

## Editorial Brand of the Year: *The Developer*

*The Developer* was launched this year with ambition and determination to tackle the big issues in urban regeneration – what have large-scale real-estate developments in UK cities delivered for the citizen?

My first day at the office was 1 October. Less than two months later, we launched *The Developer* website, biannual magazine, podcast, *The Pineapples* awards for place and the major annual conference, *Festival of Place*.

Since then, we've had more than 27,000 unique visitors to our website, [www.thedeveloper.live](http://www.thedeveloper.live) with an average of 4,000 unique users and 9,000 pageviews per month. We've signed up 170 paying print subscribers (plus a controlled circulation of 2,000), more than 1,000 subscribers to our weekly email and over 1,000 monthly podcast listeners.

The editorial brand takes a place-based approach to its audience, which means it draws its readers from across the industry, serving property developers, city planners, local government, architects and investors engaged in re-making UK cities. They read our content, follow us on social media, enter our awards and attend our events to be informed and network with each other.

Within three months of the website launch, we published our uncommonly beautiful 200-page magazine and distributed it at the Mipim property fair in March. The market was gobsmacked. Suddenly everyone was talking. Our magazine craft is driven by the ambition to combine street-style photography with Swiss graphic design, offering in-depth business intelligence on the user experience of cities.

Our flagship *Festival of Place*, a unique event featuring interactive 'placehacks' and four stages, brought 450 delegates to Tobacco Dock in East London on 9 July. The diversity of our speaker list and audience, with its near 50-50 gender parity and socio-ethnic mix, left a lasting impression on an audience used to 'male and pale' property events.

So what is *The Developer*? It's information journalism, monetised through paid delegate, subscription, sponsorship, advertising and awards entries, with £200k revenue in our first six months. But more importantly, we are the hosts of a critical conversation about what makes a city thrive; places where people want to live, work, play and learn. Our purpose is to hold developers and local authorities to account on behalf of the citizen by examining the built product of our cities and how they affect the people who live there.

Our most-read articles of the year set the benchmark for quality:

Documentary film and report, **Placetest: King's Cross**, sees anthropologist Nitasha Kapoor study the way people behave across the King's Cross campus. What she discovered was design decisions that made working-class visitors feel uncomfortable and architecture that shut out nearby council-estate residents.

Our biggest story of the year, by transport researcher Nicole Badstuber, revealed the shock fall in the population of young people living in London and why this results in fewer people riding the Underground. This demographic and transport story revealed how inflated house prices and unaffordable rents were changing the average age of Londoners and making a hole in Transport for London's finances.

Our most-popular news exclusive, published alongside landmark rulings on **Round Up and cancer in the USA**, revealed that 98% of UK councils use weedkillers containing glyphosate on housing estates and playgrounds, the result of the dogged pursuit of FOIs sent to every council in the UK.

We believe we should be named **Brand of the Year** because although small and new, with our events, podcasts and unique rich journalism, we changed the conversation in 2019.

# D

the developer

The Developer Live: Risk & Resilience takes place at  
Illuminate, The Science Museum on 8 November 2019

**Book now!**

Why are fewer people  
riding the Underground?  
The reason is not what  
you think

# Nicole Badstuber reveals the hidden demographic shift that is changing traffic and hitting TfL where it hurts



**Oxford Circus Photo: Getty**

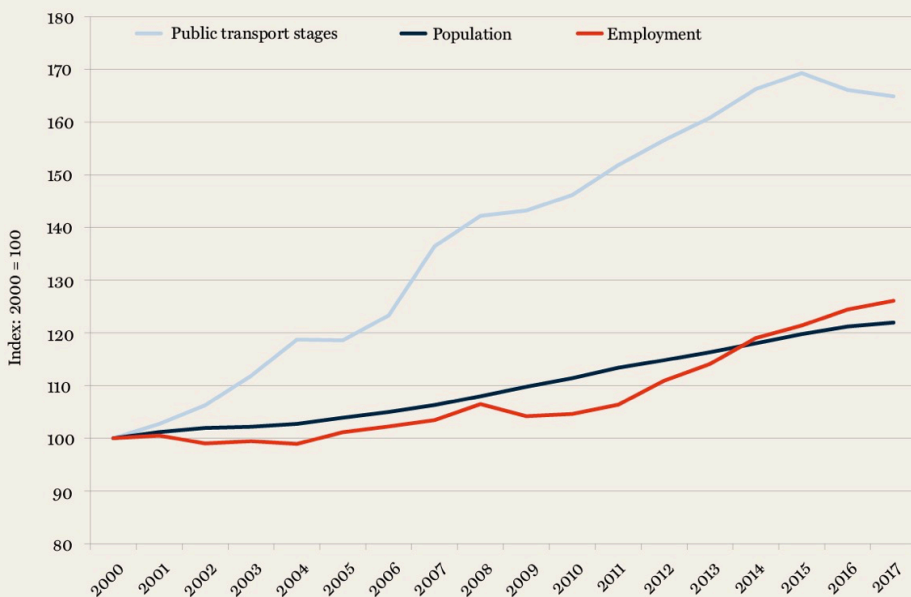
**I**n 2017, London Underground transported fewer passengers than it did the year before. Then in 2018, numbers went down again.

There had been a boom in the use of public transport in London for the past two decades. Since 2000, improvements in the bus network and transformations to the London Underground and Overground all encouraged a major shift to public transport from travel

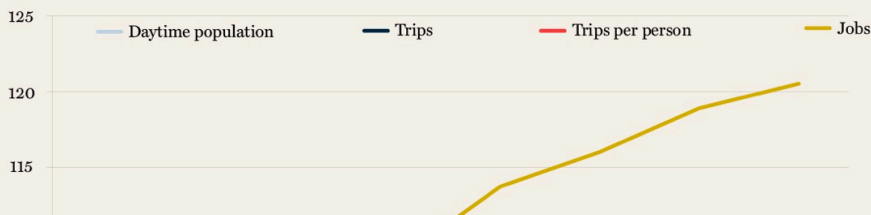


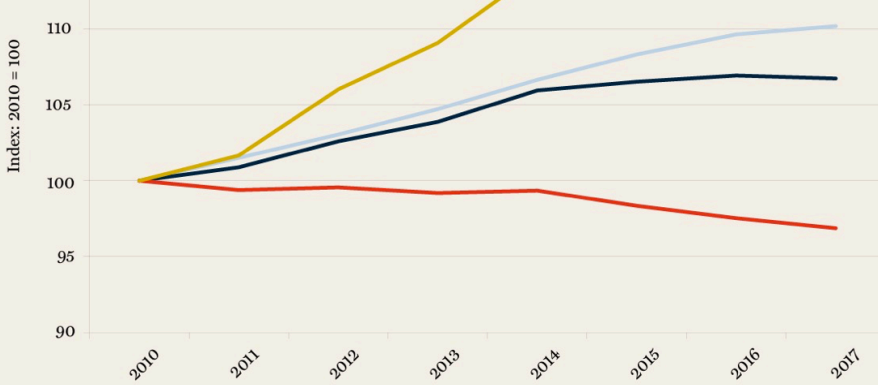
by car. While the capital's population grew 22%, public transport use rose 65%.

There was strong, steady passenger growth on the London Underground of 2-6% each year between 2009 and 2015, while across all of London's public transport modes, passenger numbers grew on average 1% each year after 2000. But then passenger numbers fell by 1.1% in 2017. And the certainty of growing public-transport use ends there.



## Growth in demand (journey stages) on the principal public transport modes Source: TfL City Planning





## **Relationship between population, jobs and trips in London, 2010-2017 Source: ONS**

Historically, London’s population has been a good predictor of demand for travel; as the population went up, so did demand. Employment is another driver because, simply put, a large share of travel is to and from where people live and work.

The number of trips-per-day by passengers has also broadly mirrored the growth of London’s ‘daytime population’ – the combined total of residents, commuters and visitors. Travel demand also reflected the state of the economy, in part through the inclusion of commuters in London’s daytime population.

But since 2014, travel demand has not kept step with the growth in London’s daytime population: while the latter continued to grow, the total trips made in the capital remained flat. This decoupling suggests that the average

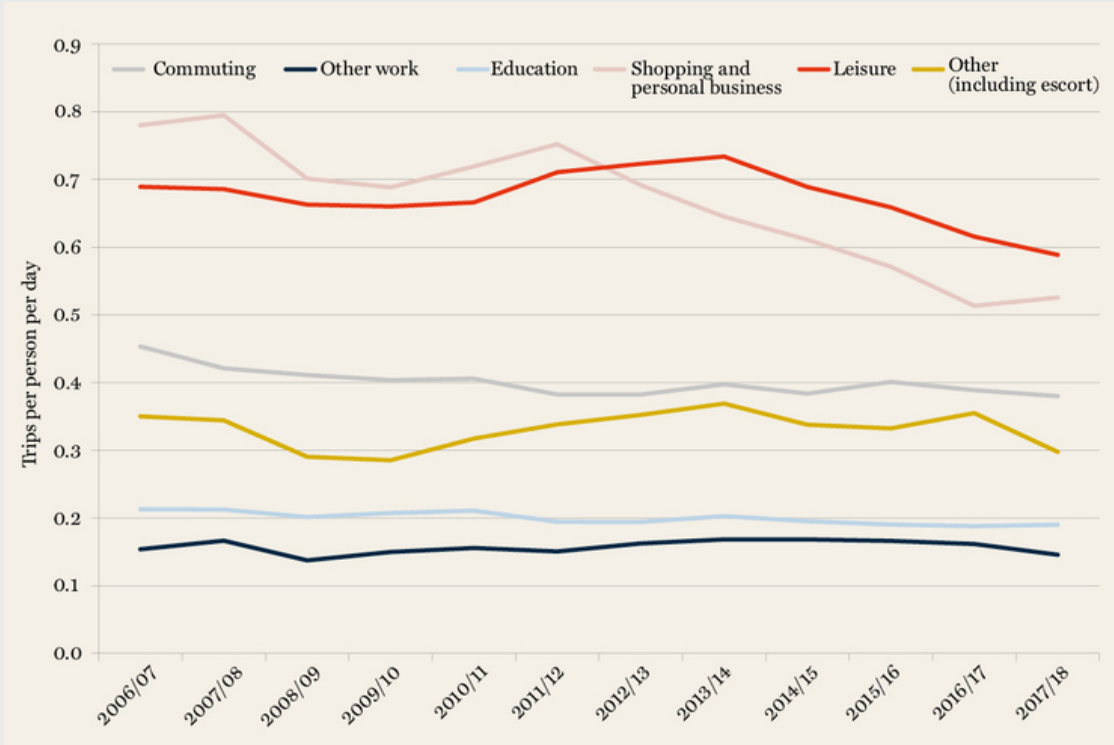
Londoner is making fewer trips – in fact, TfL figures show Londoners are making 20% fewer trips per day than a decade ago.



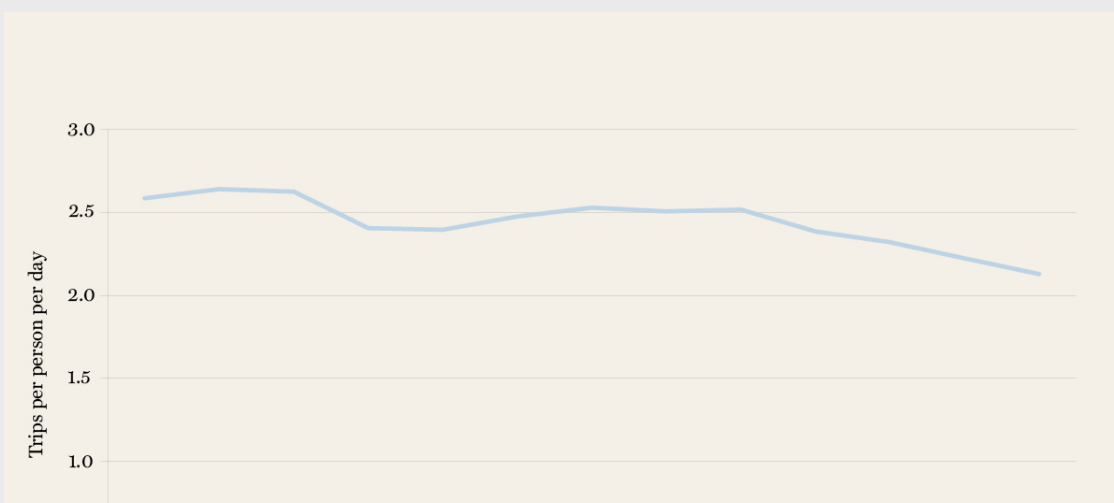
the developer  
live  
risk & resilience

8th November 2019 | Illuminate at the Science Museum

**Biodiversity, floods and disaster:**  
Developing places in a fast-changing context



## Purpose of trip Source: TfL City Planning





**Trip rate per day per person Source: TfL City Planning**

Steady population growth seems to have masked a longer-term fall in trip rates reaching back to 2007/08. From 2013/14, travel rates have fallen even more sharply: from 2.52 trips a day to only 2.13 – a 15% drop.

‘Discretionary’ trips have been cut disproportionately: shopping and personal trips have declined by 30% since 2011/12, while leisure trips are down 20% since 2013/4. By comparison, Londoners are making broadly the same number of trips for education and work as they did a decade ago.

Overall population growth has also masked changes in the demographics of London. Young people now account for a smaller share of London’s population. Estimates show that in recent years there has been no growth in the number of 17-24 year-olds in London and a flattening of growth in the number of 25-44 year-olds.

Younger age groups travel more in general and use

Younger age groups travel more in general and use public transport more in particular, so as their share of London's population has shrunk, there has been a resulting disproportionate fall in public transport use.

**“Young people now account for a smaller share of London's population and these age groups travel and use public transport more”**

The affordability crisis could be one reason why, as a proportion, fewer young people are living in London. High housing costs are a significant barrier to relocating to and staying in London, particularly for younger adults. London house prices have increased by almost 50% in real terms since 2011, putting homeownership out of reach for many.

The share of Londoners renting has increased notably in the past decade, even though rental prices have become increasingly unaffordable too: the average private rent in London rose by 41% between 2005 and 2017, compared with wage growth of just 25%.

W... ..

Workers are commuting fewer days per week but longer distances than they did two decades ago. Both occasional and regular working from home has grown. The number of commutes per worker per week fell from 7.1 to 5.7 between 1988/92 and 2013/14.

Across the nation, trip rates have been falling, too – but less steeply than in London. In the UK, they are down 16% but are now rates are relatively static.

Discretionary trips have been cut the most: trips to play sports and trips for personal business have both dropped 22% in the past decade. In comparison, trips to escort others to education are up 19%.

Trip rates appear to be continuing to fall in London, however.

**“High housing costs are a significant barrier to relocating to and staying in London from elsewhere in the UK, with London house prices up 50% in real terms and private rental costs up 41%”**

In recent years, there have been changes not only in how

often we travel but which modes of transport we use. Car trips have declined sharply, falling 34% since 2005/06 and 22% since 2013/14 alone – more than 1.5 times the average fall in trip rate. By comparison, trip rates on National Rail and London Underground have grown 22% and 26% respectively since 2005/06.

While we might be travelling less, our travel footprint is growing. London's roads are getting more congested. Most of the growth in traffic comes from vans, the number of which has increased 24% in the past five years to now account for 16% of road traffic in London. Research commissioned by the RAC Foundation estimates vans' share of traffic will rise to 21% nationally and 23% in London, compared to 14% and 15% respectively in 2010.

Why so many vans? The increase in the popularity of internet shopping and associated changes in freight and distribution are responsible. The home is increasingly becoming the place to shop: online shopping sales are growing at around 10-12% each year and now represent almost 17% of the UK's total retail sales. Around 22% of London's residents receive at least one online shopping delivery a week. Almost all online purchases (94%) made by London residents were delivered to their homes, rather than their workplaces or 'click and collect' locations.

**“The average Londoner is making 20% fewer trips per day than a decade ago. Steady population growth seems to have masked a longer-term fall in trips dating back to 2006”**

Private hire vehicles (PHVs) – Uber and minicabs – have also flooded London’s streets. Registrations soared 75% from 49,854 in 2013 to 87,409 in 2017, while the number of people licensed to drive PHVs also grew 75% from 66,975 to 117,712. In 2016/17 alone, the number of registered drivers of PHVs increased 17%. However, the growth in registrations slowed to only 1% in 2017/18 and the number of registered drivers fell 2% – the first time since 2013/14.

Travel by taxi and PHV is up, mainly around central London and during the late evening. On Friday and Saturday nights, 18,000 PHVs drive into central London. Use of PHVs could be one of the reasons for the 24% drop in the number of night bus passengers since the start of 2014/15.



**“In 2016/17 alone, the number of Uber registered drivers and other private-hire vehicles increased 17% but fell by 2% in 2017/18 for the first time since 2013/14”**

However, the introduction of night services on London Underground on Friday and Saturday nights and the subsequent changes to the bus network will also have contributed to a shift away from the night bus.

The annual growth in travel by taxi and PHV is slowing: it was only 2.6% in 2017/18 compared to 9.8% in 2016/17. “[I]t is notable that the increase in taxi and private hire trips is not as high as the increase in licensed PHVs and PHV drivers,” London’s citywide transport authority, Transport for London (TfL), concluded in its latest annual report on travel behaviour. In other words, the growth in the number of PHVs and registered drivers of PHVs has far outstripped demand for the services. This means many drivers are circling London’s streets without passengers, adding to congestion.

Major cities across the US are also grappling with declines in passenger numbers on their public transport systems, with research suggesting Uber and its competitors are the cause. On average, passenger numbers fell 1.3% on rail and 1.7% on buses each year across the 22 cities studied by researchers at the University of Kentucky. Bus use in San Francisco has fallen 12.7% since Uber and its competitor Lyft entered the market in 2010, and the researchers estimate that San Francisco would need to expand its bus services by 25% to lure passengers back and offset the effects of that fall. In New York, daily Uber and Lyft trips grew from 60,000 in 2015 to 600,000 in 2018, while trips on public transport fell by 580,000.

**“Infrastructure plans across the country assume continued growth in population and demand for travel to make the case for large upgrades and investment”**

As more and more passengers opt for a private hire ride home, cities must consider how to manage their streets effectively. Many will not be able to afford the extra public transport services needed to compete with the

public transport services needed to compete with the door-to-door service provided by cars, taxis or PHVs.

One cheaper option is to redesign the bus network, to better align routes with where the travelling public want to go. Another is to introduce road pricing, such as a per-ride surcharge on taxi and PHV trips or congestion charging for all motorised road users. A third is to rethink the allocation of road space – assigning more space to bus and cycle lanes can encourage the public to switch from cars to public transport, cycling and walking.

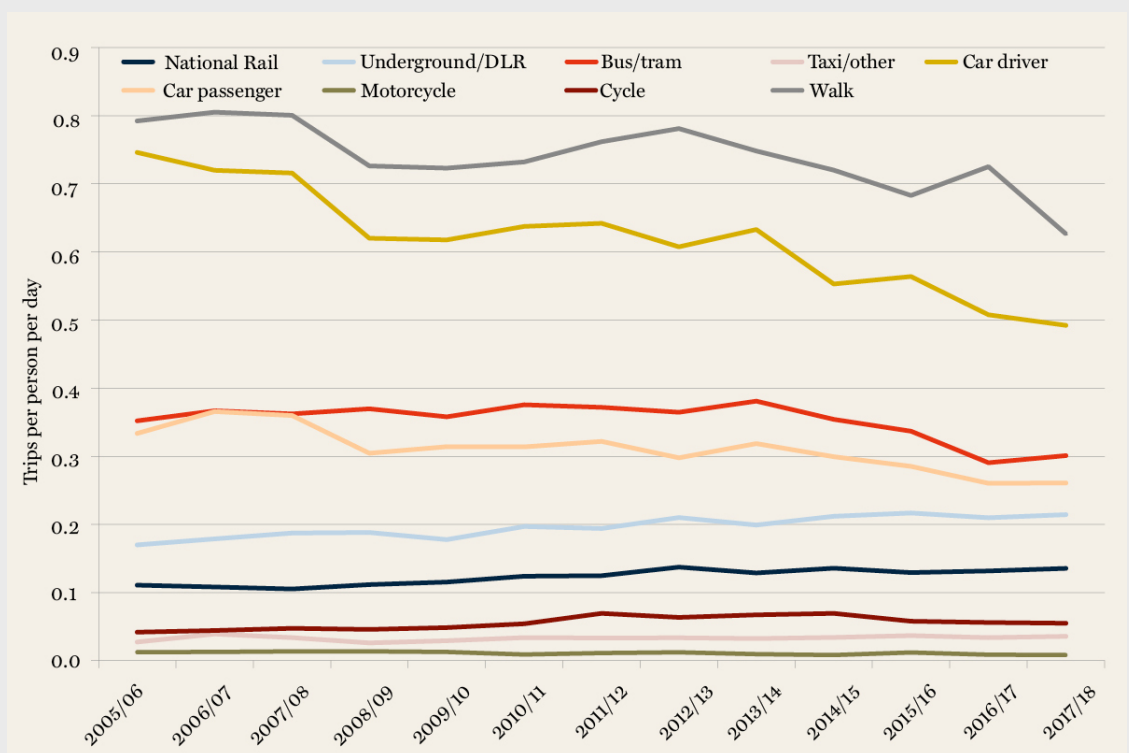
Falling trip rates could be cause for celebration. The Commission on Travel Demand, an independent research group of academics, found that developments at higher densities, close to amenities, and good public transport and cycle routes lead to reductions in trip lengths and trip frequencies. They allowed people to coordinate their activities more as part of daily life.

Falling trip rates could be a reflection of more people adopting lifestyles in dense neighbourhoods with good public transport and cycling links.

**"TfL's growing reliance on fares to balance its books makes it very vulnerable and it faces a net loss from**

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With this in mind, mayor Sadiq Khan should strongly encourage denser living and developments adjacent to transport, to support his ambitious goal of 80% of trips in London being completed using public transport, walking or cycling in 2041, given only 63% of all trips currently use one of these modes. This will need a yearly shift of 0.7 percentage points to public transport, walking and cycling, when there was a shift of only 0.1 percentage points between 2016 and 2017.



Mode of transport

Unfortunately, falling trip rates exacerbate TfL's money worries. It is banking on increasing the percentage of its £10bn-plus annual budget that comes from fares from 47% to 64% over the next five years, to cover the loss of its annual £700m grant from central government. But with the mayor committed to freezing single fares until the end of his term in 2020, any growth in income from fares will have to come from more passengers.

TfL's growing reliance on fares to balance its books makes it very vulnerable to unexpected changes in demand. Without comprehensive road pricing, TfL faces a net loss from falling demand.

Falling trip rates and the flattening of travel demand should be seen as a call for caution beyond the capital as well. Infrastructure investment plans across the country assume continued growth in population and large increases in demand for travel – indeed, these are the pillars upon which the case for large upgrades and investment programmes rest, with the government planning to spend more than £90bn on transport infrastructure in the next five years, to accommodate the perceived growing demand for travel.

**"If trip rates continue to decline, by 2040, 70 billion fewer vehicle miles will be travelled each year. That is important to what we invest in"**

Yet these changes in travel behaviour suggest significant lifestyle and social changes, which will alter the trajectory of travel demand significantly.

The Department for Transport's 2015 national road traffic forecasts highlight the importance of trends in trip rates. If trip rates continue to decline, by 2040, 70 billion fewer vehicle miles will be travelled each year than if the rates stay static. This is important to what we invest in and what the impact of our travel will be.

Any travel forecasts are vulnerable to inaccuracy as they inherently include many assumptions. Strong, transparent evidence remains key in convincing decision-makers and funders, so one needs to assess what evidence counts as good evidence. The sudden drop in trip rates exposes the risks of the sector's dependence planning for 'core' or 'most likely' demand scenarios.

Infrastructure investment planning should therefore not rely solely on a ‘predict-and-provide’ strategy. Instead, the guiding questions should be: what places do we want to live in and what kinds of activities do we need to travel for?

*Nicole Badstuber is an urban infrastructure researcher at the Centre for Digital Built Britain and University of Cambridge*







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the developer

Exclusive: 98% of  
councils use weedkiller  
linked to cancer in public  
spaces

Investigation reveals widespread exposure to herbicide glyphosate estimated to increase cancer risk by 41% in playgrounds, schools and near homes. *Christine Murray* reports



**Weedkiller being applied at Kings Crescent Estate in Hackney, in April 2019**

**A**n investigation by *The Developer* has revealed that 98% of councils use weedkillers containing glyphosate in 2018-19, with 96% applying it within 10 metres of private homes, schools, housing estates or playgrounds.

Glyphosate, the active ingredient in Monsanto's Roundup, is frequently used in towns and cities to stop the growth of plants on hard surfaces such as parking lots, footpaths, highways, fence lines, pavements, paths and brick walls in public urban spaces. It is considered the most-used herbicide in the world.

Researchers from the University of Washington recently estimated that glyphosate exposure **increased the cancer risk of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma by 41%**. In 2015, the World Health Organisation's International Agency for Research on Cancer classified glyphosate as "probably carcinogenic to humans."

In response to a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request, **291 out of 297 councils** say they used a glyphosate-based weedkiller in 2018-19, with half having used a Roundup-branded product.

Where councils had responsibility for maintenance, 93% of FOIA responses from local authorities say they have used glyphosate on housing estates (237 out of 254); 70% used glyphosate on playgrounds (187 out of 268); and out of the 169 councils responsible for school maintenance, 61% (103) say they have used glyphosate on school grounds.

However, five councils say they do not use glyphosate: Hammersmith & Fulham, Lewes, Ryedale, Sevenoaks and Southampton. Lewes Council states that it will also be stopping the use of glyphosate in Eastbourne in future as the two councils have combined service provision.

**“We have no intention of returning to glyphosate,” says *councillor Wesley Harcourt, cabinet member for the environment, Hammersmith & Fulham Council***

Other councils say use of the herbicide is under review, with nine councils specifically stating they are seeking to reduce their use of glyphosate and others trialling alternative approaches.

In March 2019, a federal jury in the US found that use of the glyphosate-based weedkiller Roundup had been “a substantial factor” in causing the cancer of a California former school groundskeeper in the second high-profile ruling to link Roundup with non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma.

In the wake of the US cases, the *Financial Times* reported that Bayer, which acquired Roundup manufacturer Monsanto last year for £63bn, faces **“an avalanche of legal cases”** estimated at around 14,000.

Bayer says its products pose no health risks. “Regulators worldwide continue to conclude, based on independent assessments, that glyphosate-based products can be used safely as directed and that glyphosate is not carcinogenic,” Bayer told *The Developer*.





## **Spraying on Kings Crescent Estate in Hackney, in April 2019**

Councillor Wesley Harcourt, cabinet member for the environment at Hammersmith & Fulham Council, says: “Hammersmith & Fulham Council stopped the use of glyphosate on streets, estates and parks and open spaces two years ago based on health reasons as per the many reports from Europe and possible law suits in the US.”

“We are now using steam and another hot foam method to remove weeds, along with some manual weeding where necessary. We have no intention of returning to glyphosate,” Harcourt adds.

Hackney says it has “significantly” reduced its spraying on highways, although its FOIA response indicates a 66% increase in use on parks and green spaces. Fareham Borough Council has invested in foamstream treatment and weed-ripping machinery, while East Sussex Highways says it is currently looking into alternative methods.



Other councils appear entirely reliant on glyphosate, however, with 111 councils saying they use no alternative herbicides, mechanical or manual methods of weedkilling.

And while 80 councils have decreased their use of glyphosate in 2018-19, 66 councils say they have increased their use of the herbicide, with some citing the weather or Japanese knotweed as requiring more applications. 90 councils say their usage is unchanged.

**70% of local authorities say they used glyphosate on playgrounds and 96% have applied glyphosate to housing estates where responsible for maintenance**

Asked to respond to the findings that some councils are moving away from glyphosate use, a spokesperson from Bayer says, “There is no evidence that local councils who choose to move away from glyphosate for amenity weed management are enhancing safety.”

Glyphosate is approved for use in the UK until 2022.

Nick Mole, policy officer for the Pesticide Action Network UK, the charity behind the Pesticide-Free Towns initiative, expressed his alarm that so many councils are using glyphosate, saying: “There is cause for concern.

“Glyphosate has been linked with a number of health issues, not only cancer. It is being sprayed, needlessly, in areas where children, potentially the most vulnerable to its harmful effects, live and play,” Mole says.

“There is a large enough body of evidence for the precautionary principle to be employed. Not least because there are effective alternatives available.”

**“The current legal cases in the US are only the top of the iceberg”** *Nick Mole, policy officer for the Pesticide Action Network UK*

The biggest spender on glyphosate is Norfolk, which spent £207,422 on glyphosate and its application



spent £297,432 on glyphosate and its application including labour, followed by Camden Council, which spent £140,653, with Milton Keynes having spent £115,653 and Hackney, £106,801 on the herbicide and its application.

The top three biggest users of glyphosate among the 297 local authorities that responded to the FOIA are Milton Keynes at 11,065 litres, followed by South Tyneside at 9,860L (with 9,400L of this applied by South Tyneside Homes). Rushmoor is third at 8849.6L.

Other major users of glyphosate include Manchester, which used in excess of 6,040 litres at a cost of £50,598, followed by Durham (5,040L); Essex (5,015L); Wirral (4,485L); Aberdeenshire (4,343L), Rotherham (3,880L), Norfolk (3,875L); Dudley (3,840L), Sandwell (3,727L); Redcar & Cleveland (3,445L); Middlesbrough (3,250L); Northumberland (3,190L); Southwark (3,118L), City of Dundee (2,754L), North Lanarkshire (2,715L) and Newham (2,700L).

Glyphosate's widespread use in city centres and public spaces is worrying, says Mole, because the number of people exposed in urban settings is greater, and glyphosate is also more likely to enter the water system.

“The main issue of hard-surface use is run-off,” says

Mole. “This is particularly problematic if glyphosate is applied in sub-optimal conditions such as rain or wind. But it is also an issue in general.

“Pesticides are mobile and the run-off ends up in drains and water sources,” adds Mole. “Decontaminating drinking water as a result of pesticide run-off adds to the bills we pay for our water, and harms aquatic ecosystems.”

According to Thames Water’s water quality reports for Camden and Hackney, the maximum pesticide count in these two London boroughs is very near the European legal limit, with a reading of  $0.093\mu\text{g}/\text{l}$  – just  $0.007$  under the European legal limit of  $0.1\mu\text{g}/\text{l}$ .

Phil Smart, inspector for the Drinking Water Inspectorate, says: “Although close to the legal limit, it is nevertheless below and presents no risk to health. Margins of error are taken care of as part of the analytical quality control process at the laboratory.”

**“Although close to the legal limit, it is nevertheless below” *Phil Smart, inspector for the Drinking Water Inspectorate***

Bayer's Monsanto is under increased scrutiny following the release of internal documents as part of the US case, known as the **Monsanto Papers**. The company has been accused of seeking to influence regulators.

In 2017, the EU appeal committee controversially voted to re-authorise glyphosate for five years despite a petition signed by 1.3 million EU citizens calling for a ban. France and Vietnam have since sought to eliminate the use of glyphosate by banning its sale or import for domestic use.

Last year, *The Guardian* revealed that **EU regulators relicensed glyphosate based on a copy-and-pasted report** presented as an independent assessment on the safety of glyphosate.

An investigation has been launched in France into **Monsanto collecting information on 200 journalists, lawmakers and other individuals** in the hope of influencing their position on pesticides.

The *Monsanto Papers* include an internal email revealed last month in which a Monsanto employee states that two of its employees are **“working behind the scenes**

**with UK government**".

A second email states the need for a new dermal absorption study "because of a pending request from two authorities (UK, Denmark) in a zonal evaluation process in EU. **If we use the default value we do not pass the risk assessment**".

In addition to health, there is concern that glyphosate is affecting biodiversity, insect populations, aquatic life and pollinators – a hot topic following the comprehensive report on biodiversity released last week, the *IPBES Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services*.

**“Urban rewilding enhances the health and well-being benefits of public space”**  
*Chris Brown, executive chair and founder of Igloo*

A recent study suggested glyphosate **damages the beneficial gut bacteria** in honeybees which makes them prone to infection.

Bayer's response reads: "Claims that glyphosate has a negative impact on honeybees are simply not true. Glyphosate and Roundup-branded herbicide products have been extensively tested in the laboratory and in the field to evaluate potential toxicity to honeybees."

Matt Shardlow, at conversation group Buglife, told *The Guardian* that **"the biggest impact of glyphosate on bees is the destruction of the wildflowers on which they depend"**.

Among the councils that have responded to the FOIA to date, 63 councils say they used insecticides and 80 have used fungicides in addition to glyphosate-based weedkillers, adding to the chemical cocktail being applied by local authorities. Frequently used products included wasp and ant insecticides and fungicides for bowling greens and pitches.

Mole says there is no barrier to becoming a pesticide-free town: "Examples from around the world show it is possible to maintain towns and cities without the use of glyphosate, or other pesticides," he says.

"France has a complete ban on the use of non-agricultural pesticides, all of Belgium's towns and cities are managed without pesticides and there are hundreds more examples from around the world where this is

happening in order to better protect the health of citizens and the environment.”

Designing out pesticide is the best approach, Mole says, by avoiding cracks and corners where seeds and weeds can accumulate, using membranes beneath paving, and making areas more suitable for brushing and sweeping.

**“We need to change the mindset about what constitutes a weed and the need to get rid of it” *Nick Mole, policy officer for the Pesticide Action Network UK***

We need to rethink the aesthetics of public space, says Mole, “moving away from formal-type gardens and using more natural planting regimes, the creation of wildflower areas and changing the mindset about what constitutes a weed and the need to get rid of it”.

Chris Brown, executive chair and founder of developer Igloo, agrees: “Urban rewilding, allowing natural ecosystems to re-establish, enhances the health and well-being benefits of public space.”

Brown adds: “Who wouldn’t be happier to hear the mellifluous song of a charm of goldfinches (who love thistles), or see the swooping flight of a summer’s first swallow (who feed off flying insects), or taste delicious local urban honey (bee forage is the main constraint on urban bee populations)?”

As for local authorities, Mole says there are numerous good reasons to phase out the use of glyphosate: “Citizens want it, alternatives are available, and in the long term it could save them money.”

Mole also says liability is a growing issue: “The current legal cases in the US are only the top of the iceberg.

“Thus far, a school groundskeeper and two members of the public have won cases against Monsanto for causing cancer as a result of exposure to glyphosate use,” says Mole. “Could a council afford to take the chance of litigation and possible compensation?”





**Placetest: King's Cross  
Central, London**

**This exclusive report  
by anthropologist and  
social researcher Nitasha  
Kapoor explores the user  
experience of King's Cross  
Central, with photography  
by John Sturrock, who  
has been documenting  
the site for 10 years**

**On the face of it, King's  
Cross Central is a place  
for locals and visitors to  
rest, shop and take part  
in events. But how does  
it work, who is there –  
and who isn't? How does  
the masterplan influence  
behaviour on and off  
its campus?**



King's Cross Central's fountains draw in young families of all backgrounds in the warmer months



The aim of this report is to create a discussion among people involved in the design and ongoing evolution of King's Cross, including developers, architects, urban planners, business owners, established and incoming local residents, local councils, and other members of the community.

It summarises findings from an analysis, or 'placetest', of the new King's Cross Central conducted in October and November last year. *The Developer* commissioned this analysis to understand how the site works from the perspective of the people who use it, with the aim of capturing best practices for now and in the future.

Anthropologist and social researcher Nitasha Kapoor conducted the research using short interviews with people on-site and in the surrounding communities, longer structured interviews and follow-up conversations over the course of a month, direct observation of usage, and an analysis of signs and communications on-site. Kapoor considered how the place is (and is not) used, how the built environment makes people feel and affects people's experiences, what contributes to this, the roles of communications, signs and advertising, and how the products and services available contribute to the experience of the place.

### Putting the past behind it

The locality behind King's Cross Station was an industrial area in Victorian times, with workers often living in the neighbouring communities. After World War II, it suffered from neglect and disuse; by the 1980s, it largely comprised abandoned factories, warehouses and small businesses, such as mechanics, freight companies and bus garages. King's Cross had a reputation for drug-related criminal activity and prostitution, but the relatively cheap rent for a central London location also attracted artists and other creative communities. In the 1990s, clubs such as Bagley's became popular venues for raves, bringing thousands of people to the area.

The decision to move the UK Eurostar terminus from Waterloo to St Pancras led landowners London and Continental Railways and Exel (now DHL) to invest in the area's redevelopment. In 2001, they selected Argent as the development partner and construction began in 2007/08. Part of the development, including Central Saint Martins art and design school in the central Granary Square, opened to the public for the first time in 2011. *The Developer's* study coincided with the opening in November of Coal Drops Yard, a high-end collection of shops and restaurants next to the centre of the development, Granary Square.



Pancras Square

This report offers insight into how people currently experience the site, but it is important to note that development will be ongoing until the early 2020s – only about half the development is currently complete, and Google's new offices on King's Boulevard between King's Cross Station and Granary Square are still being built, for example.

The analysis also only captures a particular season. The research took place as the weather was turning cooler and while there were some unseasonably warm days, which encouraged people to spend time outdoors, this was not in the numbers we see during the warmer summer months. However, we did explore with the people we met their memories of how the site was used in the summer and the report includes these findings.

The study reveals several insights into how people experience places. The development hosts different activities, including work, school, shopping, play and relaxation, but the site is geared towards satisfying a 'treat' mindset. One consequence of this is that people who can't afford the things on offer can feel at a disadvantage. The site's design is oriented away from its surroundings towards Granary Square, which means it is particularly important to consider the edges of the development, to build pathways into the area and shared experiences between communities. The relationship between the development and local communities is also fragile. Local people have suggested several initiatives to improve this, which the report will discuss later.

### The site and the square

King's Cross Central has the shape of an inverted teardrop. Railways and the canal run along the west and north sides, while King's Cross and St Pancras stations are to the south. York Way runs along the east side, separating the boroughs of Camden and Islington. Somers Town is to the west, Copenhagen Street and Bemerton Estate to the east, Maiden Lane Estate to the north. The borough of Camden has given the site its own postcode: NIC.

Housing ranges from social to luxury, and there are two primary schools, numerous office blocks containing companies including Universal Music, restaurants, a cinema, and outdoor spaces.

Foot traffic tends to enter from King's Boulevard in the south, York Way and Kings Place (currently home to *The Guardian* and *The Observer* newspapers), or the canal. The newly opened Somers Town bridge connects Camley Street to Coal Drops Yard, but it is too early to know what effect this will have.

The heart of the development is Granary Square, which is in the tradition of the European town square. Town squares have been a central feature of European urban planning for thousands of years. They are traditionally public places designed for everybody – the sites of markets and social exchange. They are places to be seen and heard, in contrast to the privacy of the home, the members' club or the office.

The openness of a square generally imposes a certain quality to interactions: the middle can make you feel exposed, so people tend to stick to the edges. William H Whyte's 1980 study *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces* identifies features that soften the wide, open space of the town square:

- 1 Areas designed to invite people in to sit and relax, such as movable tables and chairs so they can create their own social settings
- 2 Areas that break up the space and make it feel less exposed, such as tree canopies, water features and sculptures
3. Things that give people something to do and talk about, such as food vendors, events and performances
4. Other people: "Who's there? People like me or not? Do I belong?"
5. The interaction between the square and its surroundings. For example, how inviting is it to walk into the square? Is it visible? Is there easy access?

We will use these points to explore how the development works as a place.

### Points 1-3: a place to rest and do things

The openness of Granary Square lends itself to certain behaviours. The site is very clean and cleaners tidy up litter. The area is



- 1 King's Cross Station 2 St Pancras Station 3 London Kebab 4 Granary Square 5 Central Saint Martins 6 Coal Drops Yard 7 Waitrose 8 Google headquarters 9 Camden Council offices, Pancras Square Library and Pancras Square Leisure swimming pool 10 *The Guardian* and *The Observer* offices in Kings Place 11 Somers Town Bridge 12 Maiden Lane Estate 13 Somers Town 14 Frank Barnes School for Deaf Children 15 King's Cross Academy 16 King's Cross Sports Centre





Granary Square and the canal steps are extremely popular in the warmer months



King's Cross attracts a predominantly middle-class visitor with a 'treat' mentality due to the kinds of retail and experiences on offer



**“Working-class locals visit the site to use Waitrose, attend free outdoor events, or for a day out with their families; however, these numbers drop off in cooler months”**

perceived to be very safe, with security guards visible, which encourages visits by some groups, such as families with young children and women late at night. Some people don't notice the security guards or cameras, but say the area feels safe.

Granary Square attracts people who are there for work, art students, families and schools with young children, visitors shopping or eating, and tourists. For the most part, they see it as a 'treat space' – somewhere special or a destination. There are no 'routine' shops – no banks, post offices, off-licences, corner shops or pharmacies. Waitrose becomes the go-to for everything people need every day, or they go to King's Cross Station. Food trucks arrive for lunchtimes Wednesday to Friday, with a different mix of vendors each day, which makes the square feel dynamic. There's a full programme of events and experiences – ranging from free (Dr Bike, Discover NIC tours, the Canopy Market chocolate festival) to expensive (tea-blending masterclasses: £35; Spiritland talk: £79; Couples Kitchen at Waitrose: £100). Most people appear to have thought about what they're going to wear that day, be it office workers in suits, expressive art students or visitors having a day out.

Many people who use the square are not locals. They may work on-site but they live elsewhere. They may have travelled in from other parts of the country to meet a friend in London, or they may be meeting people from other parts of London in a central location.

People who work in the area and pass through it as part of their commute see it as a breath of fresh air: a bonus during an otherwise routine part of the day, an opening of space and sky, and a place for different experiences and people-watching. It's a place for them to treat themselves – they might step into a nice shop, have a look around and buy something.

In warmer weather, families with small children use the square as a fun and cheap day out. They sit and have picnics by the canal or play in the fountains.

The products and services that designate Granary Square as a treat space and make it so popular also create an inherent cost of

entry. Visitors may ask themselves: “Do I feel comfortable being seen or heard in this place? Can I afford to be seen or heard in this place?”

These questions are not new – places are regularly designed with specific interests, tastes and behaviours in mind. However, the development is marketed and largely praised as 'a place for everyone', including the established neighbouring communities.

Granary Square has met three of Whyte's requirements. It is busy and active; there are events, dynamic water features, canal boats going by, food trucks at lunchtimes, art installations, and places to sit and rest.

But when we explore the last two requirements – who is in the square and access to the square – it is less obvious that it is a place 'for everyone'.

**Point four: who's there and who's missing?**

Squares are traditionally a place of performance, formally and informally, and this seems particularly true for Granary Square. It is a place for people-watching and in turn a place to be seen.

The square is relatively new, which lends itself to looking around and exploring the site and the people in it.

The canal, canal steps, architecture and openness of the sky make for excellent light and an ideal backdrop for photographs.

There is continual change, with different food vendors, art installations and programmes of events.

Visitors take selfies: “It's such great light – I'm always taking selfies of myself on my way to work.”

People take pictures of the Word on the Water book-barge, an independently owned second-hand bookshop with live music and performances on the canal.

There are many tours of the site – both formal tour groups and independent tourists.

Fitness classes take place outside Waitrose, to the east of the square.

People on-site are mostly young or middle-aged professionals, art students, and parents with young children, and predominantly middle-class, although more affluent people may now be visiting, following the opening of Coal Drops Yard. Some working-class local residents from neighbouring estates visit the site to use Waitrose, when there are popular free outdoor events or for a nice day out with their families; however, these numbers drop off in cooler months.

At this time, in the winter months, users are predominantly white: there are very few black or mixed-race people, although there are some people of Asian or South Asian descent.

**Portrait: The 'free' Waitrose coffee queue**

During the colder months, mixing of different groups is most likely to happen in the Waitrose 'free' coffee queue. These include builders, pensioners, students, local residents from on-site and off-site communities, and office workers. The in-store cafe has a similarly diverse range of people.

The coffee queue used to be free to everyone, but you now need a Waitrose loyalty card, a receipt from a purchase at Waitrose and a reusable cup to get the free coffee. This has limited the groups of people who can access the coffee – for example, some students don't want to get the loyalty card or don't want to buy something.

The coffee queue in Waitrose illustrates everyday life in the King's Cross development – there is a daily, inherent cost to feeling like you belong. The exceptions are the fountains, for which you only need a child, and the free programme of events.

**Central Saint Martins**

Central Saint Martins is located at the top of Granary Square and has two main entrances: one in the square and one directly across from Waitrose. Large numbers of the college's students express themselves outwardly through their clothes, hair, tattoos and piercings.

Many say they are used to having their pictures taken without permission (“It comes with the territory”), but the site contributes to their feeling that they are “in a fishbowl”. Many therefore avoid the square altogether, preferring the eastern or smaller northern route offsite.

The design of the college further enhances this idea of public performance: the studios along the eastern edge of the building have large windows, which means passers-by can watch the students working.

**The development in numbers**

- Capital cost: £3bn
- Social value generated: £21m
- Community well-being uplift: £12m
- Services and amenities jobs: 160
- On-site jobs: 8,500
- Estimated uplift: £0.5bn+ per year
- Business rates generated: £25m/annum
- Commercial space: 1.4 million sq ft (three million sq ft planned)
- Percentage occupied: 97%
- New homes provided: 900 (325 affordable)
- Student rooms: 750
- Working-age residents: 1,200
- Visitors to date: more than seven million

Source: Trowers & Hamblins LLP's *The Real Value Report*



Squares are traditionally a place of performance and this is true for Granary Square. It is a place for people-watching and a place to be seen



**Portrait: Rubie Green, student artist**

Rubie has one of the studios with large windows facing Waitrose and feels they put the students' artistry on display.

"We call this place 'the fishbowl' - the art student aquarium," she says. "The school uses the windows as a living advert. Sometimes we glare back."

She used to use the grass outside Waitrose on a nice day, less so now there are so many office workers there. "It's great that they've kept Camley Street Nature Park [a park to the south-west of the square]," she adds.

We spoke about the psychological distance to neighbouring communities: "Walking to Caledonian Road [a station to the north-east of the development], you see how stark the differences are... There are opportunities to cross over - you don't have to walk far to see Maiden Lane or Somers Town."

She believes that by "being in the worst of gentrification", the students are not sheltered from it and their art becomes a response to the commerce around them: "Either go with it or rail against it - comment on it." Her "silver lining" is that studying art in such close proximity to so much commerce and so many companies can unite the art students in a common fight against the corporate world.

**Portrait: residents in offsite communities**

When speaking to residents in the surrounding communities, we often heard stories about how they don't feel welcome because they "don't wear the right things"; the shops and restaurants are too expensive and not places they would think to go to. Some people went as far as to say they felt watched and actively excluded:

"They give discounts and free tickets to the people who live in the new flats but never to our communities. It's mean";

"There is no obvious signage that says where the toilets are. Do I have to buy something?";

"The security guards stare at us. They don't expect to see us here";

"It's one thing to go and sit outside in

**"It's one thing to go and sit outside in the summer but what about when it's cold outside? Where can I go inside where I don't have to spend a fortune? They'll let us be outside, but not inside because that's expensive"**



Views into the art studios: a "living advert" and "the fishbowl"



Rubie Green in a still taken from the film *Placetest: King's Cross* on the developer.live

the summer but what about when it's cold outside? Where can I go inside where I don't have to spend a fortune? They'll let us be outside, but not inside because that's expensive."

Some people welcomed the perceived safety of the site, even if they were unaware of the security presence and CCTV; others noticed the security acutely.

The seasonality of a place is particularly relevant when thinking about how a community is formed and sustains itself over time. Free outdoor events and activities are available in King's Cross Central, but there are not the same kinds of free or affordable activities indoors.

Pancras Square, which lies between Granary Square and the two stations, houses Camden Borough Council's offices, a public library, leisure centre and swimming pool, but there are almost no signs and people on-site seem largely unaware of these public facilities.

The shops on the development are established mid to high-end chains (for example, Caravan and Waitrose) and mid to high-end restaurants and boutiques (such as The Lighterman and Spiritland). The food trucks that come to the development may

borrow conceptually from the tradition of cheap street food but they offer lunch at a treat price - a survey of what was available found the average price of a box of food was £8. The lack of cheaper options for eating, socialising and shopping effectively excludes many of the local citizens from the development. It precludes shops, cafes and bars from becoming community hubs where most local residents feel welcome and they can develop relationships with the staff or owners.

The exception to this is the Word on the Water book-barge, which has floated along Regent's Canal for years but has taken up permanent residence by Granary Square. There are regular jazz performances and it is an independent business run by friendly people whom many in the area know by their first names. It is undoubtedly one of the area's highlights - as evidenced by the number of people taking pictures of it.

Those who come from the existing community to the development often do so because someone from the local community has shown them around and made them feel like there are things for them there, too.

**Portrait: Lesley, local resident**

Lesley lives in a neighbouring community and walks through the development to get to her gym (Pancras Square Leisure), shops at Waitrose and gets her coffee. She considers the development "her space"; even though it's private land, she uses it as a public space and feels confident in it, saying: "We have to take up as much space as possible."

Lesley likes many things about Granary Square: the Skip Garden community garden and kitchen, where she learns how to cook, grows herbs and buys cheap vegetables; the steps to the canal; and the free outdoor space. She feels working-class people do make use of the fountains, tennis and football facilities and events. She brings friends to the area and shows them there are free events: "They do a good job having things for the community... for now. This is two Labour councils, side by side. Right now, things are good. What could happen if Camden went Tory? This could all change."

She especially values the site for being safe, clean and - in theory - a place for everyone. However, she doesn't know if all spaces are public and gets the sense that some places aren't as inviting as others: "Are the playgrounds for everyone? You could imagine someone asking you where you live."

Lesley represents a best-case scenario for a local resident - she makes herself feel comfortable in whatever spaces are available to her and encourages other people to feel the same by bringing them along.

**Pay and display**

Almost all products, services and experiences available at King's Cross Central are treats, and treats, by definition, are out of the ordinary and only happen occasionally.

The sense of performance that goes hand in hand with creating a treat space has resulted in an atmosphere that can exclude people who feel they can't afford to be there. However, there are many ways to 'pay':

Social capital: "Have I gained entry and acceptance through who I know or where I work?" Who has it: white-collar workers and those working in creative and technical jobs.

Cultural capital: "Am I worth taking a picture of? Will this look good on Instagram?" Who has it: kids playing in the fountains, art students doing photoshoots, and people taking selfies.

Financial capital: "Do I have enough money to buy things here? Do I look like I have enough money to browse here?" Who has it: those browsing in high-end shops such as Margaret Howell and Tom Dixon.

On the one hand, Argent has populated the place: the development is busy, active and filled with people eating, studying, working and shopping. On the other hand, the lack of provision for everyday life means people don't go to the site for routine things or they have to go offsite.

This causes frustration for those who are on-site every day for work or study, or those in neighbouring communities who would visit the site more often and feel more welcome if their everyday needs could be met there.

**Point five: the interaction between the square and its surroundings**

The fifth feature of Whyte's list for building successful small urban spaces is to consider how people access the site. The edges between the existing communities and King's Cross Central reveal and affect the degree to which the development is permeable. Do they allow everyone to have easy in-routes? Have they considered everyone's needs?

Signs and maps are important features that help to make sense of public space. Crucially, they can soften the edges between very different places and encourage permeability. Currently, the signs on the site reinforce the exclusive, inward-looking nature of the development.

There are signs and maps on the development's perimeter hoardings, which guide people into the development and help them to navigate their way around the site. But there is little on-site that leads out into the neighbouring communities - for example, towards transport links such as Caledonian Road & Barnsbury Overground Station.

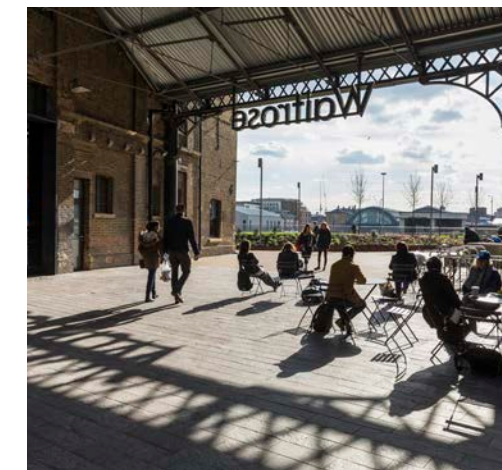
There are no signs directing people to public toilets, only small icons on the site maps.

The children's and adults' libraries are not included on maps on the site - Pancras Square Library is not listed under 'academic', 'arts and culture' or 'services'. The building that contains the library is listed as 'Pancras Square Leisure', but it is unclear that it is a public facility that also contains a swimming pool.

Furthermore, there is no sign on Pancras Square Leisure indicating that a library or swimming pool is inside. This same building contains Camden Council's offices and the word 'Camden' is in large letters on the facade; however, Camden Council is not included on site maps.

**Portrait: Edward Square, Caledonian Road** Edward Square is just off Copenhagen Street, which is a five-minute walk from King's Cross Central towards Caledonian Road.

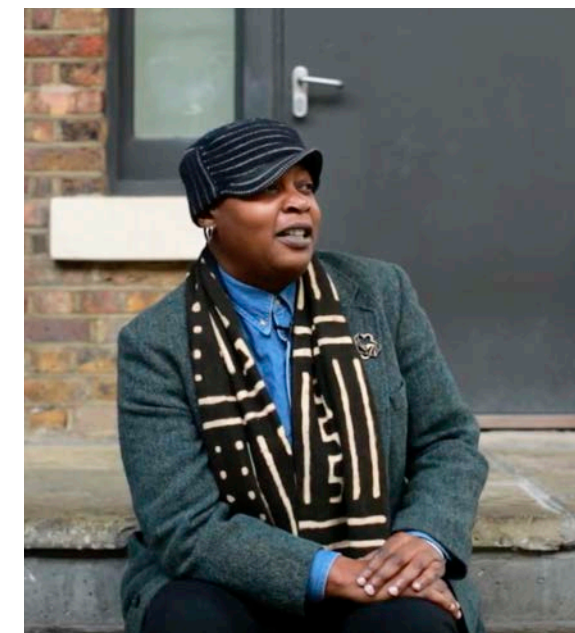
Redevelopment of the square was led by community champion Lisa Pontecorvo, who died in 2008. Her obituary in *The Guardian* stated: "Perhaps her outstanding achievement was Edward Square, a derelict patch of ground that had been one of the



Waitrose's free coffee queue provides a place for different people to meet and mix



The site is a popular place to meet in town



Lesley, a local. Photo: Jim Stephenson

earliest garden squares. Today, it is a place of celebration and recreation, with a poem by Andrew Motion [poet laureate] carved into the stone edging."

The mural on the wall in the orchard area of The Mitre pub was painted by Dave Bangs in 1984, to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the Tolpuddle Martyrs' demonstration in Copenhagen Fields and used local people as models.

Of particular note is that the entrance of Edward Square is clearly marked with the personal contributions of people who worked to make the redevelopment of the square possible:

"The design of this public park has been developed through consultation with the local community";

"The artwork in the gates was produced by the children of Copenhagen and The Blessed Sacrament Primary Schools";

'Park opened 2000. Please look after it';

'The artist for the wall panel was Kate Blee.'

Placing community members' names and contributions on the gate infuses Edward Square with human presence. By contrast, visitors must reach the middle of Granary Square before they feel they have arrived at the destination, so the community naturally turns inward as a result.

This means the development does not benefit organically from the already established local culture and must work extra hard to form connections.

Richard Sennett writes that placing community resources on the edges of a development makes it possible "to open the gates between different racial and economic communities" and lets neighbours mix casually: "Casual physical mixing is much less confrontational, as in a rich lady and her maid happening to be in the same place





Granary Square has placed public realm at the heart of the development, making what was still a construction site into a destination





Many people who work in the area walk through the development to get to their offices



Making snow angels in Lewis Cubbitt Park on a rare snowy day in London – King's Cross is seen as a destination for a day out





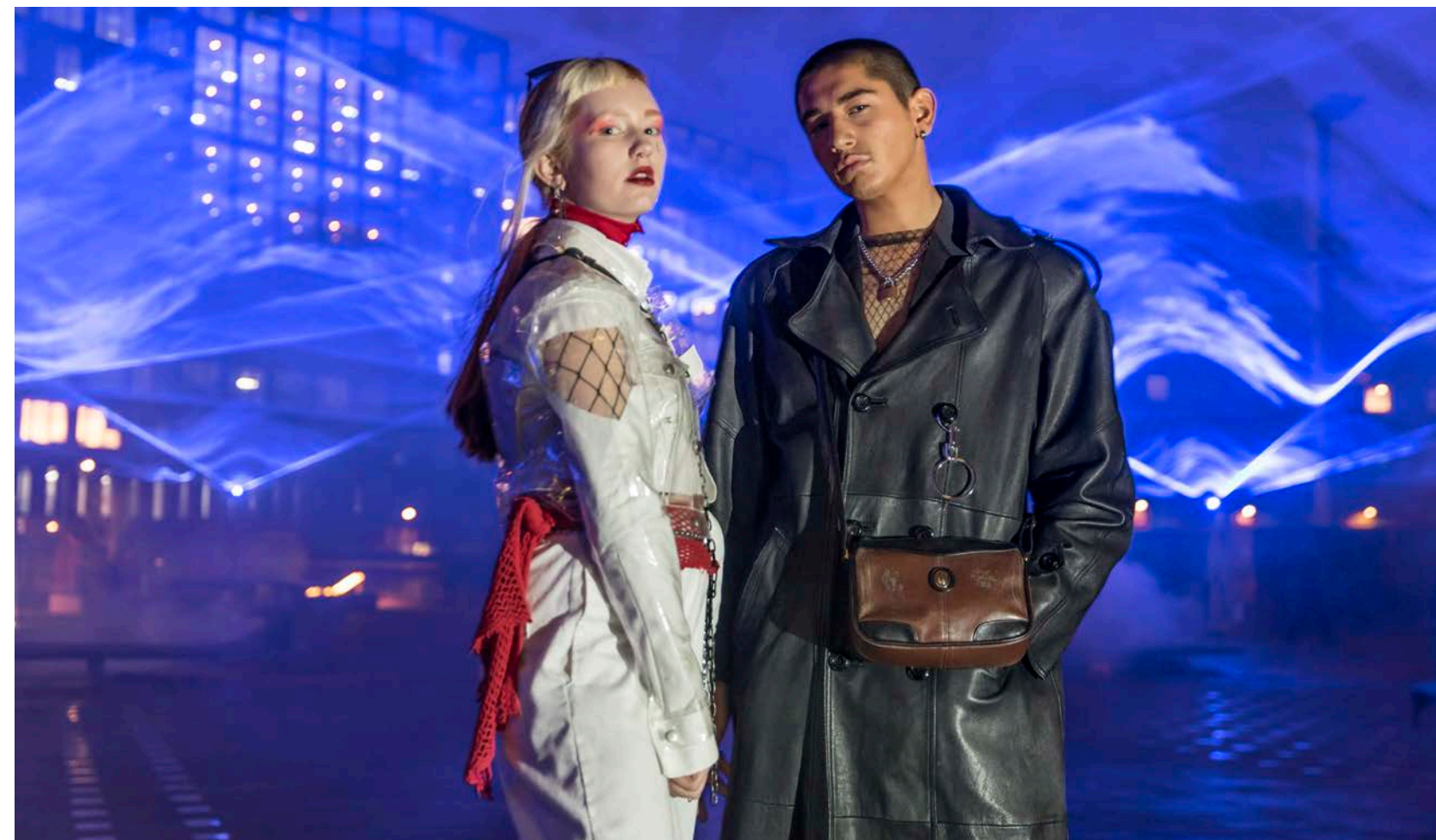
The formerly industrial canals of London are increasingly becoming recreation sites



People on site recognise that they are part of the performance art, which contributes to an excess of photo-taking



Canopy Market is held outside Waitrose on Fridays, Saturday and Sundays, plus special openings such as Valentine's Day



Central Saint Martins' students add a diversity of appearance that is almost a tourist attraction in itself





Coal Drops Yard opened in November with a range of high-end shops. The gasworks now contain new luxury flats designed by Wilkinson Eyre





Granary Square is much quieter in the winter months



This park is a quiet green space built within the third historic gas holder, designed by Bell Phillips Architects



The Handyside Gardens outside Waitrose are a popular lunchtime picnic spot for office workers and visitors





Moveable chairs allow people to make themselves comfortable and find their own space



Canal barges serve as homes to some, places to relax for others





Paving on the Islington side of York Way suffers from disrepair. Photo: Nitasha Kapoor

buying milk or booze late at night... engaging them in a common everyday task. This sort of edge experience is, in terms of the distinction drawn in our discussion of social differences in the city, inclusive rather than integrative.”

**Portrait: independent shops on York Way**

There is a string of shops on York Way, just north of Kings Place and *The Guardian's* offices, that serves as a gateway into the Copenhagen Street and Bemerton communities. From north to south along this strip, the shops are: Sid Motion Gallery (a tenant for three years), and long-established tenants London Kebab, Super Laundry, G Express Food Store and Cafe Express. One shop owner commented about the development and its potential: “We’ve watched this happening for 15 years... We’ve been hopeful.”

However, a large, continuous, eight-storey block east of Granary Square opposite the shops has shut out light and sightlines into the development at the ground level. One shop owner said: “There are no open parks or spaces facing this way... you can’t see what’s inside,” while another recalls: “I used to be able to see all the way across, but all the light is gone now.”

The pavements, road and small park in front of the shops is largely untouched and neglected, with large potholes on the road in front of the shops, which is allegedly used as a ‘rat run’ to avoid the traffic lights at the entrance to Copenhagen Street. This compares poorly with the new block of flats and retail spaces on the opposite side of the road. There is a small park called York Way Gardens between the shops and York Way, but the shop owners consider it to be derelict public space, where people drink and hang out. It is uncared for, bins are rarely emptied

and the gallery’s owner has to clean it herself.

These edge conditions highlight two distinct levels of care: the maintained, clean, safe, watched and manicured site of King’s Cross Development and the neglected side of the local residents.

**Portrait: Yunus, owner of London Kebab**

When we asked Yunus about the development, he immediately described feeling isolated, neglected, left behind and ghettoised. Aside from letters announcing the work, no one from Argent or Islington Council has been in touch or asked him about the development. His comments included:

- “We’re being left behind”;
- “No one is taking care of this place”;
- “We’re being deliberately isolated”;
- “They’ve created an inside world.”

He says he would invest in his business, but Islington Council is not taking care of the space outside or York Way Gardens: “I want to make it nice, but I can’t do the pavement. What’s the council doing about this?”

People used to be able to pull up to the shops, but parking outside the shops is now for residents or ‘pay and display’. He says people living in the ‘car-free’ block opposite the shops park their cars in front of the shops, but do not use them. “No one walks by here. It’s all cars and trucks, and no one is stopping,” he says.

It used to be busy, he continues, with builders coming by from the development. But now it’s very quiet, he says. “Nobody knows we’re here... and look at the place outside – it’s a mess. That’s not going to invite anyone in.”

**Portrait: Sid Motion Gallery**

The owner of this gallery started renting the former William Hill betting shop from Yunus three years ago. She gutted it, painted it white and turned it into a gallery. She wanted it to be on York Way, rather than somewhere such as Mayfair, because she feels it’s a more friendly, honest and accessible way of running a gallery. She invited the local

**“Locating shops between communities can serve the interests of different groups of people, due to location or need. These shops could be valuable assets for interaction between the existing and the new King’s Cross communities”**

community into the gallery and remembers meeting people from the community for the first time, including “some people [who] are still engaged and come to the openings”.

The gallery brings a different client base to this stretch of shops – people come to the gallery because they know it’s there; no one is casually stopping by. “I’ve brought a different type of person... someone who’s never been this far up York Way,” she says.

The owner feels she gains from the gallery’s location on the edge of an established community and its proximity to the King’s Cross community. In contrast, the kebab shop owner feels the opposite – he has not gained from the development and feels neglected, left out and angry.

**Place and time**

One of the most useful things planners and local councils can do is create places where different people can come together, to potentially increase physical interaction (side-by-side browsing or in a queue) and enable people to focus on commonalities, rather than differences.

These pen portraits of two small business owners highlight that locating shops between communities can serve the interests of different groups of people, due to location or need. These shops could be valuable assets for interaction between the existing and the new King’s Cross communities.

However, owners of small businesses expect to be met halfway by local councils and to some extent be considered extensions of developments, so they can benefit from the renewal. This contributes to a greater sense of place for all people.

Finally, it’s important to understand the timescale of a development as large and complex as this. King’s Cross Central has been a work-in-progress for 17 years and throughout this time, Argent has worked with local communities to preserve some of the history of the area through the King’s Cross Voices online sound archive and by naming new roads after previous landmarks, such as Bagleys Lane. It also has ongoing consultations with community members and has set up temporary community activities such as Skip Garden, a swimming pond, a sports pitch, outdoor films and sporting events.

**Portrait: Stephen, community organiser**

Stephen has been an area community organiser since the beginning of the development. Like Lesley, Stephen likes to “take up space” and make himself comfortable anywhere he wants. He’s confident and articulate about the issues his community faces.



London Kebab on York Way (top). The tall block of flats opposite give a fortified appearance to the King’s Cross Estate, while derelict gardens contribute to an us-them mentality (above). Photos: Nitasha Kapoor

As soon as we begin to talk about the development, he says no local residents were invited to the opening of Coal Drops Yard. A colleague went to visit the new shops, came back and told Stephen: “They didn’t expect to see me there.” Some of the teenagers Stephen works with who have visited the site have also noted this invisible barrier: “We just get stared at by the security guards.”

Crucially, Stephen has worked with Argent in his role as a youth organiser since the earliest stages of the development. He understands how to build a community and knows that trust must be built over time through small, continuous steps. He had a close working relationship with senior leaders at Argent and recalls their efforts to develop links to local residents. But there are now fewer and fewer signs of effective outreach, and trust from the local community is low.

In the early planning phases, Argent held consultation meetings with the local residents. A small group of dedicated community leaders fought for certain things that were important to include. However, largely these were not granted. For example, the Maiden Lane Estate did not get a bridge over the train tracks to access the development, so residents still have to walk around the edge to get in.

There was a football pitch on the site that was popular with local residents, but that land has now been turned into flats. There is the indoor Handyside Sports Pitch, but Stephen says booking it is restrictive – slots only last an hour – which is not good for the local community.

During the consultation period, Argent was asked whether skateboarding would be allowed and whether the seating and fixtures would be made of robust materials. Stephen says the company said: “Oh yes, of course.” But while skateboarding is allowed, skaters are not allowed to do jumps, only ride flat.

Community groups have tried to showcase local talent and initiatives outside Waitrose, but have been prevented. “You just get 20 reasons why it can’t happen, health-and-safety excuses, when really, you know they don’t want people from the estates. They’re worried about who comes in.”

Gang culture in the surrounding areas shows the need to engage youth and the real presence of danger – a 19-year-old was stabbed near Waitrose in September 2018, with detectives investigating the possibility that the attack was part of an ongoing dispute between the ‘Cally Road’ gang and the ‘Easy Cash’ (EC1) gang, according to local newspaper the *Camden New Journal*.

Stephen suggested possible steps to include local communities more. Businesses on-site and in the surrounding communities could donate resources to local residents and charities to raise the bar for everyone.

“Each office block should have a floor they donate to charity – that would drive people onto the development and benefit the local community dramatically,” says Stephen. Restaurants could offer free meals or discounts: “I had a bunch of vouchers put through the door from Dishoom... they can do more of this.”

Businesses could employ more local people, too. For example, Ted Baker, which has offices in Somers Town to the west of St Pancras, has hired an ex-teacher to be a community link and help local charities, while Havas advertising agency has hired an inclusion and diversity manager and a local young person is interning to make films.

Stephen’s final suggestion is to create more ‘level playing fields’ where different

**“A small group of dedicated community leaders fought for certain things that were important to include. However, largely these were not granted. For example, the Maiden Lane Estate did not get a bridge over the train tracks to access the development”**

groups use or share the same space. “It’s like a football pitch – it doesn’t matter where you’re from, you follow the rules and you play together.”

**Can a treat space include the everyday?**

The mix of relatively high-end retail chains, residences, schools and offices has created both treat and everyday spaces in King’s Cross Central, but without provision for everyday needs. The lack of everyday goods and services, more affordable price points in the retail mix, and true co-production with the local residents is causing many to feel that this is not a place designed for them.

Security measures make some people feel at ease and comfortable on-site, and often go by unnoticed. But they exclude certain groups of people, often from the surrounding communities, without cause, sometimes through subtle means, such as staring. Security cameras and guards can make others apprehensive and uncomfortable. The arbitrary rules that govern the place, such as skateboarding being permitted but not tricks, are not displayed or self-evident, which contributes to some people’s sense of unease.

Whyte describes this classic tension and offers suggestions that go beyond cameras and security towards reconciling the differences: “Electronics can’t beat a human being and it is characteristic of well-used places to have a ‘mayor’. He may be a building guard, a newsstand operator, or a food vendor. Watch him and you’ll notice people checking in during the day – a cop, bus dispatcher, various street professionals, and office workers and shoppers who pause briefly for a salutation or a bit of banter. Plaza mayors are great communication centres, and very quick to spot any departure from normal. Like us...”

“Ordinarily, guards are not supposed to initiate conversations, but Joe Hardy is gregarious, curious and has a nice sense of situations. There are, say, two older people looking confused. He will not wait for them



to come up and ask for directions. He will go up to them and ask whether he can help... Joe is tolerant of winos and odd people, as long as they don't bother anyone. He is very quick to spot real trouble, however. Teenage groups are a challenge. They like to test everybody – with the volume knob of their portable radios as a weapon. Joe's tactic is to go up to the toughest looking person in the group and ask his help in keeping things cool."

It would be valuable to think afresh about who the security is for in King's Cross Central and who is being served by it. Security guards are the face and voice of the development to an extent, and add value by being a friendly, welcoming presence whom users could potentially get to know.

Crucially, people expect some element of the unexpected in public spaces. Open-ended activities – such as skateboarding, ball games, the right to protest, non-selective and affordable market stalls, and graffiti – that are by their nature unpredictable and often spontaneous contribute to a place feeling truly vibrant and dynamic, rather than simply manufactured to look that way.

Lastly, it is important to consider how seasons affect usage, especially in an everyday context. The site is heavily geared towards the warmer months, with the fountains and steps by the canal playing an important role as a destination for a wide variety of users, including those from surrounding communities. The library and leisure facilities in Pancras Square are hidden gems that would benefit from signs and communications to encourage usage.

#### Can a place be inward-facing and take care around the edges?

If the development and design of public places are to include the surrounding communities, there are several things to consider. Placing a square in the centre of a development suggests arriving at 'the place' means leaving the surrounding community. Placing a town square at the edge of a site prevents the development from being inward-looking. Future developments could therefore consider placing town squares at the edges of sites, much in the way town halls are often situated on high streets.

Large open squares can feel uncomfortable, however, especially those with a panopticon effect, so there is a role for smaller-scale spaces that are more comfortable to dwell in. For example, the dwell time in the alleyways of Coal Drops Yard appears to be greater than in its wider main avenue.

There is a role for good, community-oriented design that extends and welcomes existing communities' access to the site.

Their way into a site could be considered when a development is planned. Maps, signs, marketing and leafleting could extend into their areas and point both ways. Signs and maps could provide continuity between the development and neighbouring communities, creating a 'two-way flow' in and out of the development. Leaflets or booklets detailing on-site event programmes could be placed in community centres, local cafes, shops and online where local residents would see them. In the case of King's Cross Central, the library and leisure facilities could be promoted on-site as free and affordable facilities for the wider community, and the library could be promoted on signs around the site and beyond, but particularly to families in Granary Square.

Designs can acknowledge sight lines from existing spaces, including those at ground level and the light from the sky. Cut-throughs in buildings could be considered to create pathways into sites, to boost footfall from existing neighbourhoods.

Everyday, independent shops can assist interactions across the edges of developments. Along with caring for the existing spaces, more of this type of retail could be incorporated into developments' edges. For example, York Way's shops could be considered extensions of King's Cross Central and included in the mix of retail available for on-site and offsite communities, as could Skip Garden's selling of affordable vegetables. There could also be more canal boats with entertainment and activities, selling affordable, everyday goods across the York Way divide – perhaps even a 'fruit and veg boat' run by Skip Garden.

Caring for the other side of the edge creates a greater sense of permeability between developments and surrounding communities. It need not be designed in the same way, but it should not be neglected space either – clean, safe and cared for is enough.

Finally, the provision of activities on-site that local residents enjoy might be at odds with what other groups like, but is an important indication that a place is 'for everyone' and helps all groups understand that they are welcome and included.

*Nitasha Kapoor is an anthropologist and social researcher*

*John Sturrock is a photographer who has been capturing the evolution of King's Cross. All photographs are by Sturrock except where noted*

#### The project team

##### Development team

King's Cross Central Limited Partnership:  
Argent (property developer and asset manager)

Hermes Investment Management  
(on behalf of the BT Pension Scheme)  
AustralianSuper (superannuation/  
pension fund)

##### Masterplanners

Allies and Morrison  
Porphyrios Associates  
Townshend Landscape Architects

##### Architects and designers

Alison Brooks Architects  
Allies and Morrison  
BAM Design  
Bell Phillips Architects  
Bennetts Associates  
Carmody Groarke  
Coffey Architects  
Dan Pearson Studio  
David Chipperfield Architects  
David Morley Architects  
de Rijke Marsh Morgan Architects  
Dexter Moren Associates  
Duggan Morris Architects  
Eric Parry Architects  
Fabrik UK  
Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios  
Glenn Howells Architects  
Heatherwick Studio  
John McAslan & Partners  
Maccreeanor Lavington Architects  
Maki and Associates  
Mossessian Architecture  
Niall McLaughlin Architect  
Olin  
Piercy & Co  
Porphyrios Associates  
PRP Architects  
Speirs + Major  
Squire and Partners  
Stanton Williams Architects  
Studio Downie Architects  
The Fountain Workshop  
Townshend Landscape Architects  
Weedon Partnership  
Wilkinson Eyre  
Wilmotte & Associés

##### Contractors

BAM Construct  
Kier Group

##### Office advisor

Cushman & Wakefield

##### Residential advisors

Knight Frank

##### Retail agent

Hanover Green

Nash Bond

##### Hotel advisor

CB Richard Ellis Hotels

