

Olympic legacy

What chance has the London Olympics of leaving real benefits that stand the test of time?

With the frantic anticipation of the build-up and the spectacular 2012 Olympic Games behind us, the focus now shifts to what benefits the event will bring to the UK population in the future. The Olympic 'legacy' has become a buzzword symbolising how the games could be good for future generations and communities throughout the country.

Olympics are not always win-win

It's difficult to predict how the future will develop. For example, what do you think the chances are of visiting London's Olympic Park in a decade and seeing a decaying, derelict zone full of litter, with 'off limits' facilities protected by fences and patrolled by security guards? It sounds unlikely. But if you pay a visit to Athens, the city that hosted the global sporting event in 2004, that's exactly what you'll find. The Olympic legacy in Greece, struggling with debt and social problems, lies in ruins.

Eight years after over £9 billion was spent staging the celebrated 2004 Olympic Games, 21 of the 22 new sporting facilities that were built in Athens lie abandoned. Travellers now use the space in front of the beach volleyball venue as a temporary camp. The Olympic stadium, once the scene of a glorious opening ceremony, is rusty, daubed with graffiti and being used by very few athletes. Even though the baseball stadium was picked up by a local football team, the transfer was not thought through well; triangular baseball pitches don't adapt well into rectangular football pitches and spectators have to watch from awkward angles. Is this the future for London?

Going for Gold in London

The aim of the London organisers was to make sure that the 2012 legacy did not turn into a Greek tragedy. At the outset, five promises were made with the aim of making sure that the London Olympics gave long-lasting benefits. By basing the Games in the capital's deprived East End, involving communities across the UK and having sustainability at its core, the bid was the most attractive one put forward in 2005 and work on the huge project began.



Queen Elizabeth II Olympic Park



Athens Olympic venue in 2012

Olympic promises

How they will be achieved

To make the UK a leading sporting nation

- New programmes to encourage people to get involved in sport
- £75 million to encourage healthy living
- More sports coaches in schools helping young people to play sport every day

To transform the heart of East London

- Delivering the Olympic Park
- Boosting local skills and jobs
- Building affordable housing
- Giving people access to sport facilities

To inspire a generation of young people

- Cultural Olympiad arts programme
- Legacy Trust UK giving grants for cultural projects
- Educational programme to use the Olympics and sport in schools

To deliver sustainable living at the Olympic Park

- 2012 sustainability plan
- Housing with increased energy efficiency
- More recycling
- Greener transport to the Games

To show that the UK is creative, inclusive and welcoming

- Encouraging companies to bid for Olympic contracts
- Boosting tourism to the UK
- Promoting UK-based sports technology

Local impact

Six London boroughs hosted the majority of the Olympic events and they included some of the most deprived parts of the city. The decision to house the Olympic Games in an area desperate for regeneration provided places like Newham and Hackney with a unique opportunity to improve local living conditions. Part of this was about jobs. Thousands of construction jobs were created in the run up to the Games and over 10 000 local people got jobs as security workers while the event was on. After the Games, converting the Olympic Park into a business and sports destination is estimated to have created 12 000 jobs and attracted £7 billion of private investment. Perhaps most important to local residents in an area of high rents and low home ownership is the pledge that 9000 new homes will be created, many of them affordable to those on low incomes.

“Converting the Olympic Park into a business and sports destination is estimated to have created 12 000 jobs and attracted £7 billion”

Host London borough	Security jobs for local people during the Games
Barking and Dagenham	1 353
Greenwich	1 396
Hackney	1 296
Newham	3 473
Tower Hamlets	1 630
Waltham Forest	1 550
Total	10 698

Sustainable Games

The transformation of the East End, both during and beyond the Games, will not have been done at the expense of the environment. The aim was to provide a blueprint for sustainable living. The Olympic Village, built to house athletes, was planned to be 44% more efficient than similar buildings built in 2006, while the sporting venues were planned to use 40% less water than similar sites because of strict conservation measures. The buildings in the Olympic Park benefited from a new heating and cooling Energy Centre with a low carbon footprint and, at the time of building, was the largest in the UK. All the timber used to build the Olympic Park was from sustainable sources and the top ring of the Olympic Stadium was made out of recycled gas pipes.

The Olympic Park was created on previously contaminated industrial land that has been cleaned up and replanted. Over 100 hectares of open space were created and new habitats now include open river banks and wetlands. In future the area will be known as the Queen Elizabeth II Olympic Park.

Meanwhile, the people of London's East End can now boast cutting edge transport links. Since the Games, Stratford has high-speed links to other places in London, several cities in Britain and into Europe.

Many private companies were also involved in the 'Sustainable Games'. Food served during the Olympics was sourced locally and represented the best of British dishes, with the hope of promoting UK companies for the long term. Chemical giant Proctor and Gamble sponsored the four-month long Capital Clean Up, which encouraged residents to take to the streets and tackle litter and graffiti. Organisers hope similar schemes will be adopted elsewhere in the country and that the Capital Clean Up will continue long after the Games.

Multiple deprivation in Newham before the Olympics

- Wages were among the lowest in London.
- Unemployment was nearly twice the national average at 6.7%.
- 34% of the population had no qualifications, compared to 24% across London.
- Overcrowding in Newham's houses was common.
- 56.3% of Newham residents lived in rented housing (the national average is 31.2%).
- Jobs were mainly semi-skilled or unskilled.
- Relatively few people were employed as managers.



The Media Centre is made of old ship containers.



The Basketball Arena can be viewed above the reclaimed and replanted riverbank.

Sporting legacy

Sport is obviously at the heart of the Olympic Games. Investment to boost Team GB's medal haul has resulted in some success over recent years, but organisers of the Games are keen that the world-class facilities built for 2012 help to generate more global athletes in the years to come.

Some facilities, such as the Basketball Arena, are temporary. But there will be many great sporting facilities left in the wake of the Olympics, not least the VeloPark's 1-mile cycle circuit, 6 miles of mountain bike route, the Velodrome and a BMX course. The Hockey Centre will become a permanent venue, to house England's team and stage the 2016 World Hockey Championships. The huge Aquatics Centre will be made available to schools and the local community, as well as to professional swimmers, so catering for all abilities.

Coupled with this, schools are being urged to allocate more time for sport and more community coaches are being provided to get the most out of youngsters with potential and even those who just want to have fun. The Leicestershire and Rutland Community Sports Partnership, for example, succeeded in getting 2,027 adults to take three 30-minute exercise sessions a week.

The Cultural Olympiad

Not everyone is motivated by sport, of course. The Cultural Olympiad aimed to inspire young people through the arts no matter what their interest or how close to London they lived. One of the more high profile programmes saw Shakespeare's plays performed in a range of languages to international audiences, as well as events featuring Ted Hughes' poetry and a concert by Sir Elton John. Sixteen million people took part in Cultural Olympiad events. Even the far-flung Shetland Islands were involved as part of a relay of film screenings curated by Mark Kermode.

A long-lasting legacy?

It's not all champagne and hockey sticks. The Olympic Games attracted its fair share of critics, not least those concerned about the amount of money it cost in times of austerity.

London

2012: Sustainable aims

- Adapt existing facilities where possible.
 - Construct on brownfield sites.
- Protect and encourage native flora and fauna.
 - Include effective public transport.
 - Use renewable energy.
- Minimise waste and maximise recycling.
- Minimise water use and use recycled water.
 - Take measures to reduce pollution.
- Create affordable housing available to all.
- Benefit people from all communities.



Members of the public enjoy the Olympic Park

Some pros and cons

The Games' budget was £9.7 billion, provided by government and Lottery funding. This was less than half the amount spent on the Beijing Olympics in 2008.	That's still over £400 for every UK household in the UK. Will those hundreds of miles away have as much benefit from it as Londoners?
An estimated 50 000 permanent jobs may be created as a result of the London Olympics.	380 companies, employing over 11 000 people, had to be relocated away from the Olympic Park. Some, like Forman's Salmon Factory, built new premises nearby but others protested that the Games were killing local business.
The Orbit art structure will become a tourist attraction in 2013 when visitors can go to the top for the view.	Tourists may not be prepared to travel so far from central London to see it.
The Handball Arena and Velodrome will remain as sporting venues.	But nobody is sure exactly how much use they will be able to generate over the years.
The Games' Broadcasting and Press Centre could be turned into an office block.	However the 15-minute walk from the station may deter this development.
There is land available for building affordable housing.	Critics say housing companies will be unwilling to pay for the high value of the land.

Many people have expressed doubts that the Olympics will deliver all that they promise. In the end, time will tell. The money has now been spent and the eyes of the media will be on the 2012 facilities to see if the legacy meets expectations. The chances of travellers living in the shadow of London's Olympic Stadium in eight years' time and the Aquatics Centre falling into ruins may be slim, but there are those who reckon the money spent on hosting the games could have been better invested elsewhere.

Discussion points

- Do you think spending £9 billion on hosting the London Olympic Games can be justified? Will the money be earned back?
- Should the city hosting the Olympics Games contribute more to the cost of the Games than cities hundreds of miles away?
- Do you think the London Games will have a positive legacy? What will be the best legacy in ten years' time?
- Is staging the Olympic Games a curse or a blessing for the host city?