

Lewisham Borough Wide Character Study

Final Report | October 2010





Booth's poverty map of London







CONTENTS



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INTRODUCTION

This study has been commissioned by the London Borough of Lewisham to act as part of the evidence base to the Local Development Framework where it will inform and support the development of planning policy. It is intended to provide a description of the physical form of the borough, its origins, places, streets and buildings to provide an understanding of the particular attributes which make the Lewisham borough what it is today. As well as supporting formal planning documents it is also hoped that it will act as a general reference document for the council and local professionals working in the area.

Aims and objectives

The key aim of the urban characterisation study is to describe the form, character and special attributes of Lewisham borough. Within this overall aim there are a number of key objectives:

- Review existing studies and summarise the main character issues and areas;
- Produce a new study of the character of those areas not covered in existing studies;
- Bring both the above together in one borough wide characterisation study;
- Base the study on the areas covered by Lewisham's local neighbourhoods but not be limited by those areas;
- Provide a robust, credible and up to date evidence base to support the relevant Lewisham Development Plan Documents and in particular the Core Strategy;

- Provide a study that will withstand proper scrutiny at the Examination into the Core Strategy;
- Provide policy recommendations that may need to be included in the Core Strategy and other DPD and SPD; and
- Meet the requirements of relevant government guidance in PPS and associated guidance.

Methodology

This study has been produced by Urban Practitioners and includes the following stages of work:

- Detailed desk-top analysis of the borough including analysis of digital mapping, historic mapping, socio-economic data and planning policy;
- Extensive site visits to the borough;
- An extensive photographic analysis of the borough;
- Use of site visits, aerial photography and web resources to build a comprehensive picture of the structure of the borough and the arrangement of different urban typologies; and
- An interim test and review workshop with the council team to agree the working method and emerging outcomes.

Report structure

Lewisham today - this section sets out an introduction to the borough, its location and context. It then provides a description of the

key physical and social characteristics of the borough including:

- Topography, geology and flooding;
- Patterns of land use and green space;
- Planning and conservation designations; and
- Socio-economic indicators.

Urban growth - this section provides an historical appreciation of the growth of the borough over time, detailing the key events, architectural periods and population growth. Maps of the borough have also been prepared from available historic mapping to show the process of growth over time.

Urban typology - the next section of the report details an approach to the classification of the various urban forms in the borough. This defines a series of urban forms to create a bespoke classification system that responds to the unique character and attributes of Lewisham. These typologies are described and illustrated in detail and accompanied by mapping to show how they are distributed across the borough.

Lewisham's places - This follows on from the mapping of the urban typologies and explains the structure of the borough as a series of settlements and neighbourhoods and notes key features which act as landmarks, barriers, edges and so forth as well as identifying historic assets and key issues which relate to each area. This work draws on the consultation undertaken with local officers.

Conclusions - the final section of the report identifies key features which characterise Lewisham borough, including elements such as the relationship between the urban areas and the landscape and the way in which the

historical development of the railways has influenced the urban form and architectural style of the borough. For each of these concluding elements the report provides an assessment of how the character is relevant to planning and development today, the pressures that may be experienced and key lessons which might inform future thinking.



LEWISHAM



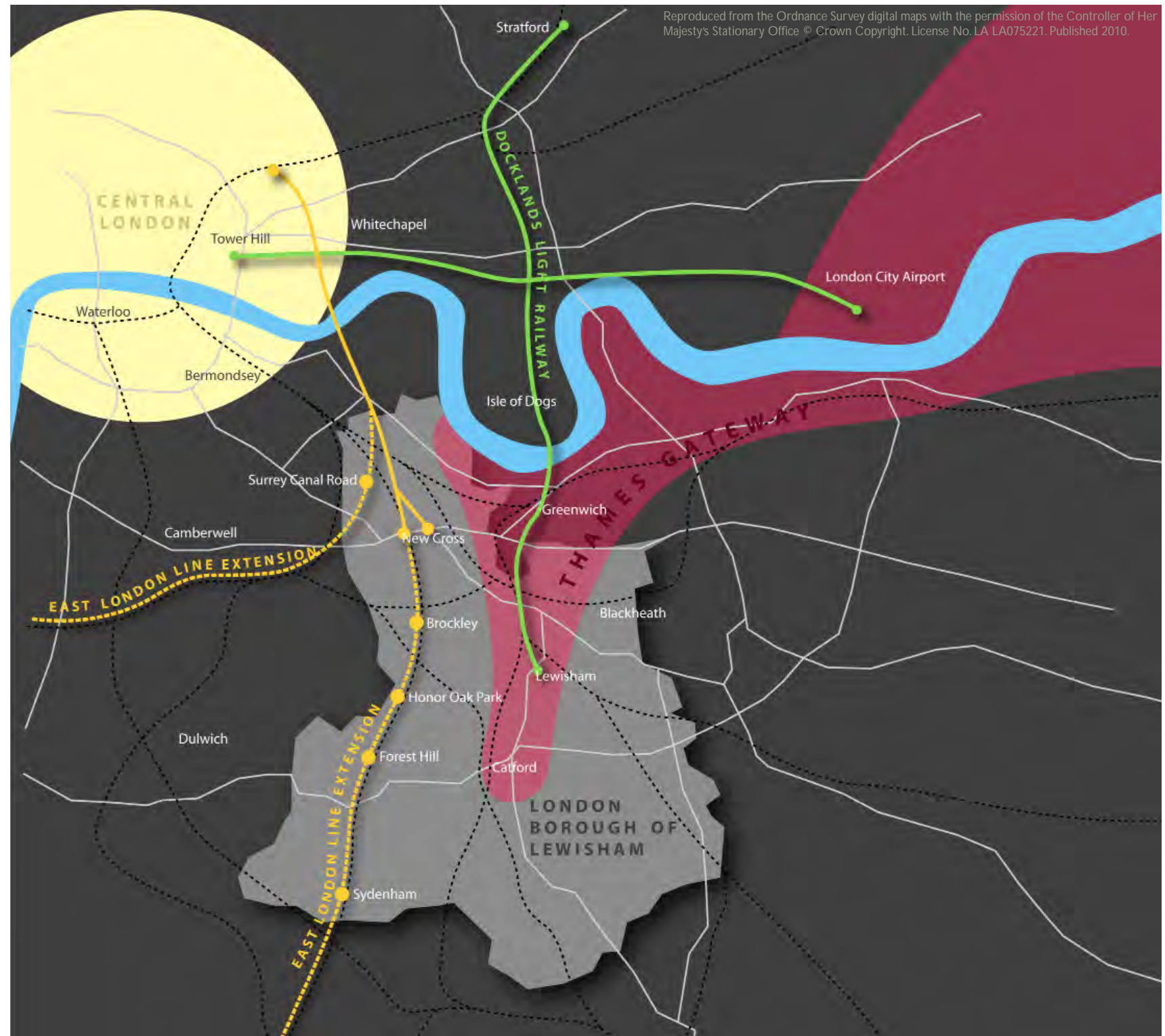
TODAY

THE BOROUGH OF LEWISHAM

The London Borough of Lewisham is located on the southern side of the River Thames. It stretches down to suburban South London taking in the centres of Deptford, Lewisham and Catford. The borough is bordered to the west by Southwark, to the east by Greenwich and to the south by Bromley.

The historical evolution of Lewisham Borough has led to the development of a range of distinctive neighbourhoods served by a number of commercial centres. Stark contrasts have evolved between the pre-industrial cores of Blackheath, Deptford and Lewisham in the north of the Borough, their mixed residential neighbourhoods surrounding them and the interwar growth that characterises much of the south of the Borough. Other notable phases of development have included the development of post-war estates, Lewisham shopping centre and most recently the growth associated with the extension of the DLR to Lewisham town centre.

Regional context (Plan by Urban Practitioners 2010)



TOPOGRAPHY

The borough of Lewisham occupies the valley and catchment of the Ravensbourne river. The borough represents a gentle bowl enclosing a significant portion of the river's water catchment.

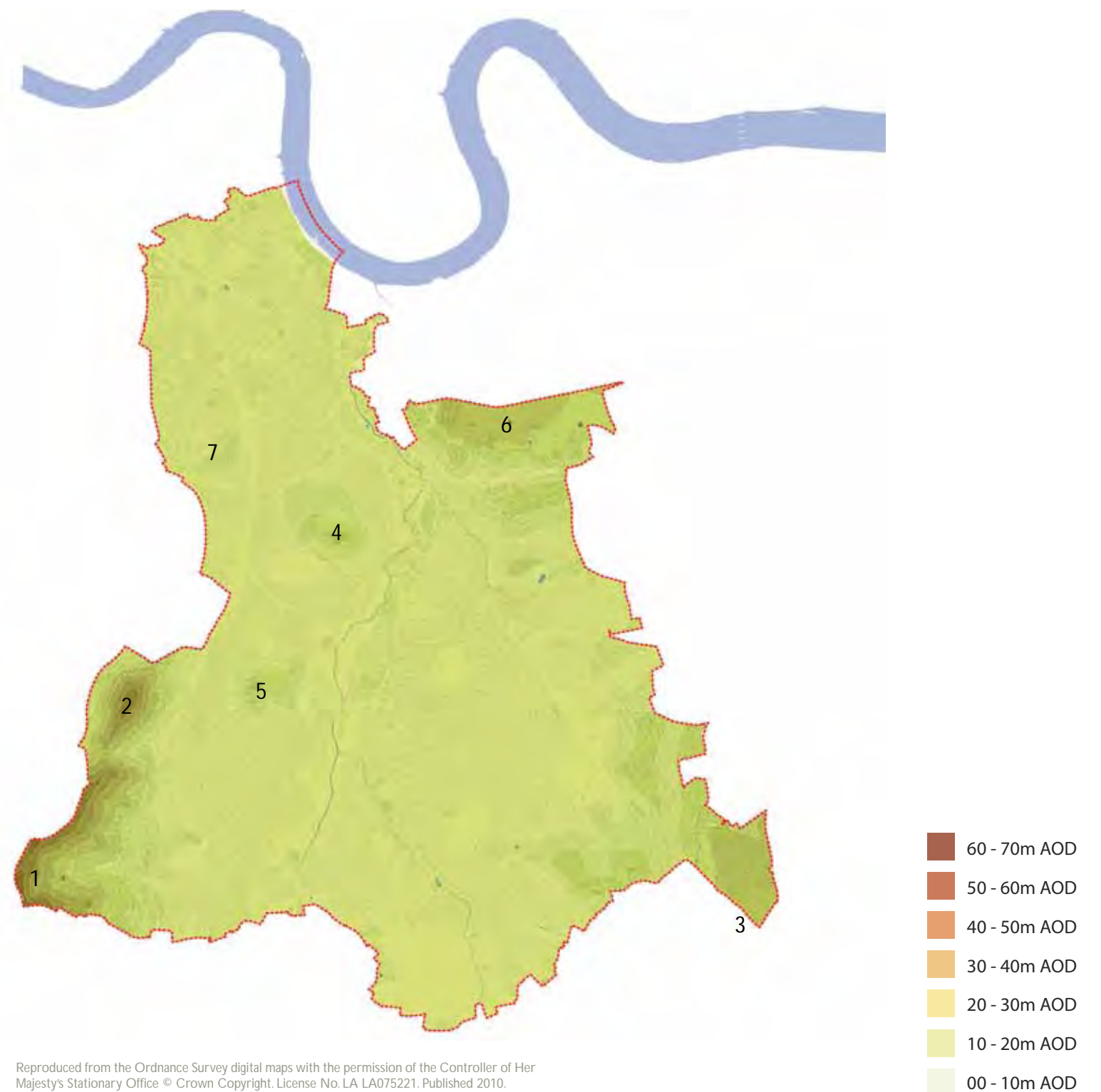
The topography rises on the eastern and western sides with the following high points:

1. Crystal Palace(109m)
2. Forest Hill (105m)
3. Grove Park Cemetery (55m)
4. Blythe Hill (50m)
5. Ladywell/ Hilly Fields (50)
6. Blackheath (45m)
7. Telegraph Hill (45m)



Looking across the borough from Forest Hill

Topography (Plan by Urban Practitioners 2010)



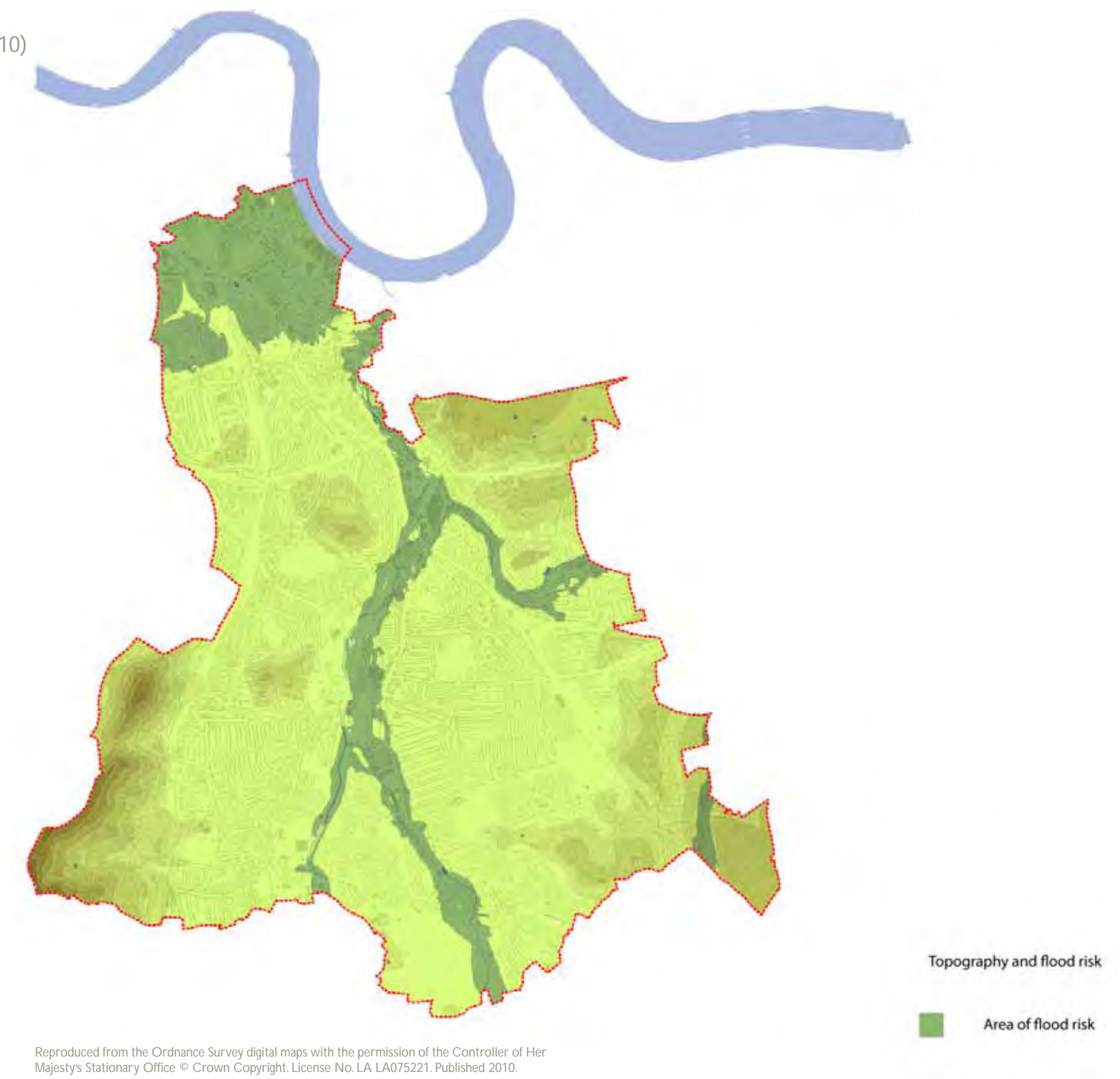
FLOOD RISK

The Ravensbourne river valley dominates the borough and as such dictates the areas susceptible to flooding. A central spine either side of the river is identified in the adjacent map as being at risk from flooding. The river runs through close to the centres of Lewisham and Catford, and the floodplain is occupied by a number of parks and green spaces along its route.

In addition, the northern tip of the borough around Deptford Wharf and New Cross occupies lower ground, potentially at risk from flooding from the River Thames.



Flood Risk Areas
(Plan by Urban Practitioners 2010)



HISTORIC SETTLEMENT

The watercourses through Lewisham have historically been the focus for settlement. The adjacent plan illustrates how the early cores of settlements (pre-1833) lined the watercourses and the adjacent road routes.

The Thames was a major influence on settlement patterns, with the waterfront around Deptford and into neighbouring Greenwich having a long history. The long history of the Deptford waterfront is related to the Royal Naval Dockyards and shipbuilding. Deptford Creek and Ravensbourne River also influenced the settlement locations away from the Thames, including Lewisham and Catford. The other key influence was the historic route of Watling Street from London to Canterbury and on to Hastings (now the A21).

The final point of note is the early village cores of Forest Hill and Sydenham which were soon to grow rapidly with the arrival of the railway.



Topography and historic cores
(Plan by Urban Practitioners 2010)



LAND USE

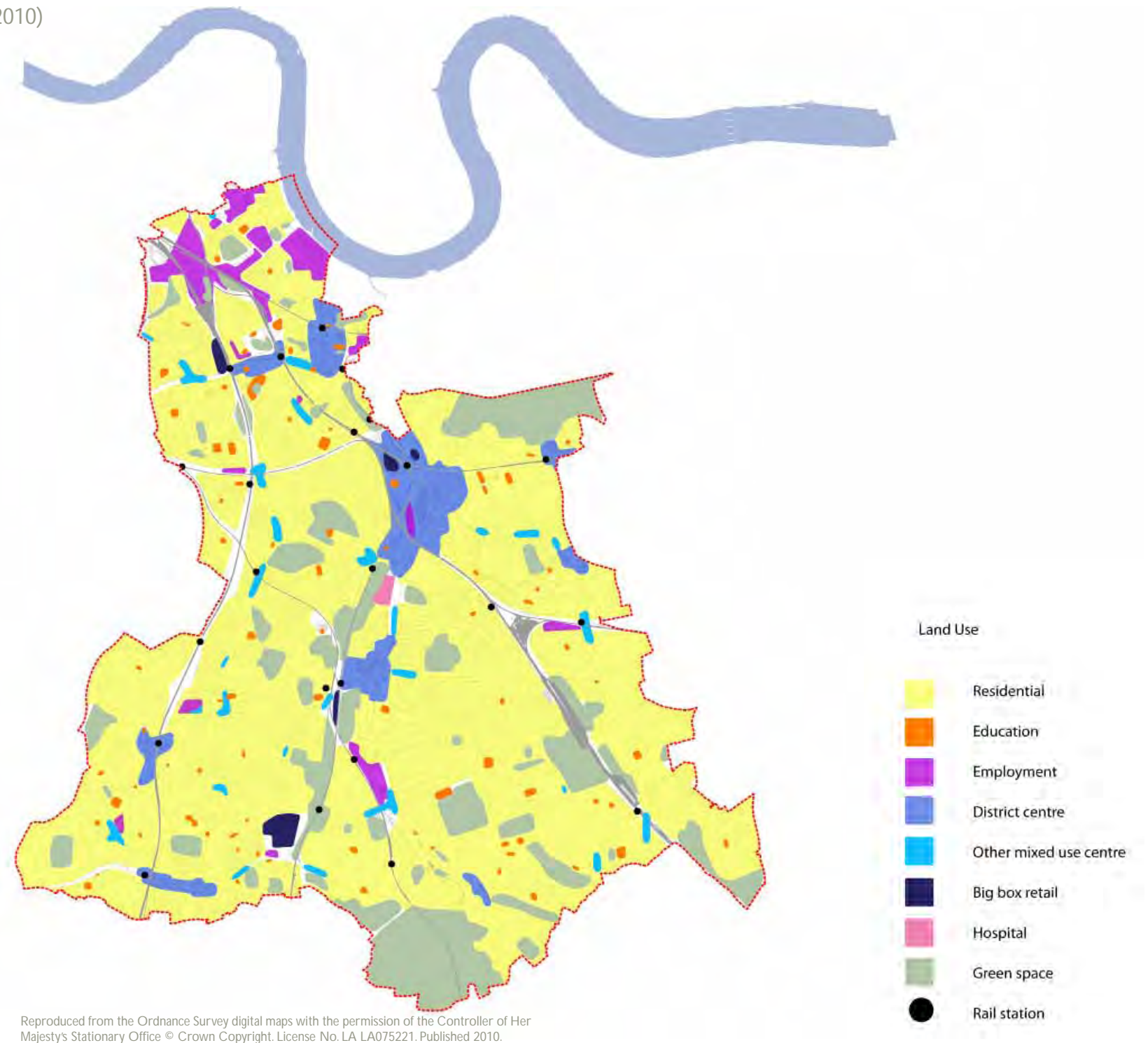
The borough of Lewisham represents the transition between inner (urban) and outer (suburban) London with a full mix of land uses within its area.

There is a concentration of employment land in the north of the borough along the Thames waterfront and between the railway lines running out of London Bridge.

There is a concentration of non-residential uses around the historic settlement cores and along key routes. A string of areas of retail and mixed-use centres are located along key routes such as the A21, focused at historic centres. Catford, Lewisham, Deptford and Forest Hill have a mix of retail and service provision, with some employment activities. As the accompanying plan illustrates there is much less incidence of mixed uses in south eastern part of the borough where there were no established settlements prior to twentieth century development.



Land Use
(Plan by Urban Practitioners 2010)



GREEN SPACE

Green space is well distributed across the borough, and neighbourhoods often have a strong relationship with a local park. Many of the borough's parks and green spaces have an important impact on the character of neighbourhoods and centres.

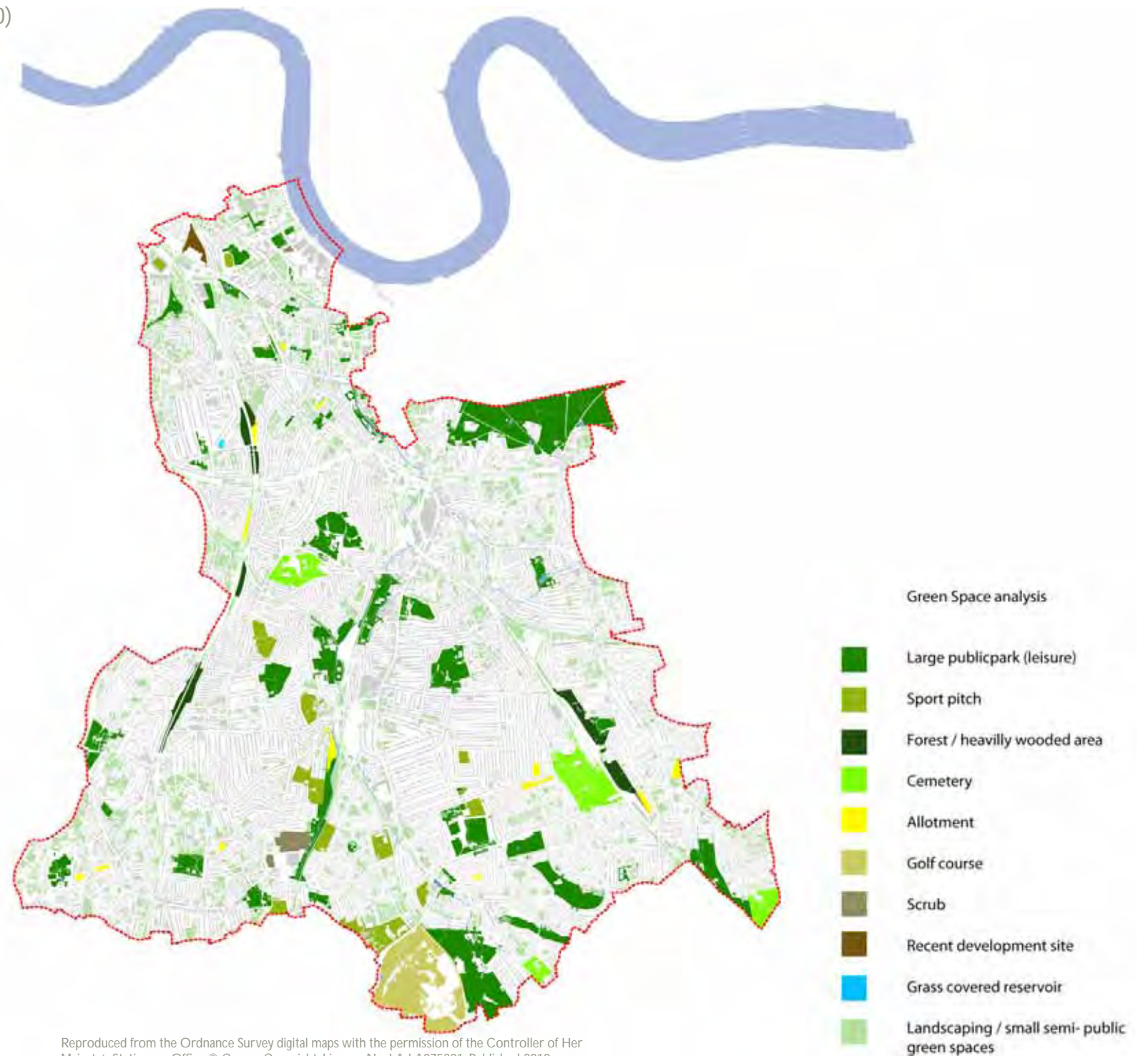
Large spaces such as the Heath at Blackheath and Beckenham Place Park have a strong landscape character, and define the image of their surroundings.

Corridors of green space are evident on the adjacent plan. The Ravensbourne river is framed by a series of spaces as the watercourse runs around Catford. In addition, a number of the rail lines act as linear ecological corridors, often with wooded habitats.

The areas where green open space is most notably absent are those areas of large Victorian / Edwardian terrace development, although many retain a green character due to street tree planting.



Green Space
(Plan by Urban Practitioners 2010)



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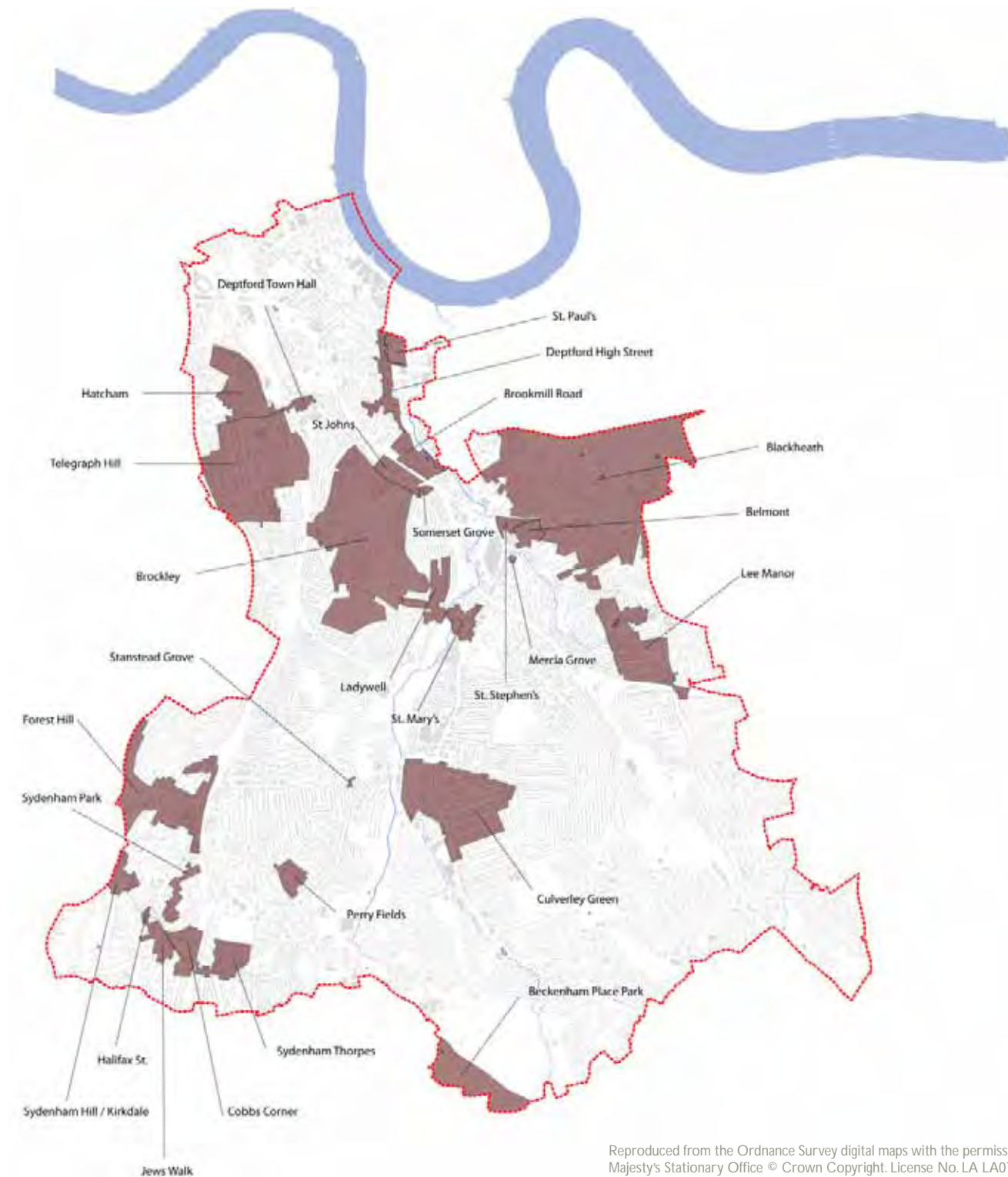
CONSERVATION AREAS

Lewisham has 28 conservation areas across the Borough, ranging from the large and complex (Blackheath) to the small and unified (Mercia Grove, Lewisham). Almost all are predominantly residential, the main exceptions being Blackheath Village (itself split by the boundary with Greenwich), Deptford High Street and part of Forest Hill. Some of the historic areas are vulnerable, being blighted by heavy traffic or for commercial areas facing economic challenges, but otherwise most of the conservation areas are well tended and their separate characters are well maintained, with a harmonious relationship between buildings, green elements like street trees or private gardens.

The conservation areas include the following selection of distinct residential neighbourhoods:

- Hatcham, New Cross
- Telegraph Hill
- St John's
- Lee
- Blackheath
- Brockley Park
- Jews Walk
- Forest Hill
- Sydenham Hill
- Deptford
- Sydenham Thorpes
- Culverley Grove
- Ladywood

Conservation Areas
(Plan by Urban Practitioners 2010)



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Hatcham, New Cross

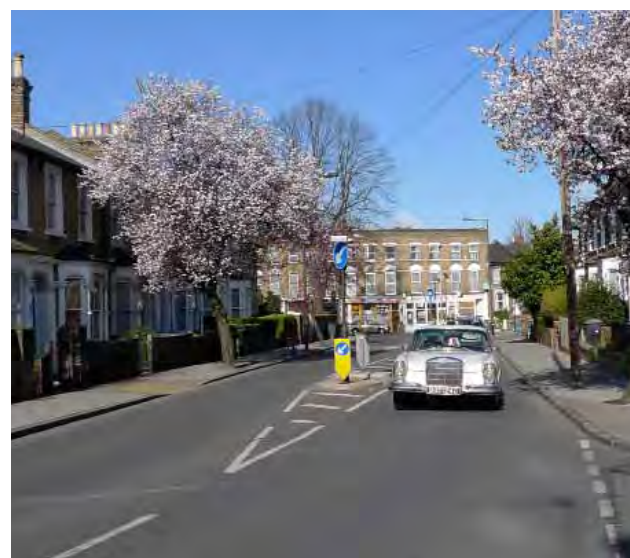
Designated in 1990, Hatcham Conservation Area is made up of commercial buildings in New Cross Road with terrace housing behind. Its name possibly derives from Anglo Saxon meaning 'a clearing in the woods' and the name was also used at an eighteenth century manor house called Hatcham Park. From 1614, the land was owned by the Worshipful Company of Haberdashers and when the manor house was demolished in the 1840s, the Haberdashers allowed terraces to be built to strict specifications.

Buildings in New Cross Road are larger, many being earlier houses with shops built later in their front gardens. Distinctive late-Victorian buildings can be seen at the junction with Queen's Road by the roundabout displaying an Egyptian-style vent pipe.



Telegraph Hill

Telegraph Hill conservation area was designated in 1990 and takes its name from one of the semaphores that was located here from 1795 to transfer messages between the Admiralty and its fleet during the Napoleonic wars. The houses we see today were built from 1871 under the control of the then landowner: the Worshipful Company of Haberdashers who set out strict guidelines to ensure the quality of their middle class estate.



St Johns

Designated in 1976. The area centres on the historic group of St. John's Church and Vicarage, the Welsh Presbyterian Church and St. John's Church Hall. There are also many terraced houses of a similar period and style to Brookmill Conservation Area.



Lee Manor

Lee Manor conservation area was designated in 1975. Houses were built from the 1860s on land owned by the Baring family who lived in the manor house (now Manor House Library). The variety of mainly two storey, pale stock brick houses and terraces, often set behind well planted gardens and the presence of Manor House Gardens give the area a pleasant suburban quality.



Blackheath

Blackheath was one of the first conservation areas in the country and was designated in 1968. Since then the boundaries have been amended a number of times, most recently in 2001. Today the conservation area extends from the village in the east, almost to Lewisham in the west, as far as Lee High Road to the south as well as across the borough boundary into the Blackheath part of Greenwich. Being such a large conservation area, Blackheath has a diverse character, the core of which focuses on the wide open heath adjoining Greenwich's conservation areas and world heritage site.

The grand houses around the heath date from as early as the 1680s, but are mostly later 18th century Georgian. The village contains many well preserved shops in buildings of varying Georgian and Victorian styles rising from the station to the heath. Further west, the urban character gives way to Edwardian suburban housing.



Brockley Park

Designated in 1973, Brockley Conservation Area is a leafy speculatively developed Victorian suburb. Its special character comes from the variety of architectural styles and detail, the leafiness of gardens and trees as well as the distinctive street layout.

Building began in the 1830s, with the majority of houses being built in the second half of the 19th century and southern parts being completed in the 1900s. Distinctive detailing includes stucco capitals and window surrounds, tile paths, terracotta details and spacious front gardens.



Jews Walk

Designated in 1973. The area consists of semi-detached villas in a Gothic Revival style, exhibiting high quality craftsmanship. The villas are built in red brick with darker diaper patterns with stone dressings, mullioned casement windows and steeply pitched slate roofs.



Forest Hill

Designated in 1976. Development dates from the last 19th century. Facades are lively and represent a cross section of contemporary architectural fashion. Materials range from typical London stock brick and plaster with slate roofs to red brick Tudor revival mansions with steep tiled roofs and leaded casement windows, evocative of a rural tradition.



Sydenham Hill

Designated in 1976. This area has a mix of building style and character, distinctive but varied in form and of good quality. It is mainly residential in character with some of the two storey terraced housing arranged around open space. The houses are constructed predominantly in yellow stock brick, with slate roofs and timber windows.



Deptford High Street and Deptford St Pauls

Deptford High Street and St Paul's conservation area were designated in 1976 and 1975 respectively. The area grew following Henry VIII's Royal Naval Dockyard and contains many 18th century buildings including the church, the Grade II* listed houses on Albury Street and several small vernacular buildings dotted between later ones along Deptford High Street. The area has continued to evolve and today is known for its street market and varied independent food shops.



Ladywell

Ladywell Conservation Area was designated on 24 March 2010. The area consists mainly of a late Victorian suburban residential development which was built by the local developer Samuel J. Jerrard. Through the 1880s and 1890s he built up long stretches of Vicars Hill and the newly laid out streets Algernon Road, Algiers Road, Ermine and Embleton Road, taking advantage of the topography and the good transport links to London.

His houses are generously sized and are stylistically distinctive as a group. Many of his other houses in the area are protected within the Brockley Conservation Area. Jerrard's development in Ladywell survives nearly complete, including its rich architectural detailing. It constitutes the core of the conservation area, supplemented by some later infill development of the late 19th and early 20th century that completed his streets.



URBAN MORPHOLOGY

The density and grain of development has an important influence on an area's character and streetscape environment. The adjacent plan illustrates how the grain of development blocks varies across the borough. One can see that in the northern tip of the borough around Deptford Wharf and New Cross, there is a great variety of block sizes and general grain. Whilst in central southern areas of the borough a more uniform and less compact urban grain is evident.

Urban Morphology
(Plan by Urban Practitioners 2010)



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Individual dense blocks of development in more open streetscape



Uniform dense development with enclosed streetscape

VEHICULAR MOVEMENT

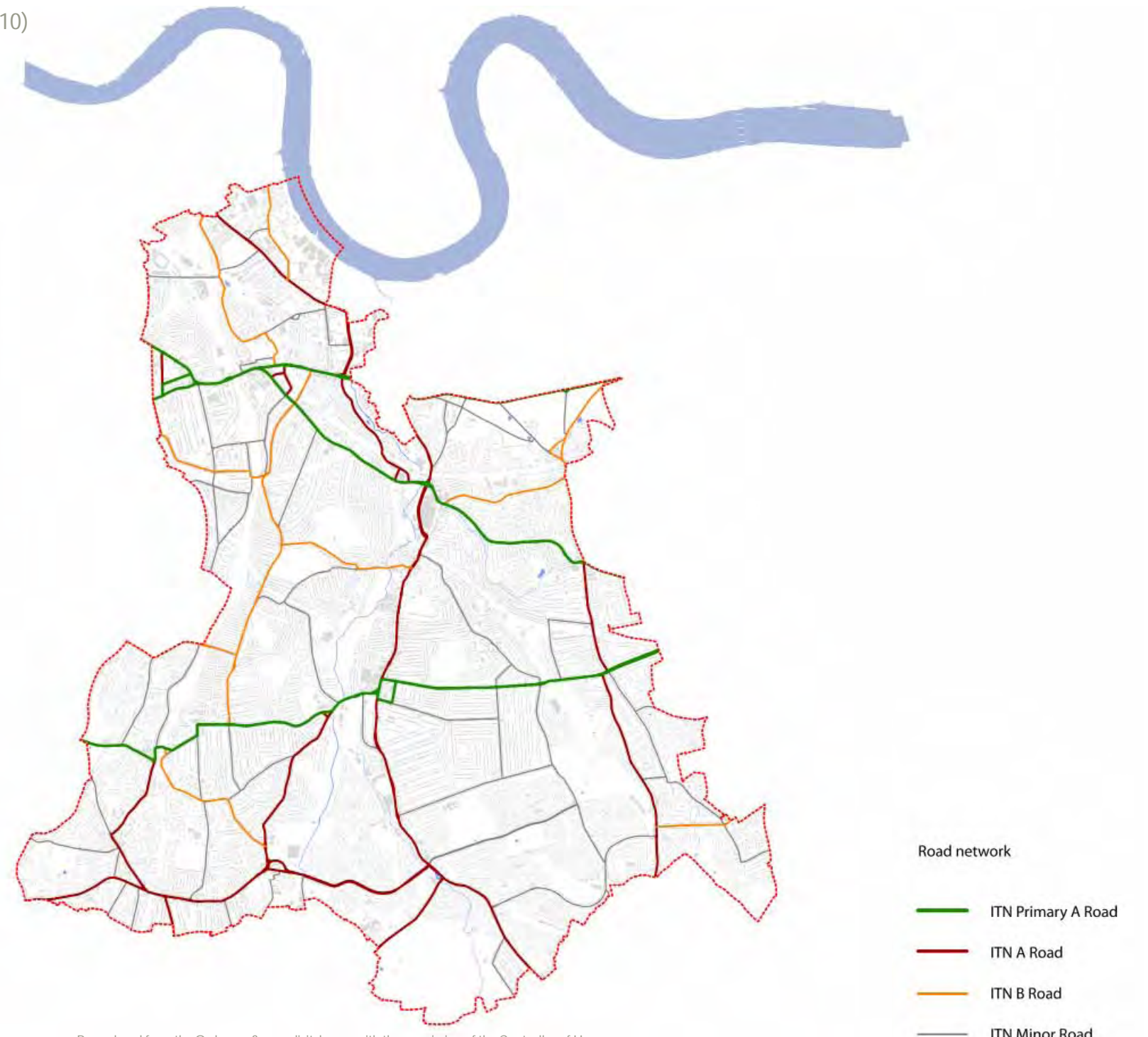
The principal vehicular routes reflect the historic pattern of movement through the borough. There have been relatively few major adjustments to the alignment of historic routes, and as such many of the historic parts of the borough are also well trafficked and remain busy to this day. The A21 therefore remains an important spinal route through the borough.

There is generally good north-south and east-west movement with good connections into surrounding areas. The South Circular Road weaves its way across the centre of the borough through the settlements of Catford and Forest Hill. This is a principal connection to Dulwich to the west and Woolwich and Eltham to the east. Interestingly there are some major routes which run just outside borough such as the A23 and A102 / A2 which relieve the borough from carrying heavy traffic on its smaller roads.



A21 and South Circular run through key centres such as Catford

Vehicular Movement
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RAIL CONNECTIONS

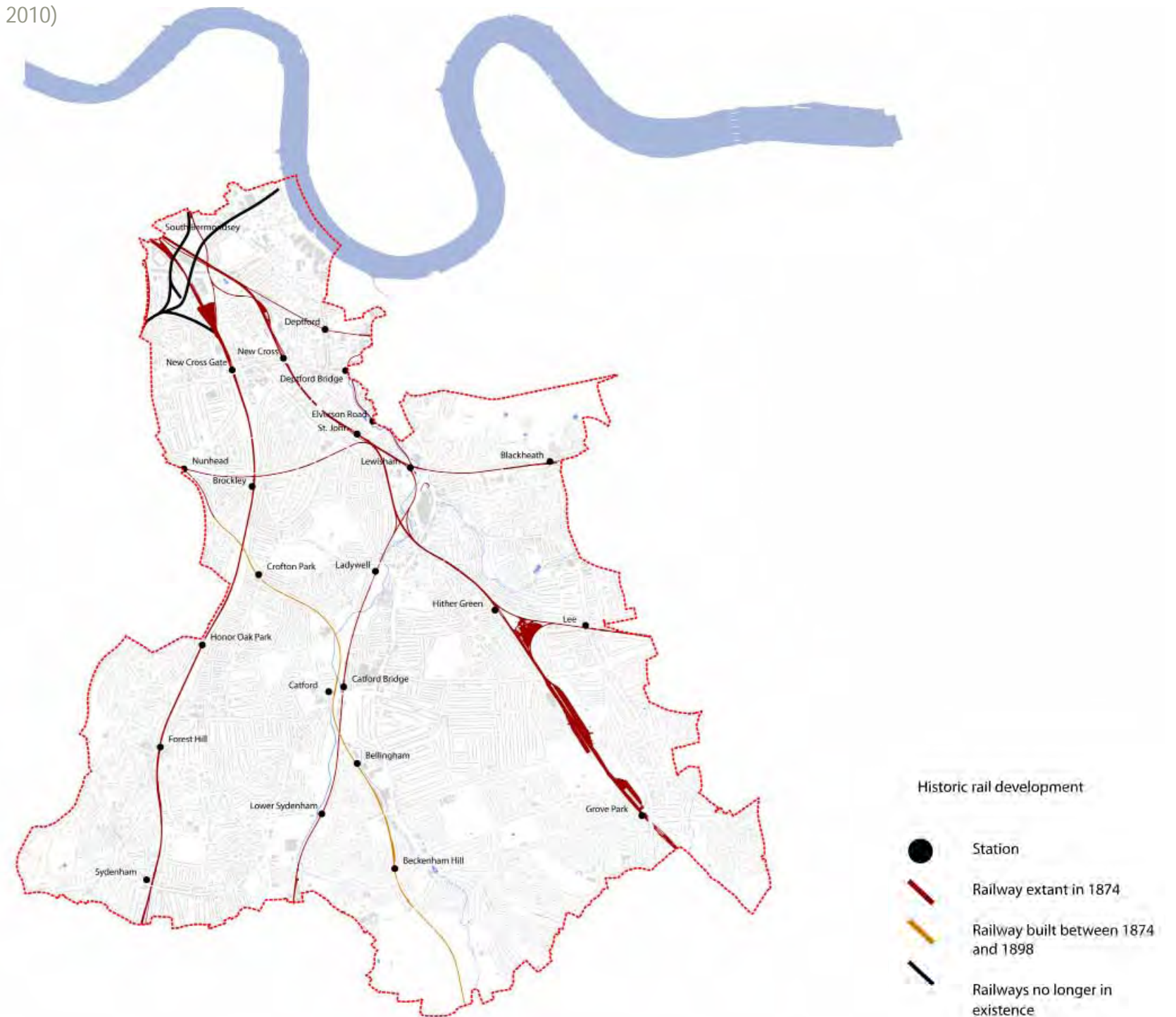
Railway lines fan out from the London termini at London Bridge, Waterloo, Cannon Street and Blackfriars. The lines intersect and several of their stations are very close to each other; prime examples are Catford and Catford Bridge, New Cross and New Cross Gate. These are the product of untrammelled rivalry between private railway entrepreneurs in the mid-19th century.

The lines were laid out to reach existing centres such as Deptford and Blackheath, as well as working with the local topography, such as the the Quaggy and Ravensbourne rivers. They in turn shaped how the borough would grow – much more rapidly at first in the north, with the southernmost areas only being built up in the first half of the 20th century.

A key feature of the railways in the north of the borough is that they are predominantly raised above ground levels, creating a series of barriers which carve up the urban area.

New overground connections are due to come on line in 2011.

Rail Lines
(Plan by Urban Practitioners 2010)



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Rail corridors divide up urban areas

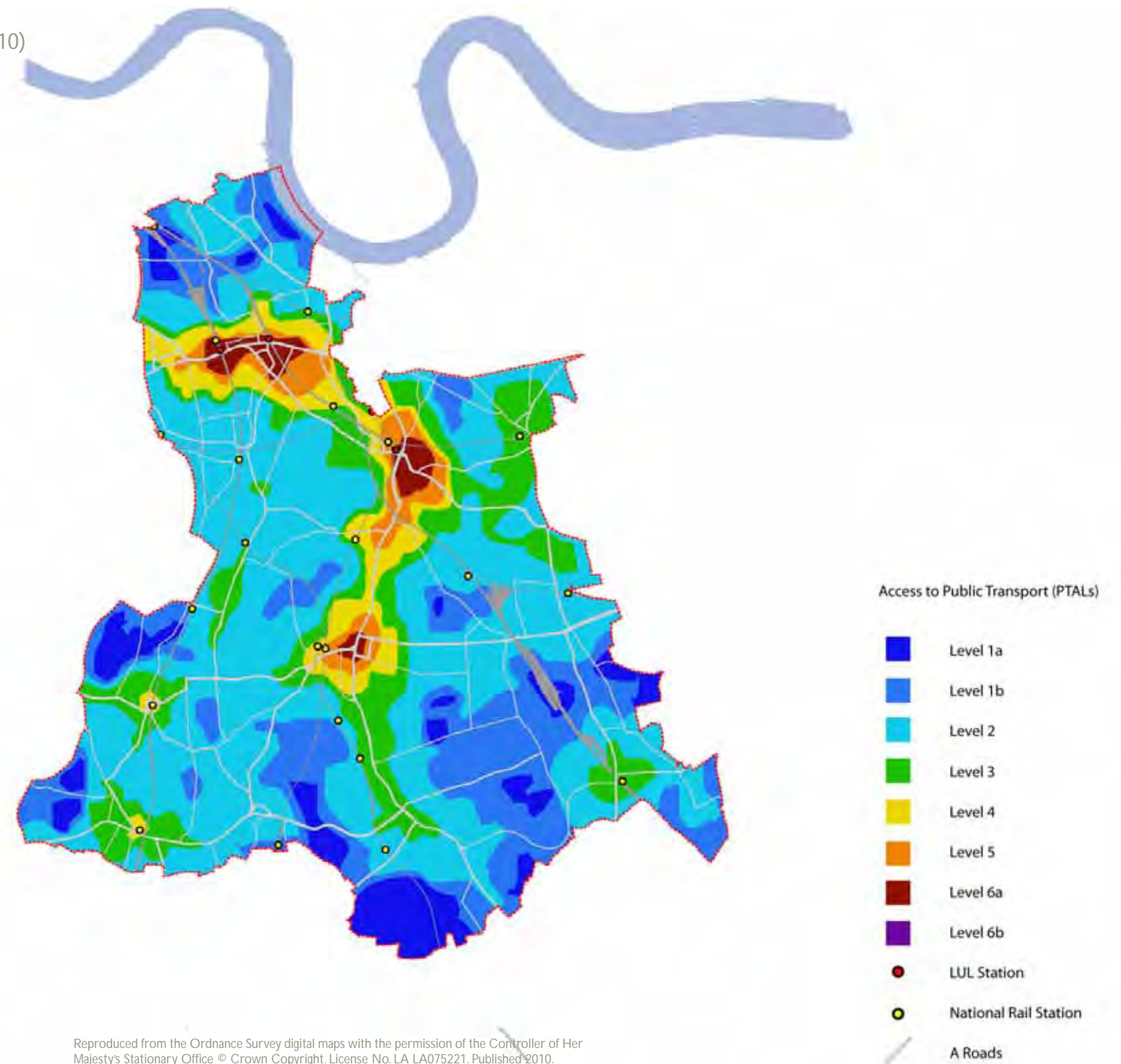
ACCESS TO PUBLIC TRANSPORT

The rail lines which weave their way through the borough provide access to both central London as well as boroughs and countries to the south.

In the north of the borough there is a high incidence of stations on different lines, which translates into a good level of rail choice in key centres such as Lewisham, Deptford and New Cross. However, there are large areas with poor access to public transport outside these centres in the north, for example along the Thames riverfront.

In the south of the borough the density of stations reduces and there are significant areas with relatively poor access to the rail network and public transport generally, for example the residential neighbourhoods between Grove Park and Catford. Whilst bus services provide an element of connectivity which can help to overcome this, it still limits the economic potential of these areas.

Access to Rail Stations
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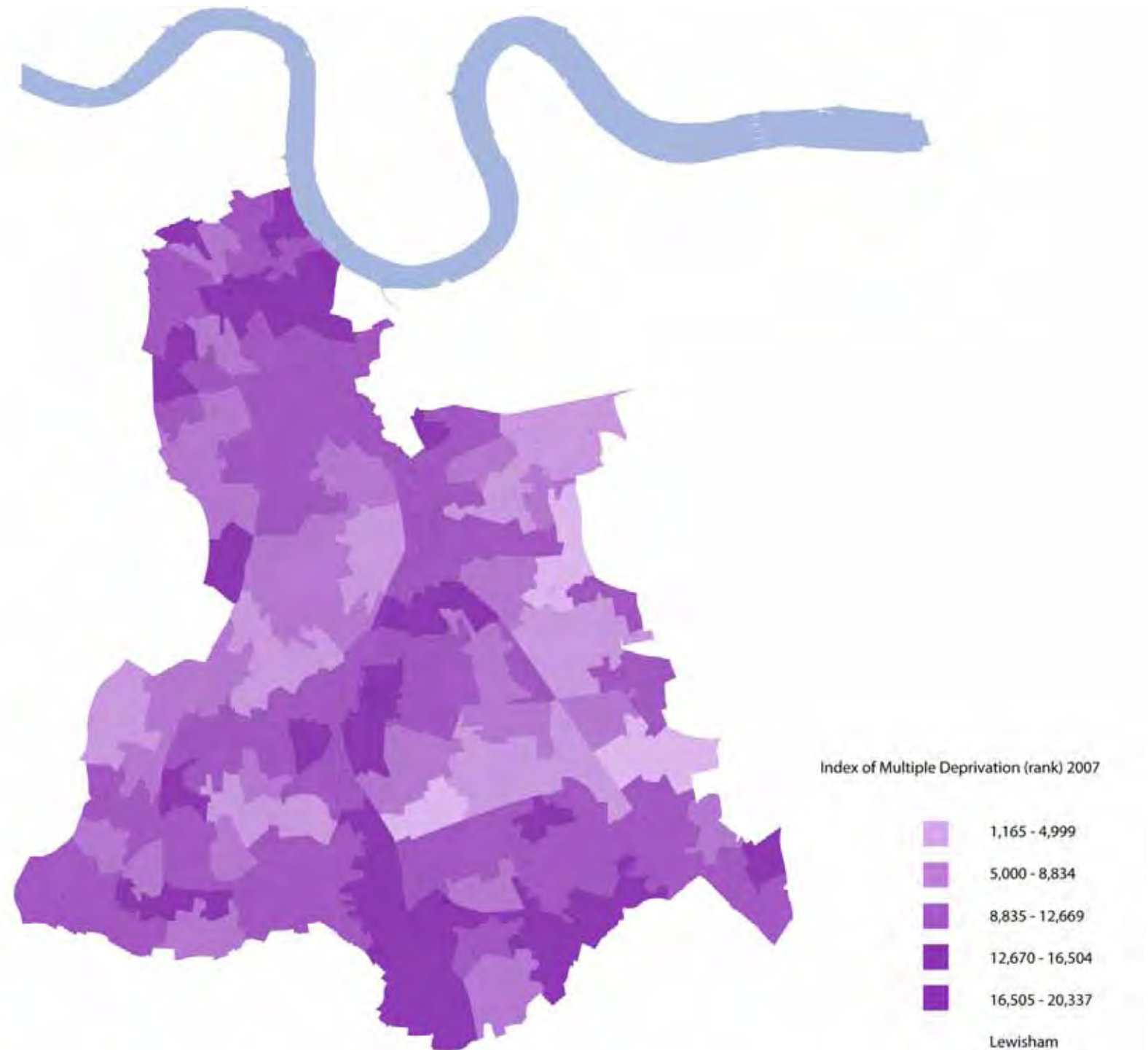
SOCIETY - DEPRIVATION

The comparison of physical characteristics and the social make-up of areas often highlights the strong link between the two. The following pages illustrate a sample of socio-economic statistics across the borough and provides a useful basis for making comparisons between different types of urban and suburban areas.

The Index of Multiple Deprivation represents a composite data set to indicate overall levels of social and economic deprivation in an area. The figures used to provide this data are drawn from the Office for National Statistics and broken down into five wards (quintiles) compared to the national figures.

The adjacent plan suggests that Lewisham is a poor borough in comparison to the national picture and that poorer and more deprived areas (indicated by a darker shade of purple) are spread throughout the area. As might be expected, there is a greater degree of deprivation in some neighbourhoods with a high incidence and density of social housing/ former council housing as well as in the core urban areas in the north of the borough.

Index of Multiple Deprivation (2007)
(Plan by Urban Practitioners 2010)



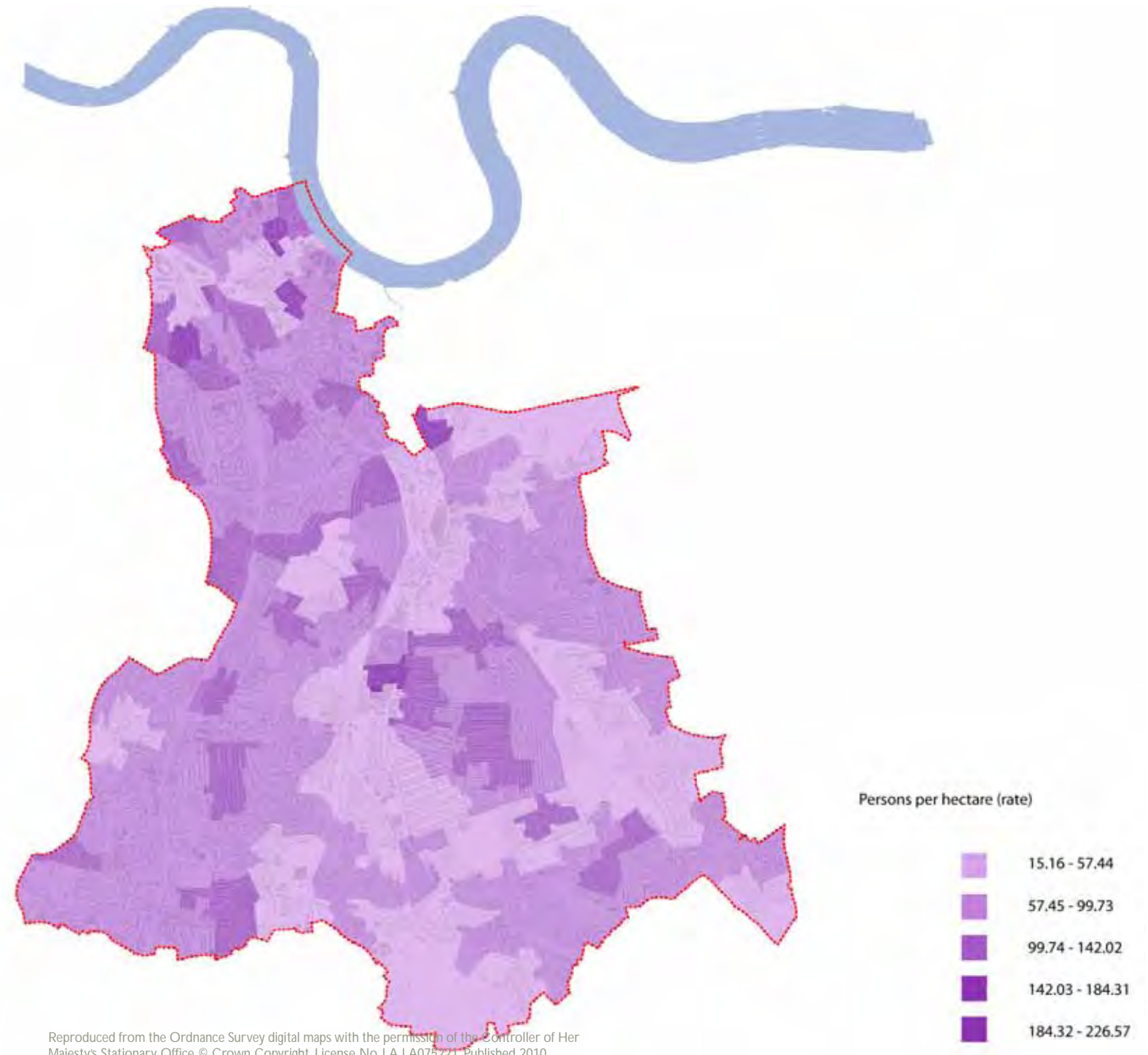
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SOCIETY - POPULATION DENSITY

The density of population is closely linked to building density and the incidence of green space and non-residential uses. A relatively even spread of population is observed across the borough, with some denser areas focused in the north and west of the borough.

The adjacent plan highlights the relative comparison between Victorian terraces and post-war development, indicating that overall these different typologies result in similar population densities.

Population Density (2001 Census)
(Plan by Urban Practitioners 2010)



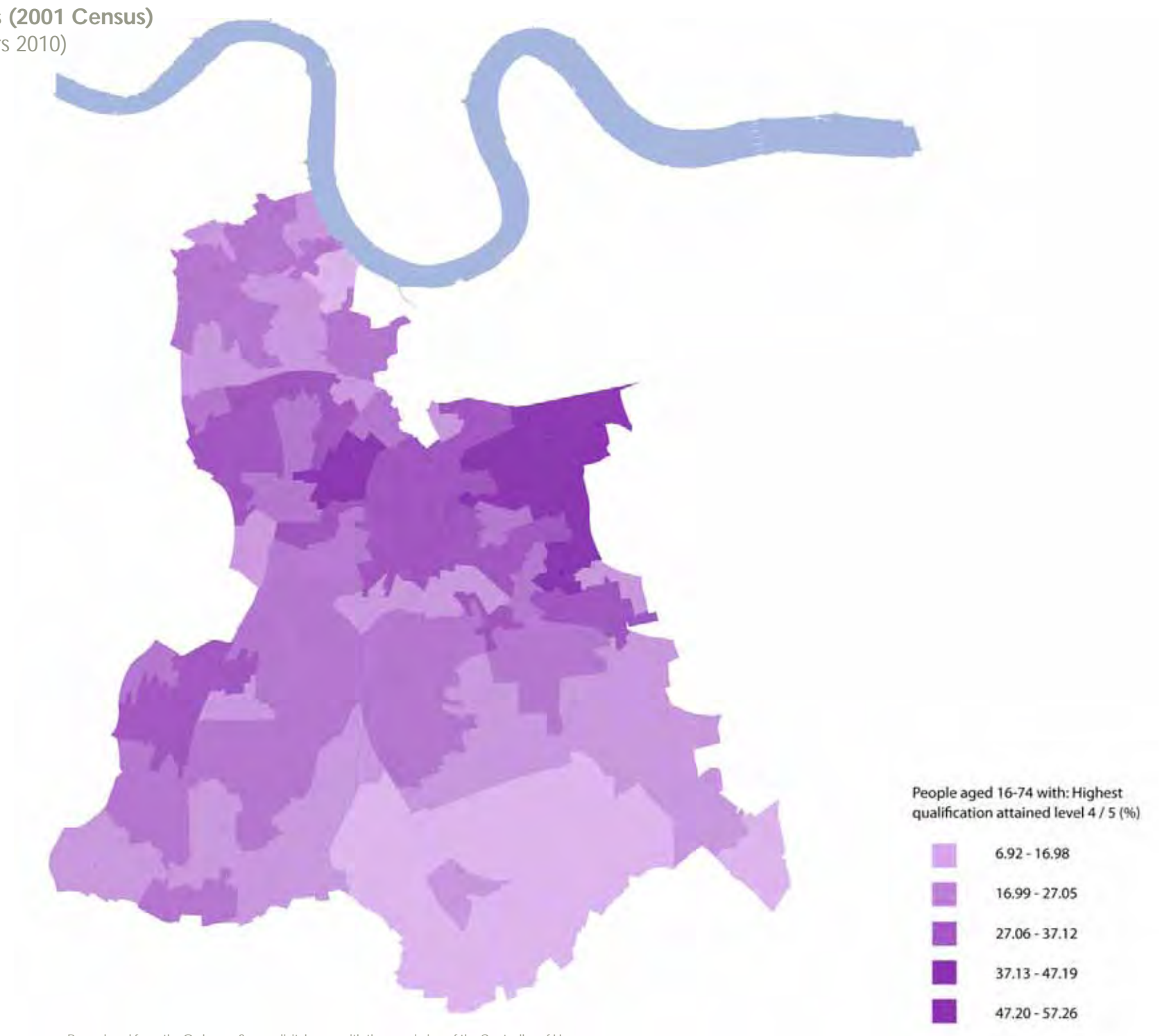
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SOCIETY - QUALIFICATIONS

The level of education attainment can be a useful measure of skills in local populations. The assessment reflects increased earning power, but also aspiration and expectation.

There is a close correlation between high educational attainment and the most desirable places to live in the borough. Blackheath is a particularly pertinent example where approximately half of the population have level 4 to 5 qualifications (degree level or above).

Level 4 / 5 qualifications (2001 Census)
(Plan by Urban Practitioners 2010)

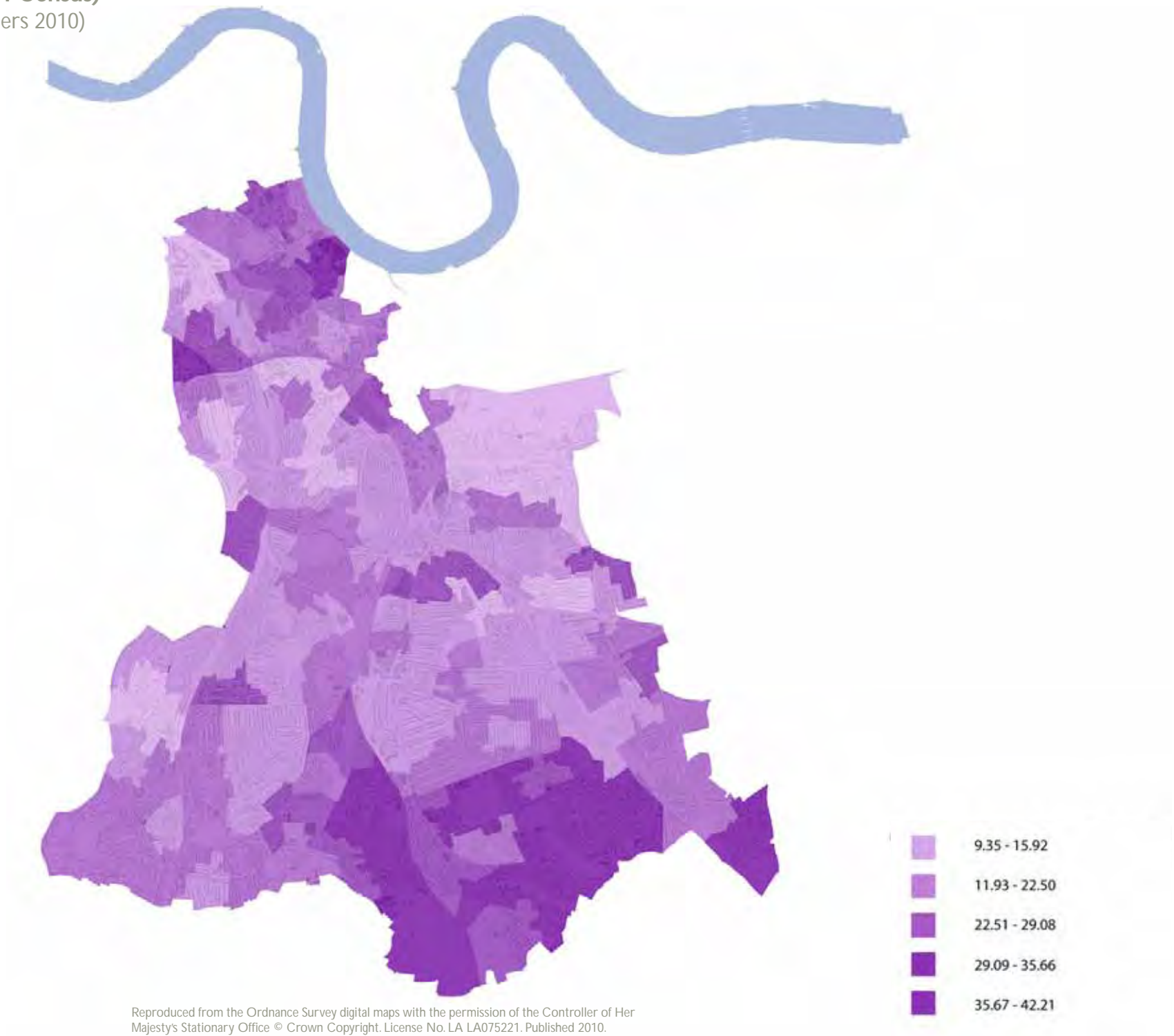


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SOCIETY - QUALIFICATIONS

The adjacent plan indicates areas where there are concentrations of people with low skills and no qualifications. There is a comparatively high incidence of people with no qualifications in southern edges of the borough around Bellingham and Downham. There are also pockets of low qualification attainment in the north of the borough around Deptford and New Cross.

No qualifications (2001 Census)
(Plan by Urban Practitioners 2010)

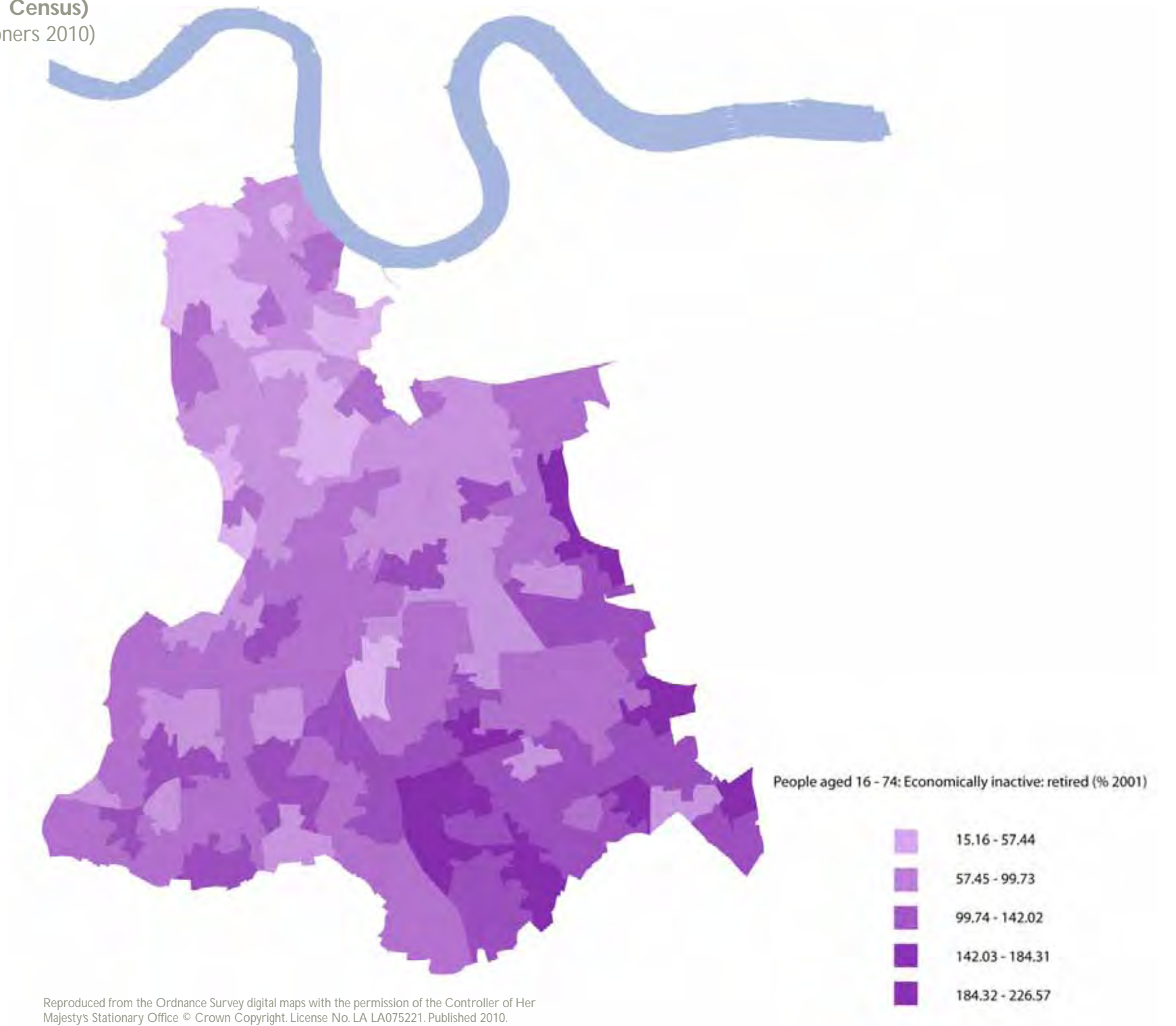


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SOCIETY - RETIRED POPULATION

The proportion of retired people varies across the borough. A greater proportion is found in neighbourhoods to the south and east of the borough as shown in the adjacent plan. These areas tend to be the more suburban communities and perhaps illustrates a desire to retire to the suburbs away from the more urban heart of the borough.

Retired People (2001 Census)
(Plan by Urban Practitioners 2010)



SOCIETY - SOCIAL HOUSING

Finally, the extent of Council or social housing across the borough is a useful statistic to illustrate spatially. In many cases, the pockets of social housing relate to planned estates developed in the inter-war and post-war era which have been retained as Council housing. They occur in key pockets and reflect comparatively large housing estates such as the Ewart Road housing estate in Forest Hill.

Council and Registered Social Landlord Housing (2001 Census)
(Plan by Urban Practitioners 2010)

