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Chinese developer signs £1bn deal for east London business park

London mayor Boris Johnson says Asian Business Port, aimed at Asian companies, would generate 20,000 jobs at Royal Albert Dock

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The Guardian, Wednesday 29 May 2013 18.52 BST



A poster is unveiled that reads 'Creating London's Next Financial District Asian Business Port' on derelict land at Royal Albert Dock in east London. Photograph: Luke Macgregor/REUTERS

A multibillion pound business park aimed at Asian companies is to be built on a historic dockyard in east London.

Advanced Business Park (ABP), a Chinese developer, signed a £1bn deal with [Boris Johnson](#), London's mayor, to develop a 14 hectare (35 acre) complex of offices and shops at the Royal Albert Dock, near London City airport.

Johnson said the park would become "London's third great business area" after the City of London and Canary Wharf, and would generate 20,000 jobs.

It is the largest investment by a Chinese company in the UK and is projected to be worth £6bn to the capital's economy by the time the first tenants arrive in 2017.

Speaking before Chinese and British officials at City Hall, Johnson said the park "will restore jobs and growth to the Royal Docks, an area ... that has been in more or less continuous decline for about 50 or 60 years".

Royal Albert Dock was Britain's largest purpose-built dock when completed in 1880 at the height of the British empire. In its imperial heyday, it was the country's most modern dock, the first to use electricity and also equipped with cutting-edge cranes and steel winches that unloaded tobacco from the US and fruit and meat from continental Europe. But like the capital's other docks, the Royal Albert fell into decline in the 1950s. It closed in the 1980s.



Royal Albert Dock development Photograph: Graphic

ABP wants to transform it into a 24-hour "city within a city". Almost 65,000 sq m (700,000 sq ft) of office space is planned and the developer hopes big Asian companies will set up their European headquarters at the park, which is close to City airport and will be near the Crossrail line linking west and east London from 2018. No tenants have signed up so far – the project has yet to receive planning permission – but ABP is in talks with at least 20 firms. The development is due for completion in 2023.

The site is also expected to attract British companies doing business in Asia. "It will be of course be largely Asian but I don't think it will be exclusively Asian," said Johnson. "It will be like London, it will be a melting pot."

Sir Robin Wales, Newham's mayor, said the project proved Newham was becoming a worldwide business destination. But the park would not repeat the "mistakes" of Canary Wharf, he said – the 1980s development has become symbolic of a divided London, with a rich cosmopolitan workforce largely cut off from some of the capital's poorest neighbourhoods.

"For all that Canary Wharf meant well – and it has created wealth – local people didn't benefit. We looked at that and learned from that," he told the Guardian.

The business park will provide lots of jobs for local people and the council would help people, including the long-term unemployed, get these positions, both skilled and unskilled, he said.

"We'll work with the employers that come, we'll understand what it is they're looking for. We will get the employers already in Newham and we'll get people into work."

Prof Tony Travers of the London School of Economics said: "There is a perennial risk with a major new investment in east London or in any deprived area that it improves the area but doesn't improve the lives of people who are already there."

Newham council, he added, had seen a lot of people get jobs at the Westfield Stratford shopping centre, but had benefited less from the Olympics.
