



Lesson 2 reading – How has regeneration transformed east Manchester? Three different strategies

1. Sportcity and the East Manchester Regeneration Strategy

The East Manchester Regeneration Strategy was launched in 1992. Following two failed bids to host the Olympic Games, this strategy envisaged a 'Sportcity' for Manchester that would bring widespread regeneration to a deprived inner-city area.

The area of east Manchester where this Sportcity development was focused was among the most deprived in the UK. Previously home to a coal mine, power station and a number of vast engineering works, the area had been hit especially hard by deindustrialisation. Widespread economic collapse had occurred, and between 1975 and 1985 the area lost 60% of its economic base. Isaac Rose (2024, p. 178) refers to east Manchester as the 'epicentre' of deindustrialisation.

In the year 2000, while Manchester was unsuccessful in its second bid to host the Olympic Games, the process of applying meant that local politicians had to work closely with an influential group of business leaders (Cochrane *et al.*, 2002). The partnership proved productive, and led directly to Manchester's successful bid for the 2002 Commonwealth Games.

The 2002 Commonwealth Games were referred to at the time as the 'regeneration games', with the hope being that they would bring longer-term investment to the area. A sports stadium, velodrome and tram line were built. The Games were estimated to have generated around 450 jobs in the area.

Following the Games, the stadium was sold to Manchester City Football Club and its owners, the Abu Dhabi United Group. The 450 jobs created by the Games have been sustained by the football club, though these are mainly part-time and quite precarious jobs due to zero-hour and temporary contracts.

Academic assessment of the impacts of Sportcity suggests that it has had environmental successes, for instance in cleaning up a 65-hectare site that was one of the most industrially polluted in Europe.

However, the investment in housing has 'caused equity problems', with three-quarters of homes in the area being considered affordable in 2002 but only 35% by 2005 (Blakeley and Evans, 2013).

2. New East Manchester Regeneration Company

New East Manchester Regeneration Company was set up under the national government's New Deal for Communities policy in 1999, which provided £50 million of funding to 39 'deprived neighbourhoods' around England. Urban regeneration companies were set up to manage the projects that would be delivered through partnerships between the public and private sectors.

The Manchester development focused on the Ancoats area in east Manchester, which had thrived economically in the past but suffered heavily from deindustrialisation. By 1999, unemployment in the area was 8.2%, double the average for the rest of Manchester. Ancoats lost 60% of its population between 1951 and 2001, and had a mortality rate 50% higher than the rest of the country (Luke and Kaika, 2019, p. 582).

As part of the Ancoats development, the Cardroom Estate, an area of council housing that had suffered from underinvestment and become stigmatised as a 'problem area' (Rose, 2024, p. 183), was demolished. The council received Millenium Community status in 2001, which brought additional funding. A partnership between the developer Urban Splash, the council and local residents was formed. However, all six community representatives resigned in 2006.

Ten years after demolition began, only 55 new low-income houses were completed, able to house just half of the 106 families that had been displaced (Luke and Kaika, 2019, p. 584). Although the regeneration also focused on increasing employment in the area, a

2013 assessment observed that 'unemployment remained unsatisfactory' (Blakeley and Evans, 2013, p. 103). The area has been rebranded as New Islington, and is dominated by high-density apartment blocks.

Luke and Kaika (2019, p. 584) describe the redevelopment as a 'handbook example of gentrification'. Gillespie and Silver (2021, p. 9) suggest that the council leased land to private developers at far below market rates, and that, in some cases, land in the New Islington area of Ancoats has been leased for 999 years at a price of £0.

3. Property-led regeneration, financialisation and short-term lets

Following the economic crash of 2008, Manchester experienced a slowdown in house-building. To overcome this, Manchester City Council have found innovative ways to partner with private firms, pensions funds, investors and others.

These partnerships are property-led in the sense that construction and private property ownership are the priorities. The council believes that house-building and neighbourhood rebranding can attract new residents to the city core and surrounding areas, which, in turn, will bring flows of investment and increased council tax payments.

To achieve these benefits, the council has pursued strategies such as low-cost, long-term leasing of council-owned land in east Manchester and elsewhere to private investors, as well as the use of loans from initiatives like the Housing Investment Fund. Companies such as the Hong Kong-based Far East Consortium have used this to build high-density apartment blocks in areas such as Angel Meadow.

Though not supported directly by the council, the rise of online platforms offering short-term lets has also brought investment (of a sort) to the area. Research has found that there was a four-fold increase in Airbnb properties in Manchester between 2016 and 2020, and that short-term letting was becoming professionalised, with over 54% of short-term-let properties being owned by investors who owned multiple properties.

A host of Airbnb properties can be found across the Northern Quarter, a culture and heritage quarter in the urban core that is in close proximity to east Manchester, as well as in east Manchester neighbourhoods such as Ancoats (Berry *et al.*, 2021, p. 34). With an average rent of £131 per night, these properties bring in more money than a landlord would receive from a long-term let.

Although these mechanisms have brought investment to the area, local residents complain of noise, littering and anti-social behaviour resulting from their use as 'party flats' by visitors to the city (Berry *et al.*, 2021).

References and further reading

- Berry, H., Davis, R., Rose, I., Sandor, A., Silver, J. and Yates, L. (2021) *Short Term Rentals in Manchester: Time to act?* Available at <http://www.gmhousingaction.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/AirBnB-Report-Dec-21-2021.pdf>
- Blakeley, G. and Evans, B. (2013) *The Regeneration of East Manchester*. Manchester: Manchester University Press
- Cochrane, A., Peck, J. and Tickell, A. (2002) 'Olympic dreams: visions of partnership' in Peck, J. and Ward, K. (eds) *City of Revolution: Restructuring Manchester*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 95–115.
- Gillespie, T. and Silver, J. (2021) *Who Owns The City? The Privatization of Public Land in Manchester*. Available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4759431>
- Goulding, R., Leaver, A. and Silver, J. (2023) *Manchester Off-Shored: A public interest report on the Manchester Life partnership between Manchester City Council and the Abu Dhabi United Group*. Available at <https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/id/eprint/189304/1/Centripetal%20Cities%20Report%20FINAL%2020%20July%202022.pdf>
- Lees, L. (2020) 'Changing urban places: what is wrong with gentrification?', *Geography Review*, 33, 3. Available at <https://magazines.hachettelearning.com/magazine/geography-review/33/3/changing-urban-places>
- Luke, N. and Kaika, M. (2019) 'Ripping the heart out of Ancoats: collective action to defend infrastructures of social reproduction against gentrification', *Antipode*, 51, 2, pp. 579–600. <https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12468>
- Rose, I. (2024) *The Rentier City: Manchester and the making of the neoliberal metropolis*. London: Repeater Books.
- Ward, K. (2003) 'Entrepreneurial urbanism, state restructuring and civilizing "New" East Manchester', *Area*, 35, 2, pp. 116–27. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-4762.00246>