

Design Review:  
**King's  
Cross  
Masterplan**

# Designed by Allies and Morrison

## Camden

12 February 2004

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We offer our congratulations to the design team and client on the impressive development of this masterplan. The constraints on the site are immense, and it is to the credit of the design team that the masterplan now on offer positively addresses these constraints in terms of the opportunities they hold, rather than the problems they create. The time that the client has allowed for design thought is laudable; the result is an ambitious scheme that has the potential to create an extraordinary new area for central London.

We welcome the thorough nature of the urban design analysis which underpins the masterplan. The scheme's development has clearly been an admirably in-depth process; we particularly welcome the use of a variety of architectural practices to work up possible designs for individual buildings or blocks in order to test the validity of the masterplan.

Set out below is a summary of the substantial points that we wish to raise following the latest presentation and in relation to the revisions and additional material that have been made subsequently in response to our comments. The points which we think will need to be addressed as the detailed design work continues are as follows.

### Entrances to the site

It seems to us that the southern entrance to the site is not yet fully resolved. It is not clear that it will act to draw people further into the scheme; the space feels somewhat ill defined, and the positions of the German Gym and Southern Stanley Building seem uncomfortable against the massive facades of the two stations. It would be useful to see an illustration of this relationship when the proposed concourse to King's Cross Station is in place. We recognise that there is uncertainty about the future of the new concourse and we urge the London Borough of Camden to work with the rail authorities and their architects to resolve this situation. However, we note that the urban design guidelines for the Southern Area begin to address the treatment of the key elevations facing onto Station Square, so that, even if the concourse is not delivered, these will form an appropriate gateway into the southern end of the site. We also think it is worth exploring the introduction of some degree of residential accommodation within the southern half of the site; the area towards the Regent's Canal is probably a more appropriate location than Station Square.

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There remains a danger that the northern end of the application site will be neglected in comparison with the south; it is a considerable walk from the mainline and underground stations. While we think that the northern end of the scheme still needs to achieve a greater sense of entrance from the north, we acknowledge that efforts have been made to address this, including the development of guidelines for the triangle site and the work illustrate views from York Way into the site. Reopening York Way underground station would make a significant difference to the access for the northern part of the site, and ideally we would like to see this happen. However, we understand that this is said to be difficult at present for a number of reasons. We would welcome the introduction of a tram service serving the northern part of the site as an alternative.

### East-west routes

We welcome the work on the east-west connections across the site and on making the masterplan relate better to York Way. We welcome the intention to create distinctive places along York Way, the fact that buildings will address York Way and the fact that there will be clear vistas into the scheme from York Way. The introduction of clear east-west routes across the site, particularly the continuation of Copenhagen Street via Goods Street through to Canal Street, is a welcome move. The other principal east-west routes, along either side of the canal, have the potential to be special parts of the scheme, and we welcome the exploitation of the level changes at the canal and the coal drops. We welcome the studies carried out to test the microclimate along Goods Way and Canal Square. While it is still the case that part of Goods Way will be overshadowed for much of the year, we accept that, as Goods Way is primarily a trafficked road, this is unlikely to present a significant problem.

We welcome the measures to ensure that, whatever use ultimately occupies the assembly shed site - and we think that the London Institute would make a positive contribution to the mix in this area - it will not be a 'blocker' in the scheme; it is important, given the central positioning of the building on the site, that the proposed public access and routes through are secured through any consent.

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## **Streets, spaces and servicing**

The hierarchy of streets and spaces is now clearer. Since we last saw this scheme, further work has been done to develop the landscape proposals. In particular, the illustrative landscape plans in the Public Realm Strategy begin to suggest a hierarchy of private, semi-private and public green spaces. We think it is important to ensure that there is a requirement for specifically green space as development areas come forward.

We welcome the fact that thought has been given to a servicing strategy, including significant basement servicing.

We note that the road patterns have been designed so that they are capable of being adopted, but a decision has not yet been taken as to whether this will happen. The mooted idea of a 'Neighbourhood Trust' to oversee the roads is interesting; however this issue is resolved, we would reiterate our view that the streets should be accessible 24 hours a day, should foster a sense of citizenship and encourage social integration. We urge that a model where a private company overtly controls access and monitors behaviour should be resisted.

## **Building heights at the north of the site**

We welcome the fact that some higher buildings are proposed for the north of the site, taking advantage of the increase in the height of the land here and the consequent potential for views across the site. In addition, this adds richness to the three dimensional form of the masterplan. We think the terrace block proposed to sit against the CTRL embankment is an appropriately strong form for this location. We are encouraged by the proposal to consider residential accommodation in this location where it can take advantage of the views.

## **Marker buildings**

We continue to support the proposition for marker buildings on the site to contribute to a sense of hierarchy across the site and to aid legibility and welcome the explicit guidance provided in each of the Urban Design Guidelines documents.

## **Further analysis**

In terms of understanding the scale and grain of development proposed, we think that comparing the proposals with other developments (including from abroad) of a similar scale, drawing out lessons from these projects about what works and what should be avoided is a useful exercise; we note that public space comparators have been included as part of the Urban Design Statement.

We welcome the work done to address the character of each of the development areas within the Urban Design Guidelines documents. We think that the views and accompanying text begin to give an idea about how

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people will experience and move through the area. It will be important that the development is geared towards the needs of local residents and people who will wish to visit on a regular basis, as well as tourists.

## **Wider co-operation**

It is vital for the future of surrounding areas that this scheme goes ahead. It is also crucial that progress in co-ordinating the relevant land ownerships and influences in the wider area is made. We continue to strongly urge the masterplanners, the planning authority, English Heritage, rail and other relevant authorities to work together to ensure that this scheme and the King's Cross station concourse scheme work successfully together, and that the planning application for this scheme can be considered in the light of a firm proposal for the reordering of King's Cross Station.

## **Conclusion**

We support the approach to the outline application for this site. We think that the scope and depth of supporting material provided including the Public Realm Strategy and Urban Design Guidelines for each of the development areas should help to ensure that the detailed proposals when they come forward will be consistent with the masterplan principles and will meet the high quality standards required for this significant area of regeneration central London. In our view, the Urban Design Guidelines documents provide an interesting model of what 'Design Coding' could be in an English context.

This is an important and exciting project which promises what we would hope to see in a proposal for this site - a new area with a strong character of its own, informed by the history and nature of the site, which at the same time links well with its surroundings - and we reiterate our strong overall support for the proposals. We are confident that the points we have raised can be dealt with as the evolution of the scheme continues.

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