**Narrator:**

At our closing ceremony, we can say that these were a Games by everyone.

**Hannah Cockroft:**

Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park has thought about it all and it's such a breath of fresh air to just go somewhere and know you can get around. It feels like a luxury, and it shouldn't, but it really, really does.

**Aaron Plummer:**

I was passionate about the legacy of 2012.

**Sam Bird, CEO and director of Netball for London Pulse Netball:**

Everyone being able to access the park, notwithstanding any physical or mental challenges they've got, it's just a such positive place in East London and it's great to see that the Olympics have left a genuine legacy at the park for sport for all.

**Peter Barry, Games Maker during the 2012 Paralympics and current Park Champion:**

There's no worries at all in the park. The park is totally accessible. It's great.

**Hannah Cockroft:**

We've worked hard to ensure Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park really is a place for everyone. In fact, we say it might be the most accessible park in the UK and has been designed to be as inclusive as possible. And that commitment all goes back to the London 2012 Paralympic Games, something I remember so well.

I'm Hannah Cockroft, winner of two Paralympic gold medals in 2012. 2012 really was the best time in my life. I know so many people say it but I genuinely, hand on heart, that would be the time of my life that I would return to any day.

I think my overriding memory of 2012 was the first time that I went near the stadium, not even went in it, the first time I went near it when the games had begun. At that point paralympic sport had never had that level of support so to have 80,000 people and to be able to hear it from miles away was really surreal.

I was 20 years old at the games and I remember going along to do a training session at the warm-up track at the stadium and I remember saying to my coach, "Oh, can you hear that noise? It's really annoying me." And it sounded almost like when you're tuning a radio in, it sounded like just lots of noise, really loud, a bit blurry. And my coach went, "Well, if it's annoying you, then you have a problem because that's the crowd, honey, you should probably get used to that." And I remember at that moment just thinking I'd never heard a crowd from outside of the stadium. I'd never had that luxury, I guess. And it really was just... It just sticks with me. It sends tingles down my spine remembering that we had that level of support.

I remember going in, the one piece of advice I'd been given was like, "Go in there, look around, soak up the atmosphere but then remember why you're there. You've got a job to do. This isn't a bit of fun. So, when you're on that start line don't smile because you're not there to be people's friends." And I, as a 20-year-old, just took this really seriously and was like, "Okay, I won't smile." And if you ever watch the video back, I've got a really stern face and then they say my name and the crowd starts cheering and I just break out into the biggest smile you've ever seen because who could not smile at that? Who could not be happy to be in that stadium? That's what the whole games was about. It was about support; it was about excitement. It was about being a part of something that still is the biggest Paralympic Games ever.

But the games, they weren't just about us as elite athletes. It wasn't just about coming and watching us do our thing. It was about everyone. It was about getting everyone involved and making sure everyone felt included. And looking back at that time, it's great to know that the achievements of Paralympics GB in 2012 was not the end but just the beginning of the story which puts accessibility and inclusivity at the heart of everything that has been developed in the area in the past 10 years. Whilst the iconic sporting venues are instantly familiar to all of us, it's the other buildings on the park and the newly developed neighborhoods where much of the good work has taken place.

**Peter Maxwell, Director of Design, London Legacy Development Corporation**

My name is Peter Maxwell. I'm the director of design at the London Legacy Development Corporation. I think it's amazing that this part of East London is recognized throughout the world following what's happened in the games, not just being the most accessible games ever, that we've taken those lessons and it's informed the development such as the housing and neighborhoods around us and the parklands as well. I don't think anybody could have imagined this would be the case. We hoped it but the fact that it's starting to come together is fantastic.

**Narrator:**

And you say they're starting to come together; the Paralympics were 10 years ago. When was your first involvement with the design of this new area or new neighborhood in the east of London?

**Peter Maxwell:**

My involvement has been since 2015 so I've definitely been involved in the legacy following on. So that's the development of five new neighborhoods within the host boroughs of, particularly, Hackney and Newham, but also Tower Hamlets and other developments such as East Bank and the cultural quarter as well.

**Narrator:**

And how proud are you to be part of a story that has created this huge area of greenlands, of urban sites, as you say, new neighborhoods, but also with that accessibility not just as an afterthought and add on but something that is front and central to everything you do?

**Peter Maxwell:**

Yeah, I think it's a different mindset to probably how people have approached regeneration in the past and putting inclusion, particularly what I'm interested in, inclusive design, so it's open to everybody, not just in terms of demographics but also in terms of physical ability and also being open to the different areas of our community. And our community is really diverse, particularly, some of the youngest, most diverse population in the whole of London and therefore the whole of the UK. So being able to respond, in a design sense, to places that are open to all is really important, making sure that we have a legacy that really endures.

**Narrator:**

So, when you identify, maybe this is a bit simplistic, but when you identify a patch of land and think, "Right, what are we going to build on there?" Whether that is a college, a university, Sadler's Wells, or maybe apartment buildings, how does that process happen, that then comes to some kind of fruition and we start seeing the bricks and mortar?

**Peter Maxwell:**

It's a long process to be sure and it always starts with a brief, an idea of what that place might be, and that brief takes on board a whole series of different factors.

**Narrator:**

And what do you ask, then, of these people in terms of that accessibility and inclusion?

**Peter Maxwell:**

Following on from the games, the games was really clear about having a set of standards about what inclusion meant in this part of East London. There are things that you have to comply with to build a house or build buildings and they're called the Building Regulations and they set down a minimum standard about accessibility for the games. They went beyond it, and we developed something called the Inclusive Design Strategy and underneath it was a set of standards. They took the best of what was available at the time and updated it so really pushed the boundary.

So, it moves well beyond physical accessibility back towards areas such as socioeconomic inclusion. For our legacy, and certainly since I've been involved, we've updated those standards twice so that they're really at the forefront of what's the best thinking about creating places that are welcoming for all. And they directly inform our brief, and they directly inform the designs for everything that we do from housing through to even how we work with existing buildings such as the sporting venues, if we're making changes to them they have to comply with those standards so that we keep at that high level of accessibility and inclusion.

**Narrator:**

When you are walking around the park, is there one part of the park, one building on the park, one venue which you look at and think, "Yeah, I'm really proud of that. We did a great job there"?

**Peter Maxwell:**

If I look at Chobham Manor, Chobham Manor is our first neighborhood. It is built to the north of East Village. It's a family neighborhood. It's got a large amount of family housing provided, which was in real need, but there's two areas of that project which I would pick out.

One is the fact that we've tried different types of housing. Most people will be familiar with London housing such as terrace housing and mews housing. We combined the terrace house and mews house to create the multi-generation house which was dealing with a particular high demand for housing with lots of bedrooms and they're really successful.

But another thing which I think is really interesting is the new nursery and community center which has got housing above it, which is at the edge of the development, which is a critical venue for the local community and acts as a real focal point. And I'm really proud that that's now up and running for the benefit of all.

**Narrator:**

You've already created something that's world-class, what are you going to do next? How can you improve what's already there?

**Peter Maxwell:**

Part of it is about active management. There's still quite a lot to be done. We're still about halfway through our building program in terms of housing, so that we need a laser focus on that. But it's also how these places are managed over the time and how people enjoy using them. So, we've undertaken what's called a post-occupancy evaluation and on our Chobham Manor project, which was our first neighborhood, as I mentioned, and that's trying to understand once we've built it, learn by doing.

And by that, I mean actually ask the people who are living in those homes what do they think of their home? What do they think of their street, what do they think of their neighborhood? Is it safe, secure? Does it allow they know their neighbors? Those sort of things. And it's really important that we, obviously, look after and understand what's good about a place but if things are created that are issues, that we rectify them and learn from those in our future neighborhoods. So that's part of the management of the place going forward and that's almost as important as when you create it for a new kind of setting a new neighborhood.

**Hannah Cockroft:**

That's Peter Maxwell, the Director of Design at the London Legacy Development Corporation giving Michael an insight into some of the behind-the-scenes work taking place as Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park develops.

I'm Hannah Cockroft, winner of seven Paralympic gold medals, 12 world titles, three of which I won at the London Stadium in 2017. You know what? I get back more than I ever thought would. For a northern lass I'm in London quite a lot so it gives me tingles, it takes me back 10 years. It really makes me wish that we had another event there, to be honest. It is probably my favorite stadium, my favorite place in the world. And I love seeing how busy it still is. I love seeing how many people have built a home there, have built a life there in a place that... I'm tempted to buy a house there just so I can be where I love.

As a wheelchair user, getting around the park is easy. It's really easy to navigate, it's easy to see where the drop curbs are or where the ramps are. It's a nice place to be because you don't have to think about how you're going to get around. And that is so rare, even in the UK. You're always having to plan your route, plan how you're going to get to the place you want to go. At the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, you don't have to worry about that and it's such a breath of fresh air to just go somewhere and know you can get around.

We, obviously, compete all over the world and there's not actually wheelchair access onto the track so they have to work that out when we arrive. It's something that a lot of stadiums and a lot of sports venues across the world don't think about but, yeah, the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park has thought about it all and it feels like a luxury, and it shouldn't, but it really, really does.

One of those 2012 venues that I remember is the Copper Box Arena. During the Paralympic Games it hosted goalball and is currently staging wheelchair matches in the Rugby League World Cup. The Copper Box is also home to London Pulse, the capital's only Super League netball team and as part of their wider commitment to accessibility and inclusivity, they've teamed up with the charity Metro Blind Sport.

**Sam Bird:**

My name is Sam Bird. I'm the CEO and director of Netball for London Pulse Netball franchise based on the Olympic Park, and we play in the Copper Box Arena.

We've been working with Metro Blind Sport for about two years now and we got together with a mutual interest to try and develop netball for visually impaired athletes. It's never been done before, and we were keen to try and support a visually impaired program in connection with being based at the Copper Box. And so, it felt like a good fit for us to be training and playing at the Copper Box which was set up for goalball and therefore had encouraged visually impaired athletes and blind athletes to play there. We wanted to try and adapt our game that we love for visually impaired netballers.

**Tracie Tappenden · CEO of Metro Blind Sport:**

Hi, I'm Tracie Tappenden and I'm the CEO at Metro Blind Sports. Metro Blind Sports was set up almost 50 years ago, we're actually going to be 50 next year. We were set up in those early days by a couple of, well, a few people that had found that, having left school, there was nothing available in London to look after people in sports that were blind or partially sighted and they set about creating a sports and social club to do just that. And here we are nearly 50 years later, and we very successfully include people from all kinds of backgrounds that are blind or partially sighted. We look after people that are serious athletes that go on to be Paralympians, as well as people that just want to do something low-key, low-level, they've never tried the sport before and want to have a go.

**Sam Bird:**

We've run four lots of courses for visually impaired netball now. It creates a great level of interest and respect, I think, amongst our athletes that train on the courts around the visually impaired athletes. But also, it's been an opportunity for our athletes to work with those visually impaired athletes as well. So sometimes we have mixed sessions, and we are developing our coaching and our understanding of what it means to be visually impaired and to take part in sport, and netball in particular.

**Tracie Tappenden:**

We were approached by Pulse, Sam Bird, who was really keen to bring netball into the VI world as there wasn't any opportunities yet to do netball for people who are blind and partially sighted. So together we looked at that and they have fortunately given us the opportunity to go along and bring some of our members to take part in their sessions for people who are visually impaired.

**Sam Bird:**

So, we've worked with Metro Blind Sport to think about the type of ball, to think about how we were going to play the game and it was very clear from Metro Blind Sport that when we work together to adapt a sport that it's still true to that sport. So, netball still needs to look like netball for visually impaired athletes. We explored a few things, and we borrowed a thing that's called a jangle ball that's used in other visually impaired sports. But we found, actually, that the jangle ball isn't great for netball because it's got a bell inside, but it needs contact with the floor to make lots of noise. We experimented a little bit and we've ended up with some really bright colored pink balls, which is great because it's pink for Pulse but it helps the visually impaired athletes pick out that strong color.

**Tracie Tappenden:**

I met with somebody who'd been taking part in the netball, and they were so excited. This person was so excited to actually be able to take part in netball in a real way as she was visually impaired. And being able to go to the Copper Box Arena and see the way things are up there was a really nice opportunity. But, most of all, the actual opportunity to play netball now as she's an adult and was genuinely thrilled to be able to go and take part and actually have a proper game.

**Sam Bird:**

It's really important that we actually do make a practical difference if we're trying to encourage people to come. So visually impaired athletes can come with a friend or a buddy for free to our games and they get priority seating, and it enables the game to be described to them. That's still something that we are trying to develop but they're very welcome at our games and it's been great to have some visually impaired athletes at our matches last season and we hope to see them again this season.

**Tracie Tappenden:**

We are working with London Pulse, and we are looking at ways that we can make this a long-term future for people to play netball who are visually impaired. And in 10 years’ time it's going to be a huge opportunity for people all over the country, not just in London, so I'm hoping that we'll partner with other people all over the country. So, yeah, I see the future as very bright for netball, for people that are visually impaired.

**Sam Bird:**

We're looking to try and create a festival, hopefully, that will take place in December at the Copper Box. And the idea is to attract some younger students, from age 12 and above, so if we've got students at visually impaired schools or at university or college, for them to come down, find a bit more out about visually impaired netball, see how the game's been adapted. We'll have some of our professional athletes down there as well to support them. And it's really just going to be a celebration of netball and hopefully encourage more visually impaired athletes to feel comfortable to come down and give netball a go.

**Hannah Cockroft:**

London Pulse CEO Sam Bird and Tracie Tappenden, Chief Exec at Metro Blind Sport. I'm Hannah Cockroft, double Paralympic champion from London 2012. It's been great to share my memories of the best summer of my life with you and also to hear about how, 10 years on, Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park continues to make real differences in people's lives with every decision they make.

Let's hear from Aaron Plummer and Peter Barry. Aaron is from Walthamstow and has cerebral palsy. He's also a member of the Legacy Youth Voice at the London Legacy Development Corporation. Peter has multiple sclerosis and was a Games Maker back in 2012 and he's now one of our Park Champions.

**Peter Barry:**

I was a Games Maker in the Paralympics, and I did some training in the stadium about six months before the Olympics and it was fantastic. It was a great, great time. I thoroughly enjoyed it and the Paralympics, and the training as well was totally wow. It was the most fantastic time, it was. Everyone was so happy. It was so accessible to everyone. Brilliant time.

**Aaron Plummer:**

I went to watch swimming with one of the many groups that I belonged to at that time, and I remember being very inspired as a young boy thinking, "Look at what all these people with a disability can do."

**Peter Barry:**

Well, I chose to be a Park Champion because the people that ran the Olympics contacted me by email and said, "We're running this new initiative in the Park, and do you want to come up for an interview to be a Park Champion?" And that's what I did, and it was great and I loved it. And the thing that I love about it is that everything is totally relaxed, and you've got no worries about accessibility or anything. You can totally relax.

**Aaron Plummer:**

When I go there, I think about 2012 and I think about how people are enjoying the park today. To think 10, 15 years ago it was just land and now it's a place that everybody can come and enjoy together and remember what a incredible year 2012 was for London.

**Peter Barry:**

Please come up to the park, it's just a fantastic place. It's totally accessible and so relaxing. Hopefully, it'll go on forever. The park is the place I love.

**Hannah Cockroft:**

Don't forget to share your memories of Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. Maybe you were there on one of the nights when I crossed the finish line first in 2012. Use #London2012 and #passthebaton. And for the latest updates, go to queenelizabetholympicpark.co.uk.

I'm Hannah Cockroft and thank you so much for having me guest host this episode of My London Legacy, a Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park podcast.