



# KINGS CROSS MEETING REPORT

## 01 JUNE 2012

### Produced by

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Special thanks to Ed Watson,  
Assistant Director Planning  
London Borough of Camden

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## TEN Group

TEN is a small group of primarily senior local government officers in London who have met regularly over eight years to share ideas and exchange knowledge on how to achieve urban renaissance. Using the principle of looking and learning they visit pioneering projects to draw out lessons that can be applied in their own authorities. In the process the members develop their skills as place-makers, and are able to build up the capacity of their authorities to tackle major projects.

Front cover images:

Left: The Granary building has been converted into the University of the Arts

Middle: The architectural roof of the King Cross Railway concourse attracts interest

Right: The setting for our meeting; The old Parcel Yard has been converted into a Fullers pub

All photos above and many of the photos in the body of this report are credited to Mark Lucas of Redbridge council

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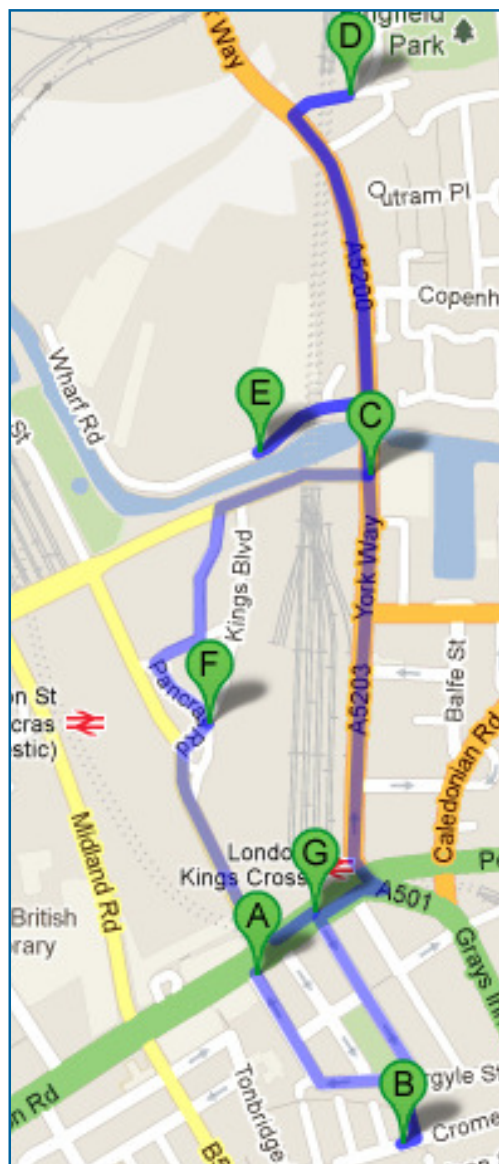
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## Introduction

The final TEN Group session of series eight started by walking around the Kings Cross area and looking at some of the major developments underway. We then discussed the impact of strategic or 'mega' development schemes, and how potential conflicts can be minimised, and community benefits secured. The discussion greatly benefited through contributions from Mike Edwards of UCL, who has been involved in the area since 1987 when Camden asked him to look at proposals, and from Craig McWilliam of Grosvenor Developments, who are engaged in a number of major mixed use development schemes.

## Walking route

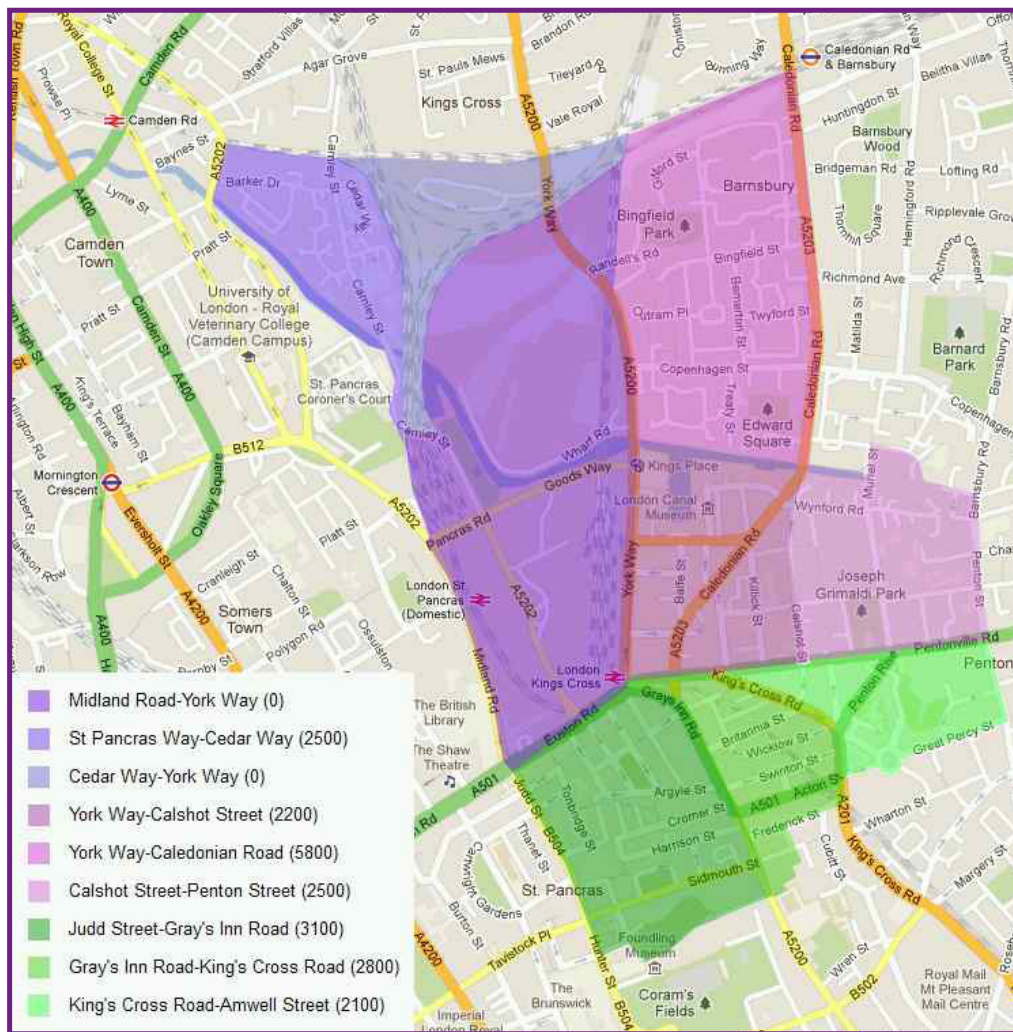
- |        |  |
|--------|--|
| 2.00pm | Meet at corner of Argyle Street and Euston Road (A)<br>WC1H 8EG            |
| 2.10pm | Walk to Cromer Street to see existing Kings Cross (B)                      |
| 2.20pm | Walk through Regents Quarter to Kings Place (C)                            |
| 2.40pm | Street-view of developing student accommodation                            |
| 2.50pm | Arrive at Central Saint Martins College of the Arts and visitors centre(D) |
| 3.20pm | Arrive at Kings Cross Western rail concourse (G) via Kings Boulevard (F)   |
| 3.30pm | Arrive at The Parcel Yard for meeting and Refreshments (G)                 |
| 3.40pm | Ed Watson gives presentation   |
|        | Michael Edwards says a few words   |
|        | Discussion   |
| 5.30pm | End of meeting   |



The walking route - Google Maps

## Context

The map provided by the new Neighbourhood Forum makes it clear that large as the railway lands are, they form a small part of a much wider area in transition which stretches both sides of the Euston Road.



*Neighbourhood Forum plan*

Historically the area has housed relatively poor and transient people, with some of the worst levels of deprivation to be found anywhere. The noise and smells from the stations and related industry blighted a large area, and most of the land was cut-off by railway lines and the canal. It latterly developed an unsavoury reputation for drugs and prostitution. However extensive areas of council owned flats in both Kings Cross and Somers Town have been renovated and the public realm upgraded with controlled access to the housing estates.



It was some 25 years ago that planners became aware of the development potential of the former Great Northern Railway goods yards, and its environmental significance. Initial proposals from a consortium led by Stanhope and Rosehaugh, based on land owned by National Freight Corporation, aroused considerable debate over what values should prevail. The office based scheme collapsed in a downturn, without agreement having been reached on land assembly. However government funding through the Single Regeneration Partnership enabled improvements to be undertaken to the public realm, including upgrading the hotels around Argyle Square.

*Right: September 1987 article by Nicholas Falk and Sir Peter Hall*



*Kings Cross Overview Brochure - March 2012*

The area contracted from 100 acres to 67 acres, when the government decided that the terminal of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link should be at St Pancras and not Stratford and Waterloo, as originally conceived. It set up London and Continental Railways as a government owned vehicle to develop the high speed rail link, and benefit from some of the value from developing adjoining land. Argent, who had taken over and developed out Brindley Place by Birmingham's Convention Centre, secured the rights to develop the site. Fortunately they were acquired by the Post Office Pension Fund, which has provided a long-term source of funds to do the necessary decontamination and site preparation works, costing hundreds of millions, before any sites can be sold off for development.



Argent put a lot of effort into building relations with the local communities, and produced a charter setting out its basic principles. The consultations revealed a common interest in making the area safer, and improving access, with the predominant view that something should happen after such a long wait.

However, as Mike Edwards stressed, targeting public regeneration expenditure on the most deprived areas does not necessarily benefit the people who currently live and work there. Some may actually lose out when property values rise. Furthermore though the main need may be for jobs for those who are unemployed, particularly young people, the real problem is accessing those that already exist. There are also issues of overcrowded housing alongside under-occupied units, and how access to the public housing stock is managed.

### Walk around

The walk around revealed a highly diverse area, with a mixed residential community including a large number from Bangladesh, who were allocated the larger Council flats that became available once blocks had been renovated. We saw a number of community enterprises, like the Lumen Café, operating out of a church, as well as signs of enterprises that had come and gone, like development trusts. An area that was a byword for 'sleaze and vice' now benefits from large numbers of communal and public open spaces that reflect the Bloomsbury character of housing around squares. These are well-looked after and used, and prove the value of the public sector investing early on in environmental improvements. They also show what could be achieved through traffic schemes that cut-off movements for vehicles but made it easier for pedestrians and cyclists.

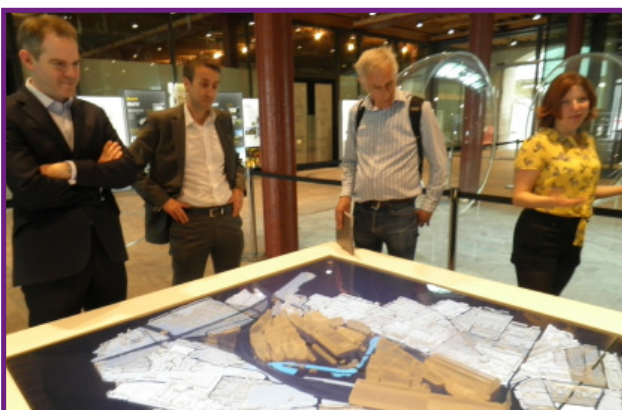
*Top: Lumen Cafe, 2nd from top: Character housing overlooking a public square and primacy to cycling, 3rd Primacy to pedestrians through attractive public walkways, Bottom: Regent Quarter*



The offices and restaurants in the Regents Quarter showed the benefits that can arise when simplistic developers' schemes are turned down, and a more intricate development results that conserved much of the original character. This was undertaken by P&O, prompted by evidence that the area was on its way up. They also sold post-war industrial units and a pub for an innovative scheme that has produced Kings Place. This has given London a new arts centre, with galleries and concert spaces, cross-funded by offices that are let to the Guardian newspaper group.

Another exceptional development has resulted from a chance meeting between Argent and the University of the Arts (formerly St Martins), who were looking for new premises. Perhaps thanks to a flexible planning permission and agreed master-plan, agreement was reached fast enough to allow them to move in to the old Granary, further reinforcing an image of the area becoming a 'creative quarter'. Links are being forged with local communities both there, and at the nearby Frances Crick Institute, which is being developed on the former St Pancras Goods Yard north of the British Library.

Almost by chance, the first housing to go ahead has been affordable and students' housing, thanks to extra investment from the Homes and Community Agency under their Kick-start programme. A training centre has been established on site for construction skills. A further piece in the jigsaw has been the transformation of Kings Cross Station, with a new concourse and Northern ticket hall, with some stunning spaces. The whole area is therefore benefitting from an unusual set of partnerships, and an imaginative form of planning, which allow for flexibility in use, while insisting on very high standards of design. The quality would certainly not have been secured if the original proposals had gone ahead, or if the government had not put in substantial public funds.



*Top: Guardian offices at Kings Place*

*2nd from top: Granary square nearing completion*

*3rd: University of the Arts exhibition hall*

*Bottom: Kings Cross model at the information centre inside the Granary building*



## Impact of regeneration

We considered the impact of the scheme in the superb setting of the restored Parcels Yard, which is now a Fullers pub and restaurant. In the discussion, it was agreed that sites of this kind should essentially be seen as strategic opportunities that are for the benefit of London as a whole. The benefits from the University of the Arts having better spaces would most probably result in increased popularity and subsequent spin-offs for the design and fashion industries. We seem to be getting better at doing regeneration, but there are still issues of who benefits, and the how the uplift in land values is captured.



*Top left: Fullers Pub; The Parcel Yard*  
*Top right: The Kings Cross concourse*

*Bottom left: A space for bicycles*  
*Bottom right: The rear entrance to kings Cross concourse and underground*

The Kings Cross scheme is proving attractive because there are sufficiently many designers and occupiers to create diversity and avoid the mono-culture so often associated with 'grand projects'. In the process a new destination is being created, and Central London now extends beyond the Euston Road (where the original railway companies had been compelled to terminate). It is possible that a different form of development agency, perhaps using Development Corporation powers, might have helped, but only if it could have taken a long-term view, and not been required to sell sites off for the highest value as early as possible.





*The joint Camden and Islington place plan and action plan for Kings Cross has been developed following consultation with people and organisations who live and work in King's Cross, drawing on a range of previous consultations and engagement in the area. It is a living document and the action plan will be monitored and developed over time with continuing input from the people and organisations who live and work in the area.*

## Neighbourhood plans and management

Instead of focussing on ambitious three-dimensional masterplans, which was one of the main recommendations from Richard Rogers' Urban Task Force, there is a new interest in what can be achieved through 'place-making' in existing areas. Non-statutory plans that seek to join up what already exists with what is feasible in the current financial climate could help change expectations. Some of the greatest benefits for poorer people can come from overcoming isolation and improving linkages (even though there may be initial resistance from community groups who want to keep their estates private).

Environmental improvements may be helped by financial contributions from developers, though there was scepticism about the impact of the Community Infrastructure Levy. It will enable funds to be raised from smaller developments, but does not do away with the need to negotiate agreements on larger schemes through Section 106. We learned that Haringey are offering developers in Tottenham freedom from both CIL and the need to provide affordable housing, which could incentivise private investment in areas of greater risk.

A major criticism was that the developments at Kings Cross have so far failed to secure an integrated approach on the part of transport planners, and London Underground led the project (because of the previous fire). The possibilities of changing the above ground traffic system are at long last being considered, but only due to the death of a cyclist. It seems we are so far unable to secure the kinds of comprehensive and integrated approach we have seen in situations like Berlin or Lille. These require land to be assembled and interests pooled, which calls for the kind of leadership that led to the implementation of the Congestion Charge, or the removal of the gyratory at Old Street.

There is also an issue of the time it takes to bring about change. Most people do not have the patience or capacity to wait for 25 years for changes to happen. Strategic development areas like Kings Cross inevitably cross boundaries. If London is to match the standards being

achieved in cities like Helsinki or Copenhagen, we need a different approach that does not just rely on extensive public subsidy and chance. As change often depends on successful lobbying, we need to find less-expensive, simpler and more effective ways of achieving transformations, for example by trying out ideas experimentally, and using short-term licences to take over unused land and buildings.

We may also have to find new forms of housing to secure a better utilisation of the existing stock, and to enable poorer people to improve their situation without having to leave their families or neighbours behind. Without 'pathways' or 'ladders' many young people may feel disenfranchised, which can lead to dealing in drugs or civil disorder. The answers may call for different forms of renting, perhaps modelled on Continental systems where renting is much more common and less stigmatised. For example a building might be rented out at less than market rents for ten or twenty years, and then sold once the area as a whole had improved. Newham is ensuring that available social housing is only allocated to people with jobs, or good employment prospects.

### **Lessons for the future**

There was a general desire to take the TEN Group forward for what will be its ninth year, and to focus on how we can apply best practice from elsewhere to the London situation. The TEN Group's combined experience and members could provide the basis for a manifesto that sought to combine environmental or spatial planning with social and economic benefits. This depends on getting 'buy-in' from other departments and agencies.

We should therefore look again at how to build skills and capacity, perhaps taking a common challenge such as reducing energy costs and emissions, upgrading existing housing estates or giving primacy to pedestrians and cyclists in appropriate places. We should continue to widen our membership, which means that members need to involve colleagues, and bring in other authorities. The idea of including those with development expertise or previous members was welcomed. We may also try to apply group expertise to particular problems that are holding back development, and, for example Haringey might learn something from Ealing (or vice versa).

The symposium on learning from Scandinavia was worth doing, but only partially achieved its aims. This is because though it produced an excellent discussion and report, it did not bring in the 'change makers' we were seeking to involve. We need to engage as a group with what is being done to develop a new 'vision for London'. If we were to focus on energy saving measures, we may well bring the experience of Freiburg over to London, which could act as a draw. If we can involve the right people, it would probably be of greatest interest to make the next European study tour to Paris, given the obvious similarities and fast rail link. We could look at how they are tackling some of the run-down suburbs, as well as spectacular new developments such as at Tobiac on the old Citroen works, and across the river at the new park at Bercy. Mark Lucas offered to make initial contacts (and URBED also knows some local experts), with the idea that we have a meeting like the one on the Stockholm estate with some local practitioners and community members.



## Delegate List

### Attendees

Stewart Murray, Chief Planning & Regeneration Officer, Redbridge Council

Ed Watson, Assistant Director Planning & Public Protection, Camden Council

Karen Galey, Camden Council

Stephen Tapper, Assistant Director, Place Shaping & Enterprise, Enfield Council

John East, Divisional Director: Development Services, Newham Council

Sue Foster, Executive Director of Housing, Regeneration & Environment, Lambeth Council

Pat Hayes, Executive Director Regen & Housing, Ealing Council

Mark Lucas, Head of Regeneration, London Borough of Redbridge

Marc Dorfman, Assistant Director Planning & Regeneration, Haringey Council

Craig McWilliam, Executive Director Grosvenor Developments

Michael Edwards, UCL

Nicolas Falk, Founding Director, URBED

Jess Bousie, EA, URBED

### Apologies

David Hennings, Head of Regeneration, Catalyst Housing Group

Darren Richards, Head of Planning & Transportation, London Borough of Sutton

Daniel Ratchford, Strategic Director of Environment & Leisure, London Borough of Sutton

Toni Antoniou, Director planning and Environment, Croydon Council

Tom Titherington, Catalyst Housing Group

Tom Jeffrey, Director Environment, Culture & Public Participation, Croydon Council

Seema Manchanda, Assistant Director Planning Services, Wandsworth Borough Council