

## **King's Cross Development Forum**

### **Annual review November 2015-November 2016**

#### **Area activity**

This year has been one of consolidation, in which new buildings were started but few were completed. Different meetings of the Forum have covered varied topics and have attracted diverse audiences.

#### **Meetings**

The Forum met three times in the year. It heard presentations about:

- Zone W.
- Building Q2.

These are discussed in the remarks below about planning applications and building designs.

The Forum also heard from:

- A senior planning officer from Transport for London (TfL), and a representative of London Cycling Campaign on the initial proposals for removing the King's Cross gyratory.
- The travel plan co-ordinator for the King's Cross Central area about the wish to enhance sustainable transport (such as cycle parking, way finding and pedestrian safety).
- Argent on a summary of the open space policy.

The Steering Group met two times in the year and transacted business by email between its meetings.

However various meetings of the Forum were planned but did not take place. People who were apparently enthusiastic about the opportunity to present projects nonetheless failed to confirm that they would attend on any date; in so doing they wasted the time of the Steering Committee and created unusually large gaps between meetings.

#### **Planning applications**

The Forum noted that, as reported in the [minutes of the meeting](#) of December 2015, the proposal for Zone W had been improved considerably since being presented to the Design Panel and Access Forum. Despite its continued reservations about the colours and finishes and about the possible creation of a canyon in York Way, it opted not to respond to the planning application.

The Forum was also concerned about some of the design decisions made about Building Q2, as mentioned in the [minutes of the meeting](#) of July 2016: some members of the Forum felt that the end result was rather ugly and too dark and that the fit-out and lay-out might be awkward as those at 5 Saint Pancras Square and the Oasis Sports Centre. The concerns were passed to the Camden officer responsible for these leisure facilities, but no objection was raised by the Forum otherwise.

The proposal for Coal Drops Yard, considered in 2015, incorporated an extraordinary roof above the nineteenth century industrial buildings in order to accommodate a department store. The Forum decided to oppose this proposal in its [response to the application](#) when the plans were submitted. Five other organisations (the Victorian Society, the Islington Society, Save, the Camden Civic Society and the Regent's Canal Conservation Advisory Committee) did so, too. These objections all noted that the planned extra floor and massive new roof would destroy some original fabric and obscure the original purpose. However, the meeting of the Camden Development Control Committee was conducted in a way that prevented the voicing of these objections. Only one Councillor felt able to say that the proposal was ugly or unnecessary; it was duly approved by the Development Control Committee.

### **Building designs**

Camden Council organises a Design Panel and an Access Forum to review plans for the King's Cross Central area before submission as planning applications. These bodies now hold joint meetings. Unfortunately these meetings are held during the working day, which limits who can attend regularly or even ever; nonetheless John Chamberlain, Del Brenner, Helia Evans, Malcolm Tucker and Robert Milne attended all of them collectively and most of them individually. The notes from the meetings of the Design Panel and Access Forum appear rather rarely, and the plans circulated for those meetings are not published (so that in principle the architects can have second thoughts before publication). The plans looked at this year included those for:

- Building Q2.
- The bridge from Goods Way past the Fish and Coal Buildings.

Building Q2 needs to meet requirements that it did not bear heavily on the railway tunnels immediately underneath and that it be slightly distinctive to reflect its civic role. Because of these the architects propose constructing it from wood more than steel or brick and cladding it with dark zinc panels. There was also a wish to echo the Midland Goods Shed by having a saw-tooth roof instead of a roof garden.

The bridge from Goods Way past the Fish and Coal Buildings is probably intended to evoke terms such as "icon", through its positioning of a bandstand half-way across. Any other purpose is unclear, as it will be close to the bridge into Granary Square and not align very well with routes from Pancras Square. The Steering Committee has written to enquire whether there could be proposals for more effective ways of spending the money.

### **Construction impact**

Camden Council holds four Construction Impact Group meetings each year to monitor the King's Cross Central area development and the construction impact on the local environment. Attendees are from Argent (and the contractors involved in the development), Network Rail, Camden Regulatory Services, Camden Environmental Health, Transport for London, a Maiden Lane Resident and King's Cross Development Forum representatives, who are Deklan Kilfeather and Jim Humphris.

As well as being briefed on the construction progress with each building and public realm areas the Group receives quarterly noise and air quality reports highlighting any threshold breaches, the circumstances for the breach and the remedial actions taken. Similarly complaints from the public and any consequential actions are reported.

Construction progress is documented [here](#).

## **Open space provision**

The intentions for open space have changed over the years, because, for example, the proposed office block for Sainsbury has been replaced and the roads nearby have been reconfigured. A description of the policy and the plans more detailed than that received by the Forum this year is to be arranged.

There have discussions about a permanent location for the Skip Garden. These are particularly important considering that the site has relatively few trees and rather many hard grey surfaces (perhaps because tunnels and utilities restricted tree positions). In fact the proportion of open space in the King's Cross Central area (let alone the proportion of green space) is not especially high: a UN report on major cities in the world comes up with much the same figure as an average.

The open air swimming pool is regarded by Argent as an art work that is intended for temporary installation, uneconomic to maintain, too little used and in conflict with longer-term plans for the open space. The Steering Committee, on behalf of the Forum, took a rather different view: it authorised the Chair to sign for it a [letter from the King's Cross Pond Campaign Group](#) asking Argent to seek permission from Camden Council to keep the pool open or at least intact, initially for a short period beyond its announced closing date, so that:

- Argent and Camden Council could consult people who live in the area and people who visit the amenities of the area about their views, and ask them whether they would like to keep the pool, or if they would prefer to have the area included in Cubitt Park as originally planned.
- The King's Cross Pond Campaign Group could explore possibilities for fund-raising to help meet the costs of establishing and maintaining the pool on a more permanent basis.

The ultimate response from Argent, a month later, said that "several irrevocable steps" were being taken that would enable the park to be completed by spring of 2017 (and would make restoring the pool rather expensive). The steps included ending the lease with the lifeguarding company, removing the toilets, pumps and filters, and appointing a contractor to complete the park. Though some councillors were interested and helpful, a [deputation by the King's Cross Pond Campaign Group](#) to Camden Council merely led to a reiteration of the Argent position by Camden Council.

## **Transport provision**

The initial proposals by TfL for the King's Cross gyratory were broad and general, with the intention of asking for community input; they had been modelled only to the extent of checking that vehicles could go around all the corners of the roads that might be converted to two way. The next stage would involve detailed modelling and a consultation on the initial proposals, to be followed by a further consultation on the detailed proposals in 2017. The alternative proposals from the London Cycling Campaign review group placed their emphasis on providing space for cyclists from the existing roads, considering that the initial proposals did little to help with residential street pollution, bus traffic and pedestrian movement as well as safe cycle route provision. Forum members felt that the initial proposals were not far-reaching enough; more options need to be considered, along the lines of those suggested by the London Cycling Campaign. The [response to the consultation](#) by the Forum reflected these views.

The King's Cross Travel Plan Coordinator promotes sustainable transport to, from and across the King's Cross Central area and supports occupants of the site in developing their own sustainable travel initiatives as part of the area-wide travel plan. Accordingly there has been a bicycle maintenance workshop each month outside winter, a "walk to work" week, training in safe urban driving for heavy goods vehicle drivers, and a King's Cross cycling application for smart phones. Though in relative terms the number of people cycling to work had fallen (because the people working in the area are predominantly office staff) there is a very high demand for cycle parking, just as the Forum has been pointing out whenever building plans have come before it.

Further details of the discussions on transport provision are in the [minutes of the meeting](#) of March 2016.

### **Community Infrastructure Levy**

The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) levied by the Mayor of London is spent on CrossRail. However, 25% of the CIL levied by Camden Council will be devoted to local works. The councillors are supposed to have consultations with local groups on priorities, which will typically relate to transport, health care, education or recreation. The Forum indicated to councillors that it would like to be involved in such consultations. One councillor requested an opinion, but the Steering Committee felt unable to provide one, as the request was made with less than a day's notice.

### **Funds**

The Forum continues to hold £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 the King's Cross Central area and its periphery.

### **Communications**

Members of the Forum were consulted by three individual students, who were typically writing dissertations on community involvement in the development of the King's Cross Central area. Members also welcomed and supported community social events organised in the Skip Garden for summer and autumn.

### **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.

## **The coming year**

With greater occupancy of the King's Cross Central area the Forum is intended to become a site occupants association that would put forward the views of people living or working in the area. In this role it would complement the residents associations dealing with the managers of particular buildings (such as One Housing Group, in the case of Saxon Court and Rubicon Court).

Of course while the area is still under development, the interests of the occupants will to some extent be considered in the marketing efforts of the developers. The intention and value of the Forum should be kept under review. In the mean time the Forum should ensure that it engages properly with the occupants of the housing and offices now becoming available. Much remains to be done if the Forum is to serve a useful purpose in the future. The Secretary and Treasurer feel that the Forum would be served better by officers who live there than by them; they are therefore asking for replacements to be nominated.

## **Acknowledgements**

The Forum is grateful to the outside speakers from the architects and developers, and employees of TfL, Camden Council and Islington Council, who have attended meetings of the Forum to explain their plans.

The Forum is grateful to Camden Council for providing meeting rooms without charge.

## **Elections**

Nominations are sought for members of the Steering Group to be elected at the annual review meeting on 22 November 2016.

## **Appointees (at review date)**

- Chair: Ben Williams
- Joint Deputy Chairs: Deklan Kilfeather and Rachel Coyle
- Secretary: Robert Milne
- Treasurer: Jim Humphris
- Other Steering Group members: Del Brenner, Helia Evans, Jasmine King, Ernie Lew, Jamie Scudamore, Norman Sheppard, Lucy Tammam and Malcolm Tucker
- Representatives on implementation panels:
  - Access Forum: John Chamberlain, Helia Evans.
  - Design Panel: Robert Milne, Malcolm Tucker.
  - Construction Impact Group: Deklan Kilfeather, Jim Humphris.