

## A heritage partnership agreement for King's Cross Station

The legal agreement between the building's owner and the local authority sets out routine works that can take place on a regular basis without the need to apply for listed building consent.



A view of King's Cross station from the top floor of the Northumberland Hotel. The station has since undergone a major extension and restoration (Photo: Historic England)

At the end of May a heritage partnership agreement was ceremoniously signed at King's Cross Station with Historic England, Network Rail and Camden Council, watched over by heritage minister Michael Ellis. This was a watershed moment for all parties as the agreement will help to ensure the efficient future management of the nationally significant site by streamlining the formal listed building consent process.

King's Cross station, designed by Lewis Cubitt, was built between 1851 and 1852 as the London terminus of the Great Northern Railway. The station's simple, powerful design is defined by the pair of rounded arches and central Italianate clocktower. In contrast with its neighbour, St Pancras, King's Cross's design purity was much admired by modernists a century later. The building has been listed at the highest grade (Grade I) since 1954 as a reflection of its remarkable engineering, architectural and railway historical interest.

As the station has grown and expanded over time, a number of changes have been made incrementally. The most regrettable of these, perhaps, was the large and incongruous green canopy at the southern end of the building, which was used as a temporary concourse area for around 40 years, blocking the view of the distinctive facade. By the early 2000s it was clear that the station was no longer fit for purpose. It had become cramped and inefficient, while the building itself was falling into disrepair and many of its beautiful architectural features had been obscured by layers of later development.

The station needed a major programme of restoration and reordering.

An inspiring restoration programme was completed in 2012 to plans by architects John McAslan + Partners, which various colleagues at Historic England and the London Borough of Camden had a key role in shaping.

The project proved that heritage and busy infrastructure can be entwined and that through close partnership working, expertise and a passion for our heritage, exceptional places can be shaped for everyone to enjoy. A strong working relationship between Historic England, the council, Network Rail and their consultants was fundamental to every stage of the project. The result is a beautifully restored and repaired historic railway station, an efficient and welcoming 21st-century transport hub and a visitor destination in its own right. The scheme has won over 30 awards, including the EU Prize for Cultural Heritage (2013), the Civic Trust AABC conservation award and the Mayor's Award and Best Project Five Years On at the London Planning Awards (2018).

The success of the project meant that discussions began early about how best to capture a record of the repairs and techniques used throughout the restoration. All parties were also keen to ensure that the significant historic parts of the station, and high-quality new elements, were safeguarded into the future.

A heritage partnership agreement (HPA) was chosen as the best mechanism for this. Introduced in 2013 as a result of reform powers





King's Cross station from York Way (Photo: Historic England)

from government (following the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act 2013), an HPA is a legal agreement between the owners of a listed building and their local authority that helps manage change efficiently, while maintaining the special qualities of a place. Crucially, an HPA captures a shared understanding of a historic site's significance, and sets out a number of routine works that can take place on a regular basis without the need to apply for listed building consent from the local authority.

Following the successful delivery of the station in time for the London 2012 Olympic Games, John McAslan + Partners was commissioned by Network Rail to prepare the HPA. Katherine Watts, senior architect at JMP and author of the agreement, developed a new format for the HPA which was graphic and significance-based. It included a consent chart on a double-page spread, which made the document easy to use – something that Network Rail was keen to promote. 'We were all pleased when Network Rail requested a hard-wearing version which would withstand many years of use,' Watts says.

Deciding what could be classed as routine or minor works was not a simple process here. Because the station is so large and complex, works that may be acceptable in one place may not be elsewhere. All parties agreed that the best way forward was to clarify where works could take place through conditions, which referred to certain parts of the building and relied on the different levels of significance being fully understood and appreciated, thanks to a series of colour-coded floorplans.

Also at the heart of the agreement is the understanding that this is a working building that needs everyday management beyond the strict confines of the historic fabric. The agreement therefore includes areas within the owner's control, such as the modern concourse and the piazza space to the southern side of the station. Consented works in these areas range from managing ticket machines, to allowing for public artworks.

'This agreement is a first for Network Rail,' says Tom Higginson, its director of planning and land services. 'We have worked closely with

Historic England and Camden Council and this agreement will save all of us time, which can now be spent in other areas, and means that passengers can benefit from improvements to the station more quickly. This will also help to reduce our costs, which is important to us as a tax-payer funded organisation.'

The HPA was two years in the making and the continued strong working relationship between all parties remained essential. We have all learned through this process that an HPA is best kept simple. It needs a clear format so that it does not just sit on a shelf but is a valuable working document for those who need to use it on an almost daily basis.

Thankfully the HPA is already proving to be a useful investment of time and has become an indispensable working document for looking after the building. Station managers have happily reported that the HPA has already paid for itself, finding it a practical guide to ensure that all works within the station are of the high quality that such an important building needs. So far around 40 works have been carried out that would otherwise have required listed building consent. This demonstrates that the HPA has streamlined and simplified the management process, saving time and money, while protecting what is special about the building for the future.

King's Cross joins a handful of statutory HPAs nationally, including Stow Maries Airfield in Essex, the University of Sussex, and several at Battersea Power Station in the London Borough of Wandsworth.

The power station, which lay derelict for over 30 years, is currently undergoing an extensive restoration programme which will transform it into a new destination for London. It entered into its first HPA in April 2018. Following the success of this, a second HPA was formed for the 100 or so retail units within the power station. This HPA enables the shopfront installation, signage and design of all retail units, and prevents the need to submit individual listed building consent applications for each.

The King's Cross HPA remains a pioneering project that demonstrates how we can progress the powers given to us by government to make the most of our heritage. A real benefit of this HPA is that it can be used as a template for future agreement. At Historic England we hope that this HPA will inspire other similar sites to consider such an agreement as a practical option for efficient management of our heritage.

Historic England will not be a party to all HPAs, but it has produced an advice note *Setting up a Listed Building Heritage Partnership Agreement* [historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/setting-up-listed-building-hpa-advice-note-5](http://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/setting-up-listed-building-hpa-advice-note-5).

Opposite: The new Western Concourse at King's Cross station, designed by John McAslan + Partners

Claire Brady is an inspector of historic buildings and areas at Historic England, working in the London and south east region.