

King's Cross Triangle: changes to planning application to be decided by officers not councillors

At the request of Argent King's Cross, developers of King's Cross Central, Islington officers are not taking new proposals for the Triangle to West Area Planning Sub-committee for a decision. They are also preparing to rip up conditions imposed on the Triangle development by the Sub-committee last April. The Triangle is a 1.1 hectare site off York Way, part of which falls within Camden since the rerouting of York Way two years ago.

In a letter of 7 December 2006, Robert Evans of Argent suggests that 'the application would not need to be referred back to your West Area Sub-committee'. And Islington planners have tabled a report for next Monday's meeting which goes along with Argent's request: it states what the officers intend to do without letting councillors consider or vote on it. But the report contains new proposals which in some cases differ greatly from the April decision.

Last March Camden's Development Control Committee agreed their officers' report without changes, subject only to Islington agreeing the same provisions. But West Area councillors made some significant changes at their own meeting in April 2006, some recommended by their officers and others agreed at the meeting after hearing objectors. They voted to refer their detailed decisions back to Camden.

'The report Islington officers made in April included several different conditions from those Camden agreed', explained Diana Shelley, of Cally Rail Group, one of the principal Islington objectors. 'Councillors were so concerned about whether the Triangle could actually be made fit for people to live in, they agreed changes to ensure that full noise and other environmental studies were done before any homes were built. And they also decided to reduce the number of homes on the site from 246 to 200, the number originally agreed jointly by both boroughs in their planning brief in 2004.'

In his letter, Robert Evans wrote that he could 'see no point in the application playing ping-pong between the two committees'. But the decision by Islington to refer their new conditions to Camden is precisely what both boroughs agreed would happen if Islington made significant changes.

Islington's decision has not been reported in full to Camden's Development Control Committee nor discussed by Camden councillors. Now Islington's officers—apparently at the developer's request—are seeking to change the Islington decision under 'delegated powers'.

What are the proposed changes?

* There are detailed proposals to reduce the 246 units to 200, as Islington councillors required. But the proportion of affordable housing is presented as an increase. In fact, under the Government's latest planning policy (PPS3), which excludes 'shared equity' from the new definition of affordable housing, the percentage of affordable units would drop from the previous 34% to 27% (54 out of 200 units).

* In April, councillors amended several noise conditions and added two completely new ones. The report to the 12th February meeting skates over these by referring to 'typographical errors' without even itemising the actual conditions. But these detailed changes were carefully debated in April and,

with the minor drafting corrections, should be referred to Camden for reconsideration. The committee was fully aware that these conditions were incompatible with those agreed by Camden—reflecting their deep concern about the lack of information on noise impacts on this vulnerable site.

* The April meeting made changes to conditions on the Code of Construction Practice and Construction Impacts Group. Again, the committee in April was fully aware of what it was doing in agreeing these, largely as a result of the case made by the Cally Rail Group, which has extensive experience of monitoring impacts during construction of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link.

‘Planning officers appear to be treating what Argent wants as more important than what their committee decided last April,’ added Diana Shelley. ‘But councillors agreed changes meant to make this development a better place for people to live. Now the planners say they don’t need either to consult local people or for our councillors to decide these new proposals. We are calling on West Area Planning Sub-committee to demand that any changes should be consulted and voted on as they would be for other revised plans.’

Note to editors

West Area Planning Sub-committee will meet at 7.30pm on Monday, 12th February, at the Barnsbury Complex, Offord Road, London N1.

The officers’ report to the Sub-committee is available at www.islington.gov.uk/Democracy/reports/reportdetail.asp?ReportID=4893&intSectionID=6&intSubSectionID=2

Argent’s letter of 12 December 2006 is attached here as a pdf.

Cally Rail Group is preparing its own detailed submission to West Area Planning Sub-committee which will be released in the next few days.

Diana Shelley
Chair
Cally Rail Group