

# ULI Case Studies

## King's Cross



*Illustrated buildout of King's Cross, looking west: the 67-acre (27 ha) site forms one of the largest city-centre regeneration schemes in Europe.*

### PROJECT SUMMARY

King's Cross is a mixed-use, urban regeneration project in central London that is also a major transport hub for the city. Located on the site of former rail and industrial facilities, the 67-acre (27 ha) redevelopment is ongoing and involves restoration of historic buildings as well as new construction, with the entire plan organised around internal streets and 26 acres (10.5 ha) of open space to form a new public realm for the area. Principal uses include 3.4 million square feet (316,000 sq m) of office space, close to 2,000 residential units, 500,000 square feet (46,400 sq m) of retail and leisure space, a hotel, and educational facilities. The site is served directly by six London Underground lines, two national mainline train stations, and an international high-speed rail connecting to Paris.

Spanning a 67-acre (27 ha) site of disused railway lands in central London, King's Cross is being transformed from an area once known for lost industry into a vibrant mixed-use city quarter. Thousands of workers, residents, and students now inhabit King's Cross, the largest

area of city-centre redevelopment in Europe. When it is completed in 2020, 45,000 people a day will benefit from the 3.4 million square feet (316,000 sq m) of office space, 500,000 square feet (46,400 sq m) of retail and leisure space, and close to 2,000 homes.

### QUICK FACTS

**Location**

London, United Kingdom

**Project type**

Mixed use—three uses or more

**Site size**

67 acres (27 ha)

**Land uses**

Office, retail, multifamily housing, hotel, parks and open space, parking, transport facilities

**Keywords/special features**

Pedestrian-friendly design, energy-efficient design, public/private development, transit-oriented development, healthy place features, place making, brownfield development, urban regeneration

**Website**

[www.kingscross.co.uk](http://www.kingscross.co.uk)

**Project address**

King's Cross  
London N1C 4AB  
United Kingdom

**Ownership entity/developer**

King's Cross Central Limited Partnership

**Ownership entity partners**

Argent LLP  
London and Continental Railways Limited  
DHL Supply Chain

**Master developer and asset manager**

Argent King's Cross Limited Partnership  
4 Stable Street  
King's Cross  
London N1C 4AB  
United Kingdom  
[www.argentllp.co.uk/](http://www.argentllp.co.uk/)

**Investment partner**

Hermes Real Estate on behalf of the BT Pension Scheme

“We were always struck by how incredible it was that we had 67 acres [27 ha] in one holding so close to the centre of the city,” says partner Robert Evans of Argent, the master developer and asset manager for King’s Cross. “The vision was to create a scheme which would be part of London, a busy place with lots going on, somewhere that could always surprise. It would have all the things that any other successful district of the city would have.”

A fully mixed-use scheme comprising old and new buildings is assembled around 26 acres (10.5 ha) of public space. Ten new public squares and 20 new streets will deliver an accessible, high-quality mixed-use environment with a strong focus on art, culture, and heritage. Overall, one-quarter of the scheme is dedicated to culture and leisure uses, and the first phases are already open to the public.

A new piece of London, with its own brand-new postcode, King’s Cross is a vibrant urban space. Proximity to one of the busiest transport interchanges in the city provides major appeal to global firms and offers a great location for residences.

An environmental exemplar, the development hosts several BREEAM (Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Methodology) “Outstanding” buildings. An Energy Centre will provide most of the development’s heat demand, contributing to the developer’s

aims to create one of the more sustainable developments in the United Kingdom.

## The Challenge

King’s Cross posed a classic regeneration challenge. In 1996, when the decision was made to finally develop the scheme, the area required a fresh identity to encourage a healthier neighbourhood and attractive destination. Only a decade ago, King’s Cross was suffering from years of decline, a “Cinderella” district that had long been shunned by big business and investment.

During the Victorian era it was a thriving industrial transport hub, but by the 1970s its distribution buildings and warehouses had fallen to dereliction. Nightclubs and artists moved in, but the area suffered from an unsavoury reputation. By the 1980s, it was the lowest-rent area for central London offices, with commercial stock mostly unchanged since the 19th century. The area was densely populated with lower-income groups, council tenants, and local enterprises.

With about one-quarter of the scheme now complete, a new and fresh identity is successfully taking root. As a result, King’s Cross has won an array of awards, and praise from London mayor Boris Johnson. King’s Cross has also become an exemplar of place-making practice within the U.K. real estate community.

## The Site

King’s Cross is being built on a 67-acre (27 ha) piece of inner-city land in central London, 2.5 miles (4 km) north of Charing Cross and 2.8 miles (4.5 km) northwest of Liverpool Street in the City of London. The teardrop-shaped site slopes upwards from Euston Road to the Regent’s Canal, which cuts the site in half, and then continues to gently slope upwards to its boundaries.

Before development began, the site consisted of disused buildings, railway sidings, warehouses, and contaminated land, as well as a variety of historic buildings, structures, and surfaces that had survived the site’s former existence as a Victorian townscape. The south half of the site was densely occupied with structures from the transport hub, including gasworks, gasholders, railways, and storage and interchange buildings.

The scheme is situated in the London boroughs of Camden (mostly) and Islington and is bordered to the south by Euston Road and St. Pancras International and King’s Cross rail stations. This transport hub is expected to support 63 million passengers a year from 2020 and offers access to six London Underground lines, two national mainline train stations, and an international high-speed rail connecting Eurostar passengers to Paris in just over two hours.

The Regent’s Canal runs east to west through the middle of the site, and the Camley Street Natural Park, an urban nature reserve, lies within the area alongside the western bank of the canal. Although the site’s boundaries do not include either, the developer has always aspired to engage positively with these neighbours, adopting a “blurred boundary” approach that complements the King’s Cross public realm and green-space offering.

## Development Team

The King’s Cross Central Limited Partnership (KCCLP) is developing the mixed-use scheme. KCCLP is the collective name for the single landowner that comprises three groups: U.K. property developer Argent (owning 50 percent via Argent King’s Cross Limited Partnership); the U.K. state-owned London and Continental Railways Limited (LCR), holding a 36.5 percent interest; and DHL Supply Chain (formerly Exel), with a 13.5 percent stake.

Argent’s subsidiary, Argent King’s Cross Limited Partnership, is developer and asset



An elevated view of the 86,100-square-foot (8,000 sq m) Granary Square, with bridges across Regent’s Canal. It has drawn more than 175,000 visitors since it opened in 2012.

JOHN STURROCK



JOHN STURROCK

*Gasholder No. 8 once formed part of the largest gasworks in London. The refurbished frame will house a new park and event space.*

manager at King's Cross. It is backed by Argent LLP and Hermes Real Estate on behalf of the BT Pension Scheme.

The development philosophy is holistic, with all the landowners working together within one overarching, shared vision. The stakeholders in the project have remained the same since 2001.

The three principal contractors are BAM, Carillion, and Kier.

## Development Background

Previously, LCR and Exel owned the majority of the land to be developed, with Network Rail, British Waterways, Transco, and the London borough of Camden also owning pieces of the site. Today, all the land is owned by KCCLP.

Property developer Argent entered the scene in 2000, promising to create an example of “best practice in sustainable development.” Its experience developing Birmingham’s Brindleyplace, a 17-acre (6.9 ha) large, mixed-use canalside scheme, had equipped it to take on the project.

At the outset, Argent was in joint venture with residential developer St. George (part of the Berkeley Group), though St. George pulled out in 2004 as part of a reduction in its portfolio of London projects.

Argent entered a joint collective ownership acquisition and development agreement with the landowners. This deal included an agree-

ment that the land was to be valued following the approval of planning permission and completion of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link (see “Transport Stimulus”). Upon valuation, Argent would have the option to acquire the land from the landowner or enter into a 50/50 partnership. The price paid by Argent was to be discounted according to that value, with that discount increasing as the value of the land rose. The deal incentivised Argent to optimise the value of the scheme, and it avoided LCR and Exel having to agree to sell the land years before completion of the rail link.

With a strong portfolio of urban regeneration projects and mixed-use development, Argent proceeded to plan, manage, and deliver the scheme starting in 2001.

## Transport Stimulus

The potential to align the transport accessibility of King’s Cross with a vibrant scheme had long been recognised. Various planning policies for large-scale redevelopment of the area had surfaced in the decades leading up to the master plan that is materialising today. However, it was the decision in 1996 to move Britain’s first high-speed railway, the Channel Tunnel Rail Link, from London Waterloo rail station to St. Pancras that provided the catalyst for landowners LCR and Exel (now DHL) to develop the site.

The landowners were also encouraged by the major implications of upgrades and restoration of the Underground stations and national mainline stations on the site that were set to be complete by 2007. They realised that any proposal needed to respond to and accommodate the large numbers of people who would be using the new international interchange.

“More than 63 million passengers will pass through the combined King’s Cross–St. Pancras interchange by 2022. King’s Cross, as a place, must be attractive to them. It must also be safe, easy to understand, and easy to navigate,” outlined the landowners and Argent in a 2001 consultation document.

## Planning Guidance

Strategic planning guidance for London, published in 1996, had identified King’s Cross as one of five “Central Area Margin Key Opportunities.” It declared that a mixture of land uses should be accommodated, with the highest densities and most commercial uses closest to the rail termini.

It also required that residential and community facilities be used to support and regenerate local communities. Planners also asked for a quarter of “distinct identity” that enhanced features of historic and conservation importance.

Both the London mayor’s spatial development strategy, “The London Plan,” and Camden Council’s Unitary Development plan reflected these objectives, with Camden outlining regeneration of the severely deprived surrounding wards as a priority.

Because planners had outlined that the scheme should be high density, the development team explored how to achieve this goal. But high density, they argued, did not necessarily mean high rise. The developers decided that a danger existed in pursuing high density at the expense of a high-quality urban environment, heritage buildings, and strategic views.

“We support a comprehensive approach to mixed-use development—as opposed to the block zoning of particular uses to specific areas—but we must avoid the development of a ‘pic ‘n’ mix’ approach,” said the developers during consultation.

Instead, the developers wanted to establish individual areas, each with its own character and sense of place, that would be lively throughout the day and into the evening. The

development team also believed that with careful, creative solutions to layout, design, management, and long-term stewardship, the conflicts of mixed-use schemes—such as noise, traffic, and parking—could be avoided.

## Predevelopment

The development team undertook almost 4,000 meetings during the consultation process.

To move forward on the master plan and avoid stylistic bias, Argent assembled a design team of three: Allies and Morrison, Porphyrios Associates (both of which it had worked with on Brindleyplace), and Townshend Landscape Architects.

Argent submitted outline planning applications to Camden and Islington in May 2004. In consultation with the two London boroughs, as well as stakeholders such as the mayor of London, English Heritage, and local people, plans were revised.

An updated application was submitted in September 2005, reflecting larger numbers of three- and four-family homes, revised proposals for the Stanley Building (a former Victorian housing block for workers), and explicit provision for health and education facilities, green energy provision, and more open green space.

A core challenge facing Argent was to organise complex landownership information across the large site—with a web of titles, encumbrances, and agreements. The developer needed to map the information in an easy-to-use system that could be viewed by employees, thereby avoiding expensive problems emerging in the future. With Argent's lawyers Hogan Lovells, a legal matrix of titles, encumbrances, and agreements was drawn up to help employees make sense of rights and restrictions across the site. This has proved valuable in saving both time and expense.

## Planning Permission

Outline planning permission for the main site was finally granted in December 2006, after six years of negotiations. The “triangle site,” a patch of land to the northeast of the main site, gained planning permission in 2008.

The approved scheme comprised a high-density, mixed-use development of 50 new buildings and structures (including 20 historic buildings and structures, 20 new public streets,



More than 20 historic buildings have been incorporated into the scheme to retain a sense of place and character.



Construction at King's Cross is expected to continue until 2020.

and ten new public spaces). The outline plans also included a “world class” public realm across 40 percent of the area, up to 2,000 homes, 650 student accommodation units, and education and health care facilities.

The development team viewed gaining planning consent as its biggest challenge. As Evans explains: “Sites like King's Cross are part of a wider debate in the city about how the city grows. Will expansion provide for more offices or housing for the local community? Most agree the answer is both, but the precise combination of that was where attention was focused.”

The permission was innovative because it allowed 20 percent flexibility to vary the mix of uses within the total floor space. Therefore, total permissible mixed-use development floor space

use was 8 million square feet (740,000 sq m) across the site, with “up to” 4.9 million square feet (455,500 sq m) for offices, 494,000 square feet (46,000 sq m) for retail, and 508,000 square feet (47,000 sq m) for hotels and serviced apartments. Up to 2 million square feet (194,600 sq m) for homes was provided for, and the remainder was to be dedicated to nonresidential institutions and leisure.

Housing was an important ingredient in gaining approval. The need for additional homes, particularly affordable housing, with good transport links, was a key principle of the mayor's strategy at the time, and King's Cross was identified as a strategic housing site. Of the 2,000 homes on site, 42 percent will be affordable. However, as final figures are yet to be determined—and in

the event that policy on affordable homes may change—that proportion could vary.

Development commenced in May 2007 after the land was freed from the Channel Tunnel Rail Link works and will continue until 2020. At the time of writing, in April 2014, detailed planning approval has been secured on more than 60 percent of the main development.

## Developing a Vision

From the outset, the vision was to create a high-density part of London where people could live and work. The team wanted it to be an “ever changing, spontaneous part of the city.”

Before the master plan was drafted, Argent drew up its vision for King’s Cross in a document titled *Principles for a Human City*. The document outlined Argent’s intention to provide the “conditions to improve and enhance urban life” as the key for economic development. Argent wanted to design its scheme to offer a truly sustainable mixed-use project based on combining economy, equality, and the environment.

The document was developed in 2001 following workshops involving Argent’s three master planner practices and other stakeholders. It

also responded to a vision outlined in 1997 by LCR, Camden, and the King’s Cross Partnership (established by the U.K. government to fund regeneration) that set out some emerging principles for development.

*Principles for a Human City* concluded that the scheme should be designed around people. Its ten principles therefore stated that King’s Cross and the development team would

- Offer a robust urban framework;
- Provide a lasting new place;
- Promote accessibility;
- Provide a vibrant mix of uses;
- Harness the value of heritage;
- Work for King’s Cross, work for London;
- Commit to long-term success;
- Engage and inspire;
- Secure delivery; and
- Communicate clearly and openly.

These development objectives would serve to create a “lasting new place” that supported changing patterns of social and economic behaviour.

## The Master Plan

While the master plan provided a unifying physical vision for the site, it was also a framework

that accommodated change, enabling King’s Cross to adapt to social and technological trends as they emerged over the 15-year building process.

The public realm, which will account for 40 percent of the completed site, was fundamental to the master plan from the outset and was the team’s first consideration. “We spent a lot of time thinking about the spaces in between buildings, about how people would use those spaces,” says Evans. “In the early days, we focused on how we would join up the various uses across the entire site, and make connections with London.”

Planners also asked that the master plan establish a structure and layout based on principles of connectivity, permeability, successful urban design, and sustainability. The master plan presented a network of public open spaces, streets, lanes, squares, and parks that permeated the urban blocks and made connections beyond the site into the wider city.

When KCCLP received final approval in 2006, floor space was outlined in terms of “total permissible use.” This allowed for flexibility, so that the floor space for one sector could be traded against another.



Cubitt Park is a lush, green open space in the centre of the site, surrounded by homes and offices.

It allowed the plan to be adapted to market conditions—meaning certain aspects of the scheme would be brought forward when the time was right, and adjustments to the land uses could be made according to demand. This gave the option of allowing individual buildings to morph, separate, and adapt.

To balance this adaptability, certain aspects of the site were fixed. Key routes and public spaces were defined, as were maximum and minimum building heights in various zones. Density and scale were also established. Design guidelines governed building techniques, materials, and how these materials would be used.

The planners required that the master plan identify the elements of existing character, landmarks, and infrastructure that the development would protect and incorporate. KCCLP, recognising that the site's heritage could help foster a sense of place, worked with the London boroughs of Camden and Islington, English Heritage, and the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment to ensure the historic environment was integrated into the spatial master plan.

But the development team did not fully design the reuse of historic buildings, even though planning policy at the time, as interpreted by many, preferred to see evidence of such details.

Initially, conservation groups were critical of this approach. As noted by Evans, "Where we saw flexibility, conservationists saw uncertainty. But in the end, it was agreed that it was pointless putting forward designs too early that might never happen. That was quite brave and

trusting of bodies like English Heritage. It is more accepted practice now, with schemes like Battersea following that example."

## Approval Process and Public Participation

During the approval process, the developers worked closely not only with the London boroughs of Camden and Islington, the Greater London Authority, and English Heritage, but also with local community groups, through the King's Cross Development Forum. The developer met with this forum about 40 times, which provided a sounding board for the emerging plans. A website and exhibitions also provided an opportunity for the general public to engage with the process.

The development team carried out interviews with members of the public on the street, consulted with youth groups, and staged many pop-up events to test ideas. Market stalls with exhibition boards in the open air were considered a much more engaging approach than the common method of displaying information in a local town hall. Because of the area's range of social and economic diversity, local youth groups and workers were also surveyed. These surveys are still being carried out today.

Consultation during the planning process established the framework for a community and regeneration programme to ensure that those living and working close by felt the benefits of the development.

The site's outline planning permission was challenged by the King's Cross Railway

Lands Group, which launched a judicial review in February 2007 to get KCCLP's plans quashed. The group challenged what it saw as inadequate energy and environmental standards, the demolition of key buildings without adequate grounds, the balance between big corporate office blocks and smaller enterprises and housing, and the proportion of affordable housing units. The legal challenge was heard in the High Court and dismissed.

## Financing and Ownership

Although KCCLP has raised working capital from early development and plot sales, the partnership's intention is not to develop and retain the site for the long term. More than half the potential development and commercial space had been sold or committed by early 2013.

Since land injection in 2009, King's Cross has been funded through a combination of equity, senior debt, and recycled receipts. Disciplined cash flow management has enabled the partnership's equity to be stretched and recycled across numerous projects and has helped create the momentum that now exists at King's Cross.

The partnership has made a £250 million investment in infrastructure at King's Cross since 2009, which has unlocked the 6 million square feet (557,000 sq m) of development on the project. The partnership's equity funding went towards new roads (including King's Boulevard), new public spaces (including Granary Square), a new bridge across Regent's Canal, canalside improvements, and the Energy

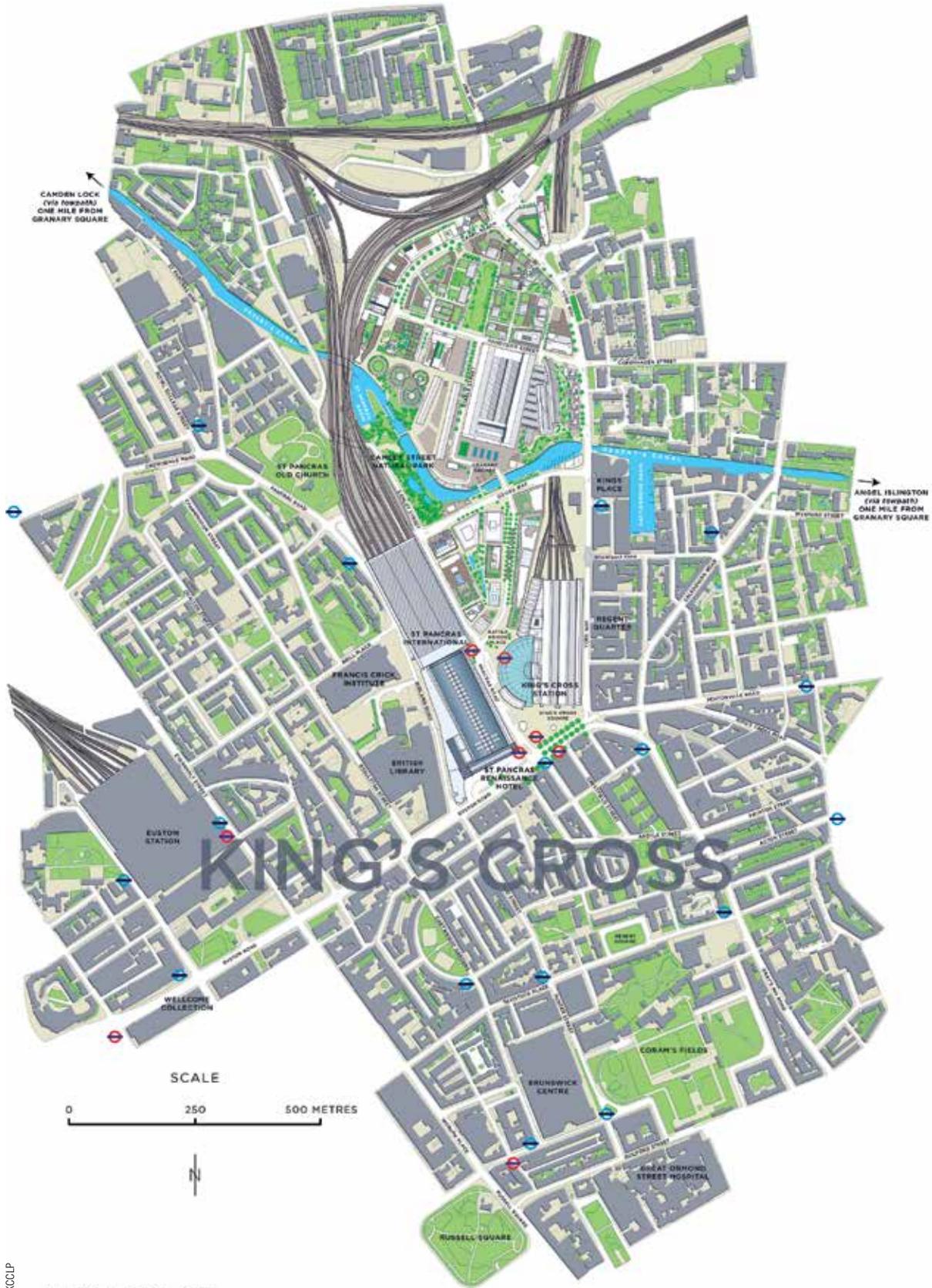


Original Victorian brick arches have been retained on Stable Street to help provide this quarter with a distinctive atmosphere.



Two Pancras Square on the south side of King's Cross.

# SITE PLAN



KCCLP

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*The mix: King's Cross delivers 3.4 million square feet (316,000 sq m) of workspace, 500,000 square feet (46,400 sq m) of retail, close to 2,000 homes, and 26 acres (10.5 ha) of public space.*

Centre and its associated district heating and distribution networks. In addition, KCCLP entered a £100 million construction contract with the University of the Arts for its campus.

The equity and recycled receipts have been used to fund infrastructure and incubate projects. Around £300 million of senior debt secured since 2009 has been used to fund some of the direct construction costs of the residential and office buildings. This senior debt package, from four leading banks, provided loans for three commercial buildings, the final phases of infrastructure, and 272 apartments at King's Cross. The facilities comprise a combined revolving credit and term facility of £75 million from Barclays Bank, an investment loan from Hypothekbank Frankfurt AG London, and two development loan facilities totaling £104 million from Deutsche Postbank AG and HSBC on a club basis. The U.K. Homes and Communities Agency has provided £42 million in public funds.

The total estimated value, including construction, professional fees, and interest costs, is expected to reach £3 billion.

## Planning and Design

KCCLP's mission was to create different patterns of use throughout the site. It wanted to offer both interesting buildings and open spaces—space that fostered a dynamic pattern of uses that included both businesses and the local community.

The south half of the site contains mostly offices and a hotel building, whereas the majority of retail, leisure, and housing units, as well as the University of the Arts campus, are to the north of the Regent's Canal.

A key aspect of design was the use of ground-floor units to keep the scheme lively throughout. To avoid dead zones of activity, all ground-floor units are, or will be, leased to different occupiers from those in the floors above. Thus, for example, the majority of Pancras Square will have restaurants, cafés, and wine bars at ground level.

The site's several listed buildings and structures, which date from the mid-1800s, have been important to the design proposals throughout and have been renovated to house new uses.

The decision to remove some of the heritage buildings was unpopular with some interest groups, and defending those decisions took time and effort. "We had to remove some older buildings to help revive others and plug them back into the city—as



*The Great Northern Hotel: The original 1854 building features of this 90-room hotel next to King's Cross Station were retained during restoration, reflecting a heritage-led approach across the scheme.*

was the case with the refurbishment and reuse of the Granary Building," according to Evans.

Deprivation in the surrounding areas, as well as antisocial behaviour, crime, street robbery, drug use, and prostitution, were all issues that the developers wanted to address through the scheme's design. Affordable housing, health care and education uses, and busy public spaces were drafted into the plan to tackle these issues.

The development team wanted to avoid appealing only to the "8 a.m. to 7 p.m." audience of workers and commuters. It wanted the site to be somewhere that had a mix of people who used the site for a variety of reasons, gave reasons to linger, and offered a place to live.

It wanted a busy, lively space that allowed people to come to work, shop, or simply muck around in the water fountains in the square outside. The team believes that this approach is what has helped attract the best occupiers from the outset.

Filling in details of the master plan has been a collaborative process with tenants. For instance, although the team knew the Granary Building would be refurbished for cultural use, the University of the Arts London signed up early enough that it could contribute to how that building was developed. Other tenants have also been able to determine how their buildings are developed and specify ground-floor uses.

**Place making as an organic process.** One of the partnership's biggest challenges was not to be too prescriptive about the tone, character,

and feel of the area. Instead, specific details of the new district were allowed to emerge over time, aided by a master plan that allowed room for flexibility, negotiation, change, and experimentation with occupiers and activities.

"Place making is about far more than what we can do as developers; there are limits to what we can achieve. So it is important not to come to a process like this with every decision made. The character of a place must grow by itself over time, and that comes from the occupiers, not from developers," says Evans.

One of the more historic buildings on the site that distinguishes King's Cross as a place is the Great Northern Hotel, first built in 1854. The building has been restored to its former glory and now serves as a principal landmark for the new King's Cross. It is located directly adjacent to the King's Cross Station and includes over 90 rooms on six floors.

**Open space.** KCCLP has planned the site so that users are never far from a lively square or street scene, with open spaces that connect users to the seasons threaded throughout; almost 40 percent of the site is dedicated to open space.

"Public space at King's Cross is about providing uses for everyone—families, workers, students, the old and young. This could be via big civic spaces, grass planting, paved areas, or small gardens," says Ken Trew, senior project director at Argent.

Argent also paid much attention to creating temporary, fun public spaces awaiting

development—a move Trew says was “tremendously successful” in encouraging people to visit the scheme in the early days.

Creating public spaces early helped attract tenants, too. “Many tenants don’t understand plans, so seeing the public spaces defined at the outset was very important in helping them understand what the scheme would be like.”

Landscapes that change seasonally contribute to the vitality of the site. To this end, Argent is working with English garden designer Dan Pearson on planting schemes that offer an informal feel as well as wider textual and colour variety.

Webs of attractive connections and spaces that enable people to filter from the wider city through the scheme have been created.

Water is also used in a variety of ways across the site to bring light into spaces. “People don’t want a sterile, corporate character. Water offers a softer feel and is very important,” notes Trew.

For example, King’s Cross includes water fountains and resting places on canalside steps. These are part of the 86,000-square-foot (8,000 sq m) Granary Square, which drew 175,000 visitors in 2012 and 2013. Designed by Townshend Architects and the Kent-based Fountain Workshop, the fountains provide spaces for families to meet and stay all day. At night, the fountains turn into a multicoloured sculpture: each jet has its own pump and light and can be programmed to dance to a range of different heights.

A mixture of uses within the open space is on offer. Both Regent’s Canal and the Camley Street Park, an urban nature reserve, have been integrat-

ed into the new scheme, as have a seven-acre (2.8 ha) playground and park for young people and vegetable “skip” garden with pop-up café. The canal is seen as one of the main arteries of the site.

King’s Cross is also London’s largest outdoor, free public wi-fi zone—creating an “always on” experience throughout the public areas.

As construction progresses, experimentation in the public realm continues. Surveys are regularly carried out to find out what users think. “We have learned that water in spaces is vital, and there is big demand for it,” says Trew. At the outset, KCCLP planned to incorporate only one or two water features, but it found those on site had been so successful that it carried on putting them into every space.

**Transport.** People come before traffic, and the development puts first emphasis on walking, cycling, and public transport. The London cycle hire scheme—Barclays Cycle Hire—has docking stations in the area, and new stations are planned across the development. Effective links between stations have also been fostered, with emphasis placed on easy navigation.

“The way people move around the site is important. Little parking is allowed on the site. The public realm is available to people and cyclists, and we have tried to make sure it is level so that those with disabilities have free access. We try to mix cycle traffic and pedestrians. We don’t have defined cycle routes. That’s been very successful,” says Trew. In addition, 865 parking spaces are scattered across the scheme (the majority contained in an underground car park).

The routes that link different elements of the site have been enhanced by the inclusion of storage facilities for bicycles in the residential blocks and a 900-space bicycle interchange between the two rail termini. Twelve bus routes serve the area.

Goods and services as well as waste and recycling will be transported to and from the site on below-ground shared-access routes, keeping the streets above mostly free from delivery vehicles. At the top of the site, two main arteries will be accessible by delivery vehicles and taxis.

To reflect the way in which people explore the wider city, King’s Boulevard, which runs south to north through the middle of the scheme, was not laid straight. This was intended to give people a sense of surprise and playfulness.

The canal has also been worked on to make sure the corridor (which includes the areas around the towpath) remains narrow in places, offering secluded areas for passersby, and opens out at points elsewhere—such as at Granary Square. “That is all part of creating that sense of light and shade you might get in the city,” says Evans.

**The Granary Building.** Recognising that the rich and varied history of King’s Cross could provide the new scheme with a sense of place and character, the design is heritage-led, with contemporary structures built around a mix of older buildings.

The Granary Complex, which once held Lincolnshire wheat for London’s bakers, is one of the 20 historic buildings and structures that



*King's Boulevard (artist's impression): A leafy thoroughfare that runs through the middle of the scheme. Street-food traders were sited here in the early days to provide a buzz on site.*



*Open space accounts for 40 percent of the scheme. Granary Square is one of ten new squares and features over 1,000 choreographed fountains, trees, and canalside steps.*

have undergone refurbishment. This £200 million transformation, by Stanton Williams architects, has restored and transformed the building into a new university campus and “creative warehouse” for Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design.

The 5,000 students and staff who arrived on site in 2011 were the first occupiers. The building sets the architectural tone for the northern part of the King’s Cross development. The building’s former stables have been turned into a bike park for 275 bicycles.

The Grade II-listed building is the front door to the campus, which extends 591 feet (180 m) to the north of the site. Internally, studios, workshops, and lecture theatres are built around a broad covered street and walkways, creating fluid routes between different departments.

These creative students have been vital in injecting life into the new scheme, providing a cultural and creative heart for the area, and have provided a hub for other practising artists, designers, and architects working in studio spaces on the site.

Although new bridges, glass atriums, and modern buildings have been added to the site, the Victorian brickwork, dock numbers on the walls, and original rails and turntables embedded in the square outside remain as features.

**Offices.** The team wanted a variety of buildings that would appeal to and accommodate growth in London’s global economy sectors as well as its London-wide and local businesses. It did not set out with any ambitions to attract a particular sector or tenant. Rather, the partnership wanted the tenant base to reflect London in all of its diversity.

The site provides 23 new and refurbished prime office buildings, with a variety of unit sizes from large, bespoke new-build spaces to studios in historic buildings. The office properties are clustered into areas, each with its own character and identity.

Pancras Square, adjacent to King’s Cross and St. Pancras International, is a new continental-style city square comprising lawns, terraces, water features, and seating areas and is surrounded by seven prime, contemporary buildings. Leases here have been taken by Camden Council and the Office Group, which will manage flexible office space. BNP Paribas Real Estate is developing Six Pancras Square, which will be partially occupied by BNP Paribas Group as well as Google.

The “Cubitt” area, the main commercial route north of Regent’s Canal, consists of five prime office buildings as well as cobbled streets and pocket parks. Handyside includes the Western Transit Shed—a refurbished historic building with Victorian brick facades that reflect the industrial character of the building. Designed to be a creative work area, the internal space is easily divisible and flexible. The building is fully let to Argent, consulting engineer firm Hoare Lee, and creative agency Zone.

Canal Reach, with three prime office buildings, is a curved, tree-lined street running adjacent to the western edge of the retail area, Coal Drops.

**Google offices.** Google announced its move to King’s Cross in January 2013 as the base for its London operations. Several thousand staff will occupy the bespoke low-rise structure when it is complete.

The web giant bought a 2.4-acre (1 ha) site from KCCLP on a 999-year lease. The plot, known as “Zone A,” is located immediately to the north of the new concourse at King’s Cross station and sits to the east of King’s Boulevard and south of the Regent’s Canal. It faces One and Two Pancras Square.

“Google wanted a big building, and there are not many places where you can assemble a 1 million-square-foot [93,000 sq m] prop-

erty. We had enough flexibility in the planning permission to offer that. They liked the tone of King’s Cross and the arts and public realm. It chimed well with them as an organisation. They liked the high-quality, professional approach—which wasn’t too corporate,” says Evans.

The purpose-built building will form an important part of the scheme and be the internet search firm’s largest office outside its Googleplex corporate headquarters in California.

Architect Allford Hall Monaghan Morris is designing the building, which includes 50,000 square feet (4,650 sq m) of ground-floor retail and a staff cycle store offering 500-plus spaces. These designers are seeking to achieve a single-shell building inspired by Victorian warehouses, thus reflecting the rich industrial history of the local area.

Approved plans included a rooftop running track and swimming pool at the headquarters. But plans are currently being redesigned after Google asked the project team to come up with an even more ambitious building.

**Diverse retailing.** The developers wanted to base the arts, cultural, and entertainment offerings at King’s Cross on diversity, fearing that a single, large “people attractor” could run counter to the dense, vibrant, and distinctive



Coal Drops Yard, a stone’s throw to the north of the canal, will host quirky boutiques, galleries, and cafés around traffic-free cobbled streets.



*ArtHouse was the first private residential block built on site and comprises 143 units of between one and four bedrooms, over eight floors.*



*Rubicon Court has 117 affordable homes, many for families. Accommodation for lower-income Londoners was a key requirement of local authorities in the area.*

urban quarter they wanted to create. Retail and entertainment at the site have therefore been conceived to provide a broad gamut of attractions with clusters of distinct character.

The high street of King's Boulevard, for instance, is a leafy thoroughfare that links the transport hubs of King's Cross and St. Pancras to Granary Square and the area north of Regent's Canal. Here, Argent plans to mix big global brands alongside unique boutiques.

It was also here that the developers tried out street-food traders, which became an instant hit with the lunchtime traffic of students and office workers. These occupants helped create a buzzy tone to the street.

Evans believes this kind of initiative established a sense of place early on. "We wanted to try new ideas. The attitude we have adopted is that this is not just our development; the tone of the spaces is created by us but also by the occupiers."

The traffic-free Coal Drops Yard—at the heart of the site—is to be occupied by retailers, galleries, boutiques, and music venues that will occupy units in repurposed Victorian archways. It's already an attraction in its own right, with luxury label Alexander McQueen hosting a fashion show there recently. Designers Vivienne Westwood and Paul Smith also used it for catwalk shows during Fashion Week.

**Housing.** Thirteen different residential developments are on the scheme. The tenure will be mixed, with some units sold for owner occupation outright, some to shared-ownership buyers, and some rented, including affordable housing tenants. Student housing developer Urbanest has developed a 27-storey tower for 650 students.

Starting values for the first residential units were above £700 per square foot before many of the homes were built. Today, the blended average is around £1,400 per square foot and is still changing. Half the buyers of residential properties so far are understood to be overseas investors and owner-occupiers.

Most of the homes on site will be single-family units (1,309). A fifth of these have been developed and sold already. The site will have 391 three- to four-bedroom units, of which 25 percent are complete and sold already.

To help capture the long-term value growth in the area, Argent and its partners have decided to retain some of the units as rental properties. Exactly how the units will be managed is still being thought through.

One Housing Group is KCCLP's affordable housing partner on the first phase of residential development. It owns and manages the 250 affordable homes for rent across three buildings

on site. KCCLP is designing and delivering the units with additional funding from the Homes and Communities Agency.

Rubicon Court was the first building of affordable homes to be delivered, with 117 units: 78 social rented apartments, which were allocated to people on Camden Council's housing list who previously were living in unsuitable accommodations nearby; 15 supported housing apartments, which were allocated through the council via its partnership with the Camden and Islington NHS Foundation Trust; and 24 shared-ownership homes.

The homes were built in small groups around three cores to create a sense of community on each floor. A high proportion of the flats are dual aspect, providing views across London from the upper floors. Every home has bicycle storage, as well as bird and bat boxes. Local charity Global Generation manages a roof garden for residents, too.

A further 143 affordable homes will be built next door, and the remainder have been developed as part of ArtHouse, which combines both open-market and affordable units.

A key worker core of 77 apartments for rent, part of the Plimsoll Building, is being built five minutes from the King's Cross transport hub by KCCLP on behalf of Dolphin Square Foundation.

**Sustainability and the Energy Centre.** The developers believe King’s Cross represents one of the most sustainable major developments in the United Kingdom. Sustainability is evident in all aspects of the King’s Cross regeneration—from energy-efficient initiatives to the reuse of heritage buildings, green transport policies, and BREEAM “Outstanding” buildings.

As part of a focus on energy efficiency on site, the scheme has installed a combined heat and power plant, the largest of its kind in the country. The plant is designed and built by sustainability experts Vital Energi, which has been appointed to provide the green energy supply on site for the next decade. Each building at King’s Cross is connected to the centre. This dispenses with the need for boilers in the buildings themselves and aims to reduce energy bills by 5 percent.

The centre will eventually be powered by three gas-powered Jenbacher engines that generate electricity for the site. Heat is being captured as a by-product and is used to provide heating and water across 99 percent of the development. The engines offset about 80 percent of the scheme’s power demand, too.

Solar panels, ground-source heat pumps, and solar thermal systems are also being used to meet a 50 percent reduction in carbon emissions, relative to the average levels in the surrounding boroughs in 2005.

The site also has 97,000 square feet (9,000 sq m) of green or brown roofs, providing space for wildlife and fauna habitats as well as offering natural cooling and insulation. Buildings have also been constructed with dense materials that help combat seasonal temperature extremes.

Other sustainable innovations include the following:

- Installation of 656 feet (200 m) of green walls;
- The Global Generation Skip Garden, an award-winning garden that educates children and adults in sustainable business and lifestyles;
- Three BREEAM “Outstanding” office buildings so far;
- 900 bicycle spaces; and
- Diversion of 81 percent of estate waste from landfill in 2013.

## Community Relations

Strong relationships with local authorities, interest groups, charities, schools, and gov-

ernment agencies have shaped the vision for King’s Cross as a sustainable development that brings economic and social benefits to the project and wider community.

“By working in partnership, we can identify issues, shape our responses, and find better, smarter ways to do things,” says KCCLP in one of its planning documents. “This forms the basis of our approach and has been crucial to the success of the project to date.”

To this end, a Community and Regeneration Programme helps improve socioeconomic opportunities for those in the surrounding area. This has provided the Construction Skills Centre, a £2 million purpose-built facility, which helps local people access employment, and the King’s Cross schools programme, which supports nearby schools with work experience and work-based learning.

The aforementioned Global Generation Skip Garden is the community project on site that teaches people how to grow, market, and sell food and builds skills in social enterprise—a scheme the developers say has “helped build trust and social capital in the site.”

## Construction

Argent invites contractors to monthly board meetings to help improve visibility of upcoming work and improve understanding about what the issues might be. Argent has mainly used three firms—BAM, Kier, and Carillion—during the development of the site to ensure continuity.

The site has presented challenges in terms of its proximity to railway lines, namely vibrations, runoff from trains, and windblown debris. Therefore, careful and meticulous planning of the infrastructure work was needed and was aided by an infrastructure specialist on each development team.

In addition, 23 Victorian gasholders were located under what is now Pancras Square. While work to ameliorate and remove the entire gasholder infrastructure was underway, a shared basement was constructed to service all seven of the buildings on Pancras Square, providing fire escapes, parking, deliveries, and storage.

## Leasing

“We’ve always had a simple view of who could come to King’s Cross. We wanted London to come to King’s Cross,” says Evans.

Therefore, a breadth of offerings was a key aspect of the leasing strategy. The team did not set out to attract one particular tenant; rather, it sought to “create a tone that was professional, but not corporate.”

Early occupiers such as the University of the Arts London are viewed as essential to establishing that feel. Evans says office tenants on site so far reflect a West End occupier base, rather than that of the City of London, which is dominated by financial service firms.

Rents for both offices and residential have outperformed expectations so far—with office tenants now paying in excess of £60 per square foot. Housing sales started at £700 per square foot, and this rate has almost doubled since the outset.

Long lease disposals to the London borough of Camden, Google, and BNP Paribas were done on the basis that these occupiers were long-term owners and investors that won’t trade out. “We want to bring occupiers to the scheme that will add something to the place,” says Evans.

## Marketing and Public Relations

The marketing strategy has focused on the area as a whole, with the main objective to market the place rather than specific buildings. Documenting heritage has helped foster a feeling of the place being an embedded part of the city; oral stories of that history have been used to convey this, and they feature on the King’s Cross website.

Providing a safe and clean environment has also been an important aspect of marketing and public relations. An estate management team, which works solely for Argent, also provides staff on site to help with information. Although a “hands-off approach” allows freedom in the public areas, the estate management team acts as a “soft security” service to ensure people using the public areas are not offensive or polluting.

A “considerate contractors” scheme requires builders not to smoke on site and to maintain attractive hoardings. Some contractors even have planted gardens.

Social media sites such as Twitter and Facebook are used to engage with the wider public. An informal marketing suite has always been located on site.

The development team has monthly marketing forums with occupiers to discuss what is

going on across the site. Tenants use the public space for their own events, too.

## Events Programme

An events programme has been underway since the early days, designed around the different user groups. The aim is to always have something for someone to do if he or she turns up on site—from film screenings that can be watched from the canalside steps to food festivals and one-off gala events. “We provide activities that are unusual and aren’t being done elsewhere in London; we want variety and quirkiness,” says Trew.

An extensive events programme is now being extended to a year-round calendar of activities, with the idea that this helps make the scheme a destination and attracts people even if they don’t plan to visit.

Public access to the events is important. Argent has always been determined to make events freely accessible.

Some of the events budget is partly funded by service charges. “Service charges may go towards hosting events such as big screens, but occupiers get the benefit as this kind of initiative makes the place and helps with retaining talent. And if you’re a retailer or restaurant, that is fantastic for footfall,” says Evans.

## Management

One estate service charge operates on site to which everyone, including Argent, contributes. That has worked really well. “It is quite complex managing schemes like this, which does not have traditional patterns of movement. We want to be a tourist attraction and for people to visit to play in the fountains. Tenants are buying into it, and we are clear what service charge will cover,” says Evans.

A fixed deal operates for residential occupiers, and a cap applies for early commercial occupiers. KCCLP covers the costs of shortfalls.

## Observations and Lessons Learned

The developers saw the creation of the new district as an organic process from the outset, ensuring they built in room for flexibility, negotiation, and change. “We came in for a lot of criticism at the beginning; some people were thrown by the lack of detail, but we knew a lot had to be left to emerge naturally. We had a vision, but we never tried to stick to one prescrip-

tive way of getting there,” explains Evans.

That approach has convinced sought-after companies and organisations such as Google to lease space. Luxury retail brand Louis Vuitton and the University of the Arts London’s Central Saint Martins school have been key in establishing the foundations of the scheme’s diverse tenant base. To all involved, these deals confirmed the project’s arrival as one of the most exciting creative commercial centres in London.

Bringing the University of the Arts London to King’s Cross is seen by Argent as crucial in defining a creative, lively, and quirky tone to the place that encouraged other tenants to follow. Establishing the public realm early helped re-define King’s Cross as a diverse and interesting district of London. “Google liked the arts and public realm. It liked the whole tone that has been created on site,” says Evans.

The developers believe they will be rewarded for taking the long-term view and pursuing the project development as a holistic venture. “We did not trade out early, and we will be rewarded for that,” says Evans, who also believes the landowners deserve credit for maintaining their interest. “It would have been easy to see the site as a package of plots to be sold off. But interests have been aligned throughout, and the landowners wanted to be part of what was created long-term.” He adds, “We have had to be flexible over our business plans, financial strategy, and the master plan.”

The developers note that some basic costs have been much higher than predicted, such as phasing costs and unrecoverable service charge costs. “Moving hoardings and dealing with the public access as you deliver are costs and they are real,” says Evans. “But to make it work you need to spend lots of money on those things. Broadly speaking, we would do it the same way again.”

## CONTRACTORS AND CONSULTANTS

### Master planners

Allies and Morrison  
[www.alliesandmorrison.com](http://www.alliesandmorrison.com)

Porphyrios Associates  
[www.porphyrios.co.uk](http://www.porphyrios.co.uk)

Townshend Landscape Architects  
[www.townshendla.com](http://www.townshendla.com)

### Contractors

Carillion  
BAM  
Kier Group

### Registered social landlord

One Housing Group

### Office advisers

DTZ  
Savills

### Residential advisers

Knight Frank

### Retail and catering advisers

Lunson Mitchenall

### Hotel advisers

CB Richard Ellis

## OTHER RESOURCES

### Videos

[www.youtube.com/ULITV](http://www.youtube.com/ULITV)  
[vimeo.com/kingscrosscok](http://vimeo.com/kingscrosscok)

### Other links

Twitter: @kingscrossn1c  
Facebook: [facebook.com/kingscrossuk](https://facebook.com/kingscrossuk)

## PROJECT INFORMATION

### Development timeline

Planning began for the King's Cross scheme	1996
Development partnership formed	2001
Initial planning application submitted	2004
Outline planning permission granted	2006
Construction started	2007
Granary Building occupied	2011
Google announces plan to move to King's Cross	2013
Phase I completed	2014
Expected project completion	2020

### Site and land use information

Office	3.4 million sq ft
Retail	500,000 sq ft
Hotel	91 rooms (30,000 sq ft)
Residential	2,000 units
Parking	865 spaces (800 in a car park, 65 on the street)
Open space	26 acres
Total gross building area planned	6 million sq ft
Total site area	67 acres (27 ha)

### Land use plan

	Percentage of site
Buildings	53%
Streets/surface parking	15%
Landscaping/open space	32%
Total	100%

### Retail information

Retail building area planned	500,000 sq ft
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### Key retail areas

Coal Drops Yard
Pancras Square
King's Boulevard

### Office information

Office building area planned	3.4 million sq ft (316,000 sq m)
Number of buildings planned	23 buildings
Annual rents	£60 per sq ft

### Major office tenants

	Net rentable area (sq m)
Google (forward sale)	92,903
Aga Khan Foundation	45,451
BNP Paribas Real Estate	18,500
Central Saint Martins College of Art & Design, University of the Arts London	39,000
London borough of Camden	17,187
SAV Credit	1,439
Louis Vuitton	

### Hotel information

Great Northern Hotel	91 rooms
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## PROJECT INFORMATION

### Residential information

	Notes
2,000 homes total	
13 residential developments	
1,309 single-family units	One-fifth sold as of early 2014
391 three- to four-bedroom units	25% complete and sold
250 affordable homes for rent in three buildings in first phase	Owned and managed by One Housing Group
Housing sales prices	About £700 per sq ft at beginning of sales; about £1,400 per sq ft in 2014

### Financing information

	Ownership interest
King's Cross Central Limited Partnership (KCCLP)	
Argent LLP	50.0%
LCR	36.5%
DHL	13.5%

### Senior debt package for initial phases

	Notes
Barclays Bank	Revolving credit and term facility of £75 million
Hypothekebank Frankfurt AG	Investment loan
Deutsche Postbank and HSBC	Development loan facilities totaling £104 million

### Public funding for initial phases

U.K. Homes and Communities Agency	£42 million
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### Investment partner

Hermes Real Estate on behalf of BT Pension Scheme	
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### Other financial information

Infrastructure investment 2009–2014	£250 million
Construction contract University of the Arts London	£100 million
Granary Building development costs	£200 million
Total development cost expected at completion	£3 billion



## About the Urban Land Institute

The mission of the Urban Land Institute is to provide leadership in the responsible use of land and in creating and sustaining thriving communities worldwide.

Established in 1936, the Institute today has more than 32,000 members, representing the entire spectrum of land use and development disciplines. Professionals represented include developers, builders, property owners, investors, architects, planners, public officials, real estate brokers, appraisers, attorneys, engineers, financiers, academics, and students.

ULI is committed to

- Bringing together leaders from across the fields of real estate and land use policy to exchange best practices and serve community needs;
- Fostering collaboration within and beyond ULI's membership through mentoring, dialogue, and problem solving;
- Exploring issues of urbanization, conservation, regeneration, land use, capital formation, and sustainable development;
- Advancing land use policies and design practices that respect the uniqueness of both the built and natural environment;
- Sharing knowledge through education, applied research, publishing, and electronic media; and
- Sustaining a diverse global network of local practice and advisory efforts that address current and future challenges.

**Patrick Phillips**, Chief Executive Officer

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## ULI CASE STUDIES

The ULI Case Studies program highlights and showcases innovative approaches and best practices in real estate and urban development. Each case study provides detailed information regarding the ideas, plans, process, performance, and lessons learned for the development project. Each also includes project facts, timelines, financial data, site plans, photos, location maps, and online videos. For more information, visit the ULI Case Studies website at [www.uli.org/casestudies](http://www.uli.org/casestudies).

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