

Kings Cross: A Creative Gateway

A Creative and Cultural Industries Future for Kings Cross

Creative and Cultural Industries Review

commissioned by
Kings Cross Partnership
LB Camden
LB Islington
London Development Agency



42% of Kings Cross creative businesses (incl. many publishing, design and information companies) between Pentonville Road and Regent's Canal.

Securing a creative future at Kings Cross

Creative businesses have an important role to play in the development of Kings Cross. With effective leadership and partnership, the creative industries have the potential to establish Kings Cross as a place known for and driven by the creativity of its resident businesses and for the high profile cultural facilities which are located there. The Creative Industries has the potential to be a major employer in Kings Cross, with much of the workforce drawn from increasingly skilled local communities.

A creative and cultural community

There are about 300 creative and cultural companies and organisations within the Kings Cross SRB area, and over 800 more on its fringes. They tend to be small (half employ less than 5 people), although most people employed in creative jobs work for the growing number of publishing, information management and design multinationals who are moving to the area.

Most of the 300 companies are design and visual businesses (architecture; contemporary arts and crafts; antiques) and media and digital companies (advertising; software and computer services; publishing). There are significant numbers of music and performing arts companies.

Kings Cross has a long history as a place of new communities arriving and settling. It is one of the best public transport hubs in any city. For most of the last hundred years its culture and creative activity – often dark, never dull – has attracted people to night clubs, dance halls, theatres, and the positive energy associated with places where there is always movement and diversity.

By their nature and work, many cultural and creative individuals and companies working locally have a lot to contribute to developing Kings Cross as an inclusive, energetic and cultured place – the kind of area which will welcome visitors and make its own working and residential communities feel at home.

Creative and Cultural Industries - Performing Arts; Crafts, Designer Fashion, Interactive Leisure Software, Architecture, Design, Advertising, Music, Film and Video, Contemporary Visual Arts and the Art and Antiques Market, Publishing, Software, Computer Services and Product Design Museums and Galleries, Archives, Libraries, Photography Events/Exhibitions, related Community and Education Activity.

Why the Creative Industries are an essential building block in the new Kings Cross.

Councils, communities, public and commercial funding and investment agencies and developers all over the UK and internationally recognise the role of the creative and cultural industries sector and its value for national, regional and local economies. They are looking to attract high value business and employment activity, and to make their cities civilised, welcoming and accessible place to live and work.

To secure these benefits, and the tangible commercial, social, educational and market-facing advantages they confer, regeneration partners in cities across the world are looking to attract and retain creative individuals and businesses and cultural organisations into their city quarters and major developments. Regeneration and development agencies do this by creating quality working, leisure and residential environments, and by devising specific support programmes for creative companies and cultural bodies.

Kings Cross is already a rich cultural and creative meeting place. A number of national cultural institutions – The Place, London Contemporary Dance School and the British Library – are “local businesses”. Within walking distance, there are the kinds of cultural riches that few other inner city development zones can offer.

These include the British Museum; the Crafts Council and Sadler’s Wells; University of London with its museums and collections; RADA, London Contemporary Dance School, London Institute and many others.

Real advantages to creative businesses

Creative companies and cultural bodies want interesting, inclusive and accessible locations, with active business and informal networks, where the quality of life and the local cultural offer and reputation will help grow, attract and retain a talented creative community.

Some of these companies are multinationals and major names. Most are small, and some of these will grow fast. They all want

- **workspace** that is affordable, which allows companies to grow or contract as they follow the creative sector business cycle.
- **targeted business advice and support** which recognises the needs of many parts of the creative spectrum are highly specialised and require specialist as well as generic support.
- **local talent** that can help micro-businesses and multinationals alike compete in a global market
- **location** which adds value and reputation as innovators, leaders and brand makers.

Particular qualities of cultural and creative businesses and organisations which benefit city quarters and give new developments a competitive edge:

- businesses that characterise a place as attractive, energetic and forward thinking
- enterprise and activity spanning the commercial and the not for profit, cultural and creative service and content origination businesses, individual artists and multinational corporations
- cultural and business values that help support individuals and build communities
- flexible and innovative business models which can help other sectors develop new ways of communication, accessing markets, and organising production
- commitment to high quality design and environments
- public presentation skills and other outward facing attitudes integral to successful destinations
- links with higher education and other institutions, for research, recruitment and professional development purposes

Kings Cross and the Creative Industries: Key Issues; Key Challenges

The creative industries sector has the potential in Kings Cross to play a central role in the future of Kings Cross, connecting with new growth areas in Camden Town, Holloway and Finsbury Park, and as a gateway to London and the UK. Companies have argued forcefully that concerted action must address a number of key issues. Evidence for this comes from discussions with large and small creative businesses in the area. This is consistent with experience from other parts of London and the UK.

This sets the following challenges in building a dynamic and inclusive creative and cultural sector for Kings Cross.

A better 'sense of place'...

Challenge: to build a coherent, progressive sense of place for Kings Cross as a 'creative place' for creative business.

Fragile networks; negligible production chains...

Challenge: to strengthen existing networks and work to connect businesses to each other and with networks outside the area.

Key anchors and hubs ...

Challenge: to support the development needs of larger creative businesses and institutions ("anchors") and to strengthen their role as key drivers of change through

- local procurement policies,
- training/mentoring and recruitment of local people and smaller, newer companies
- encouraging them to work act as local champions or "hubs"
- building a critical mass of larger, locally active bodies

Information poor and lacking in confidence...

Challenge: to build a business support infrastructure that focuses on information provision and development advice for smaller

companies; and strengthens networks through which information on markets and production chains can flow as a key medium for sustainable growth.

Creative skills gap...

Challenge: to establish a long-term approach to skills development in Kings Cross, with activities such as customised on-the-job training initiatives, targeted tertiary training, mentoring, career path development programmes, and strengthening business skills.

Creative workspace...

Challenge: to enable long term studio and small workspace facilities to be located in the area, linking with proposed Higher Education initiatives, and with the evolution of Kings Cross and a serious leisure destination in its own right.

The role of the Higher Education sector...

Challenge: to secure the long term presence at Kings Cross of one or more Higher Education Institutions, enabling them to offer support and facilities for creative, cultural and other small and medium sized businesses; and high quality student accommodation to help create a sense of energy and life on the street.

Creative leadership and partnership...

Challenge: to encourage cooperation, partnership and leadership between sectors, companies and agencies;

- establishing a robust, sustainable and independent creative and cultural sector group
- recruiting a 'creative ambassador' as a champion for the development the cultural, creative and related business ecology of 'Kings Cross Central' and the wider area
- bringing in specialised support to enable the growth of business opportunities (taken in the widest sense) for artists, sole practitioners, micro businesses and more established cultural and commercial enterprises.

Support for this approach

The creative and cultural business community and its public sector partners have agreed that a dedicated approach to creative business development in Kings Cross is required to pursue these priorities: the growth of business opportunities; support for the knowledge economy and life long learning; commitments to diversity, inclusion and renewal; and sustainable development. These are London Development Agency's strategic development priorities, shared by LBs Camden and Islington.

Leadership and engagement

An active and engaged creative and cultural business community can really add value and competitiveness to a city quarter like Kings Cross. There are plenty of examples around the world – from Central London to the City Fringe, from Berlin to New York – which Kings Cross is competing with.

Public sector and development bodies involved must support a broadly based, economically and culturally diverse business network that reflects the breadth of the locally based business sector, as well as the developers and companies working in the visitor and tourism sector.

Specialized business support and workspace strategies need to be put in place and sustained over the medium term. Sustained intervention is required in training and access to employment, to provide opportunities to a greater number of local people.

Programme Area 1 – Creative and Cultural Local Leadership - working title CREATE Kings Cross – to build partnerships and deliver the programme

Programme Area 2 –Skills Development: A long-term partnership approach with business, focused on company skills development and local employment opportunities

Programme Area 3 – Business focused CCI Intermediary Support - focused on specialist business advice and information provision

Programme Area 4 – Workspace Development. Affordable creative industries workspace provision for the retention of existing creative and cultural businesses and the attraction of new talent.

Programme Area 5 – Creative and Cultural Industries and Higher Education: a cross-borough partnership to help secure increased and better connected long term Higher Education presence at Kings Cross

High level leadership is essential to build partnerships and deliver the programme. A concerted programme of engagement will help galvanise the creative community in and around Kings Cross to play an active role in the success of the regeneration and success of the area.

For further information on CREATE Kings Cross, the creative and cultural sector group which is taking this forward, contact:
CONTACT etc

David Powell Associates Ltd. researched and wrote the *Kings Cross Cultural and Creative Industries Review* for the Kings Cross Partnership, with the support of LB Camden, LB Islington and London Development Agency.

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