

BRIGHT NEW IMAGE

Mayor convinced the Games site will change the way the world — and the residents — see East London. He tells **Cecily Liu**.

Beijing's Olympics transformed the world's perception of China forever, but one legacy London hopes to create with its Olympics is starkly different.

It is the regeneration of East London's Stratford, an area blighted by poverty, neglect and pollution from industrial activities of the past until London won its Olympic bid seven years ago.

"It seems to me that China wanted to show itself to the world and that was successful, so I think China got the legacy it wanted," says Robyn Wales, mayor of the London borough of Newham, which contains Stratford district and much of the Olympic Park.

"We are an area of poverty, and I want Newham to be a place for people who work, a place where people can bring their kids up in a decent place," he said.

According to Wales, his borough is the second most deprived in Britain and life expectancy is several years lower than in wealthier central London — hence, "convergence" with the rest of London is the legacy he hopes to see.

In the past few years, Stratford's appearance has been transformed by the building of the Olympic Park, which cost the British government 9 billion pounds (more than \$14 billion).

The opening of Westfield, Europe's largest urban shopping mall, on the edge of the Olympic Park last September has also put thousands of locals back to work.

Regeneration also includes transport infrastructures, like the upgraded underground lines, high-speed trains, and cable cars.

The challenge now, Wales says, is to ensure Stratford's new-found vibrancy continues beyond the Olympics. In particular, he hopes the Newham government's achievement of helping 5,000 locals find jobs last year can be repeated every year for a decade.

"If we keep it going for the next decade, then we will see a change for our people — and the Olympics and all the investment will have been worthwhile," he says.

After the Games, the Olympic Park will be developed into a new community that includes schools, nurseries, community spaces, health centers and 6,800 new homes, creating 8,000 permanent jobs in the process.

To be reopened as the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, the area is expected to include technology companies, a



Newham includes the 250-hectare park which now has the Olympic Stadium at its heart.

XINHUA PHOTO

base for university campuses and a new tourism attraction.

The fate of the Olympic stadium is still to be decided, with local Premier League soccer club West Ham among four bidders who want to move in after the Games.

But the aquatic center will become a community swimming pool, and the velodrome will become a local cycling venue, known as the VeloPark.

The blocks of flats where athletes are housed will provide 2,800 new rental homes from next year in a development named East Village.

The press and broadcast center will be transformed into a new complex with 91,000 square meters of business space, available for businesses to rent.

Wales describes the Games as the "opportunity of a lifetime", especially for local youth who are desperate for work. "What we are really proud to show in our area is our people," he says.

Wales, who went to see the Beijing Olympics four years ago, was "very impressed" with the show that his Chinese hosts put on — though he hopes London will be able to take better advantage of its Olympic facilities after the Games.



Robyn Wales, mayor of the London borough of Newham.

He now encourages Chinese businesses and investors to visit Stratford, and to help develop the area or open offices in the new blocks available.

"We are keen to get Chinese investment. We have an area a third the size of Manhattan to develop. There are lots of opportunities, so come and develop it," he says.

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Russian beach volleyball players practice inside the Olympic athletes village in Stratford, East London.

JOHN STILLWELL / AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Culture adds muscle to the Olympic experience

By **CECILY LIU** in London
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Ruth Mackenzie, director of Britain's Cultural Olympiad, was in awe upon seeing pottery-made dancing women who once accompanied Chinese imperial tombs now exhibiting at Cambridge's Fitzwilliam Museum.

"These women, with their beautiful hands, are still in one piece after the centuries in the tombs. It really is fantastic, I mean, what a bargain to see these treasures for free," she says.

"Also those wonderful horses and beautiful gold jewelry are such wonderful, beautiful artifacts," she adds.

The blockbuster exhibition, *The Search for Immortality: Tomb Treasures of Han China*, is just one of the 12,000 events and exhibitions produced by 25,000 artists across 204 countries for the London 2012 Festival.

Running through Sept 9, the festival is the grand finale of the Cultural Olympiad, a four-year program of Olympics and Paralympics related arts events that Britain spent more than 97 million pounds (\$144 million) to stage since 2008.

One highlight of the program is the World Shakespeare Festival, which invites international theater

groups to stage Shakespeare plays at London's Globe Theater in their own languages. The National Theater of China performed *Richard III* in Mandarin this May.

Another is *Stories of the World*, a series of exhibitions across the UK using objects and artifacts to tell stories, which includes the Fitzwilliam Museum tomb treasures exhibition.

This series also include an exhibition of Hangzhou's exquisite silk dresses at Nottingham Castle Museum and another of ancient Chinese history at Colchester Castle Museum.

However, the Cultural Olympiad received widespread criticism for its lack of coherence in its initial two years. Mackenzie, former boss of Scottish Opera, Chichester Festival theater and the Manchester International Festival, was given the helm in 2010 to give the project a fresh start.

Quickly and decisively, she dropped projects that did not seem to work. "But I'm not going to tell you about them," she says with an air of mysteriousness. "I'm only going to tell you that there are lots of great ideas, like the World Shakespeare Festival, the BT River of Music, and the work on Unlimited, which were already in place."



You don't want to have too many fish courses, because the fish may be beautiful, but the audience wants variety. Similarly you don't want to have only cakes, and no meat."

RUTH MACKENZIE
DIRECTOR OF BRITAIN'S CULTURAL OLYMPIAD, EXPLAINING WHY PUTTING TOGETHER A PROGRAM WAS A BIT LIKE MENU PLANNING

She then opened her contacts book, and invited artists from all around the world to join in. "There was no bidding process, it's not about bureaucracy," although she concedes that the selection process was "subjective".

"It is me trying to come up with a program that I feel has balance and variety."

She says it's like cooking. "You don't want to have too many fish courses, because the fish may be beautiful, but the audience wants variety. Similarly you don't want to have only cakes, and no meat."

As well, Mackenzie relied on many of her former contacts to invite a wider network of artists. This includes David Jones, producer of the *BT River of Music*, who invited musicians from each of the 204 countries competing in the Olympics

to perform along the Thames.

This includes a July 21 solo performance from Gong Linna, a famous Chinese singer who transformed traditional Chinese melodies and the *qi* (energy) of centuries-old Qin compositions into new songs.

Some events Mackenzie added to the program arguably could have taken place without the Cultural Olympiad, but the label gave them an extra boost in publicity. For example, Fitzwilliam Museum started working on the tomb treasures exhibition years ago.

As a testament to the cultural activities' inclusivity, London 2012 will offer 10 million free tickets or free places at events, and the Cultural Olympiad will involve more than 16 million people across the UK.

The tradition of the Cultural Olympiad originated with Pierre de



PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Mackenzie presents the Cultural Olympiad with balance, variety.

Coubertin, founder of the modern Olympic movement, who believed that the Games could bring sport and culture together. The combination has become bigger each time, and has reflected what the host nation has to offer.

In 1992, Barcelona staged a four-

year Cultural Olympiad, promoting local highlights including the Picasso Museum. A similar festival starting three years before the Sydney Olympics in 2000 put Australia's aboriginal people in the spotlight.

The Beijing Cultural Olympiad staged a plethora of traditional and modern culture events, including a film festival for fans of sport cinema and 1,500 young musicians performing on top of the Great Wall of China.

Mackenzie did not visit Beijing in 2008 because she did not know she would later work on Britain's Cultural Olympiad.

"Personally I am very enthusiastic about Chinese culture," she says, "but I was working on different things in 2008."

That may allow Mackenzie to create without the constraint of expectation. But how does she want her work to be remembered?

"I hope everyone who comes to the festival will be inspired by an artist, and that the world will look at our festival program and say, 'We must come to the United Kingdom and see its free museums, its brilliant theater, and its wonderful countryside and beaches, and see what fun we can have.'"