

King's Cross Railway Lands Group

Consultation response on Camden's draft Statement of Community Involvement 2011 (SCI) <http://www.camden.gov.uk/ccm/content/council-and-democracy/having-your-say/consultations/2011/statement-of-community-involvement-sci.en;jsessionid=029C27D50B7F42CBC586B4A0E593F3E6>

KXRLG was established in 1987 as an umbrella organisation representing the interests of residents and businesses in the areas affected by development of the King's Cross Railway Lands in the Camden and Islington boroughs. Its members include both individuals and groups. It was for many years funded by Camden, and sometimes by Islington, as a key mechanism to facilitate public participation in planning in the area, and has also had grant funding from various charities and trusts. Borough funding was cut off many years ago, however.

KXRLG was one of the founder member organisations in the King's Cross Development Forum established by the boroughs to channel and focus consultations on the Planning Brief for King's Cross and then on the Argent applications. It has always played an active role in the Forum and continues to do so even since Camden proposed that its operations be suspended (and withdrew staff support) following Argent's outline permission. The forum continues to operate very usefully.

The KXRLG is broadly happy with the draft SCI but wishes to make the following objections and suggestions.

A. Public participation and consultation is much more effective if based upon a well-informed public. As the SCI acknowledges, planning issues can be quite complicated and communities and individuals which get involved in local policy become more effective and more skilled participants as their experience grows. Voluntary bodies, associations and forums have an important long-term role here. But resources are essential for these organisations to operate effectively and speedily. Without any public support our organisations are all dependent entirely on voluntary unpaid labour. That is inefficient and also contains a strong class bias in favour of people with leisure and the comfortably off. We therefore consider that the SCI should - even in these times of cuts - refer to the constraints which lack of funding places on the effectiveness of consultations.

B. We consider it excellent that Camden summarises and reports on consultations and puts these documents on the web. **However, these documents must be open to comment and correction** because we have so many experiences of times when the official record of a consultation does not accurately reflect the divergence or strength of public opinion. This tends to be especially the case for consultations (e.g. "Development Forums" like

the one held on the UKCMRI) are funded by applicants and reported by applicants' consultants.

C. We are very happy with the operations of the email notification system for applications. We have to apologise for not being signed up for the parallel email notification system for "consultations". Because we were not signed up we were not aware of the SCI consultation in time and we shall rectify this. However we **suggest that there should also be a few lines about current consultations under way included in the automatic emails sent out by the planning application notification system. This would be a valuable and costless improvement.**

D. It remains the case that not everyone has internet access. We have a number of such people among our membership and their exclusion is an unacceptable breach of democratic principles. Just as we accept that there are some people to whom we have to send paper notices we consider that **Camden should set up a scheme whereby individuals could register as needing paper notifications (of consultations and /or of applications), and publicise it widely, especially among elderly and deprived sections of the population.**

E. We have limited patience with the flow of decorated emails enjoining us all to "**empower**" ourselves. But, as old hands, we may be a bit cynical on that front. If all those activities widen the active and informed citizenry then they are fully justified.

F. We consider that regular monitoring and reporting on consultations and their influence on policy are important. We suggest that this reporting be incorporated in the Annual Monitoring Report.

Some minor comments:

2.2 Consultation Board - is it defined. Who are the members? Papers?

2.4 excellent list of principles. But not everyone has internet access. See D. above.

4.12 "Development Forums" Need for write-up and feedback to be open to challenge and comment, even more so than for council-led and council-funded consultations. There can be much scope for divergent interpretations of what was said.

4.20 Planning Project Agreements - welcome but large developments need community engagement throughout implementation. This is very deficient at the moment.

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