

Meet the man behind ABP's £1.7bn Royal Albert Dock plan

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Xu Weiping

The world of international business is dominated by bland suits, dull colours and plain shirts.



Xu Weiping flanked by Mayor of Newham Sir Robin Wales and the council's chief executive Kim Bromley-Derry

Fashion has no place in the boardroom, right?

Xu Weiping would argue to the contrary, but then again, he's not your average executive.

The chairman of ABP and mastermind of the Royal Albert Dock redevelopment, he is undoubtedly a character – intelligent, well-dressed, witty and a very warm and generous host.

Already a major player in his native country, international expansion is his next goal, but what brings a multi-billionaire to a brownfield wasteland in Newham?



Mr Xu entertains the Newham delegation in the wine cellar

“I chose London just like I chose Beijing, 15 years ago,” he said. “I chose Royal Albert Dock just like I chose Fengtai district.

“London is the most international city in the whole of Europe and the Royal Albert Dock is, I think, the core area of east London.”

Work is expected to begin later this year on the 35-acre site – a drop in the ocean compared to the gigantic ABP developments under construction in China – but Mr Xu revealed the current outline is just the start.

“Of course, we will have some expansion. We will tell you the expansion next year. Our strategy will be focused in east London.”

An engineer by trade, Mr Xu was part of a pioneering generation, graduating from university with a degree in industrial automation in 1982 – one of the first batch of students to learn to use digital controls after the cultural revolution.

As the whole Chinese financial landscape began to change from a planned to a market economy, the government selected innovative graduates from across the country to take part in government management and economic research, to help drive forward the new enterprising ideology.

In 1989, he left the civil service to launch his own technology business in a rented Beijing office and claims he made his fortune selling electric fans in winter, with a staff of university interns.

Just 14 years later, the construction of the first ABP project began.

Although Chinese sites like the 150,000,000sq ft south Yangtze project are much larger undertakings, it's the Newham scheme that occupies the majority of his time.

"The Royal Albert Dock project is on my mind every day," he said. "It will be the innovative gateway and platform between China and the UK and the project will work closely with the interested parties.

"It will be one of my great dreams, it will be totally different to that in Beijing, and Haining,

"I will invest much more time and energy in building this project into a great one, it will be a combination of the occidental and oriental culture, and it will surprise you."

A well-travelled man Mr Xu drew on a visit to Kenya's Maasai Mara Park in 2006 to compare the British and Chinese economies.

"I was there for one night, and it gave me the inspiration for ABP to create an economic environment just like the one in the zoo," he said.

"In the UK, the company and the entrepreneurs are as free as those animals in the zoo, as long as you are in the boundary of the UK law.

"It is called market economy. In China in the past we had the planned economy, just like the people in the zoo we have to stay in a cage, there is no freedom.

"But now China is transforming from planned economy to market economy so Chinese people and entrepreneurs are eager for the free economic environment as long as they behave within the law."

http://www.newhamrecorder.co.uk/news/meet_the_man_behind_abp_s_1_7bn_royal_albert_dock_plan_1_4212672