

## Georgina - Presentation

### **Georgina Blakeley:**

East Manchester, ten minutes from Manchester's glamorous and bustling cosmopolitan city centre and yet literally a world apart.

East Manchester used to be an industrial power house with factories, cotton mills and coalmines. And yet by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century it bore all the hallmarks of de-industrialisation. Whether that measure was population loss, poor health, economic decline, high crime rates, households where three generations have never gone to work. By 1998 a majority of residents in East Manchester lived in neighbourhoods which were classed as being amongst the worst percent in England. No wonder then that both residents and council officials began to describe East Manchester as a basket case.

Faced with such deprivation my question today is whether or not government should try to intervene to halt the decline of areas like East Manchester. Or whether as is increasingly the case, for example, in the United States governments should simply let great cities decline and become the green spaces that they used to be.

Faced with angry residents Manchester City Council had no such choice. It had to do something. And so it began a massive programme of urban regeneration in the area. In 1999 it established one of the first urban regeneration companies, New East Manchester, which became the custodian of all the regeneration initiatives in the area. And New East Manchester worked alongside the New Deal for Communities initiatives.

The targets as you will see from the list here were certainly ambitious over a ten year period. And yet what's also important is that those targets were holistic. So, for example, there was no point in trying to tackle housing if worklessness was not tackled. And there was no point trying to tackle worklessness if education wasn't tackled.

Now I spent, along with a colleague, ten years in East Manchester researching the area. And that included interviews with residents and council officials, regeneration officials. We ploughed through endless Board Minutes. We conducted surveys. We conducted focus groups. And we came to the conclusion that you could divide the regeneration process in to five distinct stages.

The first stage from 1999 to 2002 was of excitement. There was loads of money. There was new initiatives in the air. And of course there was the impetus of the Commonwealth Games in 2002 and Manchester really wanted to put on a show for all those people who were coming to see Manchester from across the world.

The second stage was perhaps what we would call the hay day of regeneration when the major initiatives really took off and became embedded. So, for example, this was when new schools were built, new houses were built, old houses were refurbished. And there

were employment initiatives and job creation schemes. And in the second period if you can look at the Board Minutes and go through them there's a real sense of optimism. And improvements were being reported on in a really positive manner.

By 2006 the third stage there was already a note of anxiety as both residents and regeneration officials began to notice that national policy attention was moving elsewhere and public funds were beginning to taper off. Even though there was a sense of optimism that was tempered by a note of caution as people began to realise that there might be a problem of sustaining many of the initiatives that are being begun in those earlier stages.

By 2008 the recession began to bite and it had a particular effect on the housing market and on those housing developers who had invested heavily in the area attracted by a range of sweeteners and inducements from the public purse. But of course as soon as public monies began to dry up the volume house builders were no longer interested in the area and most construction ceased.

There was still some public money under what was called Maintaining Momentum Initiative but that was largely concentrated on the Ancoats area which is closest to the city centre. Most other construction work simply ended.

This problem was then exacerbated by the election of the Coalition Government in 2010 and the subsequent reduction in public expenditure. Although Manchester City Council was adamant that it remained committed to the area across the country generally regeneration initiatives simply ended.

An overall balance sheet of regeneration in East Manchester is of course difficult but there are successes and there are failures. There is a visible physical legacy not the least in the Etihad Stadium but also in the appearance of green areas and the improved appearance of housing. Education has also improved in East Manchester. For example, there are now far more pupils who gain five GCSE's at A to C level. In addition a new secondary school was built.

But there are also failures. Nevertheless it is the case that challenges remain particularly in the areas of health and worklessness. New jobs were created in East Manchester and there is a new business park which continues to attract start-up companies as well as established businesses. But it is the case that the creation of a few hundred supermarket jobs cannot compensate for the decline of manufacturing in the area where thousands upon thousands of jobs were lost from the 1970's onwards.

So does that mean that government shouldn't try? They should just simply leave cities to decline and become green areas once more. I think if you asked the residents in East Manchester they would say that regeneration does make a difference. And in particular what residents often talked about were micro achievements. For example, the scheme

of Alley Gating which you can see in the picture. Whereby alleys are closed off and made in to community spaces for residents to use. Now those are undoubtedly micro achievements in a difficult national and global context but nevertheless they do matter and they do make a difference to people's lives.

What's also the case is that politics matters. It's commonplace these days to hear that New Labour was simply a continuation of the Conservative governments before that and that indeed the Coalition Government of today is simply the same as New Labour. And yet at least in the case of regeneration if you look at New Labour's regeneration policies where most of the regeneration initiatives in East Manchester took place and compare those with the regeneration policies of the Coalition Government there is a significant difference. And it is this difference which really matters to people. People in deprived communities are those that experience the cut in public funds, the cut in public services most immediately in their lives.

Another conclusion that I would draw from my experience and research in East Manchester is that regeneration cannot rely on the market alone. It requires public funding. And I think that's clear particularly in the times of recession where a reliance on the market such as that favoured by the Coalition Government is tested and found wanting. At least in the case of regeneration I would argue that the invisible hand of the market actually turns out to be the hand of the State.

And finally, one thing that came across very clearly from both residents and public officials is that regeneration is a 30 year journey. You can't turn an area around in ten years. You can't even do it in 20 years. You need at least 30 years to turn around areas like East Manchester which have suffered the consequences of de-industrialisation.

So what of the future? Are the prospects for East Manchester bleak as perhaps I've been just suggesting? Well actually East Manchester may well buck the trend. Not the least because it continues to attract a lot of private investment from the owners of Manchester City Football Club who have signed a deal with the city council which will see major investment in the area in continued construction work in the form of hotels, a leisure complex and sports academies.

It's also important not to underestimate the political commitment of Manchester City Council which remains adamant that it will remain committed to the area and won't walk away. In fact it says to walk away now would be seen as a failure. And of course Manchester City Council has considerable political skills which means that it can often gain the most maximum benefit from national government policy. And of course although a lot of regeneration activity in the area has now ceased New East Manchester played a crucial role in providing a platform for future regeneration not the least in assembling land which will once again become profitable as the recession begins to end.

That being said the paradox remains that Manchester is still a city with a very wealthy city centre, some wealthy suburbs and many deprived areas. In other words Manchester is still a divided city as Engels once described it.