

# INVESTIGATING SHAPING PLACES

If you have started to think about your Geography NEA and you have decided that you are interested in investigating Shaping Places/Regenerating Places but you haven't really got started yet, then this document is for you.

It should take a couple of hours to read through this document and have a go at the activities. By the end of it you should have a clearer idea about:

- how and why you could investigate your local neighbourhood, town or city
- the kinds of research question that you could pose
- the importance of the literature review
- how you might collect primary data
- how to analyse any images that you collect during the investigation.

## WHY INVESTIGATE SHAPING PLACES/REGENERATING PLACES?

UK towns and cities are constantly changing. These changes are driven by, for example:

- the need for new housing
- the creation of more sustainable transport links
- changing economic activities – for example in retailing
- the regeneration of brownfield sites to provide opportunities for business, retail, leisure, and housing in mixed land-use developments.

Change and regeneration give geographers lots of potential ideas for an NEA investigation. For example, you could investigate:

- What are the causes (or key drivers) of change?
- Who are the key players and stakeholders?
- How do stakeholders perceive the change?
- Are the impacts of change positive or negative?
- Is change making your neighbourhood/town/city more sustainable?
- Is change in your neighbourhood/town/city creating conflict?

The response to Covid-19 also changed our urban environments. Cities have become quieter as a result of the lockdown (which is something that could be investigated through NEA). Less traffic has meant better air quality. It remains to be seen whether the closure of shops and businesses in the city centre during lockdown will be fully reversed as lockdown is eased, such as, for example, the re-opening of all businesses or the creation of new cycle lanes. These are all things which could be investigated through NEA over the coming months

Yet some things in urban places remain the same. Planners protect significant buildings by using Listed Building status and they conserve the streetscape of some neighbourhoods by creating Conservation Areas. The mix of change and conservation creates similar but different urban landscapes across the UK. Communities develop their own **identity** and people often develop a strong sense of **attachment** to their neighbourhood or home town. People identify with places because of the unique blend of history, culture, and social and physical features (such as landmark buildings) that have evolved over time. This gives geographers another opportunity to investigate Shaping Places/Regenerating Places through an NEA. For example, you could investigate:

- What are the historical, social, cultural or physical features of your neighbourhood/town/city that create its sense of place?
- How is your neighbourhood perceived by different groups of people?
- Is there a perceived threat to this sense of identity?
- How is your town/city represented by different people or in different media?

#### WHAT IS A LITERATURE REVIEW AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Every geography NEA should be given a clear theoretical context. This means thinking carefully about the geographical processes or concepts that help us understand Shaping Places/Regenerating Places. For example, change in your local neighbourhood, town or city can be understood in the context of **processes** such as:

- Regeneration
- Gentrification
- Rebranding

Geographical **concepts** also provide a useful context for understanding change in a local neighbourhood, town or city. Change needs to be understood in the context of such concepts as:

- **Globalisation** – how is your place connected to the rest of the world? How and why can global links lead to change in your local place?
- **Identity** – which features of your neighbourhood/town/city create its sense of place? How and why do people develop a sense of attachment to this place?
- **Inequality** – is inequality a key driver of change or is it a negative consequence of change in your place?
- **Resilience** – how are planners/stakeholders preparing your place for change in the future? For example, how is your neighbourhood preparing for changes in demography? Is there enough of the right kind of housing?
- **Representation** – how is your place represented in the media or popular culture? How do local people feel about this?
- **Risk** – how is your neighbourhood/town/city coping with external threats such as Covid-19 or changes to retailing?
- **Sustainability** – how well does your neighbourhood measure up to the criteria used in Egan’s Wheel? For example, is it well connected and well served?

Giving your NEA a clear theoretical context means that you must link your proposed investigation to:

- a key idea, process or concept that is described in the AQA A level Geography specification
- something you've read in the **geographical literature** – this is probably an explanation of the process or concept that you have found in a textbook, an academic article or a source on the internet.

The specification does not tell you how many pieces of literature you need to read, but a rule-of-thumb would be to use a textbook plus at least two more sources – so three pieces of literature is enough.

Academic journals are a good source for a literature review but they can be:

- difficult to access
- tricky to understand ... so, don't worry if you don't use one.

## INVESTIGATING CHANGE IN LONDON'S EAST END

Before we go any further, it might be interesting to experience a virtual investigation. In this investigation you are going to use Google Street View to conduct a virtual fieldtrip to locations in Limehouse (in London) that are represented in the work of artist, Doreen Fletcher.

Hopefully this experience will help you:

- Identify possible research questions that you might investigate
- Think about how an NEA is used to investigate a theoretical context that is described in the AQA specification and how this can then be linked to a literature review
- Think about how you might use a technique called re-photography to carry out our data collection. Re-photography is a valid technique for Geography NEA which relies on having access to older images from secondary sources
- Understand ways in which visual evidence can be analysed

Here is a working title for our virtual investigation:

*How is the neighbourhood of Limehouse changing?*

As titles go, this one is too vague for a good NEA title. What do we mean by change? Where is the link to a geographical concept? However, while you are doing the virtual investigation, think about how you could improve on it. How might you do something similar in your own area but with a greater focus on:

- a geographical process such as gentrification or rebranding
- or a concept such as identity or representation?

As you work through the images think about potential research questions that you could investigate in this place. Jot down at least three different research questions. Make sure that each one can be connected to a theoretical context such as one of the concepts listed on page 3.

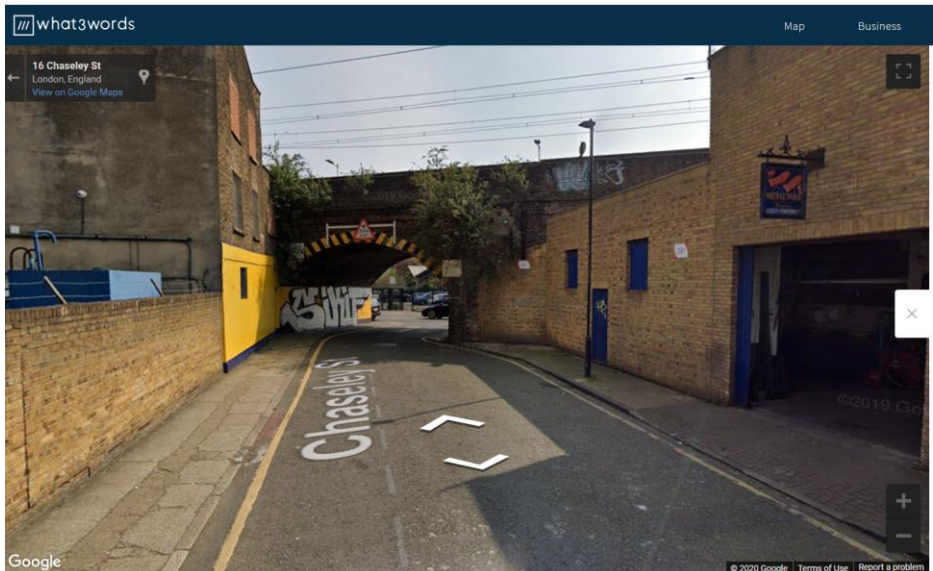
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## VIRTUAL INVESTIGATION OF LIMEHOUSE, LONDON

You are going to use a collection of images created by local artist, Doreen Fletcher, to investigate Shaping Places/Regenerating Places. Doreen has been painting images of this part of London since the 1980s. She is interested in capturing images of features that help create a sense of identity in this place but which are also vulnerable to change. Cafes, corner shops, launderettes and public houses frequently feature in her paintings.

To do the investigation you need to log on to a mapping website called What3Words. This site uses combinations of 3 words to identify very specific locations. So, for example, the location of Photo 1 (which is in Limehouse) can be found by searching the What3Words website with: rigid.buzz.sheep

### Photo 1 Railway bridge on Chaseley Street, Limehouse



This image was screen shot from what3words which uses Google Street view.

When you are on the What3Words website:

1. Find the location of each of the images of Doreen Fletcher's paintings that follow using the unique combination of 3 words
2. At each location, drop the symbol of the yellow person onto the map so you can see what the street looks like 'now'
3. Take a screen shot so you can compare the image in the painting with a recent photo of the same location. Obviously, if you visited the location in real life (rather than in the virtual world) you could take an actual photo of the place. This technique is called **re-photography**. It is a primary data collection technique that is used to collect evidence of how places have changed since the original image was created.

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#### THINGS TO THINK ABOUT DURING THE VIRTUAL FIELDTRIP

Think about the following questions while you conduct your virtual fieldtrip. Think about how you might take one or more of these ideas and use it to focus an investigation in your own locality.

- What has changed? What hasn't changed? Is there any pattern?
- Why does this change occur? How could you find out?
- What has been lost? What has been gained?
- Who has benefited? Which groups of people might have lost out?
- What might local people think about these changes? How could you find out?
- What has the artist painted? Why might she have chosen them?
- Does this collection of images create a clear sense of identity?
- Would other local people choose similar features to represent this place? How could you find out?
- How well do these paintings represent Limehouse? How is this place represented in other media?

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THE IMAGES

Image 1      **Fishmongers, Commercial Road (2003)**

Geo-location: [headed.pocket.goad](http://headed.pocket.goad)



Image 2

Commercial Road in the Snow (2003)

Geo-location: memory.detects.wings





Image 3

VIP Garage, Commercial Road (2001)

Geo-location: [vest.bits.mobile](http://vest.bits.mobile)



Image 4

Emporium, Commercial Road (2017)

Geo-location: rental.tins.oasis



Image 5

Metalworks, Chaseley Street (2017)

Geo-location: rigid.buzz.sheep



Image 6

The Queen's Head Public House (2017)

Geo-location: sport.risk.calms



Image 7

Salmon Lane in the Rain (1987)

Geo-location: choice.admit.couches



Image 8

Hand Car Wash, Salmon Lane (2017)

Geo-location: fall.social.mini



Image 9

Whit Sunday, Commercial Road (1989)

Geo-location: juror.either.strict



You can see more of Doreen Fletcher's paintings, and read her blog, here:

<https://www.doreenfletcherartist.com/>

## CONSOLIDATING THE INVESTIGATION

Now that you have completed the virtual fieldtrip to Limehouse there are a number of things you can do to consolidate your understanding and move on to planning your own NEA. I have suggested three activities below.

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### ACTIVITY 1. READ SOME GEOGRAPHICAL LITERATURE

One academic geographer who famously wrote about Shaping Places/Regenerating Places and the concepts of globalisation and identity was Doreen Massey.

Click on the link below to read “A Global Sense of Place” written by Doreen Massey in 1991.

[http://www.aughty.org/pdf/global\\_sense\\_place.pdf](http://www.aughty.org/pdf/global_sense_place.pdf)

Having read the article, think about the following points:

1. On pages 5 and 6, the author describes a walk down Kilburn High Road, in London. She concludes by writing:

*If it is now recognized that people have multiple identities then the same point can be made in relation to places.*

From what you have seen of Limehouse, both in Doreen Fletcher’s paintings and in the images shown on Google Street View, think about this idea of places having multiple identities.

a) What factors may contribute to places having multiple identities?

b) Are these identities due to internal causes (endogenous) or external links to other places (exogenous)?



2. On Page 8, Doreen Massey writes:

*Places do not have single, unique 'identities'; they are full of internal conflicts.*

Why it is important to recognise that change creates conflict? How could we investigate this through NEA?

a) Identify groups of people (stakeholders or players) who may have differing views on change in your local place.

b) What might you ask them?

c) How could you make sure that you get a balance of views from across these groups?

During the Covid-19 lockdown it may not be possible to talk to people face-to-face. Research how you could collect a digital survey.

3. On page 7, the author asks us to imagine we are a satellite, looking down on the Earth – and to visualise the things that connect us:

*If one moves in from the satellite towards the globe, holding all those networks of social relations and movements and communications in one's head, then each 'place' can be seen as a particular, unique, point of their intersection. It is, indeed, a meeting place.*

What is connecting your neighbourhood to other places? Think about the movement of people, and think about how goods, ideas and information are spread around the globe.

a) How is your place connected to other places?

b) Where is it connected to?

c) How could you investigate the importance of these connections?

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## ACTIVITY 2. THINK ABOUT RESEARCH QUESTIONS

You will need an aim for your investigation. The aim must be clearly linked to the AQA specification.

Some relevant sections of the AQA specification are copied below. Read these carefully and then suggest an overall aim for an investigation into Shaping Places/Regenerating Places in your own locality. Make sure you can make the link between your aim, the specification and a suitable theoretical context (see pages 2-3 for some advice on the theoretical context).

It is normal to break the overall aim down into manageable chunks by using two or three research questions or hypotheses. Once you have chosen a possible aim for your investigation, suggest how you could break it down using two or three suitable research questions.

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### EXTRACT FROM THE EDEXCEL A LEVEL GEOGRAPHY SPECIFICATION:

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**4A.3** Past and present connections have shaped the economic and social characteristics of your chosen places.

a. Regional and national influences have shaped the characteristics of your chosen places. These places can be represented in a variety of different forms, giving contrasting images to that presented more formally and statistically. How the lives of students and those of others are affected by this continuity and change, both real and imagined.

b. International and global influences that have shaped your chosen places. These places can be represented in a variety of different forms, giving contrasting images to that presented more formally and statistically. How the lives of students and those of others are affected by this continuity and change, both real and imagined.

c. Consideration of the way in which economic and social changes in your chosen places have influenced people's identity.

**4B.6** There is a range of ways to evaluate how people view their living spaces.

b. Different media can provide contrasting evidence about the image different people have of your chosen local place.

c. How different representations of your chosen local place could be used to influence the perception of cultural and demographic issues and conflict.

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### ACTIVITY 3. ANALYSE THE IMAGES YOU MADE DURING THE VIRTUAL INVESTIGATION

Re-photography allows you to identify change since the original image was made. Images are an example of qualitative data and a suitable way to analyse this evidence is through careful annotation of the differences that can be observed between the old and the new images. What has changed and what remains the same?

It is important to realise that labels are very different from annotations. A label is a simple description. For example, in Image 7, a simple label would point at the public house in Doreen Fletcher's painting and read:

*This public house has been demolished.*

Effective analysis involves carefully making sense of the evidence and offering an interpretation of it. In this example, an annotation of Image 7 could involve a consideration of:

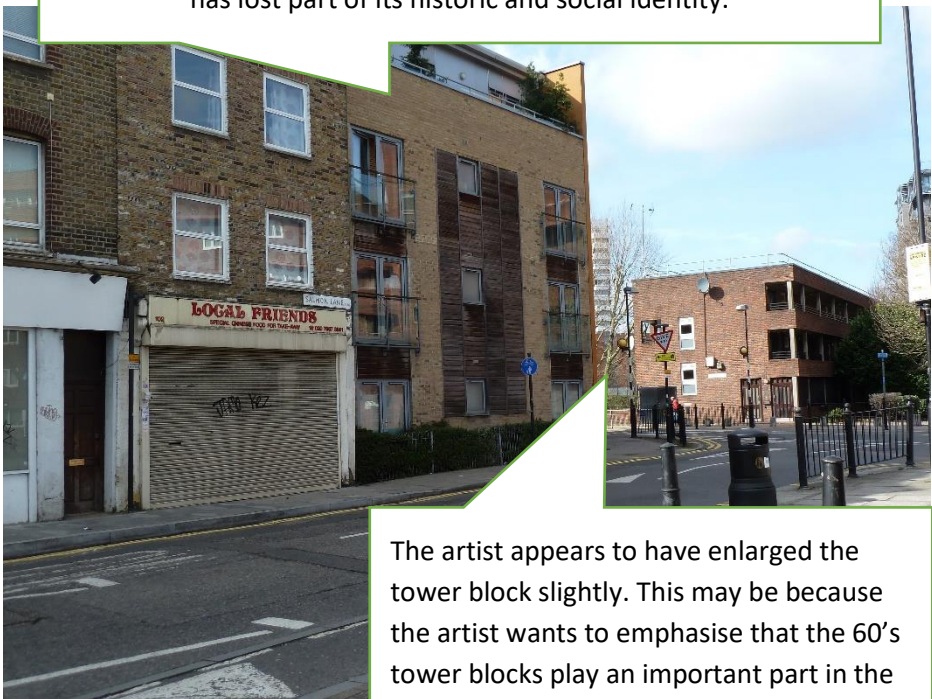
- the factors that may have caused change in this community
- how this type of change may affect communities, their sense of identity, and the local economy.

Annotation, therefore, needs to go further than description. You need to make inferences – linking this change to your understanding of the wider theoretical context – in this case, making links to concepts such as change, identity or attachment. It's also a good idea to use connectives such as 'so' or 'this means that' to develop chains of reasoning within your annotation.

The photo that follows shows Salmon Lane in 2019. Look at the annotation carefully. It does three things that make this analysis rather than description:

1. It uses connectives to create a chain of reasoning.
2. It refers directly to a review of geographical literature.
3. Also notice how the annotation refers to the 'voice' of the artist.

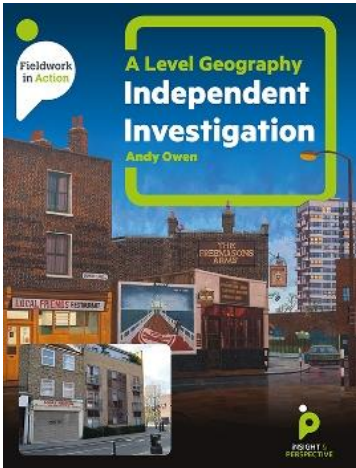
The public house in the painting has been replaced by flats so the community has lost a meeting place. A quarter of the UK's pubs closed in the period 1982-2017<sup>1</sup>. This means that this community has lost part of its historic and social identity.



The artist appears to have enlarged the tower block slightly. This may be because the artist wants to emphasise that the 60's tower blocks play an important part in the identity of this place.

1. *Why London's pubs are disappearing.* (2017), The Economist.

<https://www.economist.com/britain/2017/08/24/why-londons-pubs-are-disappearing> Accessed online 06/05/2019.



## FURTHER READING

Hopefully you have found this document useful. If so, you may find this book helpful.

Students are given all the advice they need to work systematically through their investigation from start to finish by breaking down the Independent Investigation into a sequence of manageable steps. Each step is broken down into Action Points so, at any given moment, students know exactly what they should be doing next. Checklists provide reminders of what needs to be completed. The techniques needed to sample, collect data, represent and analyse it are described methodically so that individual students can make the right choices for their own investigation.

A Level Geography Independent Investigation is published by Insight and Perspective. It was given a Geographical Association Highly Commended Award in 2020.



Amazon Customer

★★★★★ **Brilliant - a real find**

Reviewed in the United Kingdom on 22 May 2020

This is the BEST book for staff and students alike. The content is user friendly, and refreshing. New ideas and clear instructions combined with the necessary fundamentals that geographers need to know.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andy Owen taught GCSE and A level Geography for 21 years before working for one of the exam boards – making sure that GCSE Geography exams were fair and consistent. He has written numerous books for students and teachers. He is an examiner and moderator.