

Royal Albert Dock investor parades office city showcase

Business park

By Tom Mitchell in Beijing

Xu Weiping, the little-known Chinese developer who wants to revive London's Royal Albert Dock, is an experienced tour guide. A series of pictures at his Beijing investment centre show the tycoon proudly escorting Liu Qi, a former member of the Chinese Communist party's powerful politburo, around his large office park on the city's southern outskirts.

Mr Xu's guest yesterday was Richard Blakeway, London's deputy mayor for housing, land and property and the point man for the £1bn Docklands project.

"My company is very transparent, I am willing to show you everything," Mr Xu, chairman of Advanced Business Park, said as he invited the Financial Times along on Mr Blakeway's tour.

The first stop for the dep-

uty mayor was the offices of Eve Group, which sells men's fashion and employs 300 people. Xia Hua, Eve's founder and chairwoman, was one of Mr Xu's first Beijing tenants in 2005, taking one of ABP's 500 low-rise buildings. It is a cluster that ABP intends to replicate at the old Royal Albert Dock, not far from the wharves on the river Thames where goods from imperial China were once unloaded.

Ms Xia is one of 10 Chinese investors who committed their companies this week to taking office space at ABP's planned London development.

"I was the first business to open here and I want to be the first business to open in Royal Albert Dock," said Ms Xia, a former law professor from the northeastern port city of Dalian. Almost 60 companies are set to move into Royal Albert Dock, according to the mayor's office, which also predicts the development will support 20,000 jobs and become "a strategic trading hub with Asia".

When the FT visited ABP's Beijing complex in May, sections appeared sluggish and the clocks at its Maya Island Hotel had stopped. Yesterday it was bustling and the clocks at the hotel, which bor-



Boris Johnson travels on the Beijing metro yesterday. 'This is a no-lose position for London,' the mayor said of plans for the Asian trade cluster

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Xu Weiping: 'I am no ordinary boss'



rows its decorative themes from the ancient Mayans, were ticking along nicely.

The decision by London's mayor, Boris Johnson, to do a deal with an obscure Chinese developer that has no overseas projects on its CV has aroused some concern. While Mr Blakeway declined to comment on the selection of ABP, Mr Johnson defended his choice.

"ABP are very confident that they can deliver:

they're backed by the Bank of China and they have experience here in Beijing,"

Mr Johnson said during a visit to ABP's Beijing facility on the third day of his week-long China tour. "They've hired very reputable British developers and architects to go ahead with them... This is a no-lose position for London because this is land that hasn't been used for a very long time and there's an opportunity

to create a huge number of jobs and get businesses going."

The admiration is mutual. "The mayor is no ordinary government official and I am no ordinary boss," said Mr Xu, who communicates with Mr Johnson through translators. "I too am very passionate."

He added that ABP intends to begin construction at Royal Albert Dock in the second half of next

year. After visiting Eve Group, Mr Blakeway was escorted to a two-storey penthouse suite with 360-degree views over Beijing, scallop-shaped beds, fake books and a bust of Schubert. "We've seen a lot of granite and marble this week," said one member of the London delegation.

Some finishing touches are still being applied. As Mr Blakeway was escorted into the building, a puddle

of water was expanding at an alarming rate in one corner of the entrance hall.

While Mr Xu and the deputy mayor rode up to the suite in a gleaming new lift, the ones that their aides stepped into were dimly lit and lined with scrap wood. When the party left the building 20 minutes later, the puddle in the lobby had been mopped up.

Additional reporting by Wan Li