**Vision**
Thames Ward Community Project (TWCP) aims to build social cohesion within a deprived and fractured community, and to ensure that the massive social and physical upheaval that will transform this part of east London offers new opportunities for the local community. The project will bring together schools, community groups and residents from across Thames ward, over a period of three years, to develop initiatives that will improve the environment, achieve better health and quality of life for residents, increase their skills and job opportunities and ensure that they have a strong voice and can influence change in the area over the next decade.

By year three, the project will have established a resident-led Community Development Trust to continue this work into the future and to ensure that the initiatives that emerge over the next three years are sustainable.

**Context**
The development programme on Barking Riverside is set to double the ward population over the next ten years. It is attracting new investment from developers and national programmes that could benefit the whole community. However, to date, there has been no significant investment in community development and, without a clear strategy to engage the whole community, there is a danger that the changes will not benefit the older, established community and might exacerbate divisions rather than bring people together. TWCP will employ skilled community organisers to ensure that residents (in the older estates as well as the new properties) benefit from new opportunities arising from Barking Riverside, and also support them in developing the sense of ownership and control that is needed to build a more resourceful, inclusive and forward looking community.

**Riverside School**
Riverside School lies at the heart of this community and will lead the project, providing a base for activities and a connection into the community. The students will participate in every aspect of the project, helping to involve their parents, carers and other residents, and encouraging new people to get involved, thus ensuring that the project is firmly rooted in the local community.

The school is committed to serving the local community by providing the very highest standards of education and by making facilities available to local people outside school hours. They also want to be a positive catalyst for social cohesion and regeneration, by employing more local people within the school and by ensuring that families (children and parents) benefit from the opportunities created by the Riverside development programme.

The **Thames Ward Community Project** will enable the school to fulfil this aspect of its vision. Because the school serves the whole community, it offers a ‘neutral space’ where residents from different estates, people of different ages, faiths, cultures and backgrounds can come together to build a sense of unity and common purpose in this context of rapid change.
Aims and activities

Based on discussions with over 300 residents and with staff and students from Riverside School, the project will focus around three areas of activity:

• **Practical initiatives with young people:**
  - training them to listen to/interview and work with residents, so that students build relationships across the community; ensuring that the project remains rooted in what residents care about and is ‘owned’ and led by local people
  - a local history project where pupils will explore the lives and experience of long-term and more recently arrived residents and develop exhibition and web-based materials that tell a positive story about Thames ward and celebrate the diversity of the community
  - volunteering - students will volunteer, as part of the school’s ‘active citizenship programme’, to help clear overgrown gardens for elderly and disabled residents and spearhead the wider environmental projects outlined below.

• **An inter-generational ‘Community Gardening’ project will:**
  - tackle environmental neglect by restoring community spaces such as the Nature Reserve and by turning at least two derelict open spaces into community gardens and allotments
  - provide a tool-library and seed bank, and restore unkempt gardens through volunteering
  - establish a ‘gardening resource centre’ at the school with opportunities for training and potentially for local employment.
  This will help transform Thames ward from being one of the most polluted areas in the borough to being one of the most productive, and in the process create opportunities for skills development and jobs. It will also help to foster community cohesion between the settled community and families moving into new housing, and between residents from different ethnic backgrounds, improve health and life-skills.

• **Community-led facilities for families and children:**
  In collaboration with the Sue Bramley Children’s Centre and other partners, the project will seek to improve local provision for families and the elderly by;
  - supporting existing community projects and developing new community projects such as English language classes, play-schemes, activities around food, art and music
  - strengthening existing family support groups and opening up new facilities in the school for parents and teenagers
  - working with partners to improve play provision.

*Community Development Trust:*

Building on these community-led activities, we aim to establish a CDT in order to provide a more viable, long-term framework for community participation and support for community enterprise. Over the next three years, the project will help our partners broker their investment and intentions with the whole community; help residents to access new training and job opportunities; identify and support community enterprises; generate additional income for a sustainable future, and help provide a strong community voice in relation to the development programme.

This represents an ambitious vision for the project but we think it is achievable. It is an idea that residents welcome and it will enable the school, having launched and nurtured the project, to become a partner in a broad-based community organisation, which is a more sustainable way forward.
Project outcomes
1. The community will be stronger and more cohesive, with pride in its diversity and the leadership and organisational capacity to influence change, to seize new opportunities and build a sustainable future.

2. Residents, especially the elderly, will enjoy better physical and mental health and well-being, through exercise, better eating, reduced isolation, mutual support and better services.

3. Residents, especially young people, will gain skills and feel more confident about their future employability and life chances.

4. The image of Thames ward will improve – people will perceive it to be a cleaner, more attractive environment that encourages neighbourliness and makes better use of local facilities, open space and buildings.

Project partners
The project was initiated by Margaret Hodge MP and Riverside School, working with local faith and other community groups in Thames ward. It is supported by the Partnership Learning Trust and the following organisations:
- **London Borough of Barking & Dagenham (LBBD)** is committed to encouraging new enterprise, new opportunities, new people into the borough, in ways that ensure existing communities also benefit.
- **Participatory City** will encourage community participation across the borough through ‘Everyone Everyday’ this will focus on Thames ward from 2018.
- **London & Quadrant** Housing Association (L&Q) is the lead developer for Barking Riverside and is committed to working with residents across the ward.
- **Barking Riverside Ltd**, (BRL) also recognises that this project can help establish better links with the wider community.
- **BR Healthy New Towns** (BR-HNT) aim to change culture, lifestyles, health outcomes and social dynamics - our project will help HNT to reach further into the community.
- **London City Airport** (LCA) has expressed a willingness to help the project, especially in relation to reducing pollution.
- **Sustrans** are keen to work with us on developing an adventure playground, a Green Gym and other projects in the Nature Reserve.
- **B&D Council for Voluntary Service** (BD-CVS) are keen to strengthen the voluntary sector in Thames ward.
- ‘**Growing Communities’ Dagenham** has offered advice on our gardening projects – and we have links with other inspiring projects beyond Barking and Dagenham.
- **Community Organisers Ltd**, a national CO network, is providing training support. They will also link us to community projects around the country to share new ideas and inspiration.
- **Academic institutions** – we are exploring the possibility of academic support via Queen Mary University and Kings College.

Project management
Lottery funding through ‘Reaching Communities’ will enable the school to employ two community workers to develop the project: a skilled **Project Director** with significant community organising and community enterprise experience, and with relevant CDT expertise; and a **Community Organiser** (CO).
The project will be managed by a **steering committee**, led by Riverside School, with a broad-based resident membership, as well as outside expertise and input from key partners. This
will be particularly important in the formative stages of the project, before the CDT is in place.

A broader advisory group will also be convened in order to ensure that all residents are connected with the project and have the opportunity to become more involved as the initiative develops.

**Project development to date:**
In June 2016, with interim funding from Power to Change, Riverside School employed a CO to listen to residents and build support for the project. She has talked to nearly 400 residents, of whom 75 (to date) have said they want to be actively involved. She set up a student-led *Community Action Group (RS-CAG)* and, since September, the students have listened to residents and taken action to tackle issues like poor quality environment and lack of access to green space and leisure facilities. They have cleaned up Ripple Nature Reserve and are working with partners to make it safe and accessible for the community to use. They have done litter-picks and produced publicity to improve the ‘face’ of Thames ward, and they are embarking on a local history project that will connect young people with the elderly and with more recently arrived families. Land has been set aside for a *Community Garden/Resource Centre* on the new school site. The school will also ensure that students learn from the development programme itself – a massive physical and social experiment in urban renewal taking place on their doorstep.

Over the past year, the school has become a focus for community activity and is beginning to build bridges with the wider community. Residents are thrilled to see young people getting involved and have rallied round the school and the project. The school wants to tap into new opportunities for jobs and training linked to the Riverside development programme, and to mobilise the enthusiasm and energy of the whole community, young and old, to bring about positive social, economic and environmental change to this rapidly transforming part of Barking.

**Timeframe**
Reaching Communities funding was confirmed at the beginning of July. This provides more than £300,000 over three years. Additional funding has been committed by the Council and other partner organisations. This will amount to at least £50,000.

We hope to appoint the Project Director, followed by the Community Organiser, over the summer in order to maintain momentum and (ideally) be ready to press ahead with new developments at the start of the new school year in September 2017.