

**‘I can talk to people in Brazil on the Internet
but I want to know my own neighbours and
feel safe enough to be able to go out and
leave my keys in the door’**

Paula, 21

Number 9
In Celebration of Ordinariness

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Let the future Canning Town be a place its inhabitants can be proud of – an ordinary place, with ordinary fortunes and misfortunes

Accustomed, average, conventional, established, everyday, familiar, modest, popular, common, traditional, usual, not exceptional – *ordinary*.

Most people's aspirations for the Millennium are about having the biggest, the best and the most expensive of everything. For us in Canning Town that is not good enough – we want all that is ordinary, all year round. We are fed up with having extraordinary levels of crime, extraordinary problems with housing, extraordinary health and life chances for children and extraordinary results at school.

We want ordinary jobs, to which ordinary people can aspire – jobs of real worth, with adequate pay, and a chance of progression – not the low-paid, part-time jobs that we have become used to. We want ordinary housing in Canning Town, houses with gardens front and back, and pitched roofs – not the sort of problem-ridden, systems-built housing that was erected in times when architects and planners had their way. We want ordinary health facilities, the kind they have in ordinary areas, with well-maintained, up-to-date GP surgeries and hospitals. We want ordinary schools which reflect the ordinary results achieved elsewhere. And, most importantly, we want ordinary teachers who will stay in the area for more than a few months, and teach our children to want and expect better for themselves and their families. In short, we want an ordinary area much like many others.

We want other people to see us as ordinary; we want civil servants and local bureaucrats to see us as ordinary. We don't want to be stuck with labels such as 'socially excluded', 'inner city', 'sink estates', with all the stigmas that come with them.

We want other people to talk to us like ordinary people and not to treat us as some kind of social experiment. We want to be able to exercise our own ordinary rights to decide what is best for us. Please stop coming back, time and time again, with more 'initiatives'. We would have a lot of initiative ourselves if only we were allowed to use it.

Achieving this ordinariness will not be easy. It will take time. It also means that we will have to take on ordinary responsibilities for looking after ourselves and our community. For ordinariness is not something which can be imposed from above – it has to be arrived at organically, to be generated from within. Here, then, is my vision for the Millennium.

In the years to come:

- The queues at Canning Town Post Office will be made up of people queuing to buy stamps and to deposit savings, rather than people collecting benefits.

- n Our schools will be overflowing, not because of a shortage of school places, but because out-of-borough children will want to attend them.

- Our residents will no longer be boycotted by hire-purchase firms, and, as far as insurance companies are concerned, a Canning Town address will carry no more stigma than any other ordinary area.

- Marks & Spencer will have opened several new Metro stores to cash in on the increased amount of disposable income among Canning Town residents.

- The council will have rejected a planning application for a new indoor Sports & Leisure facility on the grounds that Canning Town is already well provided for with two or three centres.

- Health statistics will show that living in Canning Town is no more 'unhealthy' than any other ordinary area, and that there has



been a marked decline in the traditional killers of East Londoners, namely heart disease, cancer and TB.

■ Canning Town's Thames-side location, and its excellent tube, rail and river transport systems, will have been exploited by a huge number of riverside residential and commercial developments, providing yet more jobs for the highly skilled local workforce.

■ London City Airport will have become 'Canning Town Airport', a name considered by its new owners to have more cachet than the 'London City' tag.

■ The Government will be concerned about the alarming population drift from West to East London.

■ Canning Town and its surrounding neighbourhoods will be suffering from over-employment, with local wages at 150% of the national average.

■ A survey of local children will indicate a majority wishing to gain high-status and high-wage jobs.

■ Canning Town will be voted Best Environmental Area in England (the A13 having recently been buried).

■ By 2010 at the latest, Canning Town will have expunged both absolute poverty and, more importantly, the poverty of expectations which has held back its residents for so long.

Above all, it will be a place which will look ordinary to you, but not to us. It will be a place where we are proud to live and work and, yes, even play. It will be a stop on the Jubilee Line, where people passing by may look at each other and say, 'Umm...Canning Town, pretty ordinary isn't it?'

I can't wait.

Stephen Jacobs is chief executive of the Stratford Development Partnership



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