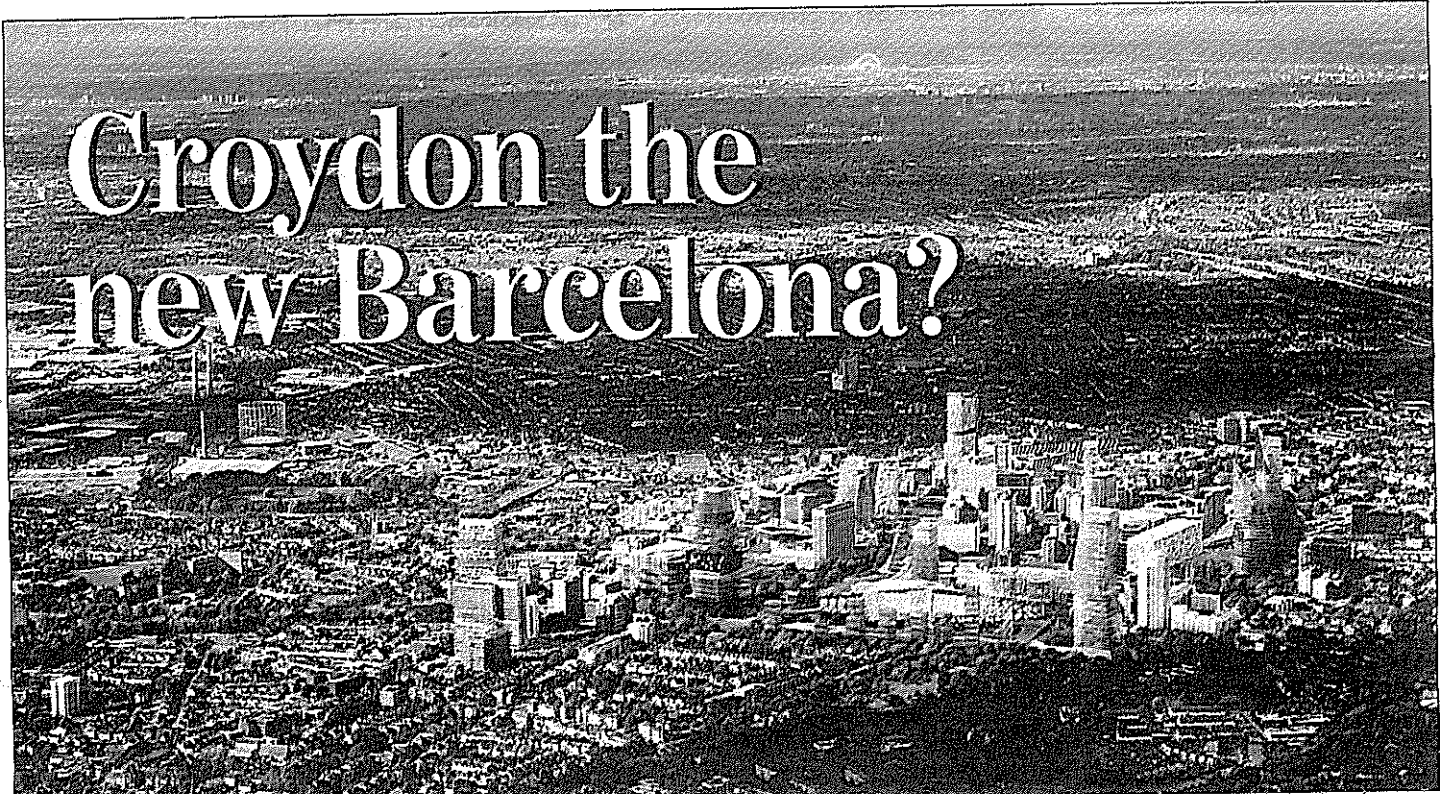


Croydon the new Barcelona?



Green city: architect Will Alsop's vision for Croydon centres on a giant glasshouse inspired by the Eden Project and a pedestrian-friendly necklace of parks. He also plans to bring the river Wandle back to the surface

£4bn vision to transform city of roads and towers

VALENTINE LOW

IT IS a place that gives concrete jungles a bad name, an urban nightmare famed for its tram system and some of the ugliest architecture outside the old Soviet bloc.

Now Croydon wants to turn itself into Barcelona, one of the coolest cities on the planet.

The much-reviled town — whose one fragile connection with glamour is as the birthplace of Kate Moss — was today announcing a multi-billion-pound regeneration plan that will include pod-shaped buildings on stilts.

With ambitions to become a beacon of sustainability, it will host a 30-storey version of the Eden Project with different sky gardens on each floor and, inspired by Barcelona's regeneration after the 1992 Olympics, scores of public squares and miniature parks in the town centre.

The transformation is being masterminded by architect Will Alsop, who plans to reverse the car's stranglehold on Croydon.

The "forest of car parks" in the town centre will be hacked back and the eight-lane Wellesley Road reduced to two so it can be lined with small-scale

SOUTH LONDON VERSUS CATALONIA

CROYDON

History: Busy market town was bombed by the Germans. Rebuilt with skyscrapers. **Population:** 430,000. **Kate Moss** was born there. **Ronnie Corbett** is a resident. **Fictional characters:** Sarah Jane Smith from *Dr Who* (1973 to 1976) was from South Croydon. In one episode she was stranded because the *Tardis* would not materialise in Croydon.

Quote: "From London to Croydon is as ugly a bit of country as any in England." **William Cobbett, 1830**

Famous for: Trams, tower blocks and the Croydon facelift (a very tight ponytail). **Attractions:** Fairfield Halls, host to Seventies' disco bands.

Music: Captain Sensible's 1982 single *Croydon* includes lyrics: "I attended Stanley Tech, in South Norwood Hill, I think it was."

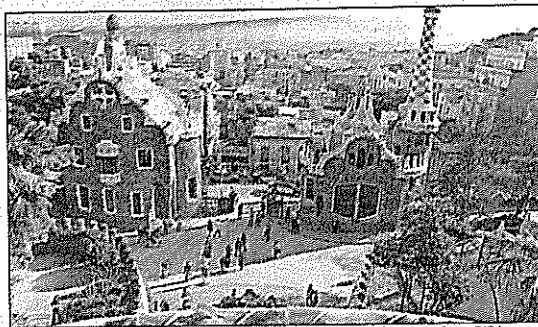
BARCELONA

History: Founded, according to legend, by Hercules 400 years before Rome. **Population:** 1.6 million. **Famous residents** include architect Antoni Gaudi, artist Joan Miró and tenor José Carreras.

developments instead of skyscrapers.

Mr Alsop will build a pedestrian-friendly "emerald necklace" of parks, and bring the river Wandle to the surface for the first time in 40 years since it was buried in culverts. He even hopes that people might fish for Wandle trout.

He said: "Croydon needs to dare to dream — it should set its sights high."



Fantasy: Gaudi's distinctive architecture helped win Barcelona a unique RIBA award

Fictional characters: Manuel from *Fawlty Towers* (allegedly). **Quote:** "The creation continues incessantly through the media of man." **Antoni Gaudi**

Famous for: Architecture. In 1999 it won RIBA's gold medal, only time the winner has not been an individual architect. **Attractions:** Gaudi's unfinished cathedral

La Sagrada Familia. World-class museums and galleries include Picasso and Miró museums. Seven beaches and FC Barcelona. **Music:** Barcelona, Freddie Mercury and Montserrat Caballé's theme to 1992 Olympics. **Lyrics include:** "I had this perfect dream, Un sueño me envolvió, This dream was me and you, Tal vez estás aquí."

The town centre population would be boosted from fewer than 5,000 to 50,000 by the building of 20,000 new homes.

Mr Alsop added: "We know London is under housing pressure but rather than building new estates in the Thames Gateway area, we should be looking to build in places like Croydon." The proposals, named *Third City* are

part of Croydon's bid to gain city status after years of being overlooked.

Jon Rouse, the council's chief executive, said: "What grew up in the Sixties was one of the most wholehearted developments of Corbusian modernism. At the time it was seen as very exciting and pointed the time to the future. But it didn't work and it became

AND WHAT THE SPANISH THINK

Zoraido Roseyo, 29, biologist: "I've never heard of Croydon. I've been to Scotland and travelled to England by car, but I have never been to this village."

Tatiana Pacheco, 28, journalist: "Croydon? What is that? No, I have not heard of it. If you ask anyone in Barcelona, they will say the same."

Ramon Guillen, 52, doorman: "This idea of sustainability is all very good, but I don't know anything about this Croydon place."

Louisa Papis, 80, retired: "I have been to Paris and New York and other capitals in the world, but I have never heard of Croydon. What is it?"

Juana de la Vasca, 42, insurance executive: "I don't know anything about the place nor do my friends. I've been to London. Is it like that?"

Graham Keeley in Barcelona

seen as an alien structure imposed on the historic settlement."

The plans will start with a £450 million urban regeneration vehicle set up by the Tory-controlled council. In addition about £3.5 billion in private investment has been earmarked for projects, including an arena for 12,500 spectators and a 44-storey residential tower.

Expats' anger as France stops healthcare for sick Britons

THOUSANDS of British patients in France, including cancer sufferers, are to have their treatment terminated within weeks under new French rules.

President Nicolas Sarkozy has sparked a wave of anger among British expats with the changes. Europe minister Jim Murphy will travel to Paris on Thursday

NICOLAS CECIL
Political Correspondent

to urge the French authorities not to cut off vital treatment. He said: "This is an issue of huge importance, particularly to those with debilitating or in some instances terminal illnesses." Some

MPs want tit-for-tat restrictions on French citizens, including tens of thousands in London. The Health Department said it had no plans for this.

Britons going to live overseas in the EU can get an E106 — if they are under the state pension age — which gives them health cover for up to 30 months. Under

the French reforms, UK citizens who have taken early retirement and are not of state pension age will no longer be able to join the French health system once their E106 expires.

Those who joined the French system have been told they will no longer be eligible for cover from the end of March.

Both groups would have to go private. Deborah Dudley, of expat group French Health Issues, said: "Most of us have invested all we have in France."

"We have paid taxes and are willing to pay into the health system. We've made new lives here which are rapidly turning from a dream into a nightmare."