

Kings Cross Development Forum

Annual review September 2010-October 2011

Area activity

This year has seen the opening of the University of the Arts, the topping out of one residential building, and the start of construction of three others. However, despite pleas by the Forum, there are as yet inadequate transport links and road crossings so that people can reach shops and services, such as those of York Way and Caledonian Road, from the north east of the King's Cross Central area.

The Forum notes with sadness the death of a student cycling at King's Cross shortly after the opening of the University of the Arts.

Meetings

The Forum met three times in the year. The meetings were less frequent than would be best for reporting and developing the activities by the Co-ordinating Group and members of the Forum. Attempts to set up other meetings of the Forum failed for various reasons. In particular, there were several attempts to set up a meeting of the Forum to discuss the new Camden Council office block; though representatives of Camden Council agreed to attend that meeting, they were in practice unable to provide a time at which they would do so.

The Co-ordinating Group met eight times in the year and transacted business by email between its meetings. Among the matters discussed, besides those mentioned more fully below, were:

- Health service facilities in King's Cross Central.
- The Islington Core Strategy.
- The (still incomplete and inadequate) York Way improvements.

Planning applications

The Planning Response Team considered the substantial 'reserved matters' applications but left aside those that usually concerned only method statements and conservation matters. It submitted responses on behalf of the Forum to the applications for:

- Building T6 (the Urbanest student accommodation block).
- Zone J (a housing block).
- Building R5 (one of the two One Housing Group housing blocks, the other being Building R4).
- Building B1 (the BNP Paribas office block).

All the responses are on the Forum [web site](#).

In general the delay caused by the economic downturn seems to have benefitted the design of buildings before planning applications have been made. The architects and developers have taken more care over the detail, colour and texture of the surfaces and integration with the surrounding open spaces.

The planning application for Building B3 (the Camden Council office block) was submitted during the summer. Though the building itself appears to be thought out well, members of the Forum considered that the approaches to it lack presence and are dominated by the BNP Paribas office block. That building itself is undistinguished and offers no shelter or pleasure for pedestrians on Pancras Road.

The initial design for King's Cross Square was disappointing, even bearing in mind the constraints imposed by Transport for London. It followed a pattern of mediocrity in the public spaces on which the Forum has commented before. It has been improved following a public consultation in which members of the Forum were quite vociferous.

The Camden Transport Strategy

The Forum submitted a [paper](#). Though no response was received, many of the recommendations were incorporated in the draft document of the “Shaping the Future of the King's Cross Area” initiative.

In its paper, the Forum drew attention again to the detailed audit for Transport for London three years ago. Transport for London has never acted on this and is now, following the recent death, speaking of consulting on “representing the needs of all road users” and “delivering schemes on site very soon”.

The Camden “Shaping the Future of the King's Cross Area” initiative

Members of the Forum attended workshops to discuss the initial paper and the draft document that was produced following (belatedly) the workshops for the initial paper. That draft document has 56 pages listing some 31 actions for the development and support of the Camden part of the area around King's Cross Station. The members noted with dismay that no structures for liaison with Islington have been introduced and no timing or resources have been allocated. In general this document, while welcome, is at least three years late.

The London Assembly Review of Community Involvement in Planning

The Forum submitted a [paper](#). The enactment of the Localism Bill will affect planning greatly: if there is no neighbourhood forum, with coherent policies, programmes and plans, the draft law seems to let a developer do anything “unless it can be proven that the proposal will do material damage”.

Funds

The Forum applied for, and received, £1000 in funding from Community Action, the charity associated with One Housing Group. The funding is to defray costs on the basis that the

Forum is concerned to integrate and represent, as far as possible, the users and occupants of both King's Cross Central and its periphery. So far the Forum has not drawn on the funding.

Web site

The Forum [web site](#) has copies of the submissions made on behalf of the Forum and pointers to relevant external documents. Members of the Forum are urged to subscribe to receive automatically information about updates to the web site, especially as documents such as planning applications are too large to be sent in mass email. Subscribing is free and simply entails providing an email address under the heading "Future posts" at the web site. Updates occur every few weeks.

Members are also encouraged to subscribe to the King's Cross Local Environment [web site](#). This is concerned with more short term matters than the Forum web site and covers a wider range of topics, so updates occur every few days.

Feedback to and from Forum members

While polite and proper, Camden Council officers have made clear that the Forum will be considered as having no more weight than any one individual. Councillors have also responded in a similar vein to suggestions for:

- Collaboration between Camden and Islington.
- Preparing for new residents.
- Encouraging temporary facilities to support residents.
- Public discussions on the new Camden Council offices and King's Cross Square.

The Co-ordinating Group has engaged with various local groups, including member organisations, in accordance with its [paper](#) on the subject. However, it has received little feedback on the issues that concern members and few notifications that responses are being made to official and commercial proposals. Without this feedback the Forum is unable to exploit its strength in helping to get support for the ideas of these groups.

The coming year

In the next year, if Forum members wish the organisation to be effective, it must:

- Encourage links between Camden and Islington.
- Decide on, and take up, its role in the new neighbourhood forum planning structure following the enactment of the Localism Bill.
- Widen membership, particularly by engaging local groups and individuals as the King's Cross Central area is occupied.

For the King's Cross Central area, as the current buildings take shape the Forum will wish to work with various organisations (the University of the Arts, Urbanest and One Housing

Group) and groups of people (the staff and students of the University and the occupants of the residential buildings).

Acknowledgements

The Forum is grateful to the outside speakers, from the architects and developers, who have attended meetings of the Forum to explain their plans. In particular, Robert Evans of Argent has attended all the meetings and been helpful throughout.

The Forum is grateful to Camden Council, Argent and (for the Co-ordination Group) the Bartlett School of Architecture and Planning for providing meeting rooms without charge.

Elections

Nominations are sought for members of the Co-ordinating Group to be elected at the annual review meeting on 4 November 2011. All the current members are willing to remain in their positions, but other nominations may be submitted.

The terms of reference of the Forum provide for four local groups and two ethnic minority groups to appoint representatives to the Co-ordinating Group. Only one group has in fact taken up its place. This is the King's Cross Railway Lands Group, whose interests run closely with those of the Forum as a whole.

Appointees (at review date)

- Chair: Hugh Lake.
- Vice Chair: Angela Inglis.
- Secretary: Robert Milne.
- Treasurer: Matty Mitford.
- Co-ordinating Group: the above officers and Michael Edwards (on behalf of the King's Cross Railway Lands Group), Helia Evans, Jim Humphris, Norman Sheppard.
- Planning Response Team: Michael Edwards, Anne Howeson, Norman Sheppard.
- Representatives on implementation panels:
 - Access Forum: John Chamberlain, Helia Evans.
 - Design Panel: Del Brenner, Angela Inglis.
 - Construction Impact Group: Jim Humphris.