

King's Cross Community Projects

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Ian Fry
Network Rail
King's Place
90 York Way
London
N1 9AG

12 August 2011

Dear Ian,

Pre planning application King's Cross Square consultation

KCCP is very grateful for the opportunity to comment on the plans for the new King's Cross Square prior to Network Rail finalising the planning application for this development.

About KCCP

We are a charitable trust working to support the improvement of the environment and public amenity in the area within a half mile radius of the perimeter of King's Cross Station.

King's Cross is often described as a fractured community, partly because it is split between the London boroughs of Camden and Islington and as historically it has faced so many major infrastructure projects within its boundaries. These have resulted in physical splits being created including the Regent's Canal, King's Cross, St Pancras and Euston Stations and the A501 ring road.

This area is of strategic importance as it combines substantial opportunity with significant disadvantage. The high density resident population is characterised by low skills and high unemployment. Several wards in Camden and Islington are in the 10% most deprived nationally.

According to the latest National Indices of Deprivation published by the Government in 2010, there are 37 'super output areas' that make up King's Cross. Of the 37 areas of KX, 34 fall into the top 10% most deprived on the basis of air quality and road traffic accidents. 33 are in the top 10% most deprived on the basis of household overcrowding, homelessness and ability to afford owner-occupation and 10 falls into the top 10% on the basis of low income.

Areas of Kings Cross fall into the top 10% most deprived in the country for crime, employment, health & disability, housing & services, income, outdoor & indoor living environment and wider barriers.

Opportunities, expectations& engagement

KCCP has always supported restoration of the original façade at the south end of the station and Network Rail is to be applauded for fulfilling this as part of the current station refurbishment.

Further, Network Rail are to be highly praised, in conjunction with LB Camden, LB Islington, Transport for London, Design for London, the Royal Institute of British Architects, John McAslan and Partners and Malcolm Reading Consultants, for launching the international competition that was intended to shape the way the newly acquired public space would be designed. Network Rail identified a huge opportunity for commuters and the local community in creating “one of the great public spaces in London”.

TRANSPORT HUB X URBAN REGENERATION

Wider regeneration will bring new residential, retail and cultural facilities to what was once a down-trodden area.
Iain Coucher, Chief Executive, NetworkRail

King's Cross Square will be one of London's most high-profile public realm projects – as significant to its setting as Trafalgar Square and Marble Arch are to theirs. The 7000m² plaza will primarily serve as an arrival threshold for King's Cross railway station, which is currently undergoing a major programme of restoration and improvement. It will be used by hundreds of thousands of railway and London Underground travellers, and crossed by thousands of pedestrians on one of London's busiest cross-city routes.

The Square will also be at the heart of a broader programme of urban regeneration. King's Cross has historically been one of London's poorest districts – the nearby slum of St Giles was the setting for the Charles Dickens novel, *Oliver Twist*. Today, however, the whole area is being transformed by two massive urban regeneration schemes at Regent Quarter and King's Cross Central. Along with the recent modernisation of the historically significant St Pancras station, they're combining to inject new energy and activity into the area.

MALCOLM READING CONSULTANTS

<http://www.malcolmreading.co.uk/kingsxsquare/kingsx3.html>

A huge section of our community had felt closed out of King's Cross Station as a result of the refurbishment resulting in the loss of any north eastern access to the station. A high profile campaign with overwhelming support pressed Network Rail to seek funding for a bridge immediately at the rear of the station to complete the east-west pedestrian and cycle link from The Angel to Marylebone avoiding the notorious A501 ring road. The campaign has so far not been successful. It was in this context that the local community felt renewed excitement for the station refurbishment when the design competition for the Square was announced in 2008.

There then followed three years of speculation about what was happening with the design, including concern that no-one appeared to be engaging with the local community during the design process.

The plans

KCCP was shocked to see the plans as revealed during the recent consultation exercise that took place in the Station. The design being shown could in no way be said to be an “exemplar”. If it is to be “one of London's most high profile public realm projects” then the public will be sorely disappointed. Although we welcome the new space being created, we cannot support the current drab, unimaginative design.

1. Urban green space and seating

We view provision of green space in KX as essential to combat our current national low ranking for access to such amenities. The plans provide for four new trees and the removal of one mature tree. Removal of this existing tree should be avoided at all costs. Further

work needs to be done to provide green areas, shrubbery to encourage urban wildlife as part of the KX Green Corridor and more trees. We understand that the space has limitations given the nature of tunnels below. However, there is no reason to avoid inclusion of raised beds, greenwalls, green roofs and imaginative planting to increase the amount of green space and potential air quality improvement.

The seating looks to be concrete and rather unwelcoming. We'd like to see seating combined with raised green spaces, similar to that at Spitalfields Market.

2. Identity

There is no attempt to give the new space its own identity other than it being the exit from the new station. We strongly urge that, given the history of the station, the space become a peace garden. We see commemoration of those that have died in the terrible tragedies at KX and the vision of peace, similar to that expressed by the OneLondon campaign following the 7/7 bombings, as a huge opportunity.

3. Public art

We support the call from kingscrossenvironment.com for a fifth plinth providing a dynamic site for public art, linking the Square with the University of the Arts' new setting behind the station.

4. Pedestrians and cyclists

We welcome removal of all the barriers and sheep pens around the pedestrian crossings at the edges of the new square. However, we are disappointed that there appear to be no provision for cyclist bays and no new TfL cycle bays.

5. Water features

We had hoped that water would feature in the new square providing a relaxing and calming effect in an otherwise hectic environment. We do understand the limitations on this due to tunnels below ground level. However, water features do not necessarily have to be deep, neither do they need use a great deal of water. For example, there is no reason that the walls of the ventilation shafts should not become backlit waterfalls, recycling the relatively small amount of water they would each require.

6. Paving

The striped design of the paving appears to us as harsh and unwelcoming. Surely something softer would be more appropriate.

The way forward

We would like to see Network Rail engage with the community to redesign the square as there is hardly anything worthy of being retained in the current design. We would be very willing indeed to work with Network Rail on this assisting with a fast participative process that would result in greater buy-in and a better result.

Yours sincerely,



Sophie Talbot
Projects Manager