

KINGS CROSS DEVELOPMENT FORUM

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Mr. Boris Johnson
Mayor of London
Greater London Authority
City Hall
The Queen's Walk
London SE1 2AA

17 November 2011

Dear Mayor Johnson,

Plan co-ordination for King's Cross Square

This letter asks you to take immediate action to ensure that all the agencies involved in the development around King's Cross Station work together, so that each proposal is presented and considered in the light of an overall strategy, as well as the many National, London and Borough policies. In particular it asks you to enforce actively your London Plan policies for Opportunity Area Planning Frameworks, Transport (especially cycling and walking) and Place Making. It is written on behalf of the King's Cross Development Forum ('the Forum').

The Forum has operated for seven years, originally with the sponsorship of Camden and Islington Councils. It lets over thirty local groups be informed of, and comment on, the developments occurring in King's Cross Station and the environs, including the 67 acre site ('King's Cross Central') behind the Station. Its objective is to help to ensure that the developments meet the needs of residents, workers and visitors.

Current Situation

King's Cross Station is a key transport hub, a heritage site and the gateway to King's Cross Central. Its redevelopment is of interest to many parties: Network Rail, TfL (London Underground, Bus Management, Street Management), Camden and Islington Councils, English Heritage, various different architects and Argent, the developer of King's Cross Central. A particularly complex area is the area in front of the Station, including **King's Cross Square**, where planning objectives are especially difficult to reconcile.

Network Rail has lately submitted planning applications to Camden Council for reconfiguring King's Cross Square when the current entrance structure is removed in 2013.

Concerns

The complexity of King's Cross Square makes full co-ordination between the interested parties especially important. However, co-ordination appears to be lacking. Proposals for parts of the area are presented piecemeal: each seems to be treated by itself and to take little account of the entire area or even every aspect of its own part. Key factors lacking co-ordination include **pedestrian road crossings**, the style and size of **shelters for people waiting for taxis and buses**, the style and location of **signage**, the location of **bicycle stands**, and the **architectural consistency** of the various fixed structures around the site.

More details are provided in the annex to this letter, which is the response by the Forum to the planning applications.

Action Requested

The Forum is recommending the rejection of the planning applications by the Camden Council Development Control Committee meeting on 15 December.

The Forum asks that the GLA uses its authority to ensure full planning and operational co-ordination for this iconic heritage site before the Camden Council consideration of the planning applications.

Yours sincerely,

H. B. Lake

H. B. Lake
Chair
King's Cross Development Forum
<http://kxdf.wordpress.com>

Copies

Sir Edward Lister, Chief of Staff and Deputy Mayor, Greater London Authority
Isabel Dedring, Deputy Mayor, Transport, Greater London Authority
Jenny Jones, Chair of the Planning and Housing Committee, London Assembly
Nicky Gavron, Deputy Chair of the Planning and Housing Committee, London Assembly
Cllr Sarah Hayward, Cabinet Member for Community, Regeneration and Equalities, Camden Council
Cllr Sean Birch, Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Transport, Camden Council
Ed Watson, Assistant Director of Regeneration and Planning, Camden Council
Sam Monck, Assistant Director of Environment and Transport, Camden Council
Charles Thuaire, Senior Planning Officer, Camden Council
Cllr Paul Convery, Executive Member for Planning, Regeneration and Transport, Islington Council
Kevin O'Leary, Director of Environment and Regeneration, Islington Council
Ian Fry, King's Cross Programme Director, Network Rail
Jaswinder Rupra, King's Cross Project Manager, Network Rail
Mike Brown, Managing Director, London Underground and London Rail, TfL
Leon Daniels, Managing Director, Surface Transport, TfL
Michèle Dix, Managing Director, Planning, TfL
Robert Evans, Executive Director, Argent

Annex: Submission of the King's Cross Development Forum to Camden Council on King's Cross Square

Planning reference number 2011/4782/P

Planning reference number 2011/4888/P

Planning reference number 2011/4779/P

Planning reference number 2011/4838/P

Planning reference number 2011/4889/P

Planning reference number 2011/4785/L

The King's Cross Development Forum is concerned with ensuring that development of the King's Cross area meets the needs of people living or working there now and in the future. It comprises individuals and representatives of many organisations from the local communities.

The scheme was described to the Forum by the architects (Stanton Williams), Network Rail and Transport for London (London Underground management) at a meeting on 4 November. The Forum is grateful for having had this opportunity to hear about the scheme and is now able to comment fully on the current proposals.

The Forum understands the constraints under which the architects have been working. It is glad that Network Rail held a public consultation (though better publicity and more information should have been provided). It acknowledges that the scheme has been improved in response to the public consultation.

However, the Forum has various extremely important concerns. Most of these arise because there appears to be no co-ordinated planning: the scheme is a partial plan that does not deal with the whole Square, all the contents of its part of the Square, or the experience of travellers once they leave the Square. Yet the site has national and international significance for its listed buildings and as a transport hub.

The requirements for the site inevitably conflict. There is competition for such space as the site can spare. This makes the need for co-ordination all the more critical.

The scheme is not due for implementation before 2013. **The Forum recommends that the plans be sent back for modification and completion before the submission of a fresh planning application.** The Forum expands on the reasons for this below.

1. *Road crossings.* The scheme does not consider road crossings, apparently because they are the responsibility of Transport for London (street management). However, the volume of pedestrian traffic envisaged by Network Rail, and already apparent around the Station, make the current arrangements untenable. The Forum understands that Transport for London is to put forward plans for the crossing by Argyle Street; however, in the opinion of the Forum more extensive changes are likely to be needed, to give more direct access across Euston Road from King's Cross Square, perhaps as at Oxford Circus. This has been requested on many occasions over the last five years (most recently at the Place Shaping workshops held by Camden). **The plans should not be considered until the street crossing problems around the site have been resolved and the natural pedestrian traffic flows can be modelled.**

2. *Design consistency.* The covering of the stairs closest to the Station, and the taxi stand canopy, have not been integrated into this scheme and have been designed by different architects, apparently at the behest of English Heritage. The emphases are said to be on *granite-clad sculptural forms* in one case and on lightness and invisibility in the other. **The plans should provide evidence that the designs form a consistent and unified whole.**

3. *Signs.* All signage has been omitted from the plans, apparently at the suggestion of the Camden planning officers. Without signs the design is incomplete and the views are misleading. Large clear signs are needed for strangers to find their ways around this transport hub, but street clutter is extremely unsightly and will destroy the ambience. As a major aim of this whole scheme is to provide clear views of King's Cross Station, a planning application that does not describe the position and size of the signs is seriously incomplete. **The plans should incorporate the signage.**

4. *Bicycle stands.* The scheme provides no bicycle stands. The Forum considers that cyclists should not have to walk to Building B1, or even to Station Square, to find bicycle stands, and that bicycle stands could be positioned near the Egg or the Rotunda without obscuring the view of the Station or impeding pedestrian access much. **The plans should ensure that the site, as a major transport hub, provide bicycle stands in accordance with the London Plan.**

5. *Bus stops.* The scheme provides relatively little shelter. The Forum does not share the belief, apparently held by Transport for London (bus management), that the canopy would not be used by bus passengers sheltering. As the canopy inevitably obtrudes into the view of the Station from the south, the Forum suggests that, by making the canopy wider (to the north, so that its northern edge would align with that of the Rotunda, or to the south, so that it would be closer to the bus stops), more waiting space could be provided without worsening the view.

6. *Shops.* The scheme appears to have enlarged the Egg to include shops, though shops are not 'plant' and there are shops in the adjacent Western Concourse. This jars with the remarks made by the planning inspector at the appeal about the London Underground surface structures in 2010, when he said "I acknowledge that most of the contents of the Egg are permitted and have been efficiently fitted into the space. However, the bin store is not 'plant' as permitted by the CTRL Act and could be located elsewhere." According to Network Rail (in a press release of 13 September) "The creation of a brand new concourse will mean passengers will enjoy over 27,000 sq ft of new shops and restaurants." That sounds like enough.

7. *Taxi stand canopies.* There is a gap between the taxi stand canopy and the Egg that does not contribute greatly to pedestrian access or the view west from the Square. Even taking into account safety and security requirements the taxi stand canopy could extend to the Egg to give better protection to people, include bicycle stands, and appear similar to the other Square canopies.

8. *Granite cladding and paving.* Dark granite seems an oppressive material for both the vertical surfaces and the horizontal surfaces. A lighter tone, perhaps in another stone, would be more cheerful and more in keeping with the brickwork of the Station.