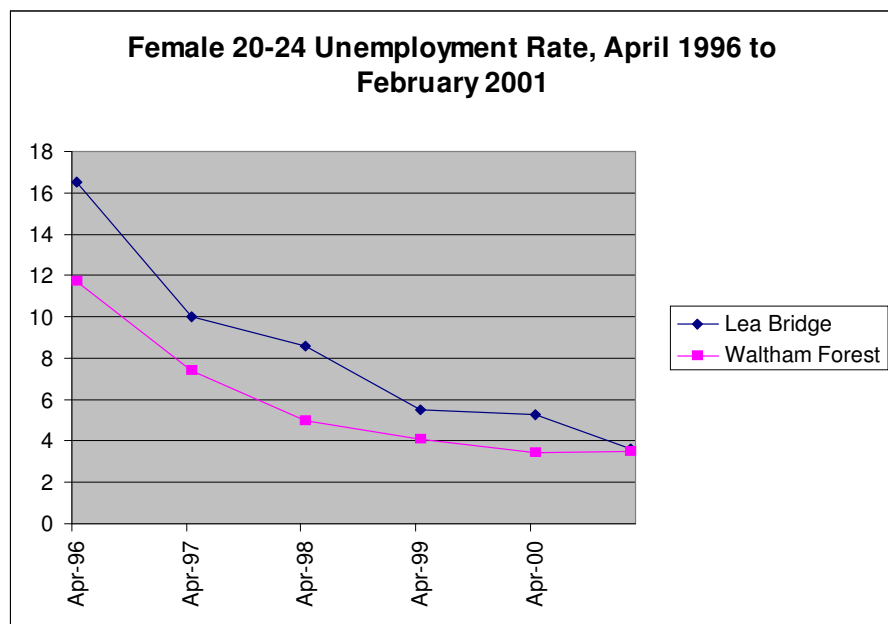
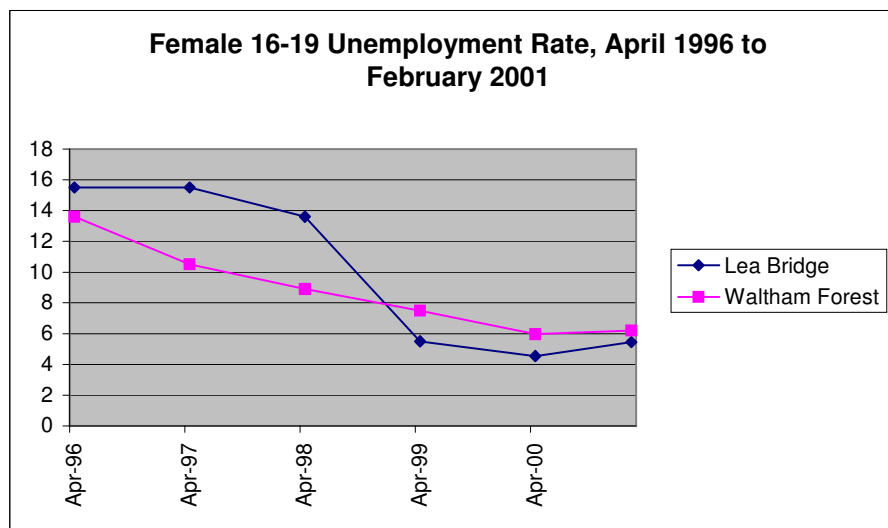
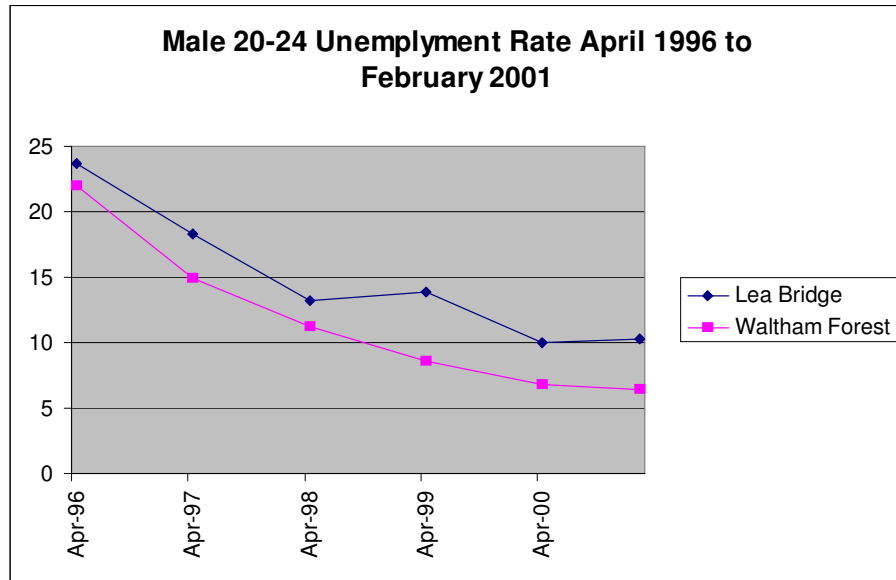
<b>Men 20-24</b>	<i>Apr-96</i>	<i>Apr-97</i>	<i>Apr-98</i>	<i>Apr-99</i>	<i>Apr-00</i>	<i>Feb-01</i>	<i>% change</i>
<i>Lea Bridge</i>	23.7	18.3	13.2	13.9	10.0	10.2	-56.8%
<i>Waltham Forest</i>	22	14.9	11.2	8.6	6.8	6.4	-70.9%

<b>Women 16-19</b>	<i>Apr-96</i>	<i>Apr-97</i>	<i>Apr-98</i>	<i>Apr-99</i>	<i>Apr-00</i>	<i>Feb-01</i>	<i>% change</i>
<i>Lea Bridge</i>	15.5	15.5	13.6	5.5	4.5	5.5	-64.8%
<i>Waltham Forest</i>	13.6	10.5	8.9	7.5	6.0	6.2	-54.4%

<b>Women 20-24</b>	<i>Apr-96</i>	<i>Apr-97</i>	<i>Apr-98</i>	<i>Apr-99</i>	<i>Apr-00</i>	<i>Feb-01</i>	<i>% change</i>
<i>Lea Bridge</i>	16.5	10	8.6	5.5	5.3	3.6	-78.3%
<i>Waltham Forest</i>	11.7	7.4	5	4.1	3.4	3.5	-69.9%

Source: London Resource Centre





These figures show that for both sexes at age 16-19, and also for females ages 20-24, unemployment rates have fallen and come into line with the Waltham Forest average. If we link this decline with the projects of the SRB programme, it appears these have benefited both younger people (primarily the 16-19 age group) and females more than older males. In fact the male unemployment rate for 20-24 year olds has shown a slight increase since April 2000.

No precise monitoring information was available to determine the ages of those participating on schemes such as Customised Training Initiative to see if many of the service users were in the younger age groups. It is though known that the LA Raiders Soccer Academy, which has been able to access SRB support through a number of projects, focuses on younger males (primarily aged between 16 to 22, though the project does take people on up to 25). This organisation, using funding from the CTI, has taken 27 young males who would be at high risk of being unemployed, and trained them for two years for an NVQ. During this time they would not be claiming benefits and thus not appearing in unemployment statistics. This scheme may well be responsible for some of the drop in unemployment for young men under 19 years old.

Another reason for this drop could be that these young people are finding jobs locally in Lea Bridge. The 2001 business survey showed that six companies (19 per cent) had employed school leavers in the past two years, an indication that local business are taking on young people in this 16-19 age group. In total 18 such recruits were reported from the 31 companies. If this is extended to the 500+ businesses thought to operate in Lea Bridge, this would suggest that up to a few hundred school leavers may have been taken on by local business in the past few years. These school leavers are unlikely to have had a chance to use the schemes provided by the SRB to aid local people back into employment, but are likely to have benefited from any improvement in business optimism and climate locally over the five years.

Overall, there have been positive changes for all youth unemployment, with the exception of males aged 20-24. Whilst it is difficult to link these changes directly with the SRB programme, it is clear from figures such as the number of jobs provided to local young people in the business survey, and projects such as the CTI, that the work of the programme will be responsible for some of this impact. Future regeneration projects in the area may wish to focus on males aged 20-24, as this appears most in need at this time.

## **Gender differences**

Female unemployment rates are commonly lower than those for males, but in Lea Bridge there is also a greater decrease over the five years than there has been for males. Again there is a possible link between this trend and the work of the SRB programme.

Both the customised training programme and business expansion programme have helped local young women to train to be registered childminders, using the Waltham Forest Childminding Scheme. Secondly, the provision of subsidised childcare during

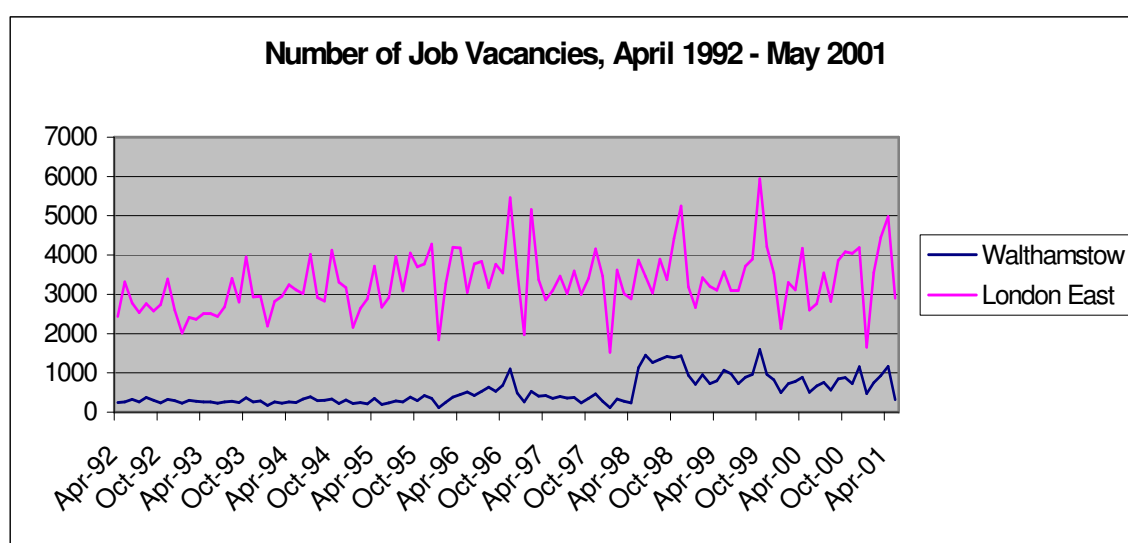
the programme has been shown to have helped a number of mothers back into employment (see annex five).

Given that both the subsidised childcare, and the flexibility provided by the CTI, have now finished, there is a danger that these benefits may shortly be lost. From the interviews for the evaluation of the nursery provision it has been shown that some women have been forced to give up work when the subsidy finished due to the cost of childcare in the area. Others, of course, have secured better paid jobs as a result of the child care assistance and are now in a much better position to afford commercial child care as intended by the programme. Further monitoring of unemployment data should be conducted to ensure any future trends are noticed and tackled as soon as necessary.

### Job vacancies

An alternative method of detecting impact from the job creation work of the SRB involves looking at the number of job vacancies being offered within the local area.

This data is presented in the graph below, given from 1992 to look at the trend prior to the SRB intervention with that afterwards.



Source: NOMIS

As the graph demonstrates, the number of vacancies reported to Walthamstow job centre rose, slightly around mid-1996, but primarily after April 1998. After this point the rise seen in Walthamstow is much greater than that seen for London East as a whole, indicating that the number of job vacancies offered has increased at a greater rate than the surrounding area.

Comparing vacancies in the period April 1992 to March 1996 with April 1996 to the present day (i.e before and after the SRB bid) shows that the average number of vacancies per month rose from 284 to 728 in Walthamstow (a 156 per cent increase). In London East, over the same period, the average rose from 3020 to 3517, a 16 per cent rise.

An even greater difference can be observed when looking at pre and post April 1998. By this time a number of SRB projects would be fully underway and job vacancies resulting from job creation projects may be starting to come through to the job centres. Before April 1998 the average number of vacancies per month in Walthamstow was 336, whereas from April 1998 to the present the average has been 908, a rise of 170 per cent. In comparison figures for London East rose from 3167 to 3552, a 12 per cent rise.

This data provides evidence to suggest that the job creation activity of the partnership has been a great success. The data does apply to a larger area than just Lea Bridge, and may thus be influenced by other factors such as other local regeneration initiatives, but the rate of increase suggests the Partnership's activity is having the desired impact.

It may be still greater more if consideration is given to the fact that the Walthamstow job centre is not capturing all the vacancies made available over this period. Analysis of the results from the 2001 business survey suggests that only 40 per cent of firms interviewed would use the local job centre in the recruitment of new staff, advertisements and word of mouth proving to be far more popular options for local business.

The data from job vacancies thus provides evidence that over the past five years the number of new jobs created in and around the Walthamstow area has increased at a rate greater than that seen for East London as a whole. Unfortunately it is unable to provide us more precise detail on the number of vacancies within Lea Bridge, but we can conclude that the SRB is one of a number of factors which have resulted in this substantial increase.

## **Education data**

The delivery plan baseline included a measure of improvements made in education. As the work of the Lea Bridge Gateway Partnership had little to do with school age children, but more with those of working age, the baseline proposed was the percentage of local residents attaining NVQs.

Unfortunately NVQ data is not collected at ward level, due to the large number of training providers who teach NVQ qualifications. This makes it difficult to trace new NVQ qualifications back to the ward of residence and so data has to be given for Waltham Forest as a whole. This data is presented below, along with comparisons for other boroughs in the area:

Percentage of total working age population with NVQ level 3+

	Dec 97- Feb 98	Dec 98- Feb 99	Dec 99- Feb 00	Dec 00- Feb 01	Change in %
<b>Waltham Forest</b>	36.2	37.7	36	38.5	2.3
<b>Barking and Dagenham</b>	22	25.3	24.6	29.8	7.8
<b>Greenwich</b>	33.4	38.8	37	44.1	10.7
<b>Hackney</b>	32.4	37.5	48.3	47.9	15.5
<b>Lewisham</b>	40.1	41.1	52.9	48.6	8.5
<b>Newham</b>	27.4	30.1	29.1	32.2	4.8
<b>Redbridge</b>	44.5	42.6	40.9	40	-4.5
<b>Tower Hamlets</b>	30.9	37.7	37.4	41.5	10.6

Percentage of total working age population with NVQ level 4+

	Dec 97- Feb 98	Dec 98- Feb 99	Dec 99- Feb 00	Dec 00- Feb 01	Change in %
<b>Waltham Forest</b>	19.6	20.4	19.5	21.5	1.9
<b>Barking and Dagenham</b>	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>Greenwich</b>	21.9	25.7	24.2	28.9	7
<b>Hackney</b>	22.4	24.4	34.8	35.7	13.3
<b>Lewisham</b>	24.8	26.1	33.1	31.7	6.9
<b>Newham</b>	21.9	25.7	24.2	28.9	7
<b>Redbridge</b>	27.7	27	25.3	21.4	-6.3
<b>Tower Hamlets</b>	20.2	21.4	27.4	31	10.8

Although these figures do show an increase over the past three years within Waltham Forest, this change is slight and is considerably lower than those increases seen for other East London Boroughs (with the exception of Redbridge).

There are various possible reasons why there is no discernible impact from programmes such as the Customised Training Initiative, which provided financial support for NVQ training. Even though the CTI helped over 100 individuals to study for NVQs, the data has not yet been compiled to confirm the number who actually completed the course and gained their qualification. Additionally, a large number of those training under this project were trained to NVQ levels one and two, for which data is not available; programme outputs report 13 individuals obtaining NVQ level two. These individuals would not affect the figures presented above. Analysis of the CTI database confirms that of the 104 individuals assisted for NVQ training, only 12 (12 per cent) were studying for NVQ level 3. The remainder were pursuing levels one and two.

Even without these problems it is still likely that no impact would be detectable from this data. As the figures relate to the proportion of the working population of Waltham Forest as a whole, figures far larger than the 100 or so trained under the SRB scheme would be needed to have an effect. In order to detect real impact on the

population of the Lea Bridge area, data would be required on a local level, for instance at that of individual wards.

## **Ethnic minorities**

To meet the aim of promoting initiatives of benefit to ethnic minority groups, the programme attempted to ensure individuals from these communities were included in the projects run through the SRB. To monitor this aim people based project outputs were required to project outputs to be achieved for ethnic minority groups.

For some outputs these projections have been achieved. For example in terms of jobs safeguarded 1,158 ethnic minority jobs have been safeguarded, against a target of 1,102, 119 ethnic minority residents accessing employment against a target of 110, and 150 individuals from ethnic minority groups achieving qualifications against a target of 125.

In other areas the programme fell short in terms of overall numbers, but this shortfall was even greater for the ethnic minority groups. For example with jobs created, despite a relatively small shortfall on the overall target, only 32 per cent, rather than the targeted 40 per cent went to ethnic minority employees. Other ethnicity targets were not achieved, sometimes even when the overall target was exceeded. For example 1,111 businesses were advised against a target of 794, yet only 117 of these were from ethnic minority groups, the target being 215. This target may have been impeded by factors such as reluctance from these businesses to utilise the advice service, a lack of ethnic minority businesses in the area to advise, or poor reporting of ethnicity data.

Encouragingly this trend was reversed in terms of new business start-ups and for the unemployed moving to self-employment. Here, despite shortfalls on the overall targets, the proportion of successful outcomes reported to be from ethnic minority groups was above that expected. Twenty-eight per cent of new business start-ups were targeted at minority communities in the area, but in fact nearly 43 per cent of the final outputs were from these groups. For newly self-employed individuals this percentage rose from a planned 30 per cent to 51 per cent.

These figures suggest that, the programme has had success in getting ethnic minority communities into the newly created jobs, and that these groups have benefited well from assistance in starting new businesses or moving to self-employment, and also from those jobs which have been safeguarded.

### *Baseline and other ethnic minority data*

Unfortunately, due to the closure of the London Research Centre, which previously provided this data, there is no available data on the rate of unemployment amongst ethnic minority groups.

Some data can be obtained from the business surveys carried out in the area. Of the 31 businesses interviewed, ethnic minorities owned only 26 per cent. This percentage seems unchanged since the first year of the survey, when 37 of 140 businesses interviewed (26 per cent) reported being owned by an ethnic minority group.

As this survey followed businesses through the five years, we would expect to see little change in this figure unless businesses in one type of ownership were more or less successful than the others. This consistent percentage suggests that over the five years there has been little difference in success between ethnic minority-owned and other businesses.

As project outputs suggest that a larger number of ethnic minority groups are starting new business ventures (50 per cent and 43 per cent of programme outputs), this percentage is likely to grow in future years. Nevertheless there is currently little evidence to suggest that the partnership has made much impact on increasing the proportion of ethnic minority owned business to the 45 per cent target outlined in the delivery plan.

Another question in the business interviews concerned the proportion of the workforce from ethnic minority groups. In the 1996 survey 40 per cent of the overall workforce was seen to be from ethnic minority groups. The 2001 survey found this figure to have risen to 57 per cent, showing that the ethnic minority workforce has increased significantly.

#### *Overall impact on ethnic minority groups*

The increase in the ethnic minority proportion of the workforce suggests that these groups have been successful in finding employment in the area over the past five years. This shows that these groups are not at any real disadvantage in the local labour market. It would be hard to attribute this changing proportion solely to the work of the partnership, as the target for jobs created was missed for ethnic minority groups and there was little in the way of real targeting for these groups. It is most likely that a number of factors are involved, one of which was the SRB.

It appears that the programme has provided some benefits for members of ethnic minority groups, particularly in terms of starting new businesses. Output data suggests that ethnic minority firms have accounted for a large proportion of the new businesses starting in the area. If this trend continues, the vision for 45 per cent of businesses to be run by ethnic minority owners may be realised.

#### **Training and local people: Conclusions**

There has been an overall decrease in unemployment within Lea Bridge, and one of the causes for this will lie within the work of the Lea Bridge Gateway SRB. Also, work with ethnic minorities appears to have been one factor in reinforcing their position in the local economy, both as workers and business owners.



Nevertheless, some evidence suggests that the observed decrease in unemployment may be caused primarily by local people finding employment outside of Lea Bridge. In addition the findings of the business survey suggest that local employers have decreased rather than increased their workforce. As a result we cannot make any conclusive statements as to what proportion of the decrease in unemployment within Lea Bridge is directly attributable to the SRB programme.

It is possible to say, however, that the SRB programme has resulted in the creation of a large number of new jobs, it has been running at the time of a dramatic increase in the number of advertised job in the local area, a fall in local unemployment (to much nearer borough and London averages), and it has reportedly resulted in the establishment of a significant number of new businesses - many of them owned by members of ethnic minority communities.

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## 6 ENVIRONMENT

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In order to meet the project aim to provide a safe and sustainable environment the programme spent £0.4 million, or seven per cent of the SRB budget. Another £0.82 million was raised in matched funding, primarily from the public sector, thus accounting for five per cent of total spend.

This area of the programme's work tackled two SRB strategic objectives:

*'To protect and improve the environment and infrastructure and promote good design' (SO3)*

*'Tackle and improve community safety' (SO5).*

These strategic objectives will be tackled separately as they require different baseline and output data and different measures of impact.

### Environment outputs

Key outputs achieved in this area of regeneration include:

- 45 waste management schemes introduced (target: six)
- 1 traffic calming scheme (target: 1)
- 9.6 acres of land improved for open space (target: 4 acres)
- 15 trees planted.

In addition the programme has enhanced street lighting and railing along Lea Bridge road, assisted in the refurbishment of the Marsh Lane pavilion and Seymour Road playground. The Markhouse corner, at the junction of Lea Bridge Road and Church Road has been enhanced and benefited from the addition of a new clock, a cycle route has been built and an unsightly bridge under Lea Bridge Road remodelled. **More details of these projects can be found within project annex five.**

It is important to remember that other projects other than those funded from the 'Environment' strand of work would have had significant impact on this objective. The best example of this is the Leyton Relief Road, especially the Argall Avenue extension. This area of road, by re-routing industrial traffic away from a residential area has had a positive impact on the environment and safety of those living in the adjacent roads (Burwell, Sanderstead etc.).

### *Baseline and other data*

Unfortunately there is no underlying secondary data which can chart the impact of these improvements, but feedback has been obtained from both business and residents which can provide an indication of these projects.

Business owners were asked if the area had become a nicer place to work, stayed the same, or deteriorated over the past five years. Encouragingly 42 per cent had noticed improvements over this period, with environmental and traffic improvements being the most commonly cited changes. Another 42 per cent reported no change and only 16 per cent felt the area had become worse. Increased traffic and crime were amongst the reasons given for a worse place to work.

Other results from the business survey show the positive impact of these projects. Seventeen of the 31 businesses interviewed (55 per cent) were aware of the environmental improvement programme, and nine (29 per cent) thought these to be useful or very useful for their company. This level of awareness matches that of both the business advice and building improvement grant schemes, putting it as one of the three best known projects from the SRB programme.

In addition, the twenty-one residents and local employees interviewed for the Nursery Childcare scheme provided the evaluation with information to support the impact of these improvements. The interviewees were asked whether they had noticed changes in Lea Bridge over the past five years. Of the 18 responses, six (33 per cent) mentioned the environmental improvements in the area, such as improved lighting. Although this percentage is not particularly high, this was in response to a question that did not ask directly about environmental improvements, and so this 33 per cent have mentioned changes such as the lighting without being prompted. In addition when asked what improvements the area most needed, only four out of twenty responses (20 per cent) mentioned the need for further environmental improvements, and in three of these cases the complaints were road/traffic related rather than general environmental factors.

### **Crime**

Although not one of the primary objectives of the Lea Bridge Gateway SRB, a reduction in crime can have an effect both on the quality of life of residents (SO7) and on business (SO1 and SO2). A decrease in activities such as vandalism has a positive effect on the environment (SO3), and so a reduction in crime is essential for all strategic objectives of the partnership.

Although the programme initially had no programmes aimed solely at crime reduction, (the CCTV project was added at a later date to capitalise on a short-term underspend and a fortuitous match-funding opportunity), project outputs include a number of crime prevention targets. Ninety-two buildings have had security upgrades (exceeding the target of 35), and 634 residential properties have had security upgrades (above the target of 559).

In order to test the impact of crime prevention projects such as the CCTV cameras, the free lock fitting service and the defensive planting on Marconi Road, baseline data has been collected since the start of the programme in order to detect any changes which have occurred.

### *Baseline data*

The original delivery plan anticipated that after five years a 30 per cent reduction in crime would be achieved in terms of domestic burglary, car crime and commercial property theft. This comparison has been made difficult by a number of factors. Firstly crime data from before April 1998 cannot be compared with later data as a number of new offences were introduced at this time resulting in a large change in the number of reported crimes. Nation-wide there was roughly a 20 per cent increase in the number of crimes seemingly committed as a result of this change, a discrepancy so large it would likely disguise any decreases as a result of the work of the SRB.

Crime statistics for the Lea Bridge area have been obtained from the Metropolitan police and comprised of incidents that occurred in beat codes JE01, JE02, JE04 and JE06. Since April 1998 the numbers of residential burglaries, non-residential burglaries and criminal damage reported to the police have increased. Between April 1999 and April 2000 reported residential burglaries were 253, non-residential burglaries 197, and criminal damage 354. These crimes have all risen at a greater rate than the borough average. In Lea Bridge between April 1998 and April 2000 residential burglaries rose by 14 per cent compared to a borough increase of six per cent, non-residential burglaries rose by 18 per cent compared to a borough increase of 17 per cent and criminal damage increased by 11 per cent compared to a borough increase of 0.4 per cent. Theft from motor vehicles declined during this period (-18 per cent) compared to an increase of five per cent in the rest of the borough.

### *The perceived increase in crime*

Surprisingly this data shows an increase in reported crime between April 1998 and April 2000. Initially this appears to suggest that the crime prevention initiatives of the partnership have failed, but such an assumption may underestimate the complex interaction between regeneration and crime. Over this period a number of residential and commercial properties were strengthened, neighbourhood watch groups supported, and a number of local people given safety and crime prevention advice. One effect of such crime prevention initiatives can be an increase in crime awareness amongst local people, which can lead to an increased level of crime reporting. Additionally the interaction between police and residents or business, as facilitated by the SRB programme can increase the confidence local people have in the police and again promote an increase in reported crime. Also, the CCTV cameras had just come into operation by the end of the period covered by the data which can again lead to an increase in the number of crimes being detected and logged.

Another reason for this perceived increase in crime could lie in the increase in incentives for crime. One example of this can be given in the shops around the Markhouse Corner. This whole area was regenerated with the assistance of the SRB, and a number of shops were refurbished and given additional security through the building improvement grant scheme. Surprisingly a number of burglaries followed soon after this development, thought to be a result of the increased incentive for crime; a prosperous-looking premises makes a more appealing target than a run down one. Regeneration, if it successfully brings wealth to an area, can thus perversely bring about an increase in crime, or at least a change in the nature of crime. This trend shows the importance of crime reduction initiatives in conjunction with regeneration initiatives, for if this is not followed a significant increase in crime could be the result.

Unfortunately these figures are unavailable beyond April 2000. Beat code level crime data was unavailable from the Waltham Forest Police, who have reported that such figures are now only routinely collated at the borough level and the central Police Information Bureau were unable to provide more recent figures. Both the council and police, through the Safety Net partnership, are currently investigating ways to make crime data available on a more local level, in line with the demands of current regeneration initiatives.

#### *CCTV and crime data*

The only crime data available beyond April 2000 is that collated specially for the evaluation of the CCTV initiative (discussed in full in project annex three). Whilst this data is not directly comparable, as it is comprised of five key locations within the SRB area and not the entire beat codes which cover it, it still provides some indication of changes in patterns of crime during 1999 and 2000.

#### **Crimes reported during 1999 and 2000 in five locations within the Lea Bridge Gateway area.**

1999	Crime Type				
	Major	Burglary	Vehicle	Beat	Total
Argall Avenue	1	4	4	2	11
Staffa Road	0	1	3	1	5
Lea Bridge Road	139	24	24	79	266
Heybridge Way	1	2	0	6	9
Church Road	5	5	5	20	35

2000	Crime Type				
	Major	Burglary	Vehicle	Beat	Total
Argall Avenue	0	0	2	2	4
Staffa Road	0	2	1	1	4
Lea Bridge Road	124	26	18	70	238
Heybridge Way	3	0	1	5	9
Church Road	8	7	7	19	41

% Change	Crime Type				
	Major	Burglary	Vehicle	Beat	Total
Argall Avenue	-100%	-100%	-50%	0%	-64%
Staffa Road	0%	100%	-67%	0%	-20%
Lea Bridge Road	-11%	8%	-25%	-11%	-11%
Heybridge Way	200%	-100%	N/A	-17%	0%
Church Road	60%	40%	40%	-5%	17%

*Source: Metropolitan Police, quoted in Mason 2000.*

These figures show that there has been a considerable decrease in recorded crime since the installation of the CCTV cameras in the Argall and Staffa areas, and also along Lea Bridge Road. Vehicle crime seems to be especially well affected, with a noticeable decrease in these three areas.

All the areas in the table above are covered by the CCTV cameras and have this fact advertised on a number of signposts in the area to increase the strength of the deterrent. The data suggests that the presence of the CCTV cameras may well be helping to reduce crime in the area.

Using the figures from this the number of reported crimes in these areas during 1999 was 326, with 296 reported during 2000. These figures give a reduction of 9.2 per cent. Whilst this trend goes some way to reverse the 11 to 18 per cent increase seen between April 1998 and April 2000, to reach the target of a 30 per cent decrease outlined in the delivery plan, crime levels will need to fall much further than this.

The Business study conducted in 2001 can provide some more solid evidence of impact of the CCTV scheme. Of the 30 businesses interviewed, 16 (53 per cent) had heard of the CCTV cameras installed in the area. Of this 16, nine companies (56 per cent) felt that they had been useful or very useful to their business.

It also appears that the presence of CCTV cameras is having an effect on unreported crime. Acts of minor vandalism, fly-tipping etc. may go unnoticed to official crime statistics, but a reduction in these could have great implications on the quality of life of local people and for businesses in the area. One example reported to researchers was that of siphoning of diesel from vehicles. This offence will often go unreported through official channels as the victim knows that there is little chance of catching the culprit, yet it can cost businesses heavily if a regular occurrence.

Since the introduction of CCTV cameras in the Argall/Staffa area there has apparently been a significant decrease in such siphoning, and both some businesses and the police representative felt this was a result of the CCTV's deterrent effects.

The partnership has had requests from residents and community reps for the roving camera within Lea Bridge to be used to combat problems such as fly-tipping. This demonstrates both the cameras' potential for community benefits and the fact that the community feels this is to be a potentially useful resource that can have a real impact on crime in the area.

### *Regeneration and crime*

As mentioned previously the relationship between crime figures and regeneration is a complex one. As an area is regenerated there may be a change in type of crimes, rather than simply a decrease per se. This may explain the increase seen here for some types of crime between April 1999 and April 2000.

### *Opinions of local people and businesses*

Perhaps more valuable than crime statistics in determining the programmes' impact on crime are the opinions of local people and businesses, for crime is really only a problem when it is affecting local business or residents in some way. Businesses still feel crime is a problem in the area. One in three businesses interviewed felt that crime was one of the big disadvantages of being located in this area. This suggests that the problem of crime has in fact worsened over the past five years for businesses in the area. The 1996 survey found that of 23 businesses experiencing problems with the area, only three (13 per cent) mentioned crime as one of these. Equally, in the 1999 survey, crime was not one of the ten most commonly mentioned problems in the area.

Some residents interviewed for the childcare survey also mentioned crime amongst the problems they perceived to be facing Lea Bridge. These comments included factors such as the need for more lighting at bus stops along Lea Bridge Road, and a need for more CCTV cameras. Overall though crime was rarely mentioned by these residents. Only three of those interviewed saw crime as being a particular concern for the area, making it the fifth most commonly mentioned problem after factors such as improved childcare, facilities for young people, road traffic and the environment. The latest crime audit to be published for the area was conducted in 1998 and found crime to be a high priority for local people. This apparent decrease in levels of concern suggests that local people do thus seem to have benefited from the crime reduction initiatives of the SRB.

### *Crime conclusions*

The crime data available shows two different trends. Firstly a general increase in reported crime throughout the whole SRB area between April 1998 and April 2000, and secondly a decrease for the majority of crime types in areas covered by CCTV cameras between 1999 and 2000.

This data suggests that the SRB initiatives have had an impact on crime in the area by the end of 2000, and that this is likely to be linked to the CCTV cameras. Feedback from business provides support for the positive impact of the CCTV scheme, but crime appears to be becoming an increasingly important priority for local business. The small sample of residents interviewed for the nursery childcare scheme suggests that crime is a lower priority for residents than for business, and that fear of crime may have fallen in recent years. It is likely that SRB initiatives, such as the fitting of locks to vulnerable households, would have had some impact on this decrease.

### **Environment conclusions**

Due to the lack of suitable baseline to use, it is difficult to provide evidence of the partnership's impact on the environment. Figures for crime do suggest that, after an initial increase in reported crime, the levels of crime in the area are starting to decline, but work such as the environmental improvements cannot really be tested without widescale surveying of resident's opinions or other research outside the scope of this report.

Work such as the improvements to Markhouse Corner, shop front improvements and the lighting and railings replaced have certainly changed the look of Lea Bridge Road, and the high awareness of these projects shown by business supports the impact on the appearance of the area.



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## 7 PARTNERSHIP

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Over the past five years the partnership has seen many changes, both in terms of style of management and in terms of representation and membership. An evaluation of the partnership, unlike those for the other areas of work, cannot rely upon secondary data analysis or other impact measures. Such evaluation must rely primarily upon subjective and qualitative analysis from attendance at partnership meetings, and from discussion with project managers and board members.

### **Characteristics of the partnership**

One characteristic of the Lea Bridge Gateway SRB partnership which arose in these discussions was the feeling that the partnership had a drive and motivation which enabled them to 'get things done'. There was a general feeling amongst those interviewed that the board had achieved more than any of the partner organisations could have on their own.

One interviewee gave the example of the way in which issues which had been raised through official channels in the council, for instance the clearing of tipped rubbish, were not resolved until they were brought up at the SRB board meeting. Another example is the completion of projects such as the CCTV cameras. Here a large sum of money needed to be spent in a short space of time, and the partnership was able to quickly appraise and approve a large financial spend within the time constraints. If this had not been achieved the money could have been lost to the area.

One reason given for this 'can do' attitude was the strong business influence brought by the board members. This was felt to lend the board a proactive and focussed approach, which seems to have been facilitated by the programme management, Stratford Development Partnership Limited. This shows one of the benefits of the SRB model. The process of working with business can prove insightful for both the council and the community, and lead to more effective ways of working. One example of such a change was reported by one of the community representatives, who stressed the value the contact with business could have for those running community organisations.

One downside of this characteristic is the way in which this 'business-like' manner has, at times, left some groups or individuals feeling 'squeezed out'. At times the board's reluctance to stray from the task in hand, or to get dragged into lengthy discussion, has generated hostility towards both the board and the SRB as a whole. This principally occurred during the development of the major road improvement projects and was a reported concern of more people from outside the partnership than from those inside.

Another concern of the 'business focus' of the board, is that a small number of residents and businesses saw the programme as providing benefits primarily for

those involved in the partnership. Although not a good reason to move away from an effective model of working, consideration of this problem and how the board might be presented to the public, if it results in a more transparent board, could prove beneficial to the partnership in its future activities.

Clearly a delicate balance is required to benefit from the business influence, whilst remaining open to consultation and differing views, but often this balance depends more upon the personalities involved than any working pattern. Any regeneration partnership board needs to have an awareness of the dangers of each extreme. The consensus appears to be that the Lea Bridge Gateway Partnership has got the balance just about right.

### *The importance of the chair*

The proactive nature of the board was also attributed to the strong chair. One board member described the chair as being 'inclusive' and another as being 'genuinely concerned with empowering local people'. A number of interviewees reported that the partnership was less decisive and effective when the chair was absent.

One example was given where the chair was excluded from project discussion due to a potential conflict of interest. The project manager reported that they felt this severely hindered the progress of the project through the board. In another example one project reported that they felt they got very little support from the board in the early months, and as a result the project was very slow to get off the ground. Once the chair was won over to the merits of the scheme, and actively pushed the project at board meetings, the project saw increased success.

### *The importance of personality*

The need for a figurehead or a driving force does not solely extend to the chair of the board. It also appears that for success a strong 'project-champion' may be needed for each project. It is clear from the project discussion (annexes three to five) that the project manager is a key factor in any project, and often projects seem to have been turned around or failed simply because of a change of personnel.

One example of such a project is the Agenda 21 community project. This appears to have struggled in early years, but with the arrival of a new project manager who quickly got involved with the board, with residents and with partner organisations, real impact has finally been seen in terms of community activities.

## **The shift from business to a community focussed partnership**

Perhaps unsurprisingly, considering its roots in collaboration between ASITA and the council, the partnership did not initially embrace community development or address community concerns. Community representatives joined the partnership as 'equal

partners' later than other partners and felt, unsurprisingly, disadvantaged. This was compounded by the funding structure of the SRB programme which was largely capital funding for the construction of the Leyton Relief Road and included comparatively small amounts for community projects.

Additionally in the early years the programme suffered some set backs which did little to enhance its image with the local community. There was an initial lack of community consultation, for example the absence of community-chosen projects in the initial bid, and as a result the community felt excluded. Council staff reported one reason for this being an initial lack of infrastructure through which to reach the community. Issues such as the relief road aroused strong feelings in some quarters, and the partnership found early attempts at consultation become side-tracked onto a debate that could not be addressed by the board. SRB money had been awarded to build the road, the board could only ensure it was built, or return the money.

Despite this poor start, interviews with current board members show the board as having made significant changes in recent years. The community sector is certainly stronger, and community representatives describe the partnership as being willing to listen to their views, and to provide assistance and support to community activities.

In turn the current community representatives have been commended for their willingness to contribute a different perspective to debate even on subjects which do not directly concern them. In the past previous representatives have sometimes been criticised for being focussed too rigidly on one issue of interest.

This shift in the board was reflected in the increased success of the community projects in the later years of the SRB. This seems to have been caused by a combination of changing concerns within the board as membership evolved, the learning process of the first few years, and simply that the board had more time and energy once the troublesome infrastructure projects were fully underway.

In its final form the partnership board appeared to have finally achieved a good balance of community, business and council representation, with many interviewees commenting on this change.

### **Changes in working patterns**

Some council staff interviewed for this evaluation were keen to stress that this SRB was the first example of Waltham Forest Council using a joined-up approach to service provision. The fact it now seems surprising that before this partnership was the first to bring together organisations such as the Police, Lea Valley Regional Parks Authority, LETEC and the Council highlights what has been achieved. The Lea Bridge Gateway Partnership was, to a great extent, a learning experience for the council, and whilst in hindsight things may have been done differently, this must be viewed as a first attempt.

Some mistakes were clearly made, for example the Police report that, having signed up to the programme, they were then given a set of targets to achieve with no

discussion or consultation. To a great extent it may be that many of these problems will now not arise. Through the working of partnerships such as this the communication channels can be established to ensure that when organisations such as these work together in future the partnership will begin on a more equal level.

### **Partnership conclusions**

It appears that over the past five years the partnership has evolved to its current stage where it has a solid core of committed members, a good balance between business and community, a good working relationship with the council, and the experience and ability to manage a programme of projects and events.

The partnership is currently looking for ways to continue its involvement in regenerating the Lea Bridge area. It's members have already agreed that they will continue to meet post-SRB in order to lobby for the changes that are still needed to the area and the services it receives.

If future funding does become available the Lea Bridge Gateway Partnership has demonstrated that it will be very capable of securing it and has proved to be a useful body to assist in the management of such funds.

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## **ANNEX 1 – THE LEA BRIDGE GATEWAY SRB AREA**

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Lea Bridge is located in East London, in the south-west corner of the London Borough of Waltham Forest. Land in the ward is used for light industrial, commercial and residential purposes. There is also a large area of parkland managed by Lea Valley Parks Authority, and several derelict sites. The ward lies in the Lee Valley corridor which was identified by the Department of the Environment as a key area in the regeneration of East London.

The SRB Challenge Fund area spans the boundaries of three wards: Lea Bridge, Leyton and St. James Street. The boundary captures four main industrial estates: Argall Avenue/Staffa Road, Rigg Approach, Lammas Road and Church Road. In 1995 these estates contained over 250 businesses, employing 2325 people, and utilising 242,366 square meters of commercial floor space. The businesses are diverse and many are small; at the time of the bid being granted around 120 had three employees or fewer. However the area also contains some of the borough's largest and most established employers, such as Lewdens Metal Products and Kemira. Retail premises are primarily situated along the two main roads, Lea Bridge Road and Church Road (Map 1).

Within the bid area there is residential property totalling approximately 2,200 households, housing over 5,000 people in a mix of rented and owner occupied two/three bed terraced dwellings. Additional facilities within the designated area include four schools, with a new secondary school under construction. There are also a number of football pitches, a miniature golf course, and a horse riding stables.

At the last census, in 1991, Lea Bridge was the seventh most deprived ward in the borough, out of thirteen wards in total. It has been eligible for Objective 2 funding from the European Union as an industrial area in decline, with an urban community that has 'recorded a substantial fall in industrial employment' (Bid Document).

In 1991, a third of the population were 24 years and under and 18 per cent 60 years and over. Sixty per cent were white, 15 per cent Chinese, 12 per cent African Caribbean, 10 per cent Pakistani; the other minority ethnic groups included Africans, Indians and Bangladeshis. In 1995 the bid for the SRB stated that 39.6 per cent (2,099) of residents were members of ethnic minorities. Almost 12 per cent of those living in Lea Bridge ward had a health problem or disability that limited their daily activities or ability to work (Policy Analysis Unit, LBWF, 1995).



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## **ANNEX 2 - HISTORY OF THE PARTNERSHIP AND ITS APPLICATION FOR SRB FUNDING**

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### **History of the Lea Bridge area**

In the mid-1930s Lea Bridge began to develop as an area for light manufacturing. Factories were built for several large companies, including Austin Sweet, Staffa Cable and Hobs Hear. These were thriving industries which provided significant employment opportunities for local people. Much of this growth occurred alongside the railway line which provided the main form of transport for freight to and from the area. Over the next 40 years mergers, take-overs and changing markets contributed to a switch from bigger firms that employed large numbers of people to small businesses and workshops which required less labour.

As new technologies led to the closure of traditional businesses, such as steel plating, the spiral of decline intensified in the early 1980s, and again in the early 1990s, when the demand for labour noticeably declined and industrial properties lay vacant. Remaining industries were hampered by the poor state of repair of many of the units on the estates, the poor image of the area, and the congested road network. In 1994 at least two large employers, relocated away from Lea Bridge, with a loss of 190 jobs, and several SMEs also moved away. From the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s the number of vacant units within the gateway area increased by over 50 per cent.

Despite its proximity to both central London and the M25, to access the area traffic had to pass along congested urban roads, making delivery to and from businesses in the area both time consuming and difficult. In addition to these problems, access to one of the main business centres, the Argall Avenue, Staffa Road, Cromwell and Roxwell area, was only available via narrow residential back-streets. This caused problems for businesses and residents alike.

As the area's industry declined, services such as banks and post offices also moved out and the railway line closed to passenger trains, making the area even less attractive to businesses. This also made the area a less desirable place to live and those that could afford to, such as skilled workers, technicians and managers moved away, adding to the difficulties of the struggling employers (Harrison 1985).

### **History of the partnership**

Some firms, however, were locked into the area, either because it was too expensive to move, or because they could not sell their properties. In response to these factors a business self help group called ASITA was formed in 1989, to try and persuade the local authority to invest in improving the approach roads to the estates, the image of the area, and to reopen Lea Bridge railway station.

At a similar time the Waltham Forest council had come round to supporting an existing proposal to attempt to solve the area's traffic congestion problems by the construction of a relief road running from Lea Bridge down to the M11 link road, which was then starting construction.

In the climate of targeted regeneration funding for integrated development of deprived areas, a partnership team was brought together by the London Borough of Waltham Forest (LBWF) which representatives of ASITA were invited to join.

An employee from the local authority planning department was given the responsibility of bringing together business people and residents to form a core team (which was widened to include other agencies, such as the police and the Lee Valley Parks Authority), and of co-ordinating the group.

### **History of single regeneration budgets**

After a review of the first two years of the City Challenge scheme, the government decided to bring together the different sources of regeneration funding and to distribute funds through a single grant, the SRB challenge fund. This would be administered by the regional Government Offices (originally this meant the Government Office for London, but now it is the London Development Agency) and delivered through partnerships integrating local services, council agencies, local businesses, and the community.

In 1994 the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) was introduced. The aim of this funding is:

*'To enhance the quality of life of local people in areas of need by reducing the gap between deprived and other areas, and between different groups'.*

The intention is to do this through initiatives that build on best practice and represent good value for money. Aims for the SRB included: promoting sustainable solutions and innovations in urban localities, and promoting lasting architectural design in urban areas. A central idea behind this type of urban regeneration policy is that of using strong entrepreneurs to drive forward change in an area.

The types of bids that are accepted are varied, and are tailored to the needs of different areas. However, the successful bids are required to contain some of the following elements:

- *Improve the employment prospects, education and skills of local people.*
- *Address social exclusion and improve opportunities for the disadvantaged.*
- *Promote sustainable regeneration, improve and protect the environment and infrastructure (including housing).*
- *Support and promote growth in local economies and businesses.*
- *Reduce crime and drug-abuse and improve community safety.*



## **Applying for SRB funding**

The partnership team immediately began bidding for SRB Challenge funds and Objective Two monies from the European Union. This gave the meetings a clear purpose and encouraged members to attend.

The membership of the 'core' partnership was made up predominately of senior managers and owners of businesses or landlords from three neighbouring industrial estates. The managing director of a property company was elected chair; other members included a local residents' representative and a local councillor, who was elected vice chair.

The partnership team aimed to lobby for the regeneration of the industrial estates and to improve facilities for local residents. At the first meeting the problems experienced by those working on the estates were identified. These problems included access to the industrial estates, parking and security. These difficulties made it difficult to retain existing businesses and attract new ones. Two decisions were also made which set the agenda for future meetings. It was agreed that:

- it was essential each partner got real and rapid benefits from the activities to maintain the momentum, and
- support should be given to the construction of Leyton Relief Road.

Although involving other agencies, the partnership was co-ordinated by the council, which provided information and technical advice regarding the issues. The partnership wrote to the Government Office for London and the local Member of Parliament in preparation for obtaining Objective Two monies for the Leyton Relief Road. Partners also met with engineers and planners to ensure that the physical improvements to the estates would address the problems. The 'can do' approach of the businessmen was the hallmark of the partnership team. The vice-chair was also mandated to take back the views of the partners to council meetings.

The work of the partnership was rewarded in the winter of 1995 when they secured SRB funding and Objective 2 monies from the European Union.

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## **ANNEX 3 - BUSINESS AND EMPLOYMENT FOCUSED PROJECTS**

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The work of the SRB to support business was responsible for a spend of £3.67 million from SRB funds, and drew in an additional £16.79 million in public and private funding.

The main projects were: the building of the Leyton Relief Road, estate improvements with the creation of the Car Park at the top of the Argall extension and the installation of CCTV, the remediation and redevelopment of two areas of unused land, and the Gateway Business Expansion Programme. These projects are discussed in turn to give a report on their progress over the five years, and an insight into their individual impact.

### **1. Road building**

The construction of the Leyton Relief Road and the Argall Avenue extension, now known as Argall Way, has always been the major priority for the SRB partnership. As a result this project has been allocated the greatest proportion of SRB spend, accounting for around 31 per cent of all SRB funding.

Although this sum was a substantial proportion of the SRB budget, it was in fact only a relatively small percentage of the total cost of the road building exercise, in fact paying just over 15 per cent of the total cost. Much additional funding was sourced from both public and private contributions in order to get the road completed. The partnership has thus worked effectively as a catalyst for this additional funding, and has achieved a major infrastructure project with a spend which, in relation to the project's total cost, was not great.

As is common with such a large infra-structural project, the construction of the road has been complex and has sparked a great deal of controversy. In order to clarify the issues it is easier to divide the road into two sections: Argall Way and the Leyton Relief Road.

#### **1.1 Argall Way**

The first section, Argall Way, connecting the Argall Avenue estates to the Lea Bridge Road has been completed and was opened in June 2000. This now provides the sole access onto the business areas running north of Lea Bridge Road, as the previous access through Staffa Road has been blocked off. Residents from the Burwell Road area had wanted this road, which effectively redirects the access to the Argall/Staffa industrial area, since the 1930's, to prevent their streets being used by freight vehicles.

There has been a clear impact of this initiative on the local residential area. Prior to the closure of Staffa Road, the approximate two-way weekday flow along this road was around 4,100 vehicles. All this traffic would previously have had to pass along one of the residential Burwell, Belvedere, Sanderstead, Flempton or Overton Roads.

Residents have benefited from a great reduction in this heavy traffic, with a corresponding reduction in pollution and noise and greater levels of safety, especially for those with young children. A number of residents from this area were interviewed as part of the Nursery Childcare evaluation and when questioned about the new road confirmed that it had benefits in terms of cleaning up the streets, making it safer for children, and night and day noise reduction. In this way this section of road can be said to have met with the strategic objectives three and seven, to promote a safe and sustainable environment, and an improved quality of life for the residents.

Whilst the benefits have been substantial for residents in these streets, further improvements will be made when access to the car repair business and scrap-yard, situated at the southern end of Staffa Road is redirected onto the new stretch of road. Currently this business creates a great deal of traffic through the residential area, as much of their business involves bringing in abandoned vehicles for local councils, and they operate a small fleet of trucks which make repeated return trips to and from the depot daily.

By providing a convenient and well-maintained road, with less restricted access, it was hoped that new business would be attracted to the area and that existing business would be more likely to both survive and remain in the area. Equally by providing an access route which bypasses residential areas Argall Way should enable the estates it services to grow without provoking further conflict between the wishes of residents and those of business. The intention was that, in time, the businesses served by this road would be able to improve their performance, expand and result in more jobs being available for local people.

If these projected effects occur then strategic objectives one and two, to enhance employment prospects in the area and to promote sustainable economic growth will have been achieved. Unfortunately, with the road having been open for only one year, it is too early to detect any real impact in terms of either new business or business survival. The initial positive feedback from businesses served by the road certainly suggests a strong positive effect is likely in the future.

This stretch of road has seemingly contributed to all the strategic objectives of the programme, and is generally agreed to be a popular and successful achievement. In the interviews conducted for this research, whenever opposition to the road has been expressed, this has almost universally been directed towards the Leyton Relief Road, rather than towards Argall Way itself.

One possible criticism of the Argall Avenue extension is that it provides a very localised impact. There are 292 residential properties affected around the Burwell Road area, and about 129 businesses ('The Gateway', Spring 2000) need to use the access road. However the nature of the SRB vehicle is to provide localised solutions to local problems, and this section of the road does seem to have provided this.

Many local residents had long wanted a separate access for the estates, and the council had long recognised both this and the importance of improving access, but had not been able to find the funding to do this. Equally the expense required was probably too great for a conglomeration of businesses to arrange. The SRB funding, partly by acting as a catalyst for other funding, allowed this project to take place. Therefore the benefits gained from Argall Way can be cited as benefits of the

whole road building exercise, as without backing for the entire project, this section may never have been built.

Another problem in the delivery of the Argall Avenue extension was the delay in opening of the section. The primary reason for this was difficulties encountered with restructuring the Lea Bridge road junction. Here the partnership had to redirect utility services to cope with the new road layout. Despite getting estimates from the authorities responsible for this work the initial quotes for this work totalled around £0.8 million, yet the work finally was completed at a cost of £2.8 million. This caused delays both in finding the additional funding and due to the time needed for the additional work. The partnership cannot be blamed in any way for this delay, as they were left powerless by the poor estimates made by the statutory utility services, and have no power to challenge the mistakes made. An additional one million pounds was obtained from European funding, and the remaining overspend was controlled primarily by redesigning the junction with Lea Bridge Road, made necessary due to problems with the water table, which led to a saving of £1.4 million for the project.

## **1.2 Leyton Relief Road**

The second part of the road, the Leyton Relief Road, linking Lea Bridge Road to Ruckholt Road, for access with the M11 link road, has caused substantially more problems.

This section has not yet been opened, making difficult the evaluation of its success or failure, though this is now out of the control of the SRB. Although all SRB money has been spent, as has the additional funding secured from Europe, the southern section of the road and the junction with Ruckholt Road, is being built by a private company as part of a supermarket development. This work has been delayed due to a land dispute, and consequently the opening of the road has also been pushed back.

The construction of this section of the road sparked vociferous protests from the community and from further afield. Both business interests and sections of the council had long been lobbying for this development, but had faced opposition from both inside the council and from the community. The Waltham Forest Civic Society, for example, had been protesting against the Leyton Relief Road for a long time before the SRB bid. Over time the council as a whole was won over to the idea of building the road, but the central government UDP Inspectorate rejected the application. The council, in an unusual move, decided to go against this decision and seek funding from other sources. Having received the SRB funding, the council was able to go ahead with the construction process despite the previous recommendation.

Protest against the road centred on three key points. Firstly there was the issue as to whether it would provide the intended impacts in terms of traffic reduction. Secondly there was concern as to whether the construction of this road (especially with the construction of other roads further north) would put increased pressure on plans to extend the road links up the Lea Valley. Thirdly there were environmental concerns expressed about the loss of both land of scientific interest and a number of rare species, resulting from the construction of the road along the Leyton yard site.

### *Traffic congestion*

There have been a number of studies attempting to model the changes in traffic flow that will result from the construction of the Leyton Relief Road. Primarily these centre around reduction of traffic on Lea Bridge Road, Church Road, and Markhouse Road. That there is a traffic problem is not disputed. A congested road network and traffic on Lea Bridge Road were the most common problems reported by businesses interviewed for this evaluation, and were also mentioned by a number of local residents spoken to for the childcare survey.

The council has commissioned several traffic assessments. One of these, the 1991 'Temple Mills Environmental Impact Assessment' by the independent Metropolitan Transport Research Unit (MTRU), concluded that the opening of the Leyton Relief Road could lead to traffic reductions of between 10 and 33 per cent for Lea Bridge Road, with potentially larger reductions for other roads in the area. This report also looked at changes in terms of public transport times, cycling, noise and air pollution. The report concluded that the opening of the Leyton Relief Road could bring about environmental improvements, should it be implemented with a number of traffic control measures, such as road closures, bans on heavy goods vehicles and restricted access times.

A report by the Department of Development at Waltham Forest Council also concluded that the relief road would result in traffic reduction for local problem areas. It showed that the roads in the study area were already at capacity, especially at peak times, and that if traffic continued to grow, as is expected, these problems would only increase. The new road could take up this increase and effectively reduce traffic on the existing roads by around six per cent.

Despite these conclusions the report does mention that the construction of new roads often will generate extra traffic to fill them, and that any relief afforded to nearby routes may only be short lived. This report makes the recommendation that additional capacity on the relieved roads is quickly taken up by the provision of bus and cycle lanes, and by pedestrian facilities. The council has acted in this way, placing bus lanes along the length of Lea Bridge Road, yet as this has been done prior to the opening of the relief road, these at present may be adding to the congestion problems and increasing journey times.

This report also agrees with the MTRU report, that the relief road would only bring benefits if it were implemented as part of an integrated approach to control traffic. It stated that:

*'Without such a package, which would have all the permission, agreements, and funding in place, the relief road could become part of a general increase in capacity, which would lead to worsening environmental problems'*

The worry that the opening of the Leyton Relief Road could release suppressed demand and increase traffic on congested roads in the area, such as Lea Bridge Road, resulted in the initial planning application being rejected by the Inspectorate at the UDP inquiry. This was also the concern of groups such as the Southern Lea Valley Partnership and the Waltham Forest Civic Society.

Unfortunately, until the relief road is opened, which is currently forecast for September 2001, little conclusive evidence can be obtained for its effects on traffic.

Most of the traffic reports written for this project were written before the completion of the M11 link road, which in itself had some effect on reduction of traffic in the area. As a result much of the baseline data collected at this time would now be inaccurate and so is of little use for determining any impact of the relief road. The exception is the 1999 LEU report, but this report focused more on the traffic flow changes around the Burwell/Wellington/Overton/Staffa Road areas. Although traffic counts were given for Church/Oliver Road, High Road Leyton, and Lea Bridge Road, a fuller study would be required to give a wider picture of the baseline traffic situation on roads such as Markhouse and Ruckholt Road. Additionally as the reports above make clear, the eventual impact on traffic reduction will depend greatly on the council's policy regarding the closure and traffic calming on surrounding roads such as Lea Bridge Road, Church Road, and Oliver Road. At present the strategy is undecided, and so predicting impact is made even more difficult.

As with all attempts to model change in traffic flow, there is dispute as to what extent these will relate to actual changes on the ground. Even though the council does intend to take measures involving road closures, lorry bans and limited access in the area, thus forcing traffic to use the new relief road, there is still fear that there will be little in the way of traffic reduction for many of the problem areas.

It has also been suggested that the traffic problems may not be as severe as reported, with some interviewees suggesting that Church Road/Markhouse Road are not the problem areas they have been made out to be. In response to this the council has stated that the road was needed partly in order to address potential traffic increases in the area which would result from development of the industrial areas.

It is recommended that a traffic survey is conducted in key areas of potential impact before the opening of the relief road, to give a recent and relevant baseline with which to compare traffic flows. Only by doing this will the real impact of the Leyton Relief Road on local traffic be detected. Before the building of the Leyton Relief Road, Southern Lee Valley Federation requested that a 'proper strategic evaluation' be carried out throughout the Lea Valley Area to look into traffic problems. The effect of the road will have impacts far beyond the area of the SRB, and an infra-structural development of this size and nature merits wide and comprehensive investigation.

#### *Further expansion*

Fears have been expressed that this road may be extended across the Lea Valley as part of a network of roads linking Lea Bridge with Tottenham Hale or the North Circular, and eventually the M25. These worries have been heightened now Enfield council have pushed through the NGAR link from the A1055 to the M25, giving added advantages to a link from Lea Bridge north to join this road in Tottenham.

There is particular concern as the land which it would cross is a Site of Special Scientific Interest, and contains an important bird sanctuary, and also because such an extension would have to cross Forest Road, which is already heavily congested. The Walthamstow Marsh SSI is one of the few extensive areas of wet grassland and marsh remaining in London, which has escaped extensive development, they

contain some of the best examples of London's natural habitats, and are a high priority for protection.

The council has stated that current policy is to oppose any extension of the road. It may however be pointed out that council policy was at one time against the building of the Leyton Relief Road, and this policy changed. It is therefore not beyond the realms of possibility that council policy may alter in the future as priorities and interests change.

It is probable that in the future certain interests will call for the extension of the road, in order to serve their needs. It remains to be seen whether opposition to this will stand firm. The worry for those keen to see the Lea Valley protected as a green belt, including some residents, the Southern Lea Valley Federation and the Lea Valley Regional Park Authority, is that as small separate sections of road are built the pressure to link these into one continuous stretch is heightened and may become unsustainable, despite strong environmental considerations.

The reasons for the opposition to the extension of the road north beyond the present section are not solely environmental. The 1991 MTRU report has suggested that if the road were extended north, for example as far as the North Circular, this would serve to bring additional traffic through the Lea Bridge area. As the road has been built with the intention of relieving local traffic problems this would run contrary to these ideas.

#### *Preservation of the Leyton yard site*

The land on which the Leyton Relief Road was built had been designated by the London Ecology Unit in 1989 to be a Grade One borough site of nature conservation importance, and efforts were being made to protect the flora and fauna that had developed along the old railway sidings. Some local residents were using the area for recreation, although its legal status was as private land, still owned by the railway company.

Various studies and surveys have been conducted to determine the levels of diversity and quantities of flora and fauna that grew in this area, and a number of rare and unusual species had been found due to the unusual composition and nature of the land. One species of tree in particular was notable, as this was the only known habitat outside of Italy.

Some protest against the relief road involved the loss of this unusual environment to a road building programme. Whilst it may appear that the council paid little attention to these concerns, they have reported that they were aware of the issues and had considered the situation. The private ownership of the land, and its status as operational land rather than derelict land, meant that it was unlikely to ever be granted status as a park or nature reserve. Indeed the railway company had cleared a section of the land at the southern end of the site without consulting the council, and was free to clear remaining parts of the land if it wished to do so.

Perversely it is possible that the move to build the road across the Leyton sidings may have actually protected the rare habitats that the former sidings provided. By taking ownership of the land to provide the road link, the council is now in a

position to safeguard the remaining habitat for a reserve or parkland, whereas without the road it was likely to eventually be cleared.

One of the environmental assessments of the area (Harvey 1999) accepts the fact the road is to be built and expresses the hope that:

*'...some of the most valuable ecological areas can be retained in the landscaping and screening proposals for the road and the development sites'.*

The council has reported that they have taken these recommendations on board during the construction process. Limestone, instead of earth, was used alongside the road, similar to what is used on railway tracks, and hopefully this will encourage the same species that were thriving there before. In addition trees have been cut only within one metre of the carriageway instead of the usual three, again protecting some of the pre-existing vegetation. We were also told that where possible the habitats for the rare species have been protected.

### *Consultation*

The council has been criticised for a lack of consultation on the planning of the road. Many of those who wished to voice the objections outlined above felt that they had not been given a fair opportunity to contribute to the discussion on and planning of the road. Since 1998 the council reports that it has sent out 15,000 newsletters each year to residential and commercial properties and to community groups, but this appears to have been more a means of communicating information rather than collecting views as a consultation exercise. Before this time the community was kept informed of developments, but there seems to be little evidence of residents having been given a real opportunity to voice their opinions to council leaders or of a comprehensive survey to collate local people's opinions on the road.

Although some businesses interviewed for this evaluation reported feeling inadequately consulted, it is clear that overall the opening of the Leyton Relief Road is popular amongst business. Previous UEL business surveys have found around 93 per cent of businesses support the project (Gordon and Sampson 1997), and this years' study found 100 per cent of companies interviewed thought the new road would be either useful or very useful to their business.

There is possibly some room for criticism of the council for going ahead with a road building exercise without the full consent of the community, yet this is perhaps outside the remit of this evaluation. The SRB, once granted, had the building of the relief road as a key output, required for continuation of funding, and so the role of the board was to push the project through to completion. This evaluation must evaluate the SRB partnership in terms of its aims and objectives, and the completion of the section of the Leyton Relief Road within its jurisdiction must therefore count as a success.

In the early years of the SRB there was some history of the community-group meetings, and even partnership meetings, becoming caught up in heated discussion about the building of the road. Here there seems to have been a problem of lack of communication. The SRB board's remit was to build the road, and thus they were concerned with the process of getting this done, whereas those against the road



seemed to feel the SRB was still deciding whether to build the road and so would be the body to address their dissatisfaction to.

This situation resulted in some level of negative feelings between some members of the community and the partnership. Some people felt they had been excluded from expressing their opinions at board meetings. Whereas the board felt that it could listen to the opinions of anyone on other issues and even could listen to positive criticism on the finer details of the road, there was no place for anti-road sentiments within the partnership. Support, or at least toleration, of the building of the road was an essential part of the partnership's direction.

Although the partnership was unable to respond to calls to abandon the building of the relief road, there were two public meetings held to discuss details such as the routing of the junction with Lea Bridge Road. At these residents voted to have the junction pass under Lea Bridge Road, a decision which was later reversed without further consultation or explanation.

Moves such as this have led to hostile feelings towards the board and the nature of consultation, with some residents and businesses expressing the opinion that council-community consultation was pointless as the council was unlikely to change their decisions based on the opinions of residents or businesses.

Although clearly some people have been left disappointed by the consultation process, it must be mentioned that these findings are based on a small sample of business and residents in the area. Those who feel aggrieved are also much more likely to remember their complaints some time later, and to bring these up in interview. The council clearly must try to satisfy the needs of the majority of its residents and businesses, whilst inconveniencing as few as possible. It is not possible to satisfy everyone, and so it may be unfair to criticise either the council or the board on the basis of a few dissatisfied voices.

### *Strategic objectives*

In terms of the SRB's strategic objectives, it is hoped that the new Leyton Relief Road will contribute to sustainable economic growth (SO1) in the area, by attracting new businesses to the area, and making existing businesses more competitive. It is also hoped that it will provide a safer and improved environment (SO3) by reducing traffic flow through the area. These effects would indirectly enhance the quality of life of residents (SO7) and employment prospects (SO2).

As mentioned earlier it is not yet possible to make conclusive statements about the impact of the road on businesses and residents, as it has not yet opened and forecasts of its effects are ambiguous. The traffic surveys mentioned previously would contribute to an assessment of the impact on residents. The most effective way to assess the impact on businesses would be by a comprehensive business survey of the area, carried out 6 months to one year after the new road has opened. This would collate the opinions of managers and owners on the effect of the new road on their competitiveness.

The high level of business support for the road suggests a probable positive impact, but only if this optimism translates into a better business environment and

is shown to benefit turnover, employment and to attract new business can the road be said to be a true success.

### *Continuation*

When the road has opened it is important that it is maintained. The council has agreed to adopt the road and to be responsible for its upkeep. Already on the section of road that has been opened, there have been incidents of tipping, and there have been reports of delays in getting this debris removed by the council. Due to the isolated location of the Leyton Relief Road stretch, it may also be prone to the activities of fly-tippers. It is therefore particularly important that the council closely monitors this stretch of road if these problems are to be avoided.

### *Lea Bridge Road junction*

Although the impact of the Leyton Relief Road cannot be seen yet, one possible problem arising from this development is the junction that has been built across Lea Bridge Road. This was originally planned to go under Lea Bridge Road, a more expensive option favoured by residents. This was dropped during construction due to the overspend on the redirecting of service utilities at the Lea Bridge junction and due to the unforeseen expense in dealing with the high water table in the region of the proposed underpass.

The junction, as it stands, has been mentioned by several businesses in our survey to be causing additional traffic and delays on the already congested Lea Bridge Road, especially with much of the junction being given over to dedicated bus lanes. It is possible that this perceived increase in traffic on Lea Bridge Road could be seen as an unintended consequence of the Leyton Relief Road's route.

Although there may be some dissatisfaction now, it must be considered that this junction is not yet fully open and that the situation is likely to change when the road has been opened and traffic flows change accordingly. Further monitoring of traffic flows at this junction would be needed to determine whether the design of the junction has been well chosen.

## **2. Estate improvements**

### **2.1 Argall Avenue car park**

Car parking was originally identified as a major obstacle for local businesses by the ASISTA partnership. With 35 per cent of all businesses interviewed in Lea Bridge during 1996 mentioning that this was a barrier to their growth (Gordon and Sampson 1997), this was clearly still the case when the SRB partnership came into being.

The problems were thought to be particularly prevalent around the top of the Argall Avenue. Two car parks have been built in this area, at the same time as the Argall Avenue extension. One of these, that adjoining the Allied Bakeries site, was paid for out of Objective Two money, and the other out of SRB money. The SRB car park

has been built but is waiting for marking and finishing details. Although access is open to vehicles its primary users at the moment appear to be skateboarders.

There have been no real problems with the delivery of this project, and despite the SRB car park having not been completed, some insight into its impact can be obtained from the business survey. The previous business survey (McInroy 1999) found that 52 per cent of businesses in the Argall area and 35 per cent of those in the Staffa area mentioned parking to be a problem. This year's survey found no businesses in the Argall Estate mention parking to be a problem, and only one business in the Staffa area (on the Dorma Estate) mentioned parking to be causing their company problems.

### *Strategic Objectives*

It is likely that the results of this small survey can be extrapolated to apply to the whole of these estates. If this is so then the project has met its strategic objectives of contributing to sustainable economic growth (SO2), by removing one of the barriers to growth and restrictions on business for companies in the areas affected.

Given that car parking was identified in both previous business surveys as a problem for local business, it is equally likely that in the past it has had a negative effect on businesses looking to locate to the area. Unfortunately no figures are currently available to see if either land use or new business start-ups have increased in the Argall/Staffa area since the provision of new car parking space, and so it is impossible to prove such an impact. Readily available car parking, where previously there was none, will have a definite effect on the attractiveness of the area for both new and existing business, and so it is likely that this will contribute to companies staying in the area and help in bringing new companies into the area. In this way the project will have assisted the programme with another of its strategic objectives, to enhance employment prospects within Lea Bridge (SO1).

### *Over-provision of parking*

The SRB-funded car park is still incomplete and, although available for parking, is as yet pretty much unused. Despite this, the completed car park (the Objective Two funded project), although used by workers in the area, doesn't seem to be full to capacity. One justification for this excess of provision may be related to the projected increase in traffic to the estates once the relief road is open. Although this explains the current under-use this seems to be in conflict with the idea of the road as a relief road primarily for freight traffic, and with the aim of promoting non-car access.

It is also possible that the current car park provision may have to decrease when the Leyton Relief Road is opened. The Objective Two car park has been built to provide possible access for Allied Bakeries when they are required to exit down the new road rather than along South Access Road. If this does occur, which has yet to be decided between the council and Allied Bakeries, the current car-parking provision will decrease, justifying the apparent over-provision at present.

### *Location of car parks*

One question over the provision of car parking is whether the location of the facilities provided is that in which they would have had the maximum benefit. There are several areas in Lea Bridge where the need for parking facilities is clearly causing major problems for small businesses. The business survey found that over a third of companies sampled mentioned parking to be a problem for their business. This figure shows that although car parking has improved for businesses in the Argall/Staffa area, the proportion reporting problems related to parking for all businesses in Lea Bridge has changed very little since the 1996 fieldwork (when 35 per cent reported problems).

The majority of businesses reporting problems with parking in the 2001 fieldwork were in Lea Bridge Road, Church Road, or the estates running off Church Road. The possible provision of car parking in other areas of Lea Bridge should thus be investigated so that they can enjoy the same advantages as those trading on the Argall/Staffa Estates.

It is especially important that small retail businesses on Lea Bridge Road have their concerns about parking addressed. When the new shopping centre opens at the bottom of the Leyton Relief Road these businesses will face a testing time. Firstly there will be potential loss of business to the new development, and secondly there will be an opportunity to take advantage of passing trade as a result of the traffic generated by the new development. If they are to take advantage of this passing trade, much of which will be travelling by car, short stay car parking must be provided. If this is not done there is a danger that many of these businesses will suffer, close, and leave Lea Bridge Road looking less attractive due to the high number of closed shops.

## **2.2 CCTV**

In 1999, due to an underspend in another programme area, £250,000 was made available for a project to introduce CCTV cameras within the Lea Bridge Gateway area. This money had initially been earmarked for matched funding for landscaping in the grounds of Allied Bakeries. The SRB cameras fed into an existing CCTV scheme in operation in other parts of the borough, and was thus able to make use of facilities at the central Waltham Forest CCTV control room for monitoring of these cameras.

Three fixed position cameras were installed in Lea Bridge, and the area has a fourth camera, for a proportion of the time, which is portable and is moved around this area and South Leytonstone. The cameras used have a near 360-degree rotation, so can capture wide images, even though fixed in one place.

### *Strategic Objectives*

The project sought to meet strategic objectives SO2 and SO3, to improve economic efficiency and to create a safe and sustainable environment. It also sought to have impacts on SO7, to improve quality of life for local residents, by reducing crime rates in the area.

Some evidence can be found to demonstrate the impact of this project on crime in the Lea Bridge area. Although a number of arrests have been made directly as a result of the cameras, the primary impact is hoped to be one of crime reduction. There is some evidence that reported crime rates in the area have declined since the arrival of the CCTV cameras. Reported incident rates for streets within the SRB area are shown below for 1999 and 2000:

1999	Crime Type				
	Major	Burglary	Vehicle Beat	Total	
Argall Avenue	1	4	4	2	11
Staffa Road	0	1	3	1	5
Lea Bridge Road	139	24	24	79	266
Heybridge Way	1	2	0	6	9
Church Road	5	5	5	20	35

2000	Crime Type				
	Major	Burglary	Vehicle Beat	Total	
Argall Avenue	0	0	2	2	4
Staffa Road	0	2	1	1	4
Lea Bridge Road	124	26	18	70	238
Heybridge Way	3	0	1	5	9
Church Road	8	7	7	19	41

% Change	Crime Type				
	Major	Burglary	Vehicle Beat	Total	
Argall Avenue	-100%	-100%	-50%	0%	-64%
Staffa Road	0%	100%	-67%	0%	-20%
Lea Bridge Road	-11%	8%	-25%	-11%	-11%
Heybridge Way	200%	-100%	N/A	-17%	0%
Church Road	60%	40%	40%	-5%	17%

*Source: Metropolitan Police, quoted in Mason 2000.*

These figures show that there has been a considerable decrease in recorded crime since the installation of the CCTV cameras in the Argall and Staffa areas, and also along Lea Bridge Road. Vehicle crime seems to be especially well affected, with a noticeable decrease in all these three areas. All these areas are covered by the CCTV cameras and have this fact advertised on a number of signposts in the area to increase the strength of the deterrent. The data suggests that the presence of the CCTV cameras may well be helping to reduce crime in the area.

Such figures do need to be treated with some caution. It could be that crime figures have reduced universally by such an amount, or that other causes have resulted in this decrease. It is hard to test whether or not the SRB area cameras have been the cause of this decrease as, with over 30 cameras on the system, most areas of Waltham Forest have now got CCTV, leaving few unaffected areas with which to compare changes in crime rates.

The Business study conducted in 2001 can provide some more solid evidence of impact of the CCTV scheme. Of the 30 businesses interviewed, 16 (53 per cent) had heard of the CCTV cameras installed in the area. Of this 16, nine companies (56 per cent) felt that they had been useful or very useful to their business.

It also appears that the presence of CCTV cameras is having an effect on unreported crime. Acts of minor vandalism, fly-tipping etc. may go unnoticed to official crime statistics, but a reduction in these could have great implications on the quality of life of local people and for the businesses in the area. One example of this reported to the researchers during the fieldwork was that of the siphoning of diesel from vehicles. This offence will often go unreported through official channels as the victim knows that there is little chance of catching the culprit, yet it can cost businesses heavily if a regular occurrence. Since the introduction of CCTV cameras in the Argall/Staffa area there has apparently been a significant decrease in such siphoning, and both some businesses and the police representative felt this was a result of the CCTV's deterrent effects.

Whilst the CCTV cameras provided by the SRB are seen primarily as a business project there are also important community benefits. A reduction in crime in the area, even if focussed on the estates will have benefits for the whole local population. The partnership has had requests from residents and community representatives for the roving camera within Lea Bridge to be used to combat problems such as fly-tipping, demonstrating the cameras' potential for community benefits.

#### *Reported problems with the CCTV system*

Despite these wide ranging benefits, some problems have been reported with the SRB funded CCTV cameras. One of these has involved the reliability of the cameras. The SRB funded cameras work on a microwave system, which has been reported to not perform as well as the original fibre transmission system in all weather conditions. On the recommendation of an independent evaluation of the cameras (Mason 2000), this system is being evaluated and may have to be replaced. These problems may have had some impact on the effectiveness of the cameras in terms of catching criminals and spotting crimes. Whilst this clearly sheds some doubt on the manner in which SRB money has been spent this cannot be said to be the partnership's responsibility as the choice of camera type was not a decision they had control over.

#### *Issues surrounding the SRB spend on CCTV*

During the course of the interviews a few concerns were raised about the way in which the CCTV underspend was appraised and approved. There has been some complaint, primarily from the community, that the time between the available funds being announced and the meeting to allocate the money was too short to allow other projects to bid for the money. The main argument seems to be that with more time community, rather than business, projects could have been the main beneficiaries.

This situation has been explained by the board, as the underspend was realised at the end of the financial year, and had to be spent quickly before the money was lost to the partnership. The council run CCTV project could be appraised quickly and

the money secured, and the alternative was to let the money go out of the area. Community groups reported that they too would have liked to bid for this money, but that the timescale was too short for them to get anything together.

Although this situation may have been unavoidable in the circumstances, there may be some lessons to be learnt for future programmes. Using the money given to community groups for feasibility studies, it may be possible to ensure that there are always projects lined up, ready to bid for funding, should an underspend become available. This really only needs to be ensured at the end of the financial year, when there is a likelihood of surplus funding needing to be spent quickly. If assistance is not given to ensure this is the case, it gives the advantage to a body such as the council in a situation similar to that which occurred. The council will often have more projects ready to be rolled out than the funding that is available, whereas the community will often only prepare projects when they know funding is available.

### *Use of SRB money*

One other issue with the CCTV cameras is the issue of whether they should have been SRB funded in the first instance. Much of the rest of the borough has CCTV coverage even where there has been no SRB money to fund this. The question must be asked as to whether the council, who pay for the CCTV work in other areas, should not be funding the CCTV installation in Lea Bridge also.

If the area would otherwise have not received CCTV, then it is understandable that the SRB be used to provide this. On the other hand if CCTV would still have been installed at council expense, even if the SRB money had not been available, then this suggests that the funds were perhaps inappropriately used.

### *CCTV conclusions*

The provision of CCTV cameras has proved to be a popular scheme with businesses, and the limited feedback received from residents also suggests that the benefits are being appreciated by them. Whilst there are some reservations surrounding implementation issues, such as whether the choice of camera type was suitable, these are outside the remit of this evaluation as these decisions were determined outside the partnership.

## **3. Remediation of contaminated land**

### **3.1 Low Hall tip site**

The council had been looking for a use for this abandoned tip site, adjacent to the Roxwell Trading Park, and community-related uses such as for a football pitch or a park had been rejected as unsuitable. The site was thus transformed from a contaminated dump to one suitable for 45,000 square feet of industrial units. The remediation of the site went smoothly, the contaminated area being capped over making use of cheap clay from the construction of the M11 link road in order to save money. Once the land was remediated it was sold at market rates to English

Partnerships, a government organisation and part of the London Development Agency (LDA), gaining a large capital receipt for the land of £495,000.

### *Delays to the project*

Problems arose when the access route to the site was under discussion. During the remediation access had been gained via the South Access Road, from the North, but when the site was opened it was anticipated that access would be obtained via the new Argal Avenue Extension from the South. The proposed access route did not require the acquisition of any buildings, but it did need to pass over the forecourts of five business properties and 12 allotments on the Low Hall Farm site.

The allotments and four businesses were willing to accept compensation, but a Compulsory Purchase Order was needed in order to obtain access over the fifth business. This was requested in February 2000, but by the end of 2000 the company agreed to a compensation package. Despite this agreement being made the DETR had not confirmed the result of the public enquiry by early 2001. This decision has been pending since February 2000, despite being a 'fast-track' scheme, and caused considerable delay for the project.

The route also required the redirection of public services, which began in March 2001, and will end in May 2001. When these are complete work can begin on developing the site with new business properties. When complete the project should provide new small industrial units and result in 110 new jobs for the area. The project has also been responsible for redirecting the access to the council's Low Hall depot, to give two access points, allowing access down Argall Way.

### *Outputs and additional benefits*

Bar the delays caused by the access route, and the need for the CPO, this project has run according to plan. Most project outputs have now been achieved, the exception being the number of jobs created (both in construction and long-term). As a result of the delay in completing the access to the site, these will now be realised after the lifetime of the project. Assuming the new industrial units are built according to plan and are filled with new business it is likely that these targets will be achieved.

This project has had other advantages in addition to the development of previously unused contaminated land. Due to the access route provided down to the new road, a number of businesses can now exit from the south of the industrial area, rather than travel through the residential streets near South Access Road. In addition it has allowed a bus route to be developed running down through the estate from Walthamstow. The precise route of this has yet to be decided, and a consultation exercise has just taken place funded by the New Opportunities for Walthamstow (NOW) SRB. If this is implemented as intended it should both provide improved access to jobs on the industrial estate for those who do not have a car, and also encourage the use of public transport for the journey to work for many of those who currently drive to the estates. The through road from South Access Road to the Leyton Relief Road will be shut to traffic other than the bus, thus preventing the route becoming a 'rat-run' for those wishing to get to the M11 from the Walthamstow area.



## *Impact*

Once again the key impacts, to provide for new economic development and environmental improvements resulting from the redirected route through the Roxwell Estate, cannot be comprehensively assessed until the work is completed and the new businesses which the project hopes to attract are established. If this occurs as planned the project should have contributed towards strategic objectives 01, 02, and 03, enhancing employment prospects, improving economic growth, and creating an improved environment. English Partnerships will be monitoring the outputs in terms of jobs from the development of the land so this data will still be collected and analysed even though the SRB partnership will have ceased to perform this function.

## *Other barriers to implementation*

One concern raised in interviews about the work on the tip site has been that the wheel washing facilities, which were installed to clean the wheels of vehicles leaving the site, were either not being used or not functioning. This allowed dirt and clay to be transferred onto surrounding roads around South Access Road. Unfortunately as work on the remediation is now complete it is too late to investigate whether this was indeed the case. It is important to note that where work may disrupt or adversely affect residents to the area, every effort must be taken to ensure this is kept to a minimum. Lapses such as this reflect badly not only on the contractor and the council, but also on the work of the partnership and create hostility between the residents and the SRB partnership where there should be co-operation.

Another concern was raised during the business interviews. One small business on the Roxwell Business Park reported that they had concerns over the new parking restrictions that will be imposed on the estate when the through road from South Access Road is opened for the bus route. Here a council representative visited to inform businesses of the changes, but when the problems resulting from reduced parking were highlighted, the council representative was unable to offer any advice to help have these concerns addressed. The business had negative feelings towards the SRB as a result of this work, felt that consultation had been inadequate, and that the needs of small businesses had been overlooked. Other businesses on the Roxwell estate may share these views, though a larger business study would be needed to see if this is a widespread problem or an isolated concern.

One of the strengths of an SRB board is that the mix of business, local people and council representatives should provide a platform for complaints such as these to be aired and addressed. Often it seems that those with feedback or problems such as these do not know where to take them. Although business and community representatives attend board meetings, their existence is not actively advertised to local companies and residents. As a result complaints like those above are not brought to the board and so cannot be acted upon by the SRB. The business in the example above had grievances against the SRB as they had not been consulted, yet had not tried to have the point aired through a business representative. If a board is to become truly representative, the channels for complaint, comment, or compliment need to be well known and well used by those outside of the board.

### **3.2 Remediation of the Radio Veneers site**

The SRB was also responsible for the remediation of another area of contaminated industrial ground, the Radio Veneers site to the south of Church Road. This was completed successfully in year three of the program and provided 1,860 square metres of industrial units. The units are currently in use. From the additional capacity at this site 75 jobs have been created. This project seems to have met the first three objectives of the SRB in the way that the Low Hall tip site should eventually do, and has not been subject to any negative feedback in the course of the interviews.

## **4. Gateway business expansion programme**

The Gateway Business Expansion Programme (GBEP) is designed to contribute towards achieving strategic objectives one and two, which are to enhance the employment prospects and skills of local people and encourage sustainable economic growth and wealth creation by improving the competitiveness of the local economy (Year three delivery plan).

The project was run in two halves: firstly a project giving business advice and grants to improve business and secondly a project giving grants to improve business premises. The two projects were managed separately and so will be assessed in this way.

### **4.1 Business advice**

The programme was initially managed by the Waltham Forest Local Authority Planning and Economic Development Department, and delivered in conjunction with LETEC and Business Link. In the early years of the project there was difficulty obtaining the support it had been hoped LETEC would deliver and there were some initial difficulties with the way the project was managed within the council. When the initial business advisor from Waltham Forest left leaving a vacant post, the project began to have real difficulties realising its targeted spend and outputs. A 1998 review of the project by UEL summarised these and suggested two possible ways forward. Firstly the evaluation proposed that the council continued to manage the project, but with a drastically altered management structure, and the second option suggested that the project be contracted out to an external organisation. This second approach was chosen.

A private company, Artistic Licence, took over the running of the project from the council in early 1999. They had been doing a good job running a similar scheme for South Leytonstone SRB and so had experience of working in this way. The first grant contract was made in early June 1999.

There were some problems with the handover from the council to Artistic Licence, as the previous post-holder seemed to have kept much of the information in his head rather than on paper. There was a list supplied of businesses in the area, which Artistic Licence still use today, albeit in an updated form.

When Artistic Licence took over, initially on a trial period, there was not a great deal left in terms of funding or grants to distribute. There was about £6,000 to give out

in grants for 2000-2001, with £20,000 funding in total. This had to pay for administration, costs/overheads etc, and equated to about one day a week in terms of staff time.

Initially Artistic Licence worked out of the SRB office, shared by the Agenda 21 Community Forum. It was soon found that with only one day a week to spend on the project, and as much of the work involved going to visit businesses, this was not needed, and the project has since worked out of the base of Artistic Licence in Ealing. The council assistant to the project was retained, but this was primarily to do administration for the council, not to help Artistic Licence.

Before Artistic Licence took over the project there had been substantial problems with a backlog to work in terms of distributing grants. This had led to some delays and complaints from businesses. These problems appear to have been ironed out, partly due to the smaller amount of money available to distribute in grants in the later years.

The work conducted by Artistic Licence includes five types of activities:

- Making companies aware of the services available
- Assisting with the application for grants (which is still processed by the council)
- Providing in depth business advice to both new and existing businesses
- Running business seminars
- Compiling a local-trading directory

### *Publicity*

One of the main challenges reported by Artistic Licence has been in publicising the services they offer to business in the area. They have attempted to do this in a number of ways.

Firstly they have published a newsletter, sent out to all businesses on the initial council business list. This was sent with a freepost envelope to return any undelivered or wrongly addressed copies so the business list could be kept up to date. Currently the list contains about five hundred names. The majority of these are established businesses, but some are the names of those known to be looking into starting a business in the area. Even with such a large contact list, each mailout has been reported to only generate about 6 to 8 inquiries. The newsletter was also left in libraries for residents to read.

Information was also left with Estate Agents, who were asked to pass it on to anyone looking for commercial property in the area, to demonstrate that there was support/help available. This was in the hope of attracting new business. Also Estate Agents were contacted for lists of available property in the area, which Artistic Licence could then pass on to businesses. Unfortunately there was little response back from either approach. Information was also sent out to local papers, which met with some initial success, but less so with later attempts. Publicity in the local press was done 'in-house' by Artistic Licence, they didn't use the publicity service offered by SDP for the SRB, although the SRB newsletter was used to get some additional advertising for the project.

The most successful means of contacting businesses was found to be cold-calling and asking if they need help. In this way the service could be explained in some detail to the businesses, and any questions they had could be answered. The majority of businesses contacted by the scheme were reached in this way. Some people were also recruited by recommendation, either from prior involvement with the project when it was council led, from Leyton Business Advise Service, or from being passed on by other SRB services such as the shop front Improvement grants or the Customised-Training programme. Also the council's SRB co-ordinator and LETEC have referred businesses on to Artistic Licence.

This publicity does seem to have paid off. From our interviews with businesses we have found that 55 per cent of businesses sampled have heard of the scheme. This shows a slight increase on the level of awareness from the previous UEL business survey when 43 per cent of businesses had heard of this project (McInroy 1999). Of all the business support organisations active in the Lea Bridge area, this is the most popular, along with the Business Improvements grant scheme operated by the SRB. Even large organisations such as LETEC, Business Link, and Waltham Forest Chamber of Commerce were known by, at most, 45 per cent of businesses.

One reason for the difficulty Artistic Licence has encountered in recruiting businesses to the scheme has been linked to the lack of grant to distribute. The service offered since they took over the project has primarily been one of advice, not of grant distribution, which is less likely to attract business than the promise of financial assistance. This possibly goes some way to explaining why the problems they have faced have been a little different to those encountered when the council ran the project, when there was more funding for grants available. At this time the major problems faced were those of dealing with the requests for grants quickly and getting funds distributed, rather than a shortage of businesses contacting the project. This is again backed up by the 2001 business survey, which showed that only two businesses (six per cent of our sample) had used the service.

The difficulties encountered in getting business to use the advice scheme raise some important questions about the need for such a scheme. If businesses do not wish to use a service which offers advice but no grants, it could be argued that there is no need for the advice service and that the money could be better spent with a grants-only service. This argument does make the assumption that businesses know what is best for them, and that if they feel they do not need advice, advice would not be useful. It seems more likely that businesses could benefit from advice, especially if they are to receive grant money, if only to double check that they are operating in the most productive manner. A better solution may be to use the offer of grants to tempt businesses to take advice. This may also mean concentrating a slightly larger proportion of money on the allocation of grants, and perhaps looking to make these a large number of small grants rather than fewer, larger ones.

### *Grants*

As mentioned above the GBEP can provide information on and help in applying for a variety of grants. SRB grant money was provided primarily for business development/expansion, but also for new business start-ups. Grants were typically in the region of £1-2,000, but the team could also advise on ERDF money, which enabled companies to access up to £5,000. This money was separate from SRB

money, but time spent advising on these applications was paid for by the SRB. As mentioned there was only a small amount of grant available in the years since Artistic Licence took over the project. All this money has been distributed.

One problem reported by project staff in association with the GBEP grant scheme was due to the links with the council. Although Artistic Licence is a private company, the grants were issued through the council. Some businesses thought that the purpose of the grant was to enable officials to obtain access to their accounts and to generally check up on the business. This problem was worsened by the grant application process and the offer letter which followed. These have been described as being both badly worded and officious, and may have been off-putting to any businesses contemplating using the service.

Some businesses actually applied for the grant, were approved in principle, but then did not take up the grant when they realised the council would need access to company accounts before finalising the approval of the loan. This is potentially more of a problem for small and more recently established businesses, who are those who are most in need of accessing such funds. Despite this it would be impossible for the council to administer grants to businesses which do not keep accurate business records.

### *Business advice*

Once a business has been advised of the services on offer, if a business does require assistance Artistic Licence can provide free advice, with the time paid for by SRB money. This can consist of information on applying for grants as described above, but also business advice and start-up advice. This could range from a quick consultation to an extensive examination of the business, for example a large report was prepared for Leyton Football club, on ways to generate income.

The project was also responsible for advising residents of the area wishing to start new businesses and advising people looking into Lea Bridge as a business location. Some have been advised, but due to the limited number of residents this hasn't been as extensive as was hoped. The project has had close links with the Childminding Network, and has advised childminders wishing to start their own childminding business. Whilst this sort of enterprise is unlikely to develop into a company employing many staff it does assist others to look for and to remain in work, and so provides additional benefits to the area beyond the childminders themselves.

### *Seminars and training sessions*

Artistic Licence have organised a number of seminars and training sessions, often in conjunction with South Leytonstone SRB. These are put on entirely with SRB money, and are free to attend. This year these have been run on topics such as 'Trading Overseas', 'Health and Safety', and 'Customer Service'. In the previous financial year 'Managing Finance' and 'Marketing' were also covered.

Unfortunately, attendance at these seminars has been generally poor. There were often very few attendees (sometimes only three or four), despite the seminars being well advertised (with press, flyers and a mailshot), and including a free buffet. A

few businesses we interviewed mentioned that a lack of time, especially for management, limited the amount of training they could go on, which may go some way to explaining this trend. Artistic Licence have also reported that they felt the poor attendance may have been due to a feeling that anything provided for free was unlikely to be worth attending. This suggests the possibility that charging even a small fee for entrance to these events may actually help to increase attendance.

### *Inter-trading directory*

By the end of the programme Artistic Licence hope to have completed an inter-trading directory for all businesses in the area. The idea is to encourage local trading between businesses. Results from our business survey show that a limited number of businesses use local suppliers (16 per cent describe their main suppliers as being from Waltham Forest/Newham, and 30 per cent as East London). This is backed up by the 1998 UEL survey which showed 32 per cent used suppliers in East London (McInroy 1999) and the 1996 survey where the figures were 13 per cent for Newham/Waltham Forest, and 25 per cent for East London.

Whilst this is often due to requiring specialist suppliers who are outside the area, there is certainly some unrealised potential to encourage trade between businesses in the area, even if this is only for smaller products such as stationary.

The impact of this project will only be seen some months after the directory is published. A baseline for local suppliers has been established over the past five years, showing only a slight increase in the proportion of businesses using local suppliers over this period. Future business studies in the area can make use of this information and look for an impact of initiatives such as this inter-trading directory.

### *Problems encountered*

When speaking to businesses, Artistic Licence was met with some hostility due to a history of rogue business advisors who had operated in the area in recent years. These 'advisors' had spoken to businesses, telling them that they could access grant money, collected fees to apply for these, and then disappeared.

The solution to this was to mention that the project was funded, that the advisor's time was paid for, and so relieve worries that they were just there to profit. Unfortunately this information highlighted the 'official' link with the council, which in turn made some businesses unwilling to talk to the project.

In addition to these two difficulties, Artistic Licence have reported that they detected some hostility directed towards the SRB amongst businesses. Some businesses would express hostility simply because the project was funded with SRB money, due to a dislike of some of the work of the partnership (for example the bus route through Roxwell Estate).

To counter these prejudices, a newsletter was devised which prominently displayed pictures and biographical information of Artistic Licence's advisors on the front page. This was deliberately calculated to offset both the 'rogue advisor' and 'interfering official' prejudices and to help build businesses' confidence in the team. Unfortunately, when done for the South Leytonstone SRB, the partnership requested

that the newsletter be changed, as it did not give adequate prominence to the role of the SRB in supplying the service.

In anticipation of a similar response to this format from the Lea Bridge SRB board, Artistic Licence again used a newsletter which had less emphasis on this biographical information. One suggestion for future programmes would be that a newsletter similar in format to the initial design be piloted to see if this produces a more favourable response. At times it may be that granting projects a little more independence and autonomy from the SRB could actually be advantageous to the aims of the programme as a whole.

The project was thus faced with a problem of presentation. Different businesses will be attracted or discouraged from using the service by different factors, so there is not one 'correct' way to sell the service. The best approach must therefore be one of flexibility, which seems to have generally been employed by Artistic Licence in the many routes they used to contact and interest businesses.

### *Working within the SRB framework*

Artistic Licence, despite their previous experience of working within an SRB structure, did report there to have been some difficulties with the outputs required by the programme. Two examples were given.

The target for 'new business start-ups advised' prevents any credit being claimed when someone presenting a poor business plan is advised not to start up in business. Artistic Licence pursued a policy of giving the best advice even when this means missing the output. This target for 'new business' was also described as being somewhat difficult due to the limited number of residents in the area. Beyond this relatively small audience the project would really need to attract new business into the area (which was tried with the Estate Agents) which seems to be a little outside the remit of the project.

Another problem with business start-ups is that they can be claimed by a number of organisations, as often an individual will seek help from a number of sources before setting up in business. This leads to problems of double counting and potentially over inflated estimates of the number of new businesses starting in the area.

Secondly, the target for 'advising' businesses was also described as being unsuitable. Although the project actually managed to exceed the required target (259 rather than 130 businesses advised in 1999/2000), such a high target puts an emphasis on quantity not quality and as a result the advice given has, out of necessity, been generally brief. This pressure results in inefficient use of the potential for advice available, and consequently does not make best use of SRB funding.

These examples show the importance of setting realistic targets, and considering the impact of targets set. It is important that targets are set in close consultation with project leaders and that targets are considered more widely to discourage perverse incentives, such as has been seen with the target for new business start-ups.

### *The LBG partnership*

Artistic Licence have not been heavily involved with the partnership, in contrast to their experience in South Leytonstone where there has been more interaction with other parts of the programme. This may have been due to the fact that they were not working with the Lea Bridge Gateway SRB from its inception. Some moves were made to involve the partnership, for instance with invitations to the business seminars. Unfortunately, no partnership members were able to attend on these occasions.

There has also been little involvement with other projects, although there has been some cross-referral from projects such as the building improvement grant. There may have been some missed opportunities for more joined up working between projects, for instance in terms of a joint advertising campaign.

### *Strategic Objectives*

By offering advice to a number of businesses in the area, the project has aimed to meet strategic objective 02, of assisting the promotion of sustained economic growth. It is hard to assess whether this has been achieved without a comprehensive evaluation of this project alone. The outputs from the project are just that, not giving an insight into the impact or outcomes that have resulted. Equally, the impact would depend on the quality of advice given, whether this was implemented, and whether this has led to any change in the success of that company over the next few years. Real outcomes are likely to be slow in appearing and it is unlikely that change will be seen overnight.

What is known is that some companies who received advice have not necessarily acted on this. Despite an extensive report being prepared for the Leyton Football club, when this was delivered Artistic Licence found the organisation had already gone ahead with changes without waiting for the advice. Other businesses that appear on the list of businesses 'advised', when questioned about the Business Advice project have reported that they have not used the facility, and clearly feel they have not received any advice of benefit to their business.

One such business has mentioned that they feel they could expand and thus employ more people by launching a new product they had developed. To do this they would need financial assistance and advice with, for example, marketing strategy. This business could clearly have benefited from the business advice available, had received two visits from project advisors, but was still seemingly unaware of the assistance they could have received and the grants available.

Although this is the case, it would be unfair to criticise project staff themselves, as these weaknesses possibly lie more in the difficulties described earlier, such as the large target for businesses 'advised'. A programme that concentrated the resources available on giving quality advice to businesses who requested it and who needed it may have had more chance of achieving measurable impacts. It may be that the advice given may also have been more useful, had it been given in a more formal manner, with a appointment system rather than a cold-called short meeting. Again the high targets set for the project limited the potential for this.



### *Impact on businesses using the project*

The two businesses interviewed that reported to have used the business advice programme reported very different fortunes over the past two years. One had nearly doubled in size (from 4 to 7 employees), but had seen turnover fluctuate rather than increase. The reason given for this was linked to the owner's health, rather than to business-related events, and the business reported making a healthy profit. The other business had nearly halved in size, with a corresponding drop in turnover, and reported to be just breaking even.

Due to the small numbers in our sample reporting to have used the project it is difficult to draw solid conclusions from these findings. Clearly the business advice was never going to provide guaranteed success for all businesses using it, and these examples show that the fortunes of businesses using the service did vary.

Opinions on the usefulness of the service also varied. One business found the project to be very useful, the other to be not useful. The struggling business was that which reported the service to be useful, showing that business success is perhaps not the best indication of the impact of the project.

### *Continuation*

When SRB funding ceases, the Business Advice service will no longer be offered. In order to inform business in the area of this, and to ensure businesses in Lea Bridge remain able to access financial assistance and free business advice, the project is sending out a final farewell newsletter to supply contact details for other organisations supplying similar services.

Due to the changing nature of business support in the area over the past five years, there are now other organisations operating in Lea Bridge and East London who can provide similar help to that provided by the project. As a result the need for localised support and advice as supplied by this project may be less than it was five years ago.

Despite a large number of organisations working in the area to assist businesses, results of the 2001 business survey revealed that very few companies are fully aware of the scope of assistance which could be on offer. Of 11 support agencies mentioned to interviewees, not one was known to more than 45 per cent of businesses, with some known by as few as 15 per cent. These percentages differ little from those seen in 1998 showing that knowledge of agencies amongst businesses in Lea Bridge has not changed over this time and remains low.

A newsletter of this kind provides only a short-term measure to solve this problem. Whilst it will provide advice for a number of firms that otherwise would be left without assistance, this information will soon be lost or become outdated. If the project was to have a more lasting effect it may have been possible to arrange for this information to be routinely collected and made available to business. In this way businesses could have been informed of a location where such information could be obtained for the foreseeable future, ideally from a venue within the SRB area or otherwise from a public library or other community venue.

## *Conclusions*

The business advice programme has clearly provided a useful service to the businesses of Lea Bridge. Although the actual impact of this is hard to show without a comprehensive survey of the businesses who used it, the concept of free advice to businesses is clearly a sound one which should be pursued by future projects.

The problems outlined in the description above give some indication of improvements which could be made to improve this service, for example a reduced focus on advising high numbers of businesses and a greater focus on the quality of advice given. A comprehensive business list and a greater pot to distribute through grants would help to increase awareness and involve more businesses.

## **4.2 Building improvement grant scheme**

Whilst the Gateway Business Expansion Programme provides advice and information to businesses, the Building Improvements grants scheme, provides financial assistance for physical enhancements to the buildings themselves. The programme was designed primarily with the aim of improving economic efficiency (objectives, SO1 & SO2), but also tied in with strategic objective 03, to create a safe and improved environment. The council again administers the project, and early work was concerned primarily with a shop front grants programme.

Grants were given out for improving shop front signage, shuttering, new roofing, and extension of premises. In order to qualify for a grant, companies had to demonstrate that the funding would enable them to improve business, create and/or safeguard jobs, and that they had considered elements of improved security in the design.

A theoretical maximum of £60,000 could be awarded without separate re-appraisal by the partnership board, but most grants given out came under a limit of £10,000. This figure was based on the estimate of £12,000 for a shop front refurbishment. Businesses were required to contribute at least 25 per cent of overall costs, although any amount over the £10,000 would have to be paid in full by the business.

The service offered by the Buildings Improvement grant was unavailable to businesses outside the areas covered by SRB funding. Businesses outside of these areas could apply for money to fund the purchase of new equipment or for feasibility studies, or get business advice, but nothing was available for premise improvement. This was known to be a priority for the bid area, as many companies operated out of run down and dilapidated premises which both affected their business and detracted from the appearance of the area.

The project is advertised through Business Link, liaison with business advisors, advertisement in the local Guardian, via distribution of leaflets, and by mailshots. Response to the programme has been very high from its inception, which is supported by the results of the business interviews where it was found that 55 per cent of companies in the sample had heard of the project. Of the organisations offering business support in the Lea Bridge area, this level of awareness is only matched by the Gateway Business Expansion, business advice project.

Once a business applied for more information, they received a visit from the project officer. At this point the project is explained, their requirements are discussed, and the project manager gives advice on the application procedure. By visiting the business before the application form is completed the manager can ensure that applications are submitted correctly and that the nature of the request meets with the aims of the project. This saves wasted time for both the business and the council, who have to formally appraise all applications before granting funding. In addition, once a grant was approved and work complete the project manager would again visit the business to ensure the work had been carried out and design and specification guidelines had been adhered to.

In the early years of the project there was no shortage of suitable applicants, targets were met easily, and a number of shop fronts were improved, primarily along Lea Bridge Road. From 1997 the project began to give grants for improving industrial premises. This was based on the knowledge that many non-retail premises were suffering similar problems with poor quality premises, and needed similar capital assistance if they were to be prevented from going out of business or moving out of the area.

Once the project started to deal with industrial premises it was soon found that the £10,000 limit was too low. Whereas shop fronts could often be covered for around this figure, the kind of work required in industrial premises could easily be in the region of £35,000 or more.

In order to meet these additional funding needs the project submitted a bid for European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) funding from GOL. This was awarded in 1998 and enabled the project to give out larger grants, funded by money from SRB and ERDF funding, and client contributions. ERDF money is only available for commercial and industrial premises, and did not cover retail. The shop fronts programme continued during this period, funded only by SRB money.

One problem with the ERDF funding was that it came under Objective Two guidelines, with a requirement that savings on energy requirements must be made. In order to do this each grant had to be subject to an energy audit, done by consultants from the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR). This survey was paid for by the DETR, and so whilst not creating a direct cost, the recommendations of the consultants had to be adhered to as a condition of grant. This had the effect of dramatically increasing the cost of the work, whereas before the cheapest alternative could be taken. As projects required a client contribution, many businesses now found themselves unable to pay the 25 per cent required, and consequently pulled out of the application for a grant. Around twenty applications have been withdrawn for this reason.

Despite these problems all available money has been distributed, helping 39 businesses over the lifetime of the programme. In many cases this has had a recognised and identifiable impact on job creation. Examples of this include work on the Lanza Securities building on Lea Bridge Road, where 50 jobs have been created with the development of a training centre on their site, 50 jobs have been created through works on the Royal Jersey buildings, and 51 jobs created by building works on the HLC buildings.

### *Strategic Objectives*

These examples of job creation show that the grants awarded certainly had an impact on the employment situation within the area, as intended. Of the 31 businesses interviewed for this evaluation, six reported receiving grants. These had been used for projects such as shop front improvements, boundary fencing, and to build a second floor within a factory. Analysis of the data received from these companies does suggest that the project was not always able to have such a positive impact however. Of the six companies awarded grants only one had increased its workforce (by four individuals or 80 per cent), whilst four others had seen a decrease in both turnover and workforce over the past two years. This may initially appear to be quite negative, but it is impossible to determine whether the job losses observed would have been higher if the building grants had not been awarded.

The project has made some improvements in terms of enhancing employment prospects and creating economic growth in the area (SO1 and SO2). Although necessary work has been achieved in many cases it is hard to judge whether the impacts in terms of job creation seen are solely attributable to the SRB grant.

The grants were not really awarded by the council in terms of economic 'need'. Although there was some attempt made to examine company accounts at the appraisal stage, it is hard for an exterior body to judge whether a business can or cannot afford to make improvements itself, or whether it would have made the changes without the grant or not. Often grants have had to be awarded on a first come first served basis, and it is hard to evaluate whether or not this corresponds to the best distribution of funds to ensure the maximum economic impact.

This suggestion is backed up by the findings from the business survey. Of the six businesses awarded grants by the project, five of these admitted that the changes would have been made in time, regardless of the SRB grant. Although in these cases jobs may have been created, it would be hard to suggest that these are solely attributable to the building improvement grant awarded.

### *Other problems*

The problems outlined above have affected the project's ability to meet its strategic objectives. Some other problems have been identified with the project which, although not affecting its ability to meet targets can provide lessons for future projects attempting to regenerate an area in this way.

### *Crime prevention*

Although the shop front improvement grants had a requirement that crime prevention was considered in the design, there have been reports of a spate of burglaries from the rejuvenated shops around Markhouse Corner. There appears to be two interrelated reasons for this pattern.

Firstly, what was previously a run down shopping area has been refurbished which, along with the general improvements to Markhouse Corner, has made the area a more attractive target for criminals. This in itself cannot be seen as a reason for

not regenerating an area. Often the process of regeneration can lead to a change in the nature or location of crime, rather than a decrease in crime. Increased prosperity clearly leads to a greater incentive for crimes such as theft or burglary, and so it is important that this is considered in the planning of regeneration.

Secondly there appears to have been an oversight when building these premises that the backs of shops can be just as vulnerable as the fronts. The shop front grant tended to fortify the front of premises with shutters or similar protection, and whilst this may act as a deterrent for the passing criminal or 'smash and grab' thefts, the more serious burglar was still able to go round the back of properties and obtain access.

Future projects working on similar developments may wish to consider such issues more closely. Crime assessments must take full consideration of the whole property, not just those bits being improved, and must consider the crime prevention needs once improvements are made, as these may well be different to those at the time of assessment.

### *Dissatisfaction amongst businesses*

Although it has achieved its spend and gone some way towards meeting its objectives, the project has suffered some problems. The first of these was highlighted during the interviews with businesses. Although 55 per cent of businesses were aware of the project, and 19 per cent of these had received grants towards building improvements, another 12 per cent had applied to the project for a grant and had either been too late, or had been promised a grant that had never materialised.

The great demand for this work, combined with the limited budget, has left some companies dissatisfied and displeased with the project. When a company sees its neighbours applying for and receiving a grant, they often feel disgruntled when they find that they are too late or when they are turned down for similar work. These grievances have been heightened by the long timescale required to get grants appraised and approved by the council. This has often taken between 3 and 6 months, and sometimes longer if plans need to be modified to take account of the recommendations.

The 1998 UEL appraisal of the Gateway Business Expansion programme reported that there had been many complaints from businesses applying for capital grants, primarily due to the long processing time, and delays in receiving payments once work had been completed. A grants procedure that works effectively and efficiently, should bring additional support, prestige and leverage to the SRB partnership. Importantly, it should also be seen by business on the ground, to be supportive and helpful. If businesses have cause for complaint about the grants procedure, this can easily have adverse effects on the perception of the partnership as a whole, despite the benefits of work that has been completed.

Although both the SRB and ERDF money is now spent and the project has no further funds to distribute to the Lea Bridge area, the project manager at the council is still working on the building improvements programme and is seeking further funding for some of the work which was not granted funding. Some of this work, such as an application for large scale roofing works on the Cromwell estate and drainage work

on the Llammas estate will hopefully be financed in the near future by another ERDF grant. Some of those who expressed dissatisfaction in the business survey may find that their applications are still being considered and that they may be granted if this further funding is awarded.

Despite this promising news it does seem that the project may have been guilty of a failure to communicate fully with the businesses it serves. If the possibility of a grant being awarded depends on funding being available, or depends on a council appraisal, it is important that this is made clear to the business so that they do not plan around a grant which may not arrive. Processing times and any potential delays should be made clear to businesses at the time of application to avoid misunderstandings of this kind. Equally businesses must be promptly informed of a decision either way, and of any further funding they may be eligible for, not left to wait until they assume the grant has been declined as seems to have occurred in this case.

It is important that the blame for this delay is not laid solely at the feet of the project manager. The workload for the building improvements grants was not solely that caused by the SRB, but also by six areas in the borough eligible for such funding. Also the project was left short-staffed when the project leader left in 1998, and one representative has been left to visit and advise around 15 new applicants a week in addition to return visits to completed projects, attending project appraisals, and administration work.

#### *Balancing the needs of business expansion and the environment*

Another problem of the scheme appears to be the confusion between the two focuses of the project, improving businesses to promote competitiveness and job creation and indirectly improving the environment. The distinction being between works that physically allow a business to expand, where it is limited by space or the state of repair of a building, and those which improve the appearance of an area through cosmetic changes.

The project focuses primarily on business improvement and environmental factors appear to be a secondary consideration, an added impact of grants given. However it is worth considering that cosmetic environmental alterations to run down properties in an area have the added effect of creating a more attractive environment both for new businesses and existing businesses. Improvements such as shop front grants therefore have an impact additional to that of improving business for the particular shop that has been refurbished, and thus play an important role in the regeneration of the entire area.

In this project grants were given out essentially on a first come, first served basis to any business which put a case forward for this money. It could be argued, more so in the case of shop front grants than for the industrial or commercial grants, that both a bigger and wider ranging impact may have been achieved by targeting these grants to certain 'offending' premises, i.e. those which were adding to the areas dilapidated and run down appearance. Such a scheme has been employed in other SRBs. For instance the shop front grants given in Chalton Street in Kings Cross were awarded on this basis, resulting in a great improvement in the appearance of this retail area.

A similar 'targeted' approach could have also been applied to the industrial and commercial grants. As these were awarded over a five-year period, there would have been time to try and distribute these grants to those businesses which could best make use of them. Here the target was to sustain existing business, attract new business, and create new jobs. To best achieve this it may have been possible to award grants, rather than on a first come first served basis, by a 'bidding' round. In this businesses or landlords could submit proposals as to what grant they require, what they intend to do with the money, and how this would achieve the desired impacts for the project. These could then be assessed and the grant money distributed to best achieve these impacts. The appraisals panel formed by the council did achieve this to some extent yet, by making the decision making process more open, may have helped make the process seem less of a lottery than it was perceived to be.

It may be the case that a greater impact would have been achieved by splitting the money into two pots, one directly targeting business improvement (in terms of that individual business) and one targeting environmental improvements for the area as a whole. Despite the different approaches these two strands would both be trying to achieve the same goal, that of improving the economic environment for the area as a whole.

#### *Continuation*

With the SRB money finished, additional funding for works of this kind will be more difficult to obtain for businesses in Lea Bridge. As mentioned earlier there are no grants of this kind available for businesses.

Some money may be available through the New Opportunities for Walthamstow (NOW) SRB programme, which covers some of the same target area and provides a similar service.

Despite the seeming lack of assistance, it must be mentioned that the project officer will still play a similar role at the council and will, as part of this job, be looking for funding for large projects in the Lea Bridge area, with funding being procured through Europe.

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## **ANNEX 5 - TRAINING AND LOCAL PEOPLE FOCUSED PROJECTS**

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Work of the programme designed to train and improve the quality of life for residents (SO7) received £1.15 million. Additional sums attracted from public and private sources increased this to £2.3 million. This sum was used to fund the following projects:

- Customised Training Initiative
- Agenda 21, Community Groups Support Network, and Community Grants Scheme
- Subsidised Nursery places / 'Active' After School Club

### **1. Customised Training Initiative (CTI)**

This project was established in 1996, designed to provide training to upgrade the skills of employees in the area and of the local unemployed and thus improve employment prospects (SO1). The project was managed by a Training and Development Officer (TDO) at Waltham Forest Training Agency (WFTA). By working within this existing structure the project was able to take advantage of the knowledge, experience, and resources available at WFTA.

The CTI was classed as a 'Training and Local People' initiative for the purposes of the SRB on the basis that it aimed to increase the skill levels and hence employability of local people. Despite this it was targeted though employers and clearly also provided great advantages for business. In this way the project also contributed to improved business efficiency (SO2).

The concept of a 'customised' training programme was that the TDO would be able to proactively identify the training needs in the area, and therefore actually promote the training of employees and residents rather than just providing a training subsidy for companies who would have provided this training anyway.

The project initially aimed to provide a subsidy of between 10 and 20 per cent, depending on the size of the company, and therefore offered a good incentive to companies and individuals to take up training that otherwise may have proved prohibitively expensive.

Early business studies in the area had revealed that nearly a third of firms in Lea Bridge provided no training for employees, and where training took place this was more often on the job, and reactive rather than proactive in its nature. In addition it was found that training was not a high priority for firms and that the cost of training was seen as a factor in preventing more being provided (Chase/Tyler 1997, Gordon and Sampson 1997).

The project was subject to a full evaluation by UEL in 1999 (McInroy 1999) which came to the following conclusions:

- Initial uptake was low, primarily due to the low priority given to training by employers, and the difficulties convincing business of the value of training such as NVQs.



- The proactive role of the TDO had begun to turn this situation around and involvement in the scheme had improved.
- Long established companies with a larger turnover and more employees used the CTI more.
- Around a quarter of the training provided by the CTI acted more as a training subsidy than as 'customised' training.

Since this time there have been some changes in the work of the CTI and this evaluation will focus primarily on work since this time:

### *Work with businesses*

Initially the main focus of the project was to provide training for people already in employment in the Lea Bridge Gateway SRB area. The first activities involved sending out mail-outs and cold-calling at companies in the Lea Bridge area to encourage employees to participate in training schemes.

The earliest forms of training offered were primarily IT training or training for skills such as forklift truck driving. Some of these, for example the forklift training, have decreased in popularity with time, perhaps due to most drivers now having received training, whereas five years ago most drivers had no licence. There is though still a demand for renewal of these licences.

The initial 10-20 per cent subsidy offered in the early years of the programme has been varied over time according to the resources of the company involved. Some training has been funded for 100 per cent of costs, but now it is more usual to fund around 50 per cent of course fees. In some cases companies have asked for the project to assist with very specialised training, for example on the use of breathing apparatus. Whilst it was still possible to provide help in these situations, if the course was very expensive it was unlikely to be funded entirely and the project would often be unable to help to source training schemes or recommend training providers in such cases.

### *Early difficulties involved in recruiting companies to the training scheme*

When the project first started the idea of 'something for nothing' actually aroused suspicion in many employers, especially when they found out that it was a council-managed scheme. Many companies were reluctant to respond to 'cold-calling', possibly due to a fear that the council was checking that all was above board. This proved to be a problem, particularly with smaller and newer businesses, and especially as employee details, including National Insurance numbers, had to be collected. At this point some businesses would feel that the process was too intrusive, and back out of the chance of having free training.

In other cases employers may have been unwilling to admit to a council employee that certain qualifications had not already been obtained by their staff, particularly if the training would lead to obtaining a license which was required by law. A good example of this was in the provision of forklift truck licences. The project found an innovative approach to this problem, by asking suppliers (e.g. forklift maintenance companies) to mention the free training on a more casual basis. This overcame

some of the initial suspicion and enabled the project to reach essential training needs which otherwise may have been hidden.

The above serves as an example of an unintended consequence of the project, as it discovered a skill shortage in the area beyond that which was previously evident. Often the project, rather than providing training to enable employees to improve their position, was providing training to enable them to do their present employment both legally and safely. Providing fork-lift truck licence training still puts these individuals in a better position to move to other jobs and makes them more employable, and so clearly meets the objective of providing increased employment prospects (SO1).

### *Difficulties in recruiting new companies*

As the project has gone on it has proved increasingly difficult to interest new businesses in the programme, and the project manager reported that often the same businesses and employees keep returning for training, with only the odd inquiry from other businesses.

This is backed up by analysis of the CTI's database which reveals that of the 52 organisations and individuals using the project's services, ten organisations have used 88 per cent of the training weeks provided. Even if one organisation (which used nearly 60 per cent of the training weeks) is excluded from the analysis, the next ten most common service users used 75 per cent of the training weeks provided. It must be noted that each training week could have a different cost to the project, depending on the type of training provided and the organisation's contribution, and so proportion of total training weeks does not necessarily relate to the amount of SRB funding accessed by that organisation.

This pattern suggests that the CTI was not a particularly inclusive project. A small number of organisations used the project many times, resulting in the benefits of the project only being felt by a small number of individuals.

One reason for this is that the project had some difficulty in contacting new businesses. Due to the failure to obtain a comprehensive list of the names and addresses of businesses in the area, either through the council or through Lea Bridge Gateway SRB partnership, a substantial proportion of mail-outs were returned unopened. It is possible that there was some unutilised potential for advertising the scheme in the SRB newsletter, local papers, or via other business support agencies in the area. This difficulty is highlighted in this year's business interviews. Of the 31 companies consulted, only seven (23 per cent) were aware of the customised training initiative, the lowest level of awareness of all the business-related SRB projects.

There is some evidence that this lack of awareness may stem from not knowing who is providing some training schemes. The 1999 evaluation highlighted this problem, stating that:

*'There was a poor level of awareness that the training had been provided by the CTI'.*

This seems to be relevant to the latest survey. Despite companies having the project explained to them, one business interviewed did not recall ever hearing about subsidised training through the SRB or through the council yet, when cross referenced with the record of companies who have used the scheme, are actually the second biggest user of the project.

Another problem that was found was that when trying to attract businesses to use the scheme, especially in the earlier stages, some companies could be turned against the project due to a dislike of the work of the SRB in general. Some companies disliked, for example, the proposed route of the relief road, and so were unwilling to be involved in any schemes linked with the SRB.

One final problem encountered when working with businesses was the reluctance of the majority of employers to allow their employees onto long courses such as NVQs. Most companies were more willing to support employees who wished to go on shorter courses which would have a more immediate impact on their business, possibly also due to the shorter time required away from work. Towards the end of the programme there were a larger proportion of people on such courses, but this seems to have been primarily a result of the cumulative effect of individuals taking these long courses which, at one day a week, could easily continue over many months or more.

### *Work with the unemployed*

Due to difficulties recruiting enough trainees from businesses in the area, the project's work began to focus more upon training of unemployed residents, with a view to hopefully finding them employment. The initial focus of this strand of work was to get local residents onto IT courses, and leaflets posted though the doors of local residents advertised this. Initial response rates were good, but by the third leaflet drop there was virtually no response. This could be a result of the demand in the area having been met, as most people who were interested had been trained.

A second push involved trying to interest local unemployed residents in sewing courses, with a view to finding employment within industry in the Lea Bridge area. Whilst there was a high level of take up for this course, it was found that after receiving training, many trainees wished to go on to education rather than employment.

It became increasingly difficult to get unemployed residents to take up training due to the New Deal scheme. Residents have found that by partaking in the Customised Training programme which, although council-managed, is outside government benefit schemes, they risk a delay in their benefits recommencing when they have completed training should they not find a job. Some residents found it easier to go onto a New Deal programme, which does not interrupt benefits in the same way.

The Department of Social Services are unlikely to change national guidelines to suit small, localised projects. In future, with consideration at the project design stage, training programmes can be structured so that they integrate into the benefits system more fully. As the New Deal programme began after the Customised Training Initiative this would not have been possible in this instance.

As a result of these problems the project has more recently been looking to spend the SRB money in different ways. This has involved a focus on funding individuals who wish to become self-employed and require training and support to do so. For example one local resident wished to set up as a self-employed counsellor working with disabled people. In order to do so a qualification, which the programme was able to pay for, was required. In addition the project has paid for ten residents to take a childcare course, enabling them to establish themselves as self-employed childminders.

Recruitment and increasing awareness have again proved problematic for this approach. Two people aiming to work in a self-employed capacity have been recruited through the LBG SRB newsletter whilst the childminding course recruits via the Childcare Network and then asks the Customised Training project to fund anyone who is resident in the SRB area. There was possibly some room for further involvement with the Gateway Business Expansion programme, but after Artistic Licence took over the project from Waltham Forest Council, there appears to have been a decrease in contact between the two projects. With both working with new business start-ups, a more integrated approach may have enabled both projects to reach a greater number of new businesses.

### *LA Raiders soccer academy*

One organisation, the LA Raiders soccer academy, has made extensive use of the Customised Training programme, using it to support their trainees as they train for an NVQ in soccer training. This combines the work of the CTI with organisations and with unemployed individuals as the LA Raiders academy provides training for unemployed local young people with a view to a career as a football coach in schools or colleges. The successful trainees, who are given business training in addition to soccer coaching training, will hopefully set up as self-employed coaches when they leave the academy, thus fitting in with this strand of work by the CTI.

Through the support of the CTI, 27 local young people have been able to train for a NVQ with the LA Raiders soccer academy. The funding received paid for training and allowed the trainees to get £40 per week living money, plus travelling expenses, whereas previously they would have to survive on additional income, savings or parental support. This allowance is likely to have assisted LA Raiders in maintaining a high attendance rate for new recruits, with 27 of the intake of 32 completing their NVQ.

### *More general problems*

Another problem has concerned the gathering of feedback for monitoring and evaluation. Ideally this would take two forms: firstly feedback on the course itself, which can be used to assess training providers and the standard of training being recommended, and secondly feedback collected some months after the completion of the course. This would enable the project to assess the long-term effects of the training, and to build up a list of good training providers. In the case of employed people this would ideally take the form of a line manager's report.

Unfortunately even the first of these two feedback reports has proved difficult to obtain, with trainees and their employers reluctant to get involved in additional

paperwork. Often the effort required to chase these feedback forms has proved too great to be practically possible on top of the workload of running the project. One possible solution, at least in the case of trainees in employment, would be to get employers to pay for the course, and only refund the money once all feedback is received. Whilst this would be likely to secure feedback, the project considered the risk of discouraging smaller employers from using the scheme too great to introduce this as practice. More success has been seen through talking to trainees on the telephone and informally collecting oral feedback on training courses for future reference.

One other problem, noted by the project manager, was that on occasion companies had a number of employees trained up, shortly before relocating to another area outside the SRB's boundaries. Although unfortunate that the scheme cannot guarantee to keep the skills that it provides in the local area, this is not a factor over which this project could have any influence.

### *Working within the SRB framework*

In general the SRB framework has worked well for this programme. The target/output-based approach has not caused problems as this approach is common to many of the sources of funding the project manager works with for other projects. In fact the TDO reported that the SRB framework has been found to be very flexible compared to, say, TEC funded schemes. Whilst many programmes have targets tightly fixed in terms of 'jobs found', the objectives for the customised training programme are primarily based simply around 'weeks of training' for individuals, allowing a far wider range of training schemes to be offered to a greater number of people. In this instance the target system appears to have been well thought out and assisted the working of the project, rather than inhibiting it.

Another advantage of being part of the SRB is that at times extra funding can become available. Due to an under-spend on other projects, the Customised Training Initiative has received some extra money, enabling it to do more than initially planned.

The only real problem that has been noted with the SRB framework was that little information was given as to exactly what would be required in terms of monitoring and reporting. Apparently if there was some advice and guidance as to what was needed at the beginning of the programme, the whole process could have been made to run more efficiently. For instance a database could have been set up to keep some of the records, which are currently updated manually. This was a problem when it came to auditing the project. Guidance of this type would also help to minimise the amount of time spent on administration and paperwork in the long term.

It may be that there is a potential for training of this kind to be offered as a matter of course to the projects funded by the SRB as projects are set up. This could be done either by SDP, who have extensive experience of working within an SRB structure, or possibly by the evaluators of the programme. Setting up an extensive monitoring system, whereby comprehensive records could be kept quickly and easily would have clear advantages for future evaluation.

### *To what extent has the project provided a 'new' service?*

The Customised Training programme has indeed provided a new service. Although in the past there has been potential for the people and businesses of the LBG SRB area to get training and advice from the same place, there are a number of unusual characteristics of this scheme:

- Never before has the council actively gone out and offered training to companies in the same way.
- There is flexibility to offer training to people who wish to go into self-employment, without the pressure to find them jobs afterwards.
- It has allowed continued training, with people returning a number of times to take different courses to higher levels, whereas many programmes are often limited along the lines of one course per person. For instance the Customised Training Initiative can fund people who wish to take NVQ courses, progressing up from the lower levels to the higher qualifications over time.

### *Strategic Objectives*

The primary interest of the project was training local people; providing them with new skills to increase employment prospects (S01). Despite this focus there are clear benefits for business, and some fieldwork suggests that the real benefits of the project lie here.

The 1999 evaluation of the Customised Training Initiative found that two-thirds of those on the scheme had initially been approached by their employer. In addition 24 of the 32 individuals (75 per cent) interviewed felt that the training they had received helped them do their current job better, yet only 12 (38 per cent) felt it would help their long-term career aspirations.

At times the impact of the CTI can thus be shown to be closer to S02, to improve economic efficiency, as the primary benefits of some of the training provided are for the businesses, not local people.

Some other examples do though demonstrate the advantages for local people. For instance, in the case of one company that was moving out of the area, the CTI managed to get some of the employees onto training schemes before it closed, giving them improved chances of finding new employment in the area. One person then received training a short while later whilst working for another company, demonstrating the success of this training in helping them find a new job.

### *Continuation strategies*

Although the SRB funding will cease on the first of April 2001, there will be a continuation of service provision to some extent. The project manager will remain as a point of contact within the council, and the training advice and information that is on offer will also be available. There will also be alternative sources of funding available for training, which can be accessed through the same route. There have been some changes recently in the organisation of these sources, and so at present it is uncertain exactly what will be offered.

As soon as more information is available it is planned to use the last of the SRB money to send a circular out to residents and businesses in the area to update them on the changes and to reassure them that some level of service will still be available. It is likely that the main source of funding will be Individual Learning Accounts, administered through the Learning and Skills Council. In terms of the service provided to residents this should not result in much change, though there may be a need for a small contribution towards the cost of training from the individual. There may be less potential for long term courses, and it is also likely that the money will only be payable once, limiting the potential for continued training as has been available under the SRB.

The service provided to people hoping to move into self-employment and small businesses may be affected more. Due to the problem of outputs being measured in terms of jobs there may be little provision to assist those who want to move into self-employment. However, both this group and businesses will be advised to contact the Small Business Service who may be able to assist them with training.

The project does thus appeared to have ensured that some level of service is still provided to the Lea Bridge area, even when SRB funding ceases. It seems that the SRB money has been used to provide an unusual service, and so it will never be possible to replace this entirely once funding ceases.

### *Conclusions*

The Customised Training Initiative appears to have worked generally well over the past five years. A large number of individuals have received training, and this has assisted both their future employment prospects and their performance in their current position, to the advantage of local business.

One reason for the success seen with this project is that it builds on existing council structures, using the Training Advice already available within Waltham Forest. By building on past experience and knowledge in this way the project has been able to run with few implementation problems. This has also been assisted by the consistency of the project staff. For the full five years the project has been staffed by the same project manager, who already had a good knowledge of training provision within Waltham Forest.

Where problems have occurred these are primarily concerned with the project's ability to reach out to new clients and companies, to ensure a select few who are aware of the project are not the only beneficiaries.

## **2. Agenda 21 community forum**

The Agenda 21 forum's primary concern was capacity building within community groups, but this was tied in with the environmental improvements of Agenda 21. Local Agenda 21 groups arose in response to the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, with the premise that:

*'Local authorities form the tier of government closest to local communities; and are best placed to interpret the needs of local people and the environment in their area'.*

The idea behind these local groups was to create a consensus between local businesses, groups and organisations on an environmental agenda and its implementation. This did seem to fit in well with the work of the SRB.

The project addresses two SRB Strategic Objectives:

- To create a safe and improved environment (SO3).
- To enhance the quality of life of local people (SO7).

Thus, according to the first appraisal form, the project had the following aims:

- To provide the community with the opportunity to take a leading role in setting priorities for their local environment.
- To provide the community with a say in how their neighbourhood is shaped to improve their quality of life.
- To provide a healthy, safe and sustainable environment.
- To create a safer environment by heightening the awareness of local residents of the need to safeguard property and to encourage their participation in schemes which will improve security and lead to that safer environment.

The intention was that:

*'Active local participation and generally improved contact and communication between the Council, community and Lea Bridge Gateway Partnership team, and other agencies should help ensure that local services meet the needs of the community, and will lead to a better informed Agenda 21'*  
(Project Appraisal form, 1996).

By 1999, although the aims remained broadly the same, it was also found that:

*'Supporting and sustaining the participation of local community representatives on the Lea Bridge Gateway Partnership Board' was a key objective of the project'.*

The view of the bid document was that there was a poorly developed community sector and network of community groups. Another view was proposed by a 1999 review of the community sector by consultants Dearle and Henderson. This report found that there was in fact a remarkable amount of community group activity in the area, with as many as 64 active groups. Although these views may appear to conflict, the Dearle and Henderson report did identify a lack of facilities or meeting place for these groups and a lack of any real community 'network'. Thus there was agreement that the lack of a strong network between the existing community groups in the area prevented them from being as effective as they might have been. The Agenda 21 community forum sought to address this.

#### *Previous evaluation*

The Agenda 21 project was subject to an evaluation during 1999 by UEL (Fearnley 2000). This found the project to have overcome initial difficulties caused by a delay in the recruitment of a project officer, a lack of any existing community structure to feed into and anti-road sentiments amongst residents and other groups. The



evaluation recognised that the project was fulfilling a need within the area, and that there was support for its continuation.

The evaluation made some recommendations to ensure the project had a greater impact in future. These included filling the vacant project officer's post and giving increased supervision to the new postholder and more support for community and voluntary groups. The report also suggested changes to the board's ways of working to ensure that community representatives were welcomed, encouraged to contribute at meetings, and kept informed of the activities of the partnership.

This report will focus primarily on work since this time, and look at developments over the past year.

Since the previous evaluation a new project officer has been appointed, and has brought some changes to the project. There had been a six-month delay in appointing someone to fill this position and so there had been a period of inactivity for the programme. Despite this it has been well recognised by many of those involved with the SRB that the project has finally begun to fulfil its potential and to involve and empower the local community.

The project officer reported that the first task on the job was to examine the previous evaluation and to address the recommendations made in this. The successes achieved since this time owe much to this willingness to both learn and act on such recommendations. The second activity completed was to visit the people in charge of the various community groups in the area, to make introductions, to discuss the Agenda 21 project, and to find out the needs and requirements of each community group.

Over the past year the project has been involved in a number of activities. A brief description of these is given below:

### *Community Group Support Network*

In order to create links between the various community groups in the area, to press for change in the local area and to channel the opinions of residents to the partnership, a regular meeting was set up for community groups.

These meetings have proved to be a useful tool. The project officer reported that in a number of cases local people brought up issues which they had tried to have sorted through contacting the council directly, but without success. When these were taken to the SRB board in this way, results were seen very quickly.

In addition to reporting feedback on key issues to and from the partnership board these meetings also served to provide a link between the community groups and representatives from authorities such as the police and council, allowing for joined up working in a way which previously had not occurred. Guest speakers were often invited to the meetings to inform and collect feedback from residents on issues relating to both the local area and borough.

Community representatives were also able to make requests at these meetings for further information on local issues, which the project officer would then follow up and report on at the next meeting. An example of this was a request for

information on the new school being constructed off Seymour Road. A project such as this, although not directly connected with the SRB, is of interest to the community and demonstrates the sort of information to which residents may have some difficulty gaining access.

Meetings were initially well attended, with the first meeting under the new project officer attracting over 50 attendees, but some later meetings have been attended by as few as five people, though still representing five community groups.

Although this facility has provided a useful service, primarily in terms of networking and information exchange, there are some issues arising from this approach which similar projects in future may wish to address.

Firstly the project officer reported that the distribution of community grants through these meetings was a real incentive to attend. Meetings where grants were to be distributed were noticeably better attended than other meetings, often with some community groups bringing many members to show support for their cause. Although this did serve to boost attendance at the meetings, and did involve residents in a way which may have not been possible without this attraction, this may have detracted from the real focus of the meetings.

Many attendees seemed to see the meetings as primarily a method of accessing funds for their group, and they did not really contribute to or benefit from the meeting as a whole. The project officer expressed the opinion that these group meetings may have been more productive if those attending had been keener to share ideas and to contribute to the general discussion.

It may be that the benefits of the grants in boosting attendance outweigh the disadvantages in detracting from the real focus of the meetings, but this issue should be considered for future projects. It may also be that separating the meetings into two separate events would have led to a more focussed Community Support Network, dealing solely with issues that effect the community as whole.

A second issue is that of accessing community opinions primarily through community groups. Primarily members of local community or interest groups were present at these meetings, with few 'unattached' residents attending. One reason for this was that the meetings were titled 'Community Groups Support Network' and were advertised primarily by a mail out to these community groups, rather than to all residents.

The agenda for forthcoming meetings were left at local libraries and in venues such as Emmanuel Parish Hall, and were also accessible to anyone from the Agenda 21 office in Hibbert Road. Despite this, if these meetings were to truly act as a means of consulting and informing the community as a whole it may be suggested that the project could have done more to make these meetings more representative of the community. Leaving notices in venues such as local shops, or a direct mailout to all residential addresses in the area may have achieved this.

There may have also been more potential to use local newspapers as a medium for advertising the work of the Agenda 21 community group. The project officer reports that towards the end of the project this was done more, especially since the launch of the local newspaper Waltham Forest Today, and so future community work in the area should also be able to make use of this publication.

Clearly to involve the community as a whole is always a difficult process, and often the best way to access residents is through existing community groups, but it seems that both the name of this forum and the means of advertising the meetings did little to attract the general community.

It is important to note that this is not a criticism of the work of the Community Group Support Network, but an observation that the body responsible for consulting and communication with residents was not actually attended or representative of this group. Most residents will tend not to be members of any community group, but would still like a say, and an opportunity to be consulted, on what is happening in their area. In addition the community forum had the difficult task of trying to provide capacity building for local groups, whilst also trying to act as the means of consultation between the SRB and the community.

A recommendation for the future would therefore be that two groups are set up, one concerned with community groups, where grants could be accessed and capacity building training provided, and one concerned with matters of general interest to residents. The first of these groups could be advertised to community groups alone, the second, called a 'Community Forum', or 'Resident's group', could be advertised to all households. This would allow the average unattached resident to attend more general meetings in which they have an interest, and thus provide more representative feedback to the board.

### *Capacity building*

In recognition of the lack of expertise amongst community groups in the area, the Agenda 21 project has organised a series of events, provided by a Community Consultant, on capacity building in the community. These covered subjects such as:

- Funding and regeneration.
- Writing an effective funding proposal.
- Partnerships.
- Effective networking.
- Financial Management.
- Marketing and Publicity.
- Training for Partnership Board Representatives.

These sessions have been reported to be well attended and popular with network members and also local residents who were interested in starting an organisation. The office was also available for community groups for use as a meeting room, and has been used by some neighbourhood watch groups and tenants associations for meetings. In addition the Agenda 21 office was made available for community organisations to provide assistance with photocopying and the use of a computer, in order to help those running such an organisation.

The office also provided an information centre for these groups and also for individual residents. Leaflets and displays were available on services such as the SRB grants and assistance available, and also information on other assistance such as help for new business or the Prince's Trust charity.

There did also seem to be some suspicion from community groups about the use of these free facilities, possibly due to the suspicion detected by other projects about getting 'something for nothing'. As a result the project officer reported that some community groups have made full use of the services available, whereas others have made none. This may point to a need to improve communication and awareness of these services and to educate community groups on the method by and purpose for which these are funded.

### *Events*

The Agenda 21 programme was also responsible for organising community events. A number of these have been organised, including walks around Leyton and Walthamstow marshes, a canal boat trip, a bug hunt for local children and a summer jamboree with environmental awareness walks, face painting, music, storytelling and a tour of Middlesex filter beds. In addition the project has organised a 'Give and Take' day, where local people could exchange unwanted items, and an event at Emmanuel Parish Hall to celebrate International Women's day.

Many of these activities served a number of purposes. Firstly they provide opportunity for the community to get together and interact. This opportunity was often seized by the project as an opportunity to give out information on subjects such as Crime Prevention and Energy Awareness, with events often being attended by police and environmental officers, with free handouts such as UV property marking pens and energy saving light bulbs. Secondly, many of these projects had an element of environmental awareness, such as introducing local young people to the natural resources on their doorstep, or putting the principle of recycling into practice (Give and Take day).

As many of these events had a focus on young people, and as a number of them took place over the summer holiday period, they have also been acting to fulfil one unmet need of the area; that of activities for younger people. The results of the 2001 childcare survey show that 12 per cent of our sample mentioned that there is a shortage of things for young people to do in Lea Bridge. This results in numbers of children hanging around in the streets, often disturbing residents or creating problems with vandalism and litter. Although this was not one of the direct aims of the project, the provision of such activities clearly meets this need, and has thus been a positive unexpected consequence of the activities provided.

### *Dagenham Brook project*

Another example of the support given by the Agenda 21 project to local environmental work is the Dagenham Brook project. In partnership with the Lower Lea project, and the children from a local school, St Saviours, a dipping platform was built at Dagenham Brook, the area landscaped and a path constructed. This will enable local school children from St Saviours and other schools in the area, to carry out science projects and educational activities. The children at St Saviours have already undertaken various activities, such as surveys on the brook to record pollution levels, and learning how the brook could be oxygenated. The children gave a presentation of their results and made a booklet which will be sent to various bodies at the town hall.

This project was actually funded by London Waterways, but is relevant to the SRB as the Agenda 21 project provided an environmental officer to co-ordinate the work, funded the feasibility study and secured funding for this project from London Waterways. This provides an example of how SRB money can be well used to bring in other sources of funding for the area.

### *Community safety*

A number of activities have been co-ordinated by the Agenda 21 project to achieve improvements in community safety. The project has worked closely with the police on these matters, and has created some lasting relationships between this organisation and local residents which will continue when the project itself has finished.

### *Community safety event at Tesco supermarket, Leyton*

One such activity was a community safety event when two police officers attended Tesco supermarket in High Road Leyton, giving personal safety advice, and general information on matters such as mobile phone security coding. Free property marking pens and personal attack alarms, purchased by the SRB, were also handed out on this day. Over 400 people were advised on this occasion, although, as the supermarket is a short distance outside the SRB area, it is not known how many of these were actually residents of the Lea Bridge Gateway area. Unfortunately no venue is available inside the SRB area which is suitable for such an initiative, and so this site had to be used.

### *Security lock fitting service*

Early in the programme £2,000 was spent on the purchase of mortice locks and door furniture. In a programme administered by the Agenda 21 officer, the police and the North London Probation service, at risk groups, including the elderly, victims of crime and single people, could have free security locks fitted to their homes.

This project has had some difficulty, both in identifying vulnerable households, and also in distributing the locks, as they were to be fitted by people serving community service. Although the operatives were to be supervised, the fact that someone on probation would be fitting the locks seems to have put off many of the target households. As a result there are still a small number of locks remaining, though the majority have been distributed.

The reluctance of residents to be involved in this scheme was an unfortunate consequence of the imaginative and innovative approach this project took to provide this service at little cost to the SRB. The failure of this project to distribute the locks therefore does not deserve any criticism. Future projects may thus be advised to look for similar innovative methods, yet if using individuals on probation in this way it may be worth considering putting more in project literature to calm the fears of residents. This may be achieved by stressing the fact that all work will be carried out under close supervision, or that no one will need to enter the house in order to fit the lock.

### *Marconi Road Neighbourhood Watch scheme*

Earlier in the programme funding had been allocated to Marconi Road Neighbourhood Watch scheme, a small community group which had been fairly inactive. When the new project officer went to visit the community organisations just after starting on the project, this money was found to be still unspent, some months after it had been allocated. As a result the Agenda 21 officer, in conjunction with the police and the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers, assisted the project to achieve the spend by planting a selection of thick and prickly shrubs and plants.

It is hoped that this 'defensive planting' will stop youths congregating around the estate, and thus prevent the residents from being disturbed and intimidated. It is also hoped that it will have a knock on effect on crime in the area. Fewer young people hanging around should decrease vandalism and the presence of thick and prickly shrubs will hopefully prevent prospective burglars from being able to easily hop over garden fences when looking around.

It is a little early to see any impact of this work as the bushes are still fairly close to the ground, but as they grow thicker the real impacts should be seen. It is important that this work is not now left to overgrow, or the bushes that were planted to improve the area could begin to become an eyesore and be seen as a place where street criminals or muggers may be able to hide.

Through this work the Neighbourhood Watch scheme in Marconi Road has become rejuvenated. Whereas before the Neighbourhood Watch scheme in the area was inactive, the interest generated by the planting has encouraged residents to communicate and to work together towards the common goal of improving the estate. They are now holding regular meetings which are well attended, and inviting speakers from bodies such as the council, housing associations and the police.

This demonstrates how a project can encourage capacity building and community involvement even when the primary focus may be elsewhere, as here where the focus of the work was initially crime prevention.

### *Community art*

The Agenda 21 project has also been involved in the project to construct a piece of community art to be displayed at the junction of the Leyton Relief Road and Lea Bridge Road. This project has used a private consultant, the Freefrom Arts Trust, who have supplied a number of prospective designs based on research into the history and environment of the Lea Bridge area. The Agenda 21 project was primarily involved in the consultation phase of the project, attempting to get feedback from local people on these proposals. Consultation has taken place through a display in the Agenda 21 office, by consulting the Community Group Support Network, an article in the local paper, and a consultation day was held at TESCO's in order to establish people's views.

At all these venues residents had the opportunity to vote for the design they preferred and so to have a real input into the structure which will soon become part of the local scenery. Unfortunately response has been slow, and the project officer

has expressed surprise that so few people were bothered to make the effort when given the opportunity to have their say.

There are various possible reasons for this lack of response. One is that the community did not feel that this issue was one in which they had any real interest, and so were happy for any design to go up without their personal input. If this is the case it may be that the community should have been initially consulted as to whether they wanted a structure at all, or whether they wanted the money to be spent elsewhere. The danger of this is that those who strongly object are far more likely to make themselves known, and therefore the danger is that nothing would ever be achieved.

Some local residents have proposed a second reason. The researchers were told that some individuals would have liked to vote on the sculpture and to see the designs, but that most of the consultation took place during office hours or early evenings when many people are out of the area for work. If consultation of this nature is to be successful it is vital that the possible hours are kept as wide as possible, and preferably involve a mix of weekends and weekdays, daytimes and evenings so that everyone who wishes to contribute can do so.

### *Community Grants scheme*

The partnership, over the five years, also approved £141,000 towards a number of individual community grants. These were allocated to various projects including a pedestrian crossing, a feasibility study to look into ways to fully utilise Emmanuel Parish Church, and £20,000 to refurbish Marsh Lane pavilion as a base for the LA Raiders soccer academy. This project also improved facilities for the wider community, who use the pavilion for sporting activities at weekends. Other grants were given out to residents of Belvedere Road and to the local Allotment association for work needed in these areas.

Although these projects will have gone some way to meeting the needs of local people, some evidence suggests that the impact on the lives of most residents may be slight. For example, when the 2001 Nursery Childcare evaluation asked 21 parents what improvements they felt had changed Lea Bridge over the past five years, none of these community projects were mentioned. Admittedly this is a small sample, selected on the basis that they have young children, and so may not be representative of the whole community, but this finding does cast some doubt on the 'community benefits' of these projects.

Again it seems there may have been some danger of the community grants being allocated according to the priorities of those who were connected to the partnership in some capacity, rather than to projects which would benefit the whole community. The three community representatives to the SRB board all came from organisations or bodies which received grants in some form through the community grants scheme; Allotment Holders Association, Belvedere Road, and LA Raiders.

This pattern does not mean that the representatives pushed their interests before those of the wider community, but suggests that other organisations may not have been aware that the grants were available, and so did not put in for funding. If an SRB is to give out grants for community purposes in this way and if the community

is to benefit and notice the impact of the work achieved, it is essential that there is wide consultation and awareness of the scheme before the monies are allocated.

### *Working within the SRB structure*

Overall the project officer has reported that working within the SRB structure was actually a useful process. For example the regular monitoring and evaluation was found to be of use for identifying problems in the project and for finding solutions to meet these.

The previous 1999 evaluation of the whole Agenda 21 project was one example of this, proving to be a useful document when the new project officer took over. Another example given was the regular appraisals and the requirement to fill in an annual return of targets and outputs met. At times this helped to alert the project officer to areas which had been neglected in project work, and thus these could be addressed.

One example given was the target to educate women in safety issues. Self-defence classes were given, but when the project officer realised the target was not being met, the police and a crime prevention officer were brought in and a programme was organised involving women working in local factories. By going to the place of work and giving advice on personal safety this target was met. The SRB structure here can be seen to actually be driving creative thinking and innovative ways of working and, for this project at least, to have been a useful and constructive tool.

In general, by working in this way, output targets were met, and the project officer found both the partnership and the council to be helpful and supportive towards the Agenda 21 work. The officer had some advantage, having contacts at the council from a previous post within Waltham Forest, and so could call on these for assistance at times. There may have also been some element of personality in this, as the previous postholder had experienced some difficulty in working with these organisations.

There is also a possibility that this positive report is a result of a change in the focus and drive of the SRB as a whole. As mentioned earlier in this report the SRB, in the early years, was often accused of being rather infrastructure-orientated. As these infrastructure projects have been completed, the board appears to have moved to become more community focussed. It appears that, with this increased attention from the board, the community projects have been empowered and thus able to have an impact in a way they did not achieve during the first years of the programme.

This is backed up by findings from interviews with one community representative and the Agenda 21 project manager. Both reported feeling that the board was open to the points of view they, and other community representatives, voiced. The community representative was able to give a comparison with other SRB boards, being a member of other partnerships, and compared the Lea Bridge partnership favourably with other similar bodies in terms of its willingness to discover and respond to the community's viewpoint. Given that the earlier evaluation of the Agenda 21 Community Programme recommended that community representatives were given more of a voice at board meetings, the partnership must be commended



for the way in which it has responded to this criticism and made changes accordingly.

### *Continuation*

The Agenda 21 project officer has funding through the New Opportunities for Walthamstow SRB to remain in the post until September 2001, and so will be working in the area after the Lea Bridge SRB is finished. Unfortunately the community office portercabin on Hibbert Road will be given back to the school in whose grounds it is situated, so after this time this community resource and central point of access will be lost, with the project officer likely to be based at the town hall.

### *Impacts*

The Agenda 21 project has, certainly in later years, made some real moves to empower local community groups, and to decrease the levels of crime within the area and thus attempted to meet Strategic Objectives three and seven. The question must be asked as to whether this will have a real and lasting impact on the neighbourhood as a whole, or whether these have only been small improvements which will benefit only a few individuals for a short space of time.

Some work, such as the Dagenham Brook project and the work with the Marconi Road resident's association does appear to be set to provide ongoing benefits towards these strategic objectives.

By providing capacity building and support for community groups over the past five years it is hoped that the community sector in the area will have been sufficiently strengthened to continue without the support of the regular meetings and the project officer. Whether this does occur will have to be seen, but much will depend on the community groups themselves and the willingness of organisations such as the council to keep up the good working relationships which have been forged. If these are allowed to lapse then the real lasting impact of the Agenda 21 project could be limited.

## **3. Targeted childcare**

One reason that many children in the UK are brought up in relative poverty is that parents cannot find affordable childcare and thus cannot get back to work. Targeted, subsidised childcare was to be provided by the Lea Bridge Gateway SRB to assist in tackling the high unemployment rates, especially amongst single parents and ethnic minorities in the local area, and to address the recognised shortage of childcare provision.

### *The childcare problem*

This shortage seems to remain, with over 60 per cent of parents in the 2001 childcare survey reporting that childcare in Lea Bridge was difficult to find. Even where childcare can be found parents often find that it is expensive. The weekly

costs of childcare are typically between £50-£100 per week for after schools care and £100-£150 for a full time nursery place (findings from the 2001 childcare interviews).

Many parents find themselves in what is known as a 'childcare-trap'. Childcare can prove to be so expensive that parents must stay at home to look after their children rather than working, as often they will be financially better off on state benefits than going to work. The cost of childcare can also prove prohibitive for those wishing to train and gain further qualifications. Some courses provide childcare for trainees, but many require parents to find and pay for their own childcare whilst attending training.

The problem particularly affects single parents who often have a lower household income, and have less flexibility to juggle the demands of both a job and childcare duties.

By providing subsidies the childcare projects sought to meet the SRB strategic objectives one and seven, improving employment prospects and enhancing the quality of life for residents. In addition, by allowing employees to fully commit to their jobs, and to remain in work despite having to deal with childcare, the project also aimed to help meet strategic objective two, to improve economic efficiency.

The childcare provided by the Lea Bridge Gateway SRB was in two forms, firstly subsidised nursery provision for children of pre-school age, and secondly an after schools club to assist the parents of school age children.

### **3.1 Targeted nursery childcare project**

In 1996 when SRB funding was awarded, there was a lack of adequate nursery provision in Lea Bridge. What was available consisted primarily of unregistered childminders, or involved a trip outside the area. The cost of this childcare also caused difficulties for parents.

#### *The project*

To solve these problems the SRB established a Nursery, in conjunction with a private company, with the SRB paying subsidies for around 25 places per year. Each child was eligible for two years of subsidised places, normally enough to last up to school age, with the first year being fully funded, and the second year funded at 50 per cent of cost. The nursery was owned and run independently, but the council handled the funding provision and subsidies for parents. In addition the nursery provided training for local people wanting to be childminders, so in itself was contributing to increasing the employment prospects of local people.

The principle behind this provision was to give parents a chance to return to work, or to go into training, with their child in a nursery which was close to work or home. The Nursery, initially Nashluck, then reopened as Bright Stars, was located on Lea Bridge Road in the centre of the SRB area and hence very accessible. Parents were eligible for the scheme if they lived or worked within SRB boundaries and if their household income was below a certain threshold, which depended upon the number of children they had.

Initially the project had some difficulty filling the childcare places, but eventually this was achieved. Reports from parents using the nursery were very good. Most parents were very happy with the standard of childcare provided by the nursery, and were pleased with the staffing levels, levels of health and safety, and facilities. The only common complaint was that the building had no playground, but most parents felt this was a minor point and were satisfied overall.

### *Problems at Bright Stars Nursery*

Unfortunately, the nursery provision developed difficulties in early 2000, when the private company running the nursery disappeared under a cloud of financial irregularities. Luckily SRB funding was being paid to the nursery on a monthly basis, so little in the way of SRB funding was lost, but this threw the scheme into disarray. A number of parents were left particularly inconvenienced as the nursery shut without any warning.

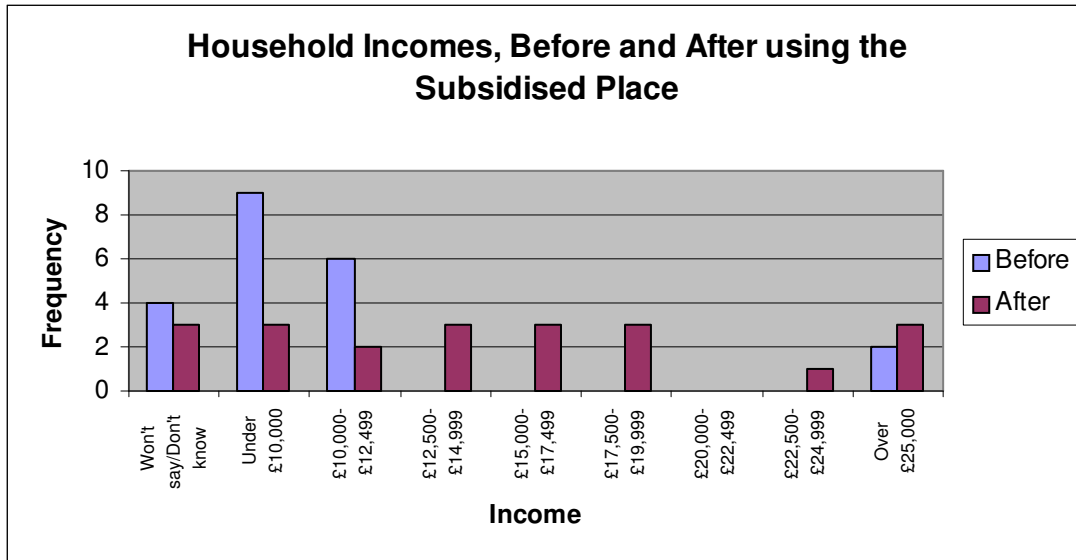
The council attempted to find alternative sources of childcare, but as the Bright Stars nursery was the only such service available in Lea Bridge this proved difficult, and most parents eventually made their own arrangements. The subsidy continued for parents at a number of other registered childcare providers, but the disruption to the scheme meant some parents left the subsidised scheme during the confusion.

### *Impact of the project*

The Nursery childcare scheme has been subject to a full project evaluation in 2000-01 by UEL, and the results are being published simultaneously with this report. With this in mind this report will give a brief outline of the findings of the evaluation.

To evaluate the childcare scheme a total of 21 parents who had children on the scheme were interviewed. Initially it was hoped to interview a great deal more of these, but despite getting contact details a number of parents could not be traced, both by telephone and by house calls. A number were confirmed to be not at their current address, and more were unobtainable at their last recorded address. In total it appears that just over 60 parents benefited from the scheme, mostly for two childcare years, hence the output of 110 childcare years provided by the scheme over the five years.

An assessment of household incomes reveals that most parents have improved their income since the time before they used the subsidised place. The graph below shows how reported household incomes have changed from before to after using the subsidy:



When asked if the childcare scheme was a factor in them improving their household income, all those who replied stated either that the subsidy did help or that it will help in future, when they have finished training. The improvements in household income appear to have been achieved by taking part in training, or by the subsidy allowing parents to work longer hours and become more involved in their jobs, without the worry of the additional childcare costs incurred.

These results show the scheme to be having a real impact on those it has supported, and managing to some degree to meet strategic objectives one and seven, improving employment prospects and enhancing the quality of life for some residents.

#### *Parents' opinions on the closure of Bright Stars Nursery*

Despite these benefits the interviews did highlight some problems of the project. Many of these complaints were concerned with the closure of Bright Stars nursery, and complainants seemed to feel that the council could have done more. One third of those interviewed reported that for various reasons they had to stop using the subsidy when the nursery closed.

It appears that many felt that, with the subsidy being council provided, the council was fully responsible for the nursery provision. Whilst the closure of Bright Stars was out of council control, and took the council as much by surprise as it did parents, it does appear that communication with parents could have been better. Many parents reported that the only thing they heard was that they needed to now find their own childcare. Given the inconvenience it caused some parents, one actually lost her job as a result of having to take time off work due to the loss of the childcare, some further assistance may have been useful, if only to protect the image of the council and the partnership.

#### *Targeting of the project*

Results from the survey also suggest that the scheme may not have been targeted as well as it might have been to provide maximum impact. If the reported

household incomes are to be believed it seems just under 10 per cent of our sample managed to get the subsidy, despite earning over the required threshold (a maximum of around £18,000 a year, and only then if there were four children in the family). Some parents actually reported that they felt the application process was too easy, in that no real checks were made to confirm that the details given by parents were true. A photocopy of a wage slip had to be included with the application form, but there was no mechanism to stop a parent who wished to gain a subsidised place from neglecting to disclose their partner's wages to reduce the apparent household income.

Another problem with the distribution of subsidies concerns the criteria on which the grants were awarded. To qualify parents must be either in paid employment or in training or education. This could exclude many people who would like to look for work or to enter training, but could not do so without the guarantee of a subsidised childcare place. This meant the project was missing some of those they most intended to target.

From our sample it seems that around 14 per cent were able to get past these restrictions and to get the subsidy when they were looking for work or looking after children, but these criteria were displayed on the application form and so may have discouraged some individuals from applying who did not feel they were eligible. This seems to be a case where a slight anomaly exists between the application process and the aims of the project. Ideally parents would be able to apply for the subsidised place, get an approval in principle, and then, armed with this, sign up for training or look for work, secure in the knowledge that their childcare needs would be met when they did start.

This situation is particularly relevant to those seeking employment. The act of looking for a job can in itself be very time consuming, and to be able to get subsidised childcare in order to look for employment could be very useful. Additionally, many jobs would require an applicant who could start quickly. As the subsidised childcare place could at times take up to 8 weeks to be awarded from the completion of the application form (as was the case for 24 per cent of our sample), it is unlikely an employer would hold a job for this length of time.

If they are to truly tackle the problem of the childcare-trap and help parents back into employment future childcare subsidies may have to bear this loophole in mind when deciding upon criteria for acceptance on the scheme.

#### *Problems caused by the restricted target area*

Another anomaly in the application criteria concerns the requirement for working within the Lea Bridge Gateway area, if the parent's home address was outside the area. Two parents noted that the subsidy was very useful when they worked in the Lea Bridge area, but that they lost the subsidy when they took better jobs outside the area. One of these actually then had to give up this new job and has been unemployed for the last four years. Although the nature of the SRB is that it is focused on a single geographic area, these examples show how this restriction can cause real problems for those who use the scheme. Such occurrences cannot be blamed on the Lea Bridge Gateway partnership, but do highlight that the problems faced by the residents and workforce of the SRB do apply to those living outside this

area, and that the provision of localised solutions can at times seem a little unfair to those who miss out.

### **3.2 After School Club / Active Club**

The concept behind the After Schools Club, later known as the Active Club, was to provide affordable childcare for the parents of school age children in Lea Bridge. This would enable parents, who wished to work or train, to do so without the burden of being tied to collecting children at the end of school, and without the expense of employing a childminder to do this for them. The club also ran during school holidays, providing activities for the children in a safe and supervised environment whilst their parents worked.

The club was managed by a combination of council staff, playworkers, and a parents committee. Twenty-five funded places were provided by Lea Bridge Gateway SRB, with parents paying a small subsidy to have their children on the scheme. The club was based at the African Caribbean Centre in Ive Farm Road, which provided a suitable venue within easy reach of Marsh Lane playing fields. This project built on an existing After Schools Club, and primarily provided subsidised places for this facility. Tapping into this existing structure enabled the project to be up and running very quickly, and to start having an immediate impact.

#### *Problems at the African Caribbean Centre*

Unfortunately in February 1999 the council withdrew its funding for the African Caribbean Centre, as a result of concerns over financial propriety. For a time the club continued to function in this venue, but after this the situation at the venue became difficult. There have been reports of the club having to function in circumstances where water services for the centre had been cut, and where officials from the African Caribbean Centre were disrupting the meetings of the parents group. The Active Club struggled on until August 1999 when the centre closed and the After Schools Club was forced to close due to a lack of suitable venue.

Much effort was made after this time to find a suitable venue. The headteachers in the area were approached to see if a venue could be found in a local school, but this met with little response. An appeal was also made to the community through the SRB newsletter but eventually, after looking at around 20 alternative venues, the remaining funding was transferred to other community projects.

Again this childcare project suffered as a result of factors out of the control of the SRB board. There has been some suggestion that the lack of a project manager exclusively dedicated to this project may have had some effect on the failure to find a suitable replacement venue. However, this appears to have only been a problem due to the exceptionally difficult circumstances the project found itself in. A management structure consisting of a parents committee with council support would ordinarily provide adequate backup for a project of this nature, and the project had run for some years without a dedicated project manager at the council. The primary problem appears to have been a lack of a suitable community venue where the project could be based; a problem identified at the outset of the SRB bid.

## *Impact*

Although the project has not been subject to the same evaluation as the nursery project, it seems likely that the provision of subsidised childcare to school age children would have a similar positive effect on those using the scheme as the targeted nursery project. Available accounts suggest the After Schools Club was well run and successful until the time of its closure, and so there appears to be little that future projects can learn from the problems encountered.

## *Remaining demands*

The feedback from parents interviewed for the nursery childcare questionnaire revealed that there is still a need for a facility such as the after schools club in Lea Bridge. Many of those who used the nursery places report a need for childcare for their children now they attend school. A good example can be drawn by means of a brief case study collected during the childcare interviews:

*'One young mother, interviewed on the Ive Farm Estate, has been unemployed for four years, with the exception of a brief stint where she was eligible for the subsidised nursery funding and took a job in the Lea Bridge area.*

*She now finds herself unable to work as she needs to pick up her young son from school at 3:30 in Lea Bridge. The cost of after-schools childcare has proved prohibitive to her working, as the wages she can command would not make it worthwhile, especially once travelling expenses have been covered. She would like to train and thus improve her earning potential, but has found that this too is limited by a lack of childcare provision; most courses finish at 4pm at the earliest. As a result she is still unemployed and claiming benefits.'*

This example shows that after school care, as provided by the Active Club, can be as important as Nursery provision for children of pre-school age, if parents are to be able to go back to work. The problems the project set out to tackle also seem to remain. Future planning for the area should strongly consider reinstating a similar type of provision in some form, maybe with a decreased reliance upon an exterior organisation to keep the provision available.

## *Continuation*

By their very nature both the childcare subsidies were destined to have a finite lifespan. Although the Bright Stars nursery, before closing, was to fund two places, a subsidy such as this can really only occur where a funding pot, such as an SRB, exists to pay for it. The only possible continuation strategy for a scheme such as this would be to look for alternative funding, or to keep abreast of current government subsidies and make parents in the area aware of what help was available. Fortunately the Working Families Tax Credit has now been put in place and provides assistance for parents with childcare costs, so some help should be available to parents on low incomes in Lea Bridge.

Unfortunately this scheme requires families to be already working and to provide wage slips at application. Due to this parents seeking employment will find it difficult to access the benefits, as they did with the SRB funded Nursery project.

From speaking to parents in the area, it also appears that there is a lack of awareness of these new benefits. Although alternative sources of help are now available, it seems there is a need to raise the awareness of these if parents in the area are not to sink back into the same situation as they were in before the SRB. It is possible that the role of educating parents in the area on the availability of government subsidies could have been contained in the exit strategy for the project, but this may have had a limited effect as it would only alert the area's current parents as to the current government strategy.

Another problem also remains for the area, as although assistance with childcare is available, there is still a shortage of available childcare. It may be that the SRB money spent on subsidies through both projects (which totalled £550,000), could have been better spent funding the purchase or construction of a childcare centre, which could be council owned, with a private company contracted to run the centre.

By charging a reduced rent to the company the cost of all places could be kept lower than at most private nurseries, and the monies received could be used to fund a number of further subsidies for local low income families. By remaining landowners of the building, and by offering attractive terms, the council should be able to easily replace the contracted service providers if for any reason they were unhappy with their performance. This would also get round the problem seen in both childcare projects, where the council was unable to quickly rectify problems created by external agencies.

It does seem that there is a demand for such a centre, with over 42 per cent of parents mentioning a demand for more local childcare facilities in the 2001 childcare survey. If the size of centre was built according to this demand there should be little difficulty getting a private company in to run it.

This proposal does presuppose that most parents would be happy for their children to attend a childcare centre, rather than to use a childminder or other form of childcare. Some further investigation would be needed to verify the precise childcare demands and needs of local residents before any conclusions are made. The childminding network is active in Waltham Forest and, with a number of childminders having received help through the Customised Training and Business Support initiatives, it is likely that there are adequate childminders in the area to meet the demand for other types of care, allowing the two to co-exist side by side.

Such a project could provide additional benefits for the area. The physical presence of a 'Childcare Centre' would make parents aware of its existence and help address the problems of unequal access often seen with a subsidy. Here some parents happen to find out about assistance, whereas others only discover help was available when it is too late. A childcare centre would also provide a good place to advertise government financial assistance, such as the Working Families Tax Credit.

### *Childcare conclusions*

Both projects clearly had some benefit for those that used them, and created a detectable impact, for example in terms of the demonstrated increased household income for those on the nursery childcare subsidies. Although for both projects this impact was lower than it might have been, and whilst some improvements



could have been made, the primary reasons, bad luck with the chosen contractors, lie beyond the control of either the board or the council.

Unfortunately the impact seen has probably not had any lasting effect beyond those families who used the scheme over the five years. It does appear that by approaching the problem in a different manner and trying to develop an infrastructure that allowed the childcare needs in the area to be met, the project could have had a greater impact.

In this way lasting affordable childcare could be made available with continued benefits for the whole community (SO1 and SO7). Additional benefits could also be achieved in terms of making the area a better location for business (SO2), as local, cheap, available, and most importantly permanent, childcare would be an attraction to new business and an advantage to existing firms. Such a project could have had a more lasting regenerative impact on Lea Bridge, and so in some ways there was a failure at the planning stage. Hopefully the feasibility of such a project could be considered if future spending becomes available in the area.

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