



George Osborne in Beijing yesterday announcing an £800m joint venture to develop land around Manchester airport

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Johnson peddles brand London

Trade ties

London's mayor presses the flesh to entice students and investors, write **Tom Mitchell and James Pickford**

The last time Boris Johnson was in Beijing in 2008 he cut a somewhat comical figure as he accepted the Olympic flag from his triumphant hosts in the city's cavernous "Bird's Nest" stadium. London's mayor was in more cosy confines on his return visit to the Chinese capital yesterday. A year after London held its own successful games, Mr Johnson pressed the flesh with amused – and often enthused – Chinese onlookers at exhibitions that trumpeted London's universities and some of Britain's most famous brands.

Mr Johnson, a recognised and popular figure in China, will today make a

joint appearance with George Osborne at Peking University. The week-long visits mark a thaw in Sino-UK relations after David Cameron's meeting with Tibet's spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, last year angered the Chinese government.

Mr Johnson likes to brag that there are now more Chinese students in London than any other city outside China after a 150 per cent surge in the past five years, and cited soaring demand in the world's second-largest economy for everything from British tea to luxury cars.

But Mr Johnson said yesterday that there had been an inadequate number of visa approvals for Chinese tourists. "London is the best city in the world to visit," the mayor told reporters.

"So it's always been a bit depressing to find that more Chinese people seem to end up going to Brussels. I love Brussels, don't get me wrong, beautiful place, but as a

tourist venue it doesn't hold a candle to London."

The mayor remains an unapologetic recruiter of Chinese investment to London. In 2004 just eight Chinese businesses chose to invest in the city; last year the figure was 27. Over the past 10 years, 153 Chinese companies invested in London, compared with 453 from the US and 207 from India.

Three high-profile Chinese investments have been announced this year. Dalian Wanda, a Chinese property group, is planning a £700m luxurious hotel and apartment complex in London's Nine Elms. In May another Chinese developer, Advanced Business Park, announced a £1bn regeneration of Royal Albert Dock as the centrepiece of an "Asian business port". Last month, yet another Chinese group, Zhongrong, unveiled a £500m plan to resurrect Crystal Palace, the Victorian architectural masterpiece that housed the Great Exhibition of 1851. "This avalanche, this

bow wave of Chinese investment... enables us to get off the ground developments that would otherwise be completely stalled," Mr Johnson said. "We wouldn't have a chance of rebuilding Royal Albert Dock or Crystal Palace or whatever it is if not for the drive of some of our partners overseas."

Mr Johnson was also peddling a brand of retail politics unknown in China's tightly controlled political environment, in which mayors play second fiddle to more powerful Communist party secretaries. His two public appearances, at Beijing's premier art district and a large shopping centre, generated much enthusiasm from curious onlookers and admirers.

"I think he's lovely but is also older than I was expecting," said Feng Xian, a young woman at one of the events. "I saw pictures of him riding a bike and was impressed by his manner."

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