



WORKING POSITIVELY FOR KINGS CROSS

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**London Borough of Camden:
General Purposes (Development Control) Sub-committee 8 March 2006**

Statement to be made by the delegation of the King's Cross Railway Lands Group (the KXRLG).

The KXRLG has nearly 20 years experience in pressing for the genuine regeneration of the Railway Lands, of informing local residents and businesses about developments in the area and acting as a channel for informed views. We have consulted very widely with member groups on both versions of the Argent scheme and as a result we urge Camden and Islington Councils to reject the scheme in its present form.

Objections are partly about procedure and partly about substance:

Procedure:

1. We feel the time allowed for your deliberations over these 2 evenings, with an 800+page report to digest, and many detailed objections to consider, does not permit councillors to make a fully informed judgement. The amount of information, and the gravity of the commitments involved, requires much more consideration and real discussion.

2. There have been serious procedural failings:

- last-minute changes were made to the Joint Planning Brief (which increased the expected office space by a third) on which neither councillors nor consultees had any opportunity to comment;
- attempts within your Council to prevent your constituents from lobbying you;
- We would also add that the Objections to the Argent revisions expressed through the Kings Cross Railway Lands Group (and some others) were been omitted from the Pre-Agenda Report. ; and
- Even the report before you has changed substantially from the 'pre-agenda report' issued only a week earlier.

Substance

3. An outline planning permission is the wrong way to regulate a huge development taking 12-20 years. It is like writing a blank cheque. It is also not a proper way to deal with listed buildings. Permission should be sought phase by phase if the Planning Authority is to take its responsibilities seriously.

4. There is simply too much space proposed for corporate offices. It makes the scheme too dense and bulky and casts the canal and the Camley Street Natural Park in shadow. There would probably be twice as many office jobs as even the London

Plan proposed, with all the associated load of long-distance commuting. Corporate office jobs are not going to solve local unemployment problems: if they could, they would have done it long ago.

5. The small and medium firms of the locality are already being displaced and the rest will be pushed out, with less than 1% of the new space planned for Small or Medium Enterprises.

6. There is not nearly enough housing proposed in this scheme. Social housing to rent – which is the main local need – would only be 500 units over the whole development period with only 220 social rented units in the critical 1st 1000 homes being built. This is far less than required by the Councils' Joint Planning Brief and far less than the London Plan policies call for. Indeed the London Plan requirements should be *increasing* now because of the under-achievement of its targets so far this century. Furthermore the social rented housing units are not big enough: there are no 5-bedroom units proposed, and too few 4 and 3 bedroom units compared with the Councils' own requirements to match local need.

7. The project is totally unacceptable on environmental grounds. Its imbalance of jobs against housing worsens the load on tidal commuting into central London. Within the site the developers are not proposing anything like a zero-energy development. The response to the London Plan target of 10% renewable energy is completely unsatisfactory. Other groups are making this objection in more detail and we support the Green Party's call to make Kings Cross a flagship zero-energy development to set an example for London.

8. Our members strongly support the objections by the Cally Rail Group on the proposals for the Triangle site and by the Kings Cross Conservation Area Advisory Committee on heritage buildings. We support objections made by local tenants associations and cultural groups and by those who argue that this application is not sensitive to Camley Street Natural Park and the Canal. To save time we are not duplicating the statements by their delegations.

9. The Heads of Agreement for Section 106 are entirely unacceptable for the following reasons

- i. The total volume of commitments is costed at £20m over 20 years, only 1% of the "development value" quoted by the press. This compares with £120m in the case of Stratford where the same landowners appear to have taken matters more seriously. The amount currently on offer here is derisory.
- ii. The contribution envisaged for "community" facilities is an average of only £75,000 per year, which could scarcely pay 3 salaries.
- iii. Neither that derisory sum of money nor any tangible assets are proposed to be in trust under community control, despite all the representations made to your officers: it is proposed to pay the money to the Council instead of a community development trust and none of the local groups is happy with that.
- iv. The assurances that 30% of employment would be for local people are worthless unless there is an enforceable delivery mechanism and sanctions for failure.

10. Finally, the application and the proposed conditions are inadequate on the issue of phasing. It is essential, to satisfy local needs and your own Planning Brief, that much tighter conditions prevent each phase of office/commercial development being occupied until the pro-rata proportion of social rented housing is completed and ready for occupation. We suggest the planning authorities insist on a planned approval process, with conditions for when each phase is to be delivered. It is critical to have much more information about the phasing of the early programme and the time span to achieve the targets as set out.

Conclusion: We consider that this Committee should reject the application. It is not 'regeneration' in the real sense of the word but rather Argent's proposals simply offer gentrification and the corporate destruction of a vibrant area in which people live and work. Local estate agents are already getting calls from Parisian businesses asking about buying up ex-council flats in Somers Town to be ready for the new development. Do we want to lose yet more council housing to wealthy businessmen? If the community and the Councils work together to address the unacceptable aspects of this application, a development that benefits everyone can be achieved.

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