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Comment: Broadcast legacy for 2012

[Kay Hutchison, 6 July 2009](#)

Media consultant Kay Hutchison outlines why a media centre move to the East End of London will be a lasting legacy of the London 2012 Olympic Games.

There is a 'must happen' feeling among everyone associated with the project

There are there clear benefits for the media industry

There are also benefits for education, for sport, and for the local community as a whole

It started with a question: "How would you like to have a piece of the giant 1.3m square foot 'shed' they are building in the East End of London as a Broadcast Centre for the 2012 Games?"

Not a question you get asked every day. Peter Welton, executive director of East London Business Alliance (ELBA) had come to see me, in my then role as director of partnerships at Red Bee Media, the company responsible for the payout and branding of all BBC Channels, and a host of others including Virgin Media, Channel 4 and UKTV. Red Bee's owner, Macquarie - itself a member of ELBA - had suggested we speak.

I have a long history in media, but was initially sceptical about the attractions of any move to East London, as the industry is currently centred in West London - Soho, White City, Chiswick and out as far as Pinewood. However, the more I worked on the opportunity, the more I could see it really made sense.

It's two years since that initial conversation. During that time we have been working to define the opportunity, determine what customers want and to articulate a vision. As the months have passed, many events have conspired, almost magically, to create the most amazing 'must happen' feeling among everyone associated with the project. It's also wonderful to realise that not only are there clear benefits for the media industry, but also for education, for sport, and for the local community as a whole.

The 2012 Broadcast Centre is the place where all Olympic TV coverage will be coordinated and it will also house some 20,000 journalists, producers and technicians. In terms of physical size, the development would stretch between Oxford Circus and Tottenham Court Road in London with a floor area equivalent to that of the tallest building in London's Canary Wharf and then some. Thanks to the Broadcast Centre the world gets to see, read and hear about the London 2012 Games, but for all its importance, it's rarely the focus of public attention. The architectural interest is centred on Zaha Hadid's Acquatics Centre and the enduring sporting memories of 2012 will of course focus on inspiring performances at the many sporting venues, including the innovative 80,000 seater Olympic Stadium.

But in reality, it's the Broadcast Centre complex that has the greatest potential to deliver a lasting legacy, one which will surpass that delivered by any previous Games. 2012 offers up a unique set of circumstances. London is already a world leading media centre, digital media is fast supplanting the old, analogue, business models of the last century and so major structural change is inevitably coming. London's own focus is also gradually moving east. Add to all this the fact that Hackney, where the complex is located, is itself home to one of the most vibrant and extensive creative communities in Europe and you have the ingredients for a truly inspired media centred development. The area boasts connections with some of the UK's top creative talent (Tracey Emin is one in a long list of big name artists who have worked in the area) and don't forget the hundreds of talented young creatives that are there now - the Traceys of the future.

We have been consulting widely, engaging the local Council, all of East London's Higher Education providers, the LDA, and of course with all the creative sector's industry groups. We shared the collective vision through a specially commissioned film - New Generation London - which got one of its first airings at London House in Beijing. It's not all been plain sailing - virtually every fortnight there has been a new challenge: just as we expected to proceed to the next level the focus would suddenly change, or a new issue emerge.

The Olympic Development Authority (ODA), the agency responsible for building all the facilities, are understandably focused on two key issues - delivering faultlessly to the deadline and doing so within budget - and there are no second chances, the world's biggest media event has to start on time - on the 27 July 2012- and it has to work. Yes, everyone acknowledges the legacy is important, but perhaps not at the price of delivering the Games!

The Broadcast Centre legacy opportunity was recognised early on. The initial solution was to appoint a specialist, private sector, developer, but as financial markets collapsed and property prices fell they found it impossible to find finance. The early part of this year was therefore spent with UK government and the ODA re-evaluating the options, and it was here that we benefited from all

the work we had done in the past. Building on our work, and with the support of various public sector organisations and industry representatives, we were able to demonstrate the opportunity really did exist. So, in January 2009, the UK government decided to back the vision, agreeing that 'best value' would indeed be generated by following the original proposal for a permanent facility and so it agreed to put £350m behind project.

There are of course other potential legacy projects - the village of 3,000 homes, the fantastic sports venues, including main stadium and aquatics centre, and the Olympic Park itself which will be the largest urban park to have been created anywhere in Europe in the last 150 years. All will become the responsibility of the newly formed Legacy Company - under Baroness Ford. But it is the Broadcast Centre that has the potential to be the main legacy centre piece of the Games.

The UK has vision, imagination and ideas – but it is not best known in recent times for actually embracing wholesale changes like those we envisage. However, in my view, as people see the Games infrastructure emerge, on time and on budget, it will bring about a renewed sense of confidence, drive and momentum enabling us all to embrace this 'once in a generation' opportunity.

Kay Hutchison, pictured above, now runs her own media consulting company Belle Media, together with her business partner Richard Dijkstra. Before founding Belle Media, Hutchison held a variety of senior roles at BBC Broadcast/Red Bee Media, most recently as director of partnerships, responsible for developing and managing relationships with global businesses including LOCOG (London 2012 Organising Committee), Microsoft, Apple, IBM, Siemens, Alcatel-Lucent, Accenture, VizRT, Ericsson, C4, C5, ITV BBC, BSkyB and Virgin Media. She is also the driving force behind the Legacy 2020 business partnership looking at the post Games use of the 2012 International Broadcast Centre.

Prior to BBC/Red Bee she worked as an independent consultant on projects that varied from advising on an on-air design pitch for Discovery Kids, USA, the UK Government's feasibility study for Teacher's TV and a strategic report for Channel 4 on out-sourcing all its Presentation. Career highlights included leading the on-air presentation launch team at Channel Five and Head of On-Air at Disney Channel UK when it launched in 1995.

For further information about Belle Media, visit: www.bellemedia.co.uk

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