

Evening Standard Comment: The Chinese rescue the Albert Dock

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The Docklands were in their heyday the hub of London's global trade. Now, in a new incarnation, the Royal Albert Dock is to become an ambitious business centre intended to attract Chinese and Asian businesses seeking a base for their London, UK and European operations.

Chinese commercial developer ABP will turn a 35-acre site into a complex of businesses, shops and flats designed by Sir Terry Farrell. If all goes well, it could create 20,000 new jobs and generate up to £23 million a year in business rates. The Government is desperate to attract Chinese investment in Britain; just what an opportunity this represents for doing so can be seen in the Chinese banks and businesses visiting the area today.

The deal underlines just how important it is for government to maintain investment in the capital's infrastructure. One of the reasons for the choice of this part of the Docklands is that it is next to City Airport and the new Crossrail station that will be opened in 2018. The area is already an Enterprise Zone, which means that it can attract tax incentives and simplified planning procedures. But the relative proximity to the City as a financial centre and to the technological enterprises based in Old Street is important as a means of creating a network of business, commerce, finance and technology.

The choice of London as a base for Chinese and Asian business reinforces the case for a more rational visa system for Chinese businesspeople coming here. The Government has made progress on this, with new proposals for a visa system to encourage investors and bright entrepreneurs from the Far East, but we still lag behind the Schengen zone in attracting Chinese visitors. That must change now.

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The East End can only prosper with this advent of the Far East to the Docklands; it's good for the country too.

The (benefits) cap fits

The extent of popular support for the Government's cap on benefits is the most striking element of a new poll. Remarkably, Londoners were just as supportive of restricting payments to £500 a week as the rest of the country, even though the cost of living here is significantly higher than elsewhere. Nearly nine out of 10 Londoners polled supported the cap; indeed 30 per cent thought the proposed limit of £26,000 a year too high and favoured a limit of £20,000 a year. A significant number of people — nearly a third in London — favoured restricting child benefit to the first two children. The findings give a welcome boost to Iain Duncan Smith, the Work and Pensions Secretary, who is already seeking further cuts to the welfare budget. The level of support for his overall benefit reforms in London is 69 per cent.

The poll suggests that Mr Duncan Smith is right to argue that people who themselves have to struggle to pay for rents and mortgages and to plan for their own families resent having to pay for those in the same predicament. Of course the cap on housing benefit will mean disruption to the lives of people who may have to move to cheaper areas, but that is the dilemma that those who are not on benefits have to meet already. For Labour, the findings are a reminder that welfare cuts are an issue on which ministers seem to be on the right side of public opinion.

Bikes in the box

Bike boxes at junctions will join bus lanes as a source of potential fines and penalty points for motorists if Andrew Gilligan, the Mayor's cycling czar, has his way. He's right too; the boxes help cyclists and they must be protected from over-eager drivers.

