

King's Cross Development Forum

Annual review November 2016-November 2017

Area activity

This year has been one of consolidation, with only one major planning application.

Meetings

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

- Zone A.

This is 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) on the feedback to the initial proposals for removing the King's Cross gyratory.
- Argent on some details of the open space policy.

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

Another planned meeting of the Forum did not take place, because the intended speaker wanted to avoid any possibility of confrontation.

Planning applications

The Forum felt that the scheme for Zone A was inward-looking, with its own gym, pool and Multi Use Games Area (for example). In its [comments on the application](#) the Forum noted that:

- The roof top gardens could be opened much more frequently than that the once or twice per year mentioned by the architects. The architects seemed quite capable of solving any problems of confidentiality and security that more frequent opening might produce. (The planning officer responded that the outline planning permission did not require the gardens to be opened.)
- There should be a regular programme of events open to the public, perhaps akin to those being set up by the Francis Crick Institute and the Institute of Physics. This might include courses in coding, statistics and setting up companies (for example). (The planning officer responded that the auditorium would be too well occupied to provide public events.)
- The building could be configured to permit a future passage through to the bridge over the railway lines. (The planning officer responded that the requirement on Argent to permit a future passage to a bridge had ceased.)

Further details of the discussions are in the [minutes of the meeting](#) of May 2017.

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 attendance. The notes from the meetings 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:

- Pavilion H.
- Building S1.
- Zone A.
- Building Q1.

Pavilion H is to be a small building at the bottom of Stable Street. It was to have had two storeys but has been made to have one storey (except for the lift booth), at the level of Coal Drops Yard, not at the level of Granary Square, so it will not block the view of the Fish and Coal Buildings from Stable Street.

Building S1 and building S2 (which is currently being built) form a complementary pair of office buildings with shops or restaurants at ground level, fronts on Handyside Street, common materials and similar detailing. The basement size and location are limited by the railway tunnels underneath, so the cycle stores are on the ground floor while the associated toilets, showers and lockers will be on the first floor. The office floors above include three large roof terraces at different levels.

Zone A comprises one building that stretches from Goods Way to King's Cross Station between the railway lines and the Boulevard. It is varied by having rising lintels and planted balconies step up the site from south to north, in ways that seem to be tied to the internal routes and to the tapered shape. The office floors effectively hang from the core; every second or third floor reaches out as far as the external walls, where deep wooden mullions provide shade and reduce the loading of the walls. The shops are designed to look different outside from the offices (and indeed from each other): they vary from a large store to some cosy ones for which small Victorian shop fronts might be claimed as an inspiration. The scheme seems to be carefully thought out in various ways; the landscaped roof is especially notable.

Building Q1 is a three-storey office building just south of building Q2 (which is the planned sports hall). The railway tunnels immediately underneath had a lot of influence on its design. As with building Q2 there was a wish to echo the Midland Goods Shed by having a saw-tooth roof instead of a roof garden. However the saw-tooth is deliberately set at an angle to the walls (and to the saw-tooth on building Q2) so that from ground level the roof looks "interesting" on all the walls even if it jars with the other saw-tooth roofs when seen from above. Care has been taken with the form of the building: a notch has been cut from the building on York Way to remove a dark corner, and the corner between York Way and Handyside Street has been chamfered; however, even more might have been possible, as, for example, a slice all the way along the building, to broaden York Way, would have been better than the notch, and the short chamfered wall would be better with a prominent marker above.

Construction impact

In the past Camden Council has held 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 were 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. The intention was to provide a briefing on construction progress, report on noise, air quality and complaints, and highlight threshold breaches and consequential actions.

These meetings appeared to fizzle out during 2016, so the Forum asked for them to be revived for 2017. However, attendance this year seems to have been desultory, and at least one of the meetings has been cancelled at short notice. Construction progress was documented [here](#) until late in 2016.

Open space provision

The intentions for open space in King's Cross Central have changed over the years. The most recent change is to accommodate pedestrians (and cyclists) better around Granary Square: the main bridge over the Regent's Canal will be paved to create a continuous surface from Granary Square to Goods Way, the southern part of Granary Square and the adjoining east-west length of Stable Street will be restricted to pedestrians and cyclists and paved to match, vehicles will turn in Stable Street (except early in the morning, when they will be allowed to serve Coal Drops Yard and Fish and Coal Buildings) and busses will terminate in Canal Reach. Service vehicles for the Coal Drops Yard and Fish and Coal Buildings and Building H will be allowed past the turning point early in the morning. The paving should also mark out the original canal basin fully.

However, whether the Boulevard will remain closed to motor traffic is still unclear. TfL might still want to use it in the plans for the gyratory. In the mean time excluding vehicles from the main bridge into Granary Square is a useful advance.

The square in Zone S, currently expected to be called Keskidee Square, is to have a single large tree and paving by Lucy Skaer that commemorates the former brick making on the site and the Afro-Caribbean heritage of the Keskidee Centre near Caledonian Road (which was the first black arts centre in the UK, later became a church and was burnt down five years ago). Custom clay bricks will be made by hand to show marks of their making: some will highlight the nature of unfired clay, containing footprints, handprints and other traces of their manufacture. They will be arranged like African strip weaving, in which narrow bands of weaving are sewn together to produce a larger sheet; the effect should be produce a sequence of varied but connected motifs.

Transport provision

Lisa Young, from TfL, outlined the conclusions from the initial consultation on the King's Cross gyratory. In line with the [response to the consultation](#) by the Forum, TfL was considering:

- The shape and size of the congestion charge zone and ultra-low emission zone.
- The enforcement of existing rules, such as those on engine idling.
- The possibility of having raised tables for pedestrian and cyclist crossings.
- The value of two way working on each of the roads.

The feasibility design, with traffic modelling (of, for example, the effect of two way working on Pancras Road) was being made to take into account other schemes as far as Euston Station, including the cycling routes and the north-south traffic flows.

At the time of the meeting the consultation about it was expected to be in June or September 2012. Members of the Forum were dissatisfied with these dates; they wanted it in March, not June, let alone September, as many relatively cheap and simple remedies could be put in hand now without jeopardising the long term plans. However, since then the consultation has been delayed over a year: the official view now is that it will be in late summer 2018.

The traffic modelling included the cyclists but not the pedestrians except for the journeys between the stations. It is unclear how the business case (using costs of journey durations) could be correct without taking into account all of these pedestrian journeys.

Further discussion on these and other points is reported in the [minutes of the meeting](#) of November 2016.

Under current TfL plans, bus route 394 (from Homerton to Angel) will be extended to King's Cross Central by Copenhagen Street, York Way and Canal Reach. Whether Copenhagen Street is suitable for this purpose remains to be seen. The north-south public transport improvements for King's Cross Central still seem to be limited to increasing the frequency of bus 390.

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.

Camden Giving is being set up on the model of Islington Giving but with funding from the King's Cross Central Limited Partnership (KCCLP) and as a channel for CIL. The Forum discussed briefly with Global Generation the possibility of joint submissions to Camden Giving.

Funds

The Forum continues to hold £1000 in funding from Community Action, the charity associated with One Housing Group.

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 was 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).

However, the Forum has had only limited success in engaging with the occupants of the area. A year ago the Secretary and Treasurer pointed out that the Forum would be served better by officers who lived there than by them, that local replacements should be found, and that they intended to leave their posts after a year; however, no replacements have come forward. The Chair, too, is intending to resign. There have also been suggestions of setting up a site occupants association that is deliberately entirely different from the Forum.

The declining frequency of meetings of the Forum reflects both the reducing level of new major planning applications and the limited level of success in engaging the occupants. However, there is a case for the Forum to continue for a while, to consider the remaining major planning applications, through the Design Panel and the Access Forum and through occasional public meetings.

The annual review meeting should therefore consider what purpose, if any, the Forum should have in the future, and who should act as its officers for that purpose.

Acknowledgements

The Forum is grateful to the outside speakers from the architects and developers, and employees of TfL, 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 13 December 2017.

Appointees (at review date)

- Chair: Deklan Kilfeather
- Deputy Chair: Ben Williams
- Secretary: Robert Milne
- Treasurer: Jim Humphris
- Other Steering Group members: Del Brenner, Rachel Coyle, 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.