

THE Docklands24



Reg Ward: the man who drove east London's resurrection

John Hyde, Chief Reporter [<mailto:john.hyde@archant.co.uk>] Monday, 10 January, 2011 17:38 PM

HE WAS the visionary who oversaw the most dramatic change in London since the Roman invasion.



Reg Ward, who died last Thursday, may have been a surprise choice to lead the London Docklands Development Corporation back in 1981.

But his charisma and energy – not to mention his imagination – would vindicate his appointment as he spent seven years helping to transform the derelict former docks.

The LDDC was not always universally liked, as local residents saw what they believed was the destruction of their heritage and home.

But the LDDC was a figurehead for Margaret Thatcher's Government and for the 1980s as a whole as it went from a relatively small-scale proposal to the creation of London's new economic centre.

George Iacobescu CBE, Chief Executive of Canary Wharf Group, said: "As the first Chief Executive of the London Docklands Development Corporation he was a crucial figure in the creation of the Canary Wharf project. He had a great ability to see the potential of this area when most people saw only problems.

"Reg's legacy lies in the transformation of east London - without him it just would not have happened."

Mr Ward, who was born in 1928, arrived in Docklands after a career which saw him in various local government posts.

Alongside chairman Sir Michael Pickard and Government minister Michael Heseltine, London Docklands was chosen with Liverpool to be the focus of new Enterprise Zones, aimed at rejuvenating neglected areas of each city.

Planning restrictions were lifted and business taxes relaxed as the commercial sector was encouraged to move east.

Mr Ward realised that transport would be crucial to any regeneration to attract people and sanctioned a radical phase of road building to bring the area up to scratch.

Bringing key workers in from home and abroad was key, so the Docklands Light Railway was commissioned in 1984 and construction would begin a year later on the £30 million London City Airport.

At the same time, the area was experiencing a radical growth in residential accommodation – with 11,500 new homes either built or started six years into Mr Ward's time at the helm.

As Thatcher's Government encouraged the Right To Buy, home ownership in Docklands rocketed, from just five per cent in 1981 to 38 per cent by 1988.

Perhaps most importantly of all, it was Mr Ward who resurrected the plan for One Canada Square, which had collapsed in 1987 but came back to life when he introduced Margaret Thatcher to Paul Reichmann, who would go on to build Britain's biggest tower.

Of course, the LDDC was not without controversy. Often criticised for a lack on consultation, local residents lead rallies in protest at the noise, pollution and lack of job opportunities.

In an interview for Museum of Docklands before his death, Mr Ward's enthusiasm for the job was evident many years after he left to work on other projects around the world.

"I react to places I am given responsibility for and as I walked the Docklands I dreamt," he said.

"You had this established area that despite all its dereliction and materials everywhere were these massive docks and riverside that in a sense were an unrivalled location."

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