

ESRC / CABE seminar June 08

Urban Renaissance?



King's Cross area: a renaissance?

This was a presentation in the 4th (London) seminar of a national series run by ESRC and CABE evaluating the impact of the Urban Task Force Report *Towards an Urban Renaissance* (1999). The proceedings will form a book edited by John Punter and Matthew Carmona in 2009

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Outline:

- Was the Urban Task Force report an appropriate approach?
- Was it appropriate for London?

- Disentangling multiple causation at King's Cross
- Outcomes and prognostications in and around King's Cross
- Tentative conclusions

Image: Sheila Smith on day 1 of the Eurostar service



Was the UTF an appropriate approach?

Lots of good sense

- on the need to strengthen the fiscal and policy autonomy of local government after decades of weakening
- on the potentialities of good design
- on mixed-use (cf Jane Jacobs)
- and....other things

Weaknesses

- on densification - not very scientific - rather a panacea
- on greenfields / brownfields - rather a fetish
- on property markets - ducking land policy
- on gentrification and displacement - in denial
- “...will identify causes of urban decline...” No.

International context of change in London

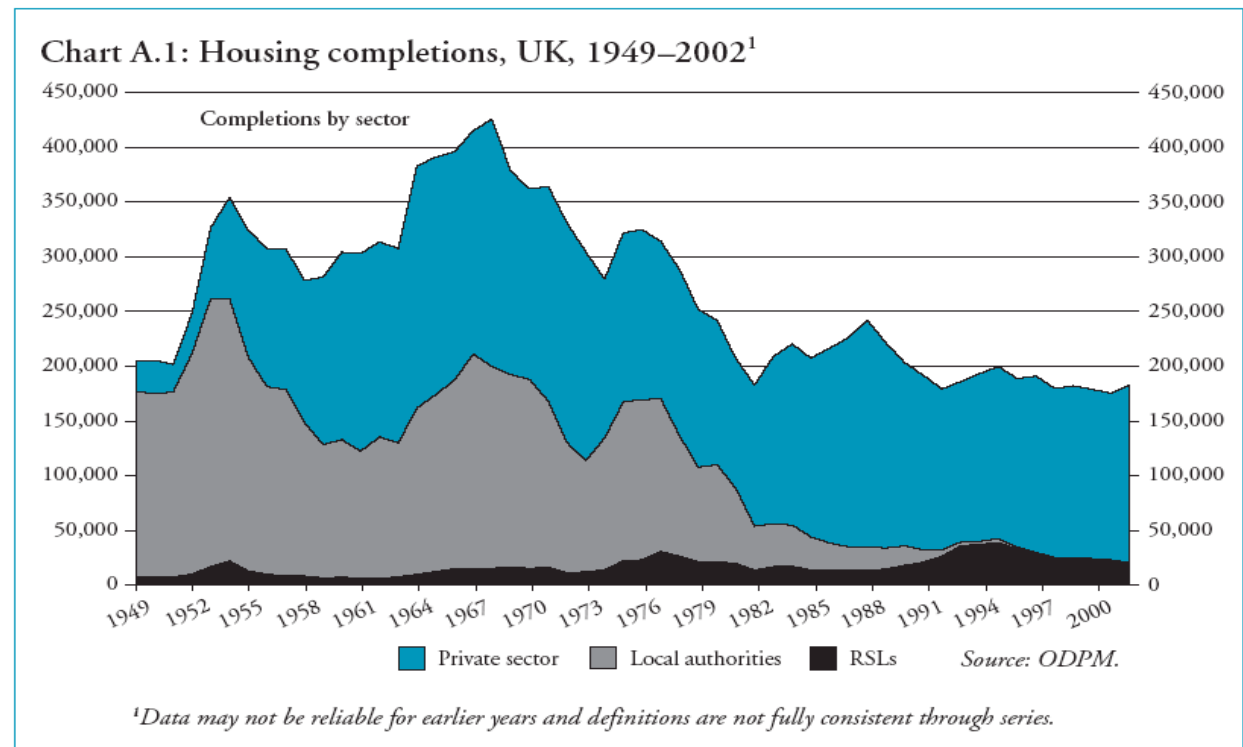
- A period of rapid capital accumulation
- A great deal of money-capital in the hands of investors worldwide, desperately looking for profitable outlets
- Authoritarian regimes increasingly dominating the profitable **production of goods**
- In N W Europe profit was being sought in chasing the growth of asset values; increasingly a *rentier* economy
 - housing
 - land and other real estate
 - retail and service businesses, wireless spectrum
 - in general: whatever was an ‘under-priced’ asset
 - fuelled further by low interest rates, de-regulation
- this speculative pursuit of asset values was self-fulfilling while it lasted, but inherently unstable

Multiple discourses, policies

- 'Urban Renaissance'
 - Social exclusion - NDC etc
 - Local government 'reform'
 - 'Competitiveness' agenda
-
- There is not time in this short presentation to explore the conflicts among these agenda. An excellent critical review is Claire Colomb, Unpacking New Labour's 'Urban Renaissance' agenda: towards a socially sustainable reurbanisation of British cities, *Planning Practice and Research*, 22, 1, 2007
<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/content~content=a781484342~db=all>

UK housing and property

- Investment has been pouring in to housing, property and credit-supply
- ...but not much of that is going into **new production** of housing; most into acquisition, chasing up the prices of the stock
- = a practical dilemma for management of the economy:
 - high interest needed to deter credit growth and housing price inflation; but low interest needed for the productive economy. Stability may be unattainable.
- = an intellectual dilemma for neo-liberal economics
 - rising (house) prices do NOT produce the expected surge in output so the problem gets worse, not better



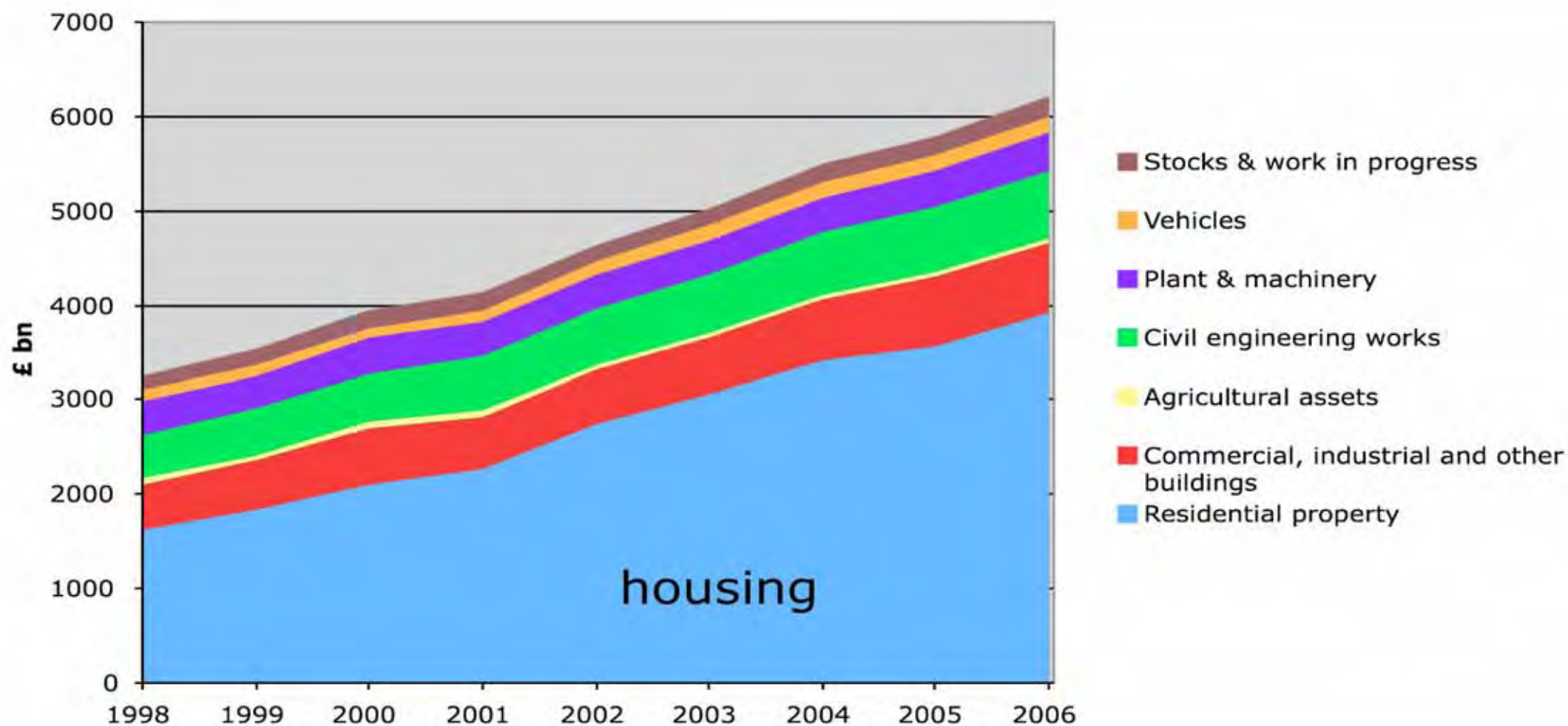
...and equivalent for London, to '06

Chart 1 Housing supply in London by tenure since 1970



Source: GLA and Communities and Local Government

Market value of property in UK 1998-2006



- Fixed tangible assets; RICS 2008 from ONS 2007

Interpretations of the crisis

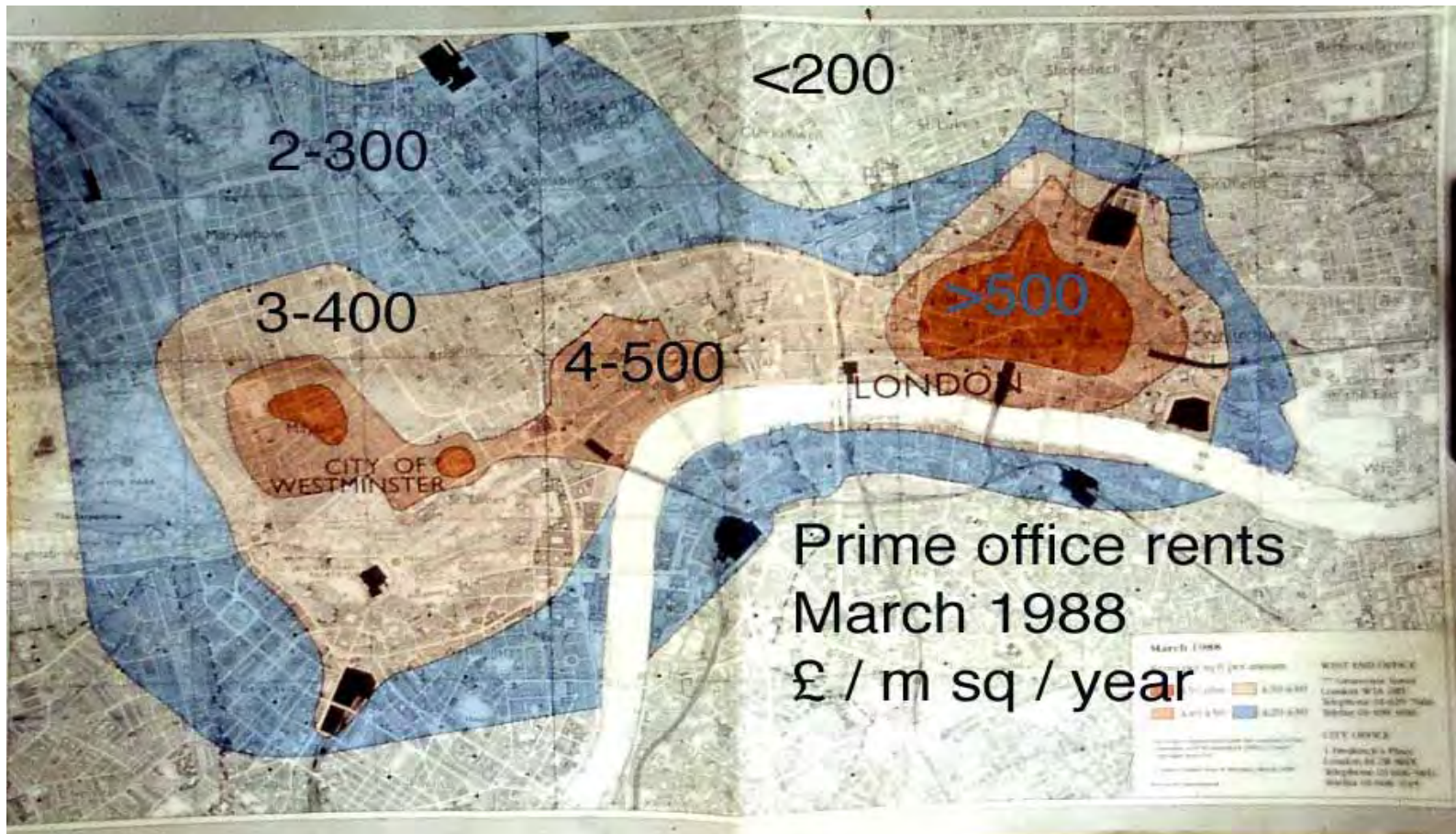
- Economists' orthodoxy
 - markets would equilibrate if permitted to do so
 - planning is the problem: de-regulate
- The alternative view
 - the process is a class-relations problem
 - planning is (an unwitting?) part of the mechanism
 - deal with it through a set of measures aimed at the class-relations directly
 - (rather an 'institutional' view, but more politically explicit)
 - London's growth is a poverty machine as well as a wealth machine

Was the Task Force appropriate for London?

- for most of London: NO (Docklands may be different)
- There was little unused land, and no problem getting it into use (except speculative withholding)
- De-population of Greater London and Central London had already reversed from 80s or 90s
- There is no net exodus of high income groups
- We do lose middle-income households, though
 - Buck et al 2003; Champion 1989; Hamnett 2003; Butler 2003
- A ‘renaissance’-style upgrade of London through urban design and intensification would increase displacement
- ‘One size fits all’: certainly not for London

King's Cross situation in 1990s

- ...still the lowest-rent part of central London



King's Cross situation in 1990s

- decades of disinvestment and planning blight



King's Cross situation in 1990s

- economy of non-corporate, and often non-profit activity, enjoying high accessibility at low rent
 - scene painting for opera, theatres
 - break-of-bulk drinks distribution
 - print
 - taxi repair
 - noisy clubbing
 - unions, charities, campaigns
 - prostitution, drugs etc
- dense social housing; multiple cultures and 'communities'

King's Cross situation in 1990s

- high deprivation scores in some wards
- but many higher-income, educated, working people too
- right-to-buy in council estates rising to about 30% now
- Severe overcrowding, especially (but not only) among Bengali households
- Both Boroughs' housing needs at unattainable levels; annual net losses of social units persist
- But some very good housing upgrading through Estates Improvement (well before SRB or Urban Renaissance)



Michael Edwards
photos of improved
estates.

King's Cross situation since mid-1990s: policy

- 'Regeneration' seen as establishing old and new narratives...
 - OLD: poverty, decay, drugs, prostitution, low property values
 - NEW: prosperity, cleansing, vibrant, creative, high property values
- 'London world city' the dominant discourse, with Finance and Business Services (FBS) in the lead
- Increasing influence of property/FBS sectors in the London policy community (via City Corporation, London First and later Ken Livingstone's mayoralty, and now Boris Johnson's. Major and Blair governments too.)
- London Plan (2003 onwards) clearly views KX as an extension of central London

GLC 'community areas' 1985

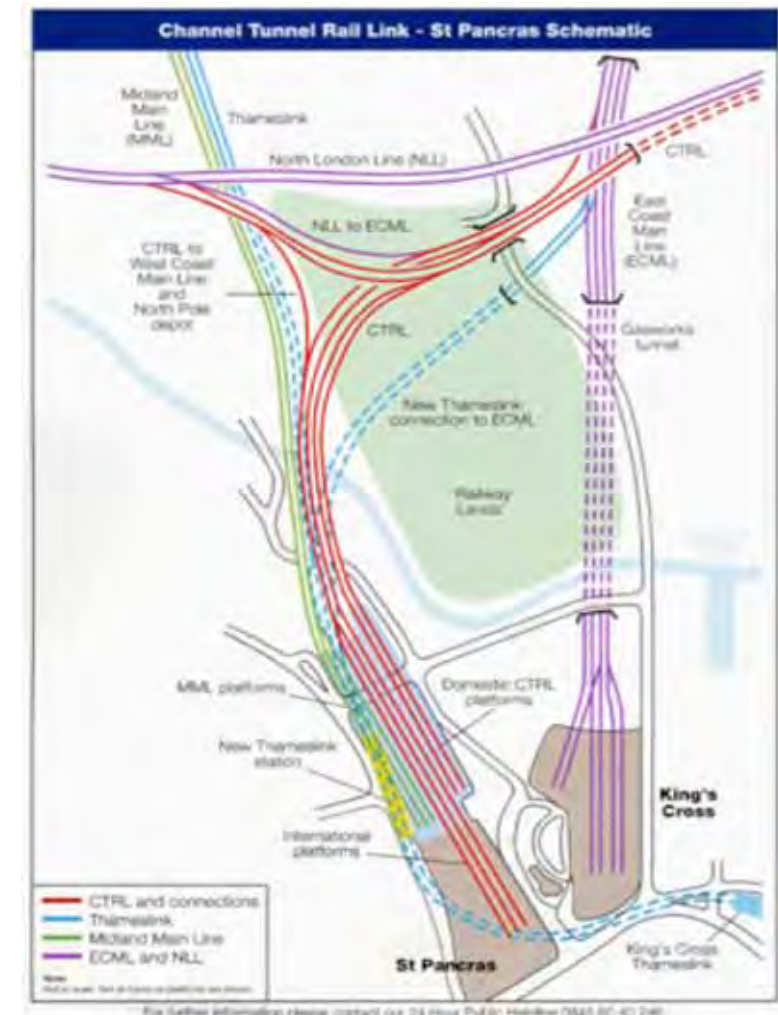
- London Plan CAZ
'opportunity area' 2003➤



CTRL

- Decision on new route in 1996 Act
- Crucial government decision on private and public financing: profits from the railway lands must reduce Treasury subsidy to London and Continental Railways
- SRB scheme contributed a clean-up, re-imaging, a good employment placement scheme and a legacy Trust which failed
- Railway land not available for development before 2007; but the blight is already ended and developments begin to go ahead on adjacent sites...

LCR plan






- Transformations in the Fleet valley, alongside the Circle and Thameslink lines, 2000-08



Michael Edwards
images

A photograph of the entrance to the Gagosian Gallery. The entrance consists of a large, frosted glass door on the left and a smaller, dark-framed door on the right. The text "GAGOSIAN GALLERY" is printed in a clean, sans-serif font on the large glass panel. The building's exterior is made of dark, textured stone or brick. The ground in front is a light-colored, paved sidewalk.

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

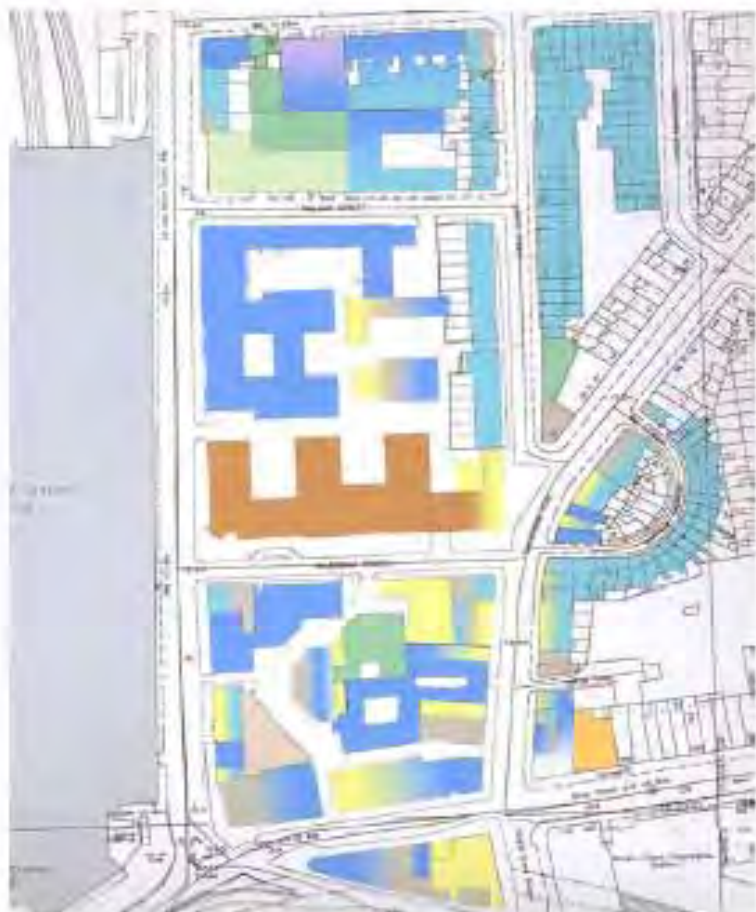
Regent's Quarter P&O



Figure 15, view of the east side of King's Cross before re-development (source data: Brochure one master planning, P&O – RHWL Architects, August 2001)

- 1970s Stock Conversion
- 1986 P&O acquired, then expected to sell for CTRL
- after CTRL Act, blight ends
- LB Islington planning brief
- 2001 Planning Application

Regent's Quarter Rolfe Judd



Map 2. Rolfe Judd Regent Quarter's master plan presented in September 2000. Source data: P&O Kings Cross Holdings, Analysis and Master plan, September 2000

Shop (S1)	Hotel (H1)
Professional and Financial Services (P1)	Reservoir (R1)
Food and Drink (F1)	Hotel/Residential/Reserve (H1/R1/S1)
Offices (O1)	Civic (C1) (to level 10 or 11) (to level 10 or 11) (to level 10 or 11)
General Industry (G1)	Theatre/Entertainment
Water and Distribution (W1)	Kings Cross Station

- much demolition proposed; offices, retail, hotel, parking, 20 dwellings
- 2001 application met massive resistance from communities, from conservationists, from SRB partnership
- permission refused by LB Islington and fresh negotiations started to secure conformity with planning brief



Map 3, RHWL, Regent Quarter's master plan, site plan ground floor (source data: Brochure one master planning, P&O – RHWL Architects, August 2001)

Regent's Quarter RHWL (P&O second attempt)

- more housing (138), less office, negligible parking, minimum demolition
- permission 2002
- 2/3 completed 2005
- private residential pre-sold fast
- non-residential sold on to Lasalle Investment Management



Figure 22, Regent Quarter future view of the site (source data: Brochure one master planning, P&O – RHWL Architects, August 2001)



Edwards photos of interior of Regent's Quarter, southern block

King's Place, York Way Parabola Land



- Site developed for light industry by GLC 1980s
- Housed printer and a pub
- Acquired by Parabola
- Dixon Jones appointed after competition
- concert halls, restaurants etc, galleries, 7 floors of offices, 28,000m²
- Half pre-let to *The Guardian*
- Completion 2008



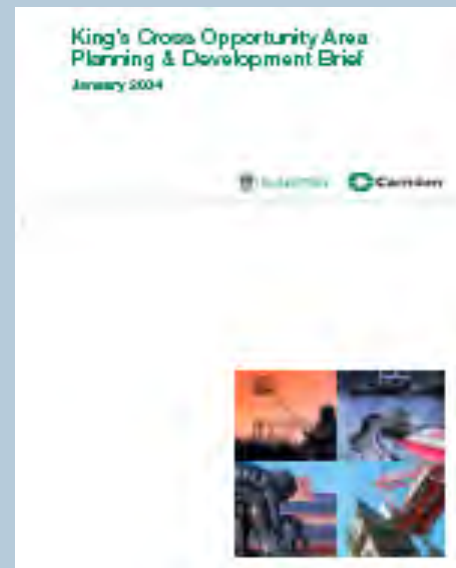
- below: McIntosh image

Parabola images above and below



King's Cross Central: Argent / LCR / Excel

- LB Camden developed a 'Planning Brief' (and finally joined with Islington)
- Uneasy compromise between market forces and citizen / political priorities
- Opponents marginalised as unrealistic, never satisfied
- Parallel, interactive and convergent process between Camden and Developers

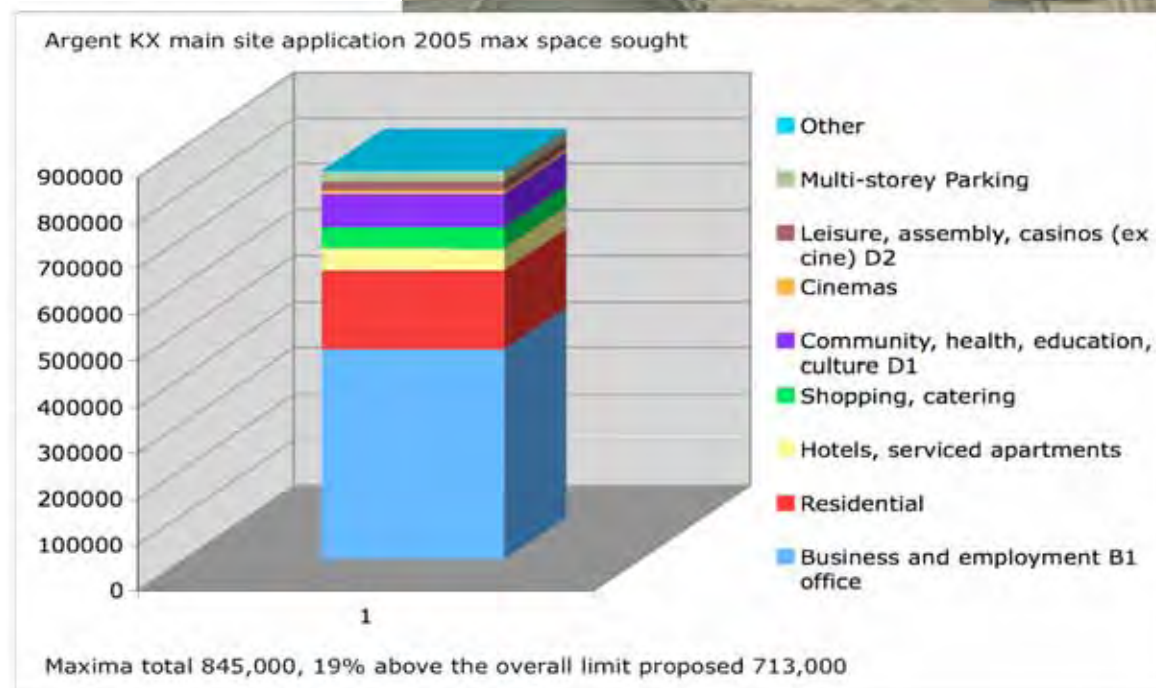


King's Cross Central: CBRE, Allies and Morrison, Porphyrios, Arup Economics,...

- Consultation process won prizes but was widely experienced as manipulative
- Dissident councillors marginalised
- Main controversies over social housing content and treatment of heritage
- Permission granted for a uniquely flexible mix of uses; outline Listed Building Consents



Images:
Argent above
Edwards below



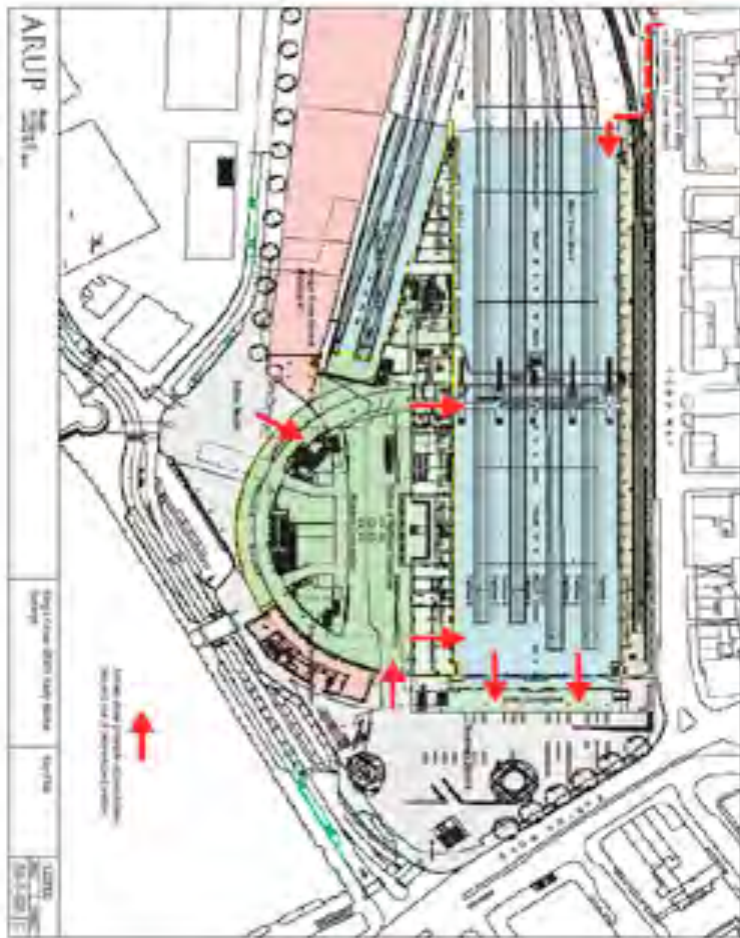
King's Cross Central Illustrative Scheme Plan



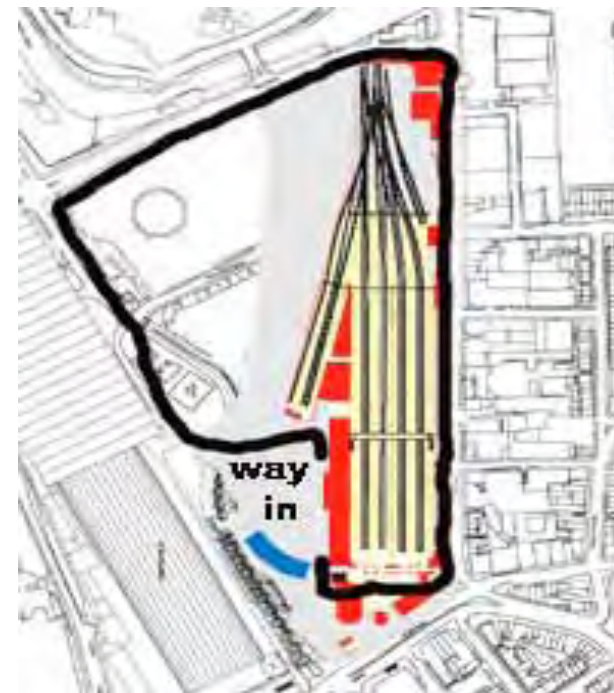
- Streets will be public highway
- use of Granary as university
- a pre-let to Sainsbury's HQ
- interesting architecture so far
- Argent a good developer and financially robust

- only 1700 dwellings, 42% 'affordable', on main site
- massive office blocks between stations erases heritage and overshadows canal, stations
- connectivity poor in some directions
- excess corporate office space

Finally, a public/private issue still rumbling on: permeability of King's Cross Station



- Network Rail proposing just one way in to a ticket-only station

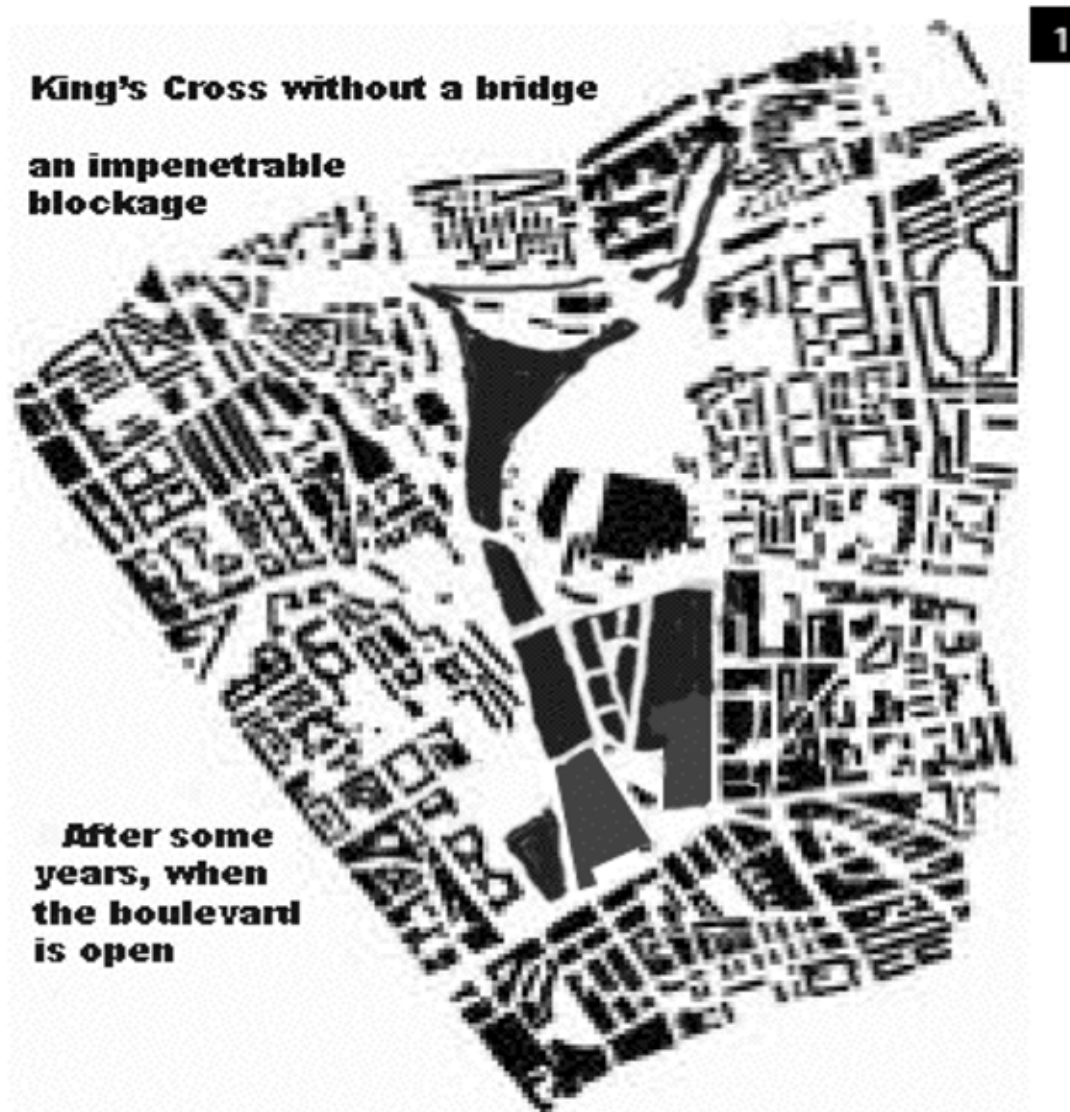


Graphics based on Network Rail / Arup



- In everyone's interest to have a link but...
- LBC is planning authority; LBI bears the worst impact
- LBC failed to ensure Argent and/or NR would pay for it

Figure ground based on work of Dr Khaisri Paksukchareon, shows situation during Argent construction



- more at www.kingscrossaccess.com

Figure ground based on work of Dr Khaisri Paksukchareon, shows situation after Argent construction

Conclusions

Prof Ruth Glass,
originator of
'gentrification' 1964



- neo-liberal hegemony (horrible jargon, but true)
- structure / agency
 - structures strengthening
 - agents compliant/weak
- We are witnessing very strong structures of thought and power, with few visible signs that any agent will change them.
- Losers largely without voice, or at least not heard
- Even the strongest development plan policies are negotiable: only view corridors are sacred
- The presumption on densification raises development potential everywhere and has (*inter alia*) strong negative effects on London, both locally and at a structural level

References

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[[link to book](#)] [PDF: www.kxrlg.org.uk]
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