

CASE STUDY:

nationalgrid

# Poplar, Tower Hamlets, London

## History

The gasworks at Poplar was originally built in the 1820s and was then operated by the Poplar Gas Company. It was an early example of a purpose built works provided by a contractor – often described then as an ‘ironmonger’ or ‘iron founder’. This method of delivering a local gas works was common at the time, with an entrepreneur often setting the site up, providing some sort of management and then passing it on to another body, in most cases this would be a local authority. Several works such as the one at Poplar were built at the request of local people, and in 1824 seventeen people living in Robin Hood Lane signed a petition urging Poplar Vestry to buy gas for street lighting. This provided the Barlow family, who had built numerous gas works, with the opportunity to provide a gas works in Poplar.



Excavation of  
**28,000m<sup>3</sup>**  
of material

Costing £16,000 to build, the gas works at Poplar was adjacent to the West India Dock wall. The Dock Company, frightened of fire, therefore insisted on certain standards of gas holder design. The gas works as they were eventually constructed can be seen on Crutchley's New Plan of London (1829). After the Poplar Gas Company fell into financial difficulties, the works were eventually bought out by the Commercial Gas Company, which had acquired part of the McIntosh estate next to the River Lea.

As part of National Grid's on-going commitment to regenerate former gasworks sites, investigations were made some years ago into remediating part of the site. National Grid held talks with the Environment Agency and London Borough of Tower Hamlets over how best to fulfil the council's aim of eventually decommissioning and removing the gas holders at Leven Road.

The site was tenanted by a variety of small industrial units, which needed to be relocated to another part of the site whilst

work took place. Due to the sites' position on the River Lea, the project team were able to remove materials from site via barge to minimise disruption and reduce the project's carbon footprint.

Following planning permission in December 2010, remediation of 3 large areas of the former gas works site was carried out in March 2011 and involved excavation of approximately 28,000 m<sup>3</sup> of material. The project was successfully completed on time.

## Regeneration Strategy

Following extensive site investigations, a strategy based on the removal of environmental risks was agreed in line with discussions with the Environment Agency and London Borough of Tower Hamlets. The remediation work commenced in March 2011, this was based on an environmental improvement strategy targeting 6 key areas of the site such as the below ground gasholder, tar tank and storage areas and involved excavating approximately 28,000 m<sup>3</sup> of material.

### Remediation work included

- 28,000 m<sup>3</sup> tonnes of material was excavated, stockpiled, screened and tested
- Approximately 3,500 m<sup>3</sup> tonnes of material was removed by barge - meaning 200 fewer lorry movements from the site
- Noise, vibration and odour monitoring undertaken throughout
- Creating a temporary home for security and car parking ahead of the 2012 Olympic Games

**3,500m<sup>3</sup>**  
tonnes of material  
removed by barge

Temporary home  
for security and  
car parking ahead  
of the 2012  
Olympic Games

## Outcome



The work was completed on budget and to timescale. Due to the nature of the site and early contact being made with local stakeholders and residents, there were no complaints about the work to remediate the site. The site even featured on the Channel 5 documentary series, Super Grime, about large-scale clean-up operations.

By using barges to remove material from the site, the carbon footprint of the remediation job was significantly reduced. While barging material was not without difficulties, this was a good 'proof of concept' for this method of removing material, and there are some lessons learnt for future projects that look to use the same approach.

### Working with local schools

The team worked with Culloden Primary School, to create a small allotment as part of National Grid's community investment. A school power event was also carried out to celebrate the completion of the project.