

A LEVEL GEOGRAPHY

Year 11 into Year 12 Transition Project

Changing Places: The Distant Place — Stratford

AQA A Level Geography (7037)

Summer Independent Research Project

Name:

GCSE Geography teacher:

Welcome to A Level Geography

Congratulations on choosing to study Geography at A Level. This project is designed to bridge the gap between GCSE and A Level by introducing you to Changing Places, one of the human geography topics you will study in Year 12. Changing Places asks bigger, more conceptual questions than GCSE Geography: not just what a place is like, but how and why people understand, represent and experience it differently.

Unlike GCSE, A Level Geography expects you to work with abstract concepts, weigh up competing viewpoints, and use evidence to build a sustained argument. This project gives you a head start by asking you to research a real place — Stratford, in east London — which will be studied in class as our distant place, contrasted with our local place, Maidenhead.

What you need to produce

Complete at least 3 of the tasks in this booklet over the summer and bring your finished work to your first Geography lesson in September. You should aim to produce:

- A completed copy of this booklet, with at least 3 tasks attempted in full sentences.
- An A3 or A4 annotated profile of Stratford (map, images, key statistics and your own annotations).
- Notes from at least two of the wider reading/viewing sources listed at the end of this booklet.
- A list of any words or ideas you were unsure of, to raise in your first lesson.

Expect to spend around 5–6 hours on this project in total across the summer. Little and often works best — an hour a week is more effective than one long session.

Part 1: Understanding the Key Concepts

Before researching Stratford itself, you need to understand the ideas that Changing Places is built on. Use the AQA specification language below, and research each term using your own words. A glossary table is provided in Part 4 for you to complete as you go.

1.1 Categories of place

Geographers distinguish between different types of place, and the same location can fall into more than one category depending on who is experiencing it:

- Near places / far places — places we have direct, everyday experience of, versus places we only know indirectly.
- Experienced places / media places — places we have physically visited, versus places we only know through television, social media, news or film.
- Endogenous and exogenous factors — the internal characteristics of a place (its own economy, buildings, community, geology, history) versus external forces that shape it (national government policy, global economic trends, migration, investment from outside).

Task 1

- Define 'near place', 'far place', 'experienced place' and 'media place' in your own words.

- For you personally, is Stratford a near place or a far place? An experienced place or a media place? Explain your answer in 3–4 sentences.

1.2 Representation of place

Places are represented in different ways depending on who is doing the representing and why. A place can be represented through data (e.g. census statistics, crime figures), through art, photography and literature, through film and news media, and through informal representations such as social media posts. Representations are not neutral — they are chosen and shaped, and different representations of the same place can even conflict with one another.

Task 2

- Find three different representations of Stratford — for example a news article, a tourist board description, and a resident's social media post or local blog.
- For each one, note who created it, what impression it gives of Stratford, and why that impression might differ from the others.

1.3 Relationships between people and place

A place can be understood from the inside or the outside. Insider perspectives come from people who live in and belong to a place, with lived experience and detailed local knowledge — sometimes called an 'insider' viewpoint or a person's 'mental map' of a place. Outsider perspectives come from people who do not live there, such as visitors, planners, journalists or investors, who often rely on generalised or partial information.

- Lived experience — the personal, everyday, sensory experience of living in a place.
- Insider / outsider perspective — how belonging (or not belonging) to a place changes how it is understood.
- Everyday landscapes — ordinary, familiar spaces of daily life (a local park, a corner shop, a bus stop) that matter to residents even though they are rarely represented publicly.

Task 3

- Imagine two people describing Stratford: a long-term resident who grew up there, and a tourist visiting Westfield Stratford City for the day. Write two short paragraphs (3–4 sentences each) representing how each person might describe the place, and explain why their descriptions would differ.

1.4 Factors leading to change in places

Places change over time as a result of several overlapping factors. As you research Stratford, try to sort what you find into these categories:

- Economic — investment, deindustrialisation, new industries, employment change, house prices.
- Demographic — who lives there, migration, age structure, population growth or decline.
- Social and cultural — community identity, diversity, gentrification, changing attitudes.

- Political — government policy, planning decisions, regeneration schemes, devolved or local decision-making.

1.5 Players (stakeholders) in place-making

Different groups have different levels of power to shape a place, and often have competing priorities. Key player groups include national and local government, private developers and investors, local communities and residents' groups, and other organisations such as charities or transport bodies.

Task 4

- List at least four different stakeholder groups involved in the regeneration of Stratford.
- For each one, note in a few words what you think their main interest or priority in the area would be.

Part 2: Researching Stratford — Our Distant Place

Stratford, in the London Borough of Newham, east London, is our distant place case study for Changing Places. It will be studied alongside Maidenhead, our local place, so that you can compare how a large, rapidly-changing part of inner London differs from a Berkshire commuter town. Use the tasks below to build up detailed background knowledge before September — you do not need to memorise facts now, but you should understand the story of the place.

2.1 Locating and introducing Stratford

Task 5 — Locating Stratford

- Find and sketch (or print and annotate) a map showing Stratford's location within Newham, within London, and within the UK.
- Note Stratford's approximate distance and travel time from Maidenhead.
- Identify the main transport links serving Stratford (rail, Underground, DLR, Eurostar/international connections).

2.2 Stratford before regeneration

Research what Stratford was like in the second half of the twentieth century, before its transformation. Look for information on its industrial history, its economic decline, and the reputation it had by the late twentieth and early twenty-first century.

Task 6

- What was the historic economic base of Stratford and the surrounding Lower Lea Valley (industry, docks, manufacturing)?
- What evidence can you find of decline in the area in the late twentieth century (unemployment, deprivation, derelict land)?
- Find one statistic that illustrates the level of deprivation in Stratford/Newham before regeneration, and note where you found it.

2.3 The 2012 London Olympic and Paralympic Games as a catalyst

The London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games are widely seen as the single biggest driver of change in Stratford. Research how the Games were used as a tool for regeneration, not just a sporting event.

Task 7

- Why was Stratford chosen as the site for the Olympic Park?
- What major infrastructure and venues were built for the Games (e.g. the Olympic Stadium, Aquatics Centre, Athletes' Village)?
- What has happened to these venues since 2012 (their 'legacy' use)?

2.4 Economic and physical change since 2012

Task 8

- Research Westfield Stratford City. When did it open, and what impact has it had on employment and the local economy?
- Research the transformation of the Olympic Park into Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. What is there now?
- Find evidence of new housing development in and around Stratford (e.g. the former Athletes' Village, now East Village). What claims are made about its affordability and mix of housing?
- Research East Bank — the cultural and education quarter on the Olympic Park (institutions such as UCL, V&A East, Sadler's Wells, BBC). What role is this intended to play in the area's future?

2.5 Demographic and social change

Regeneration does not just change buildings — it changes who lives in an area and how communities experience that change. This is where insider and outsider perspectives, and conflicting representations, become especially important.

Task 9

- Find evidence of how the population of Stratford/Newham has changed since 2012 (growth, diversity, age profile) — a council or ONS (Office for National Statistics) webpage is a good place to start.
- Research the term 'gentrification'. Find at least one source that argues regeneration has benefited existing residents, and one that argues it has caused problems such as rising house prices or displacement.
- In your own words, summarise the tension between these two viewpoints in 4–5 sentences.

2.6 Different representations of Stratford today

Task 10

- Find an official or promotional representation of Stratford today (e.g. from the London Legacy Development Corporation, Newham Council, or a property developer's website).

- Find a resident or community representation of Stratford today (e.g. a local news outlet, community group, or resident interview/vlog).
- Compare the two: what is emphasised in each, and what is left out?

Part 3: Comparing Stratford with Maidenhead

One of the key skills in Changing Places is comparison — using a near place and a far place to draw out what makes each place distinctive, and what forces of change they share. Complete the table below using your research on Stratford and your existing knowledge of Maidenhead.

Theme	Stratford (distant place)	Maidenhead (local place)
Location and scale		
Historic economic base		
Key driver(s) of recent change		
Population and demographic change		
Housing and development		
How outsiders represent the place		
How insiders/residents might describe it		

Task 11 — Extended writing

- Using your completed table, write one paragraph (150–200 words) explaining one similarity and one difference between how Stratford and Maidenhead have changed. Try to use at least three key terms from Part 1 (e.g. endogenous/exogenous factors, insider/outsider perspective, representation).

Part 4: Glossary

Complete this glossary as you work through the booklet. Use your own words rather than copying definitions directly from a website.

Key term	Definition in your own words
Place	
Space	

Key term	Definition in your own words
Near place	
Far place	
Experienced place	
Media place	
Endogenous factor	
Exogenous factor	
Insider perspective	
Outsider perspective	
Lived experience	
Everyday landscape	
Representation of place	
Regeneration	
Gentrification	
Stakeholder / player	

Part 5: Wider Reading, Watching and Listening

Choose at least two of the following to explore over the summer and make brief notes on what you learn. You do not need paid access to any of these — all can be found through free news websites, YouTube, or your local library.

To read

- News coverage of the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park and East Bank development — search reputable UK news sites for recent articles on 'Stratford regeneration' or 'East Bank Stratford'.
- The Office for National Statistics (ONS) profile for the London Borough of Newham — search 'ONS Newham profile' for up-to-date population and deprivation data.
- The London Legacy Development Corporation website, which manages the Olympic Park and reports on its ongoing legacy programme.

To watch

- Documentaries or news reports on the London 2012 legacy, searchable on YouTube (search 'London 2012 legacy Stratford') — evaluate who made the film and what viewpoint it represents.
- Local council or resident-made videos about life in Newham/Stratford today, for a contrasting insider perspective.

To listen

- Geography-focused podcasts covering urban regeneration and place (ask your teacher for current recommendations if you are unsure where to start).

A note on using sources

As you move into A Level, you are expected to evaluate sources rather than simply collect facts. For everything you read or watch, ask: who produced this, why, and who is it aimed at? Does the source have a reason to present Stratford in a particular way (for example, to attract investment, to campaign for residents, or to sell newspapers)? Keeping a brief note of the source and its likely viewpoint alongside each piece of information will save you time when you start writing essays in Year 12.

September Checklist

Before your first Geography lesson in Year 12, check that you have:

1. Completed at least 3 tasks in this booklet, in full sentences.
2. Produced an annotated A3 or A4 profile of Stratford.
3. Made notes on at least two wider reading/watching/listening sources.
4. Completed the glossary in Part 4.
5. Written a list of any questions or terms you want to check with your teacher.

Bring this booklet, your Stratford profile, and your notes to your first lesson. We look forward to welcoming you to A Level Geography.