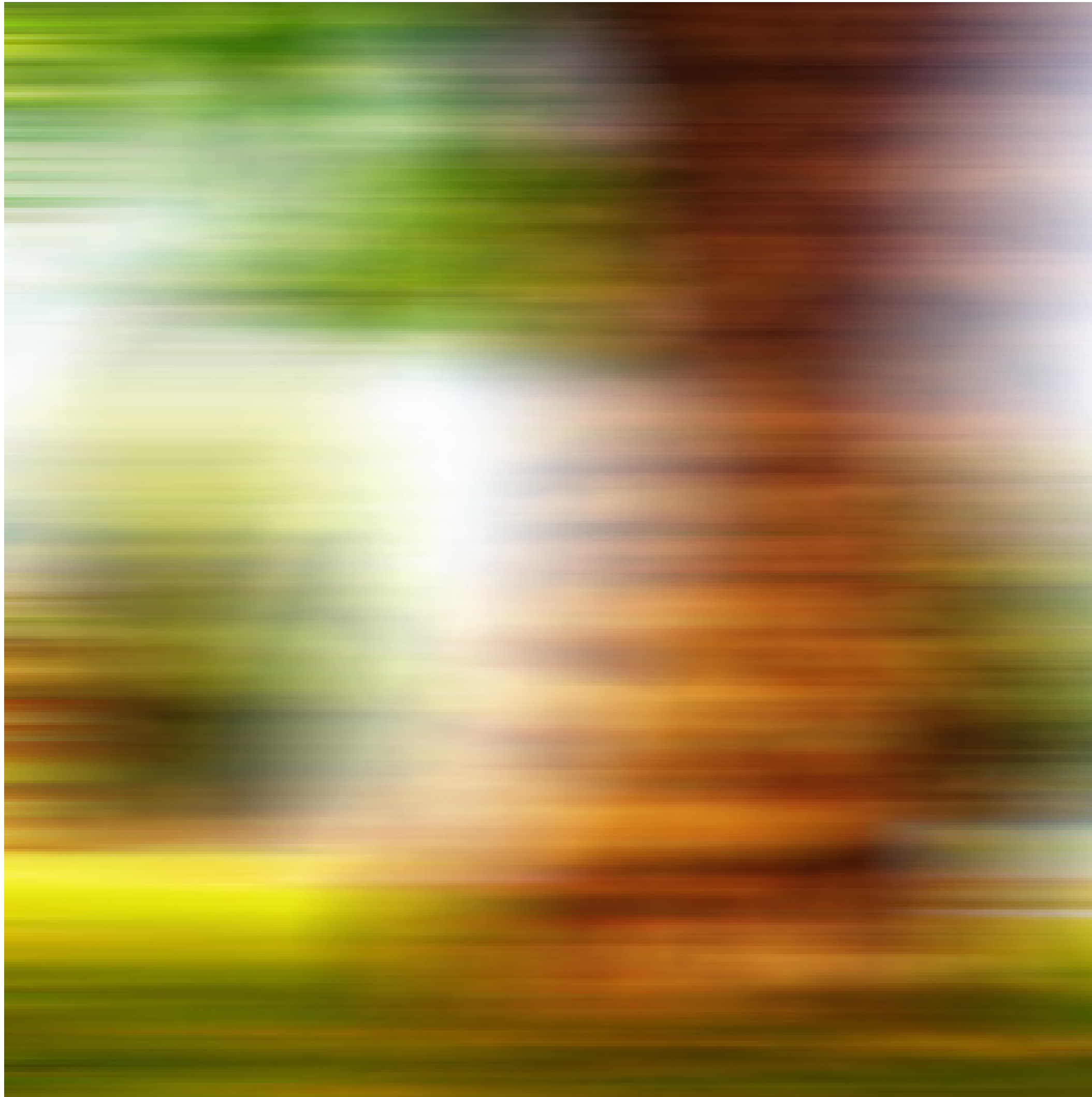


Mass-Observation Project on 3rd June 2009 by Ela Kosmaczewska

Exploring the Regeneration Project
Elephant & Castle



St Mary's Park

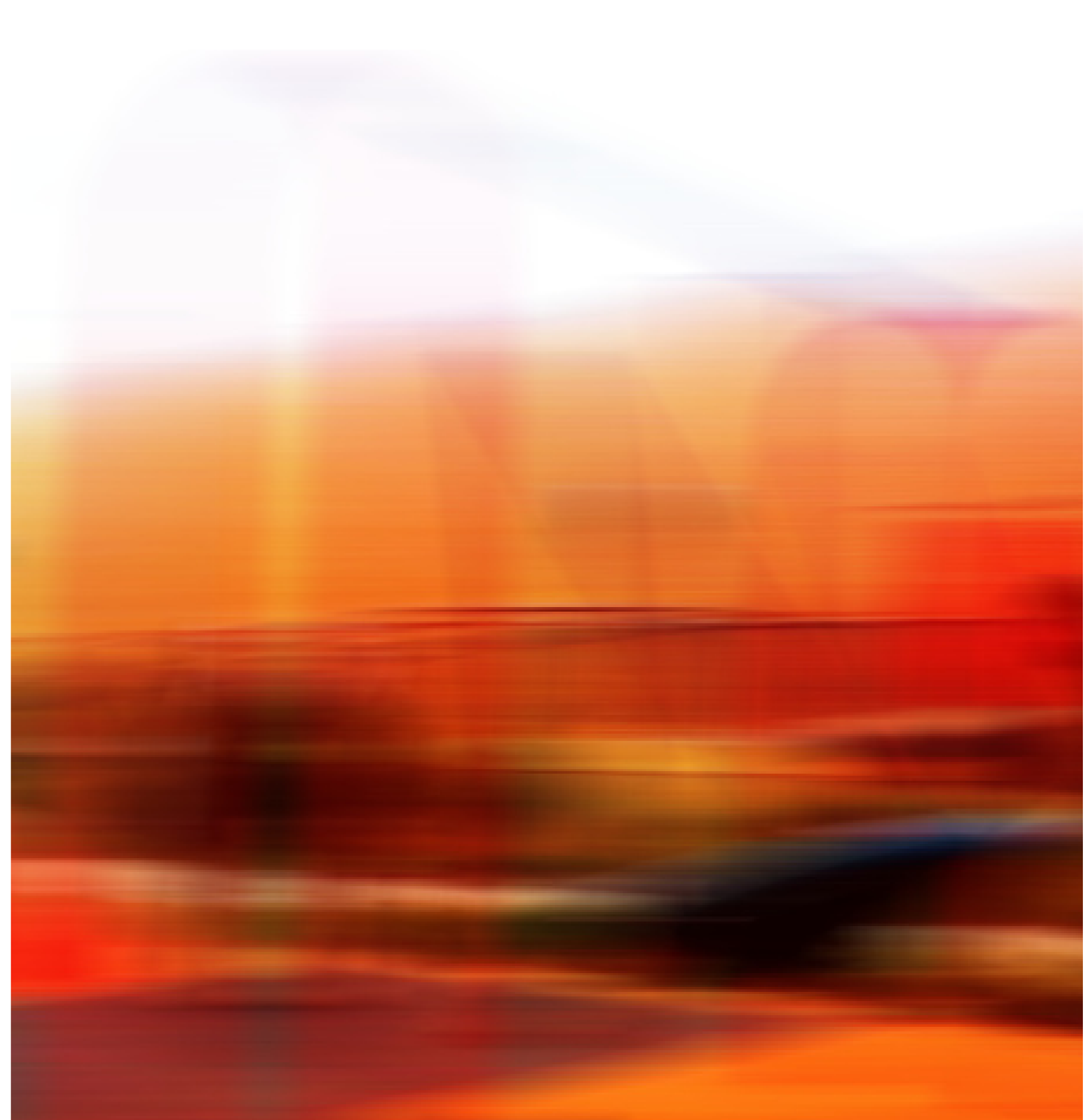
Standing in this large expanse, once holy ground, where even those underground have moved on to allow for redevelopment to take place. Bumpy, bleached out rectangular patches are left behind, a constant reminder of those who once lay beneath the soil. *What a bizarre juxtaposition of death and new, hopeful life. Perhaps this here regeneration effort is purgatory, awaiting it's after-life manifestation.*

Jim shares memories of a once pristine space and leaning against a tombstone as a young man, where we now sit. The tomb no longer there.

One vast old plane tree proudly stands slightly off-centre, its leaves rich, full, unspoilt, except for the carrier bag with *dubious*, unknown contents hanging some 8ft up among its leaves.

Newington Butts

The view across the grassy expanse overlooks a primary coloured playground and beyond that too, on the horizon the Shopping Centre graphics, deep red facade stand out proudly, retaining their colour despite the polluted smog-clogged air. Set against the yellow and blue zebra-crossing beacons, the playground appears to extend into the shopping centre, obscuring the heavy traffic between them. The garish colour palette reflects the possibility of finding potential peace here. *Impossible*. Traffic roars past in all directions.





Newington Butts Pt. 2

The information centre 'Connecting the people of Southwalk to London and Europe' is closed: disconnected. Perhaps not enough funding to keep it open. Enough for solar-paneling though. *Nice touch.* Nothing here seems smooth and calm; all around a sense of unfinished business.

At the bus stops along Newington Butts, Lambert, who lives in Brixton, but comes through the area frequently, tells me that the estate being pulled down is promising. Gang wars between the two estates behind the shopping centre had made people nervous, "The redevelopment is ultimately, a good thing and can only spell positive things ahead." He seemed compelled to mention the landmark, Hannibal House, which he quite likes. I mistakenly thought he was speaking of the Strata Tower which to me, was far more compelling!

Shopping Centre

The entrance to the centre reminds me of a stretch of Paris by the Moulin Rouge where market stalls inside and outside populate the walkway with constant bombardment of offers and sale items. Here though, the mood is somber. The stench around me is unbearable, potent, pissy-smelling. No wonder the faces look sour.

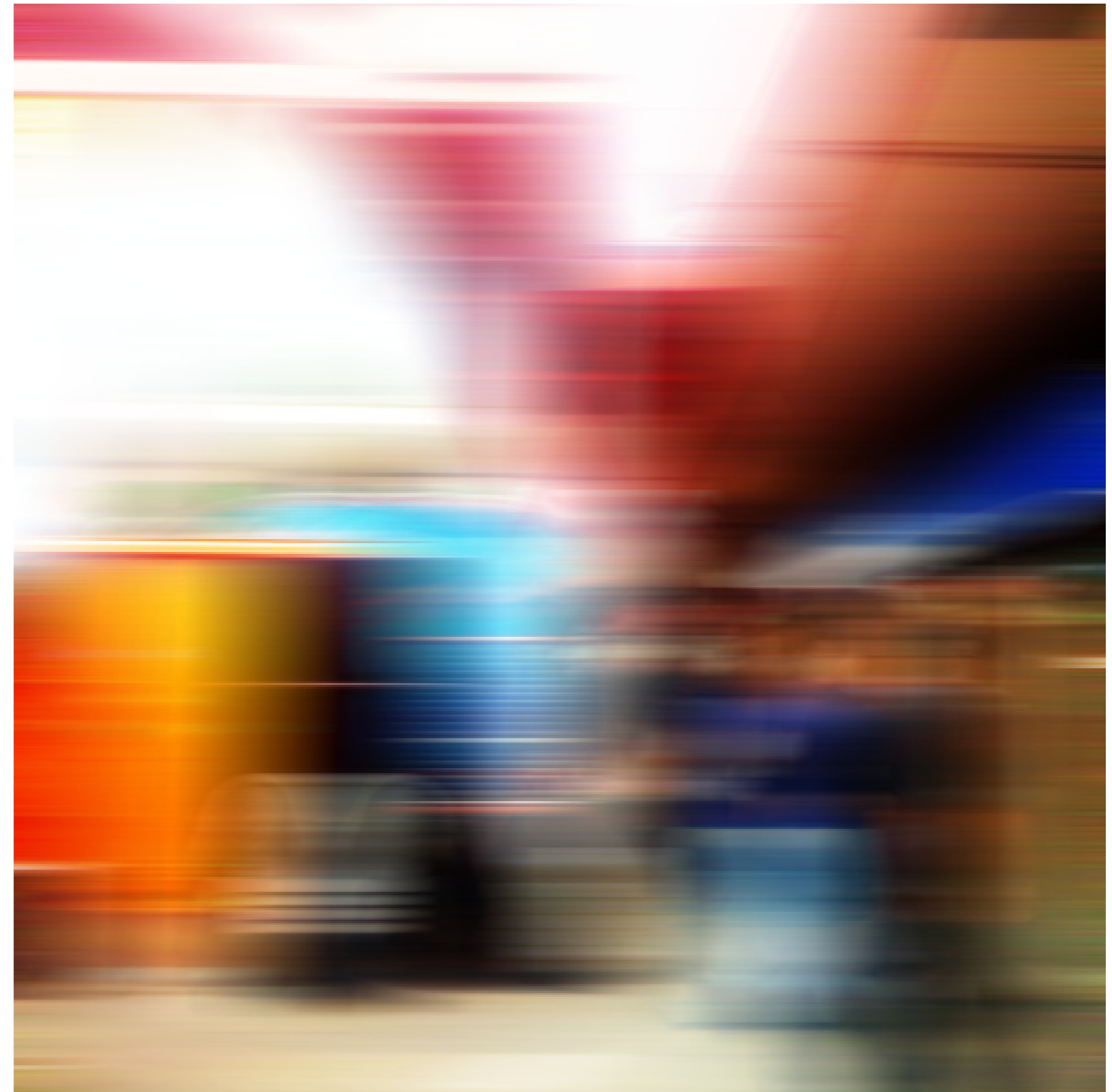
A variety of languages pass me by - Russian, perhaps Czech, an Eastender and is that Mandarin?

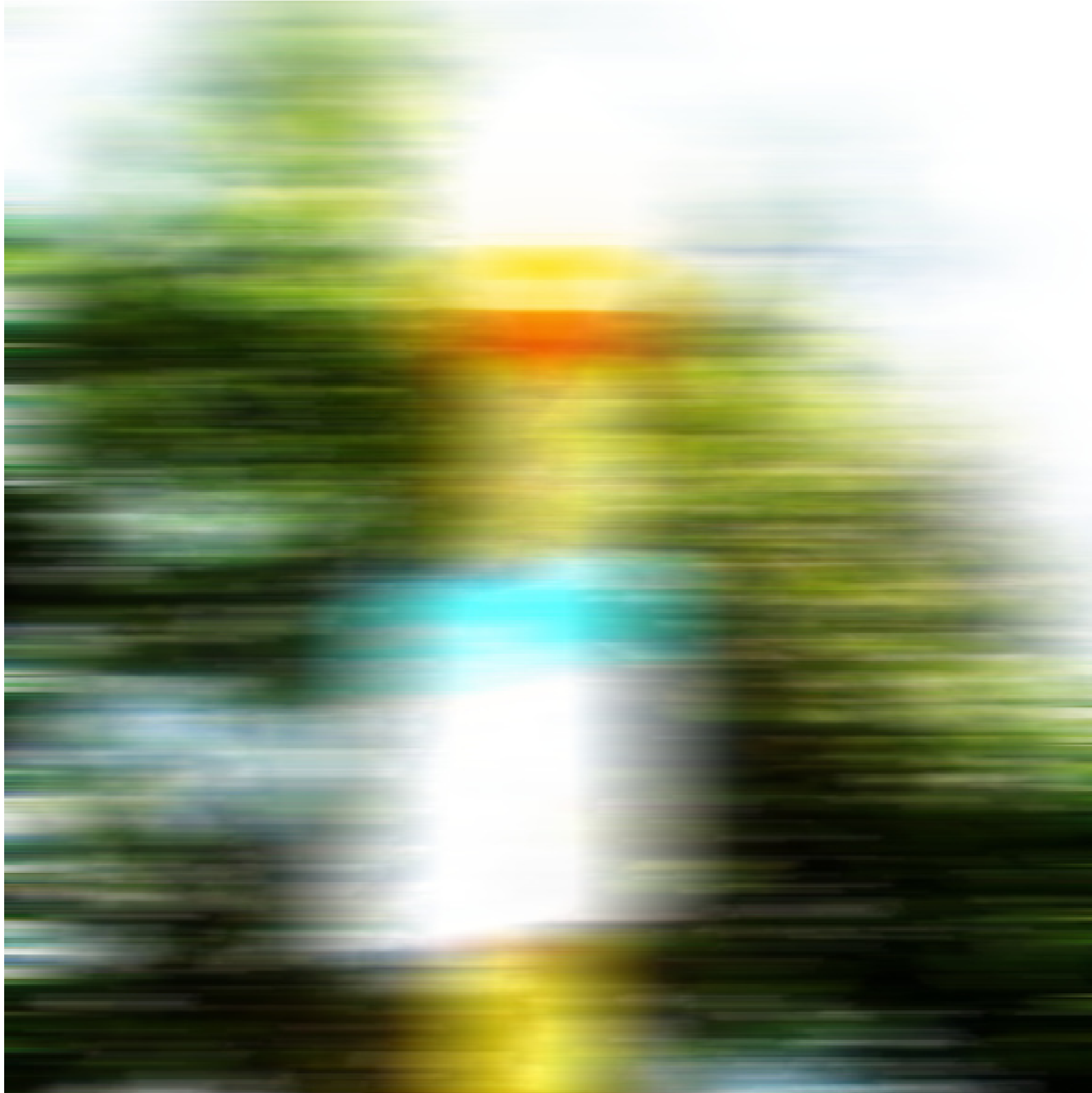
Just near the entrance a Lebanese mobile phone seller blanks me - no interest in speaking about the regeneration project. *Perhaps over-saturated with questions or perhaps simply doesn't like a smiling face?*

Welcome to London Palace, the casino at the top of the Shopping Centre. As we stand waiting for the staff to acknowledge us, a constant stream of white, pension-age women filter up the escalator and to the left, off into the distance, beyond the files of fruit machines.

The bowling/online bingo area to our right is empty for Christine from Nunhead who is happy to chat. Playing online bingo she tells me she's not bothered about the regeneration project. She'll still be playing online, whatever. Her mounds of shopping and happy disposition suggest she's not directly affected.

Laston, who manages the bowling reception knows nothing about how the regeneration project will affect him and his colleagues. Seems nervous, uncertain, but welcoming; "Nothing is definitive," except that deadlines keep getting delayed."





Final Thoughts

I make my way back to the park where I settle once more and reflect. Hardly anyone directly affected by the regeneration project has been willing to chat. Everyone around seems gloomy, except those who are only passing through. Worthy of reflection - perhaps let down?

I can just about make out the sirens as they struggle to break through the already unbearable traffic din. The floor beneath shudders. *That must be the underground. Or perhaps it's a sign of the uncertain times ahead for the regeneration project.*