

Crossrail 2 consultation

Response of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea 21 December 2015

1. The Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on the latest information regarding Crossrail 2 and, in particular, the design and location of the proposed King's Road station. The Council remains supportive of the Crossrail 2 project as a whole; the following response is concerned only with issues around how Crossrail 2 would affect Chelsea.
2. The Council has supported the idea of a new underground railway serving Chelsea for many years. We have long-established planning policies that give explicit support to the Chelsea-Hackney Line, and we are in the course of updating these policies to reflect the new name and alignment of the line. While Crossrail 2 trains and platforms would be bigger than those envisaged for the Chelsea Hackney Line, it is clear that the station now proposed at Sydney Street would be consistent with the Council's existing planning policies and objectives. For example, Policy CT2 of the Council's Consolidated Local Plan expresses support for the Chelsea Hackney Line, the precursor to Crossrail 2.
3. We are aware that a great many Chelsea residents have concerns about the proposal in King's Road and, even with the new information supplied through the current consultation, there remain some things that they, and the Council, do not yet know. This is most obvious in relation to the details of construction – exactly how the station would be built, how many lorry movements there would be, whether there would be any road closures (other than in Jubilee Place) that would be required, and so on. The Council accepts that at this stage, engineers do not know exactly how the station would be built, though it certainly welcomes TfL's plan to construct the running tunnels prior to excavating the station box. That should make a huge difference to the number of lorry movements required in Chelsea. Council officers would scrutinise very closely the construction method proposals as they emerge prior to the approval process, in order to ensure that the station is built in the least disruptive way for our residents, businesses and visitors.
4. The Council recognises that TfL cannot give an absolute guarantee that boring the tunnels and building the station in Chelsea would not lead to some ground settlement. The Council welcomes TfL's commitment to minimise the risk of any settlement and to working with Historic England to ensure the protection of important buildings and conservation areas - and to provide appropriate compensation and remediation. While there has been debate locally about the risk of settlement, it is important to note that on Crossrail 1, on larger excavations than envisaged in Chelsea, most reports of settlement were at the minor end of the scale, such as superficial cracks or difficulties with doors and windows jamming.

5. Notwithstanding the detail that is still to be supplied in relation to construction methodology, the Council and the public in general do now understand much more about your station proposals than we did until quite recently.
6. The Council would like to acknowledge the work that TfL have already undertaken to address our residents' concerns in relation to the following aspects of the proposed scheme.

Location of the station

7. In particular, we know now that, rather than building the Crossrail 2 station on the site of Chelsea Fire Station, using Dovehouse Green as a worksite, the station would be sited at the southern end of Sydney Street. The Council welcomes TfL's response to residents' concerns about the impact of the Dovehouse Street proposal on both the Fire Station and Dovehouse Green.
8. There are several advantages to the Sydney Street site. Firstly, this end of the road is less residential in character than Dovehouse Street. Secondly, the station would be close to both east-west buses running along King's Road, and to two bus routes running up and down Sydney Street. There is likely to be less demand for buses in Chelsea as a result of the station, but it is important to ensure good interchange with local bus services. Thirdly, the Council understands local concerns about the use of Dovehouse Green as a worksite, and welcomes the news that this is not necessary for a Sydney Street station. Finally, it is good news that uncertainty around the future of Chelsea Fire Station has now been removed by the selection of the Sydney Street site.
9. However, there remains a degree of concern about the acquisition of the Royal Brompton Hospital's land and the potential impact this may have on their ability to deliver world class medical facilities. The Chelsea Medical Quarter remains one of Chelsea's biggest assets and one that would be improved further with the presence of a station. The Council understands that the Royal Brompton is in discussions with TfL with a view to achieving a mutually satisfactory outcome, and we hope very much to hear positive news on this in due course.

Design and footprint/size of the station

10. We now know that the station would sit between and under the existing buildings at 250 King's Road and 151 Sydney Street, both of which would be retained. Escalators and a lift would take passengers from the surface level to an underground ticket hall area and thence on to the platforms.
11. The station factsheets that TfL has produced for this consultation do not show artists' impressions of the stations, but the Council understands from discussions with TfL that a modest glass box between the existing buildings would be in line with its expectations for the structure of the station above ground. Indeed there might not be any station structure above ground at all.

12. The Council will continue to work with TfL on the design features of the station as the scheme is progressed, and of course we would need to give formal consideration to the design of any station structure in our role as Local Planning Authority. It is helpful that TfL has confirmed publicly that the Royal Borough would be the Planning Authority that decides the application for this station so that we would have full control of the design elements.
13. For now it is clear, that the station at Sydney Street would have a footprint no greater than the existing gap between the buildings, and discussions with TfL officers suggest that it would be just a single storey height above the level of the street.
14. Unlike some of the larger stations on the line, the King's Road station would have just the single point of entrance, although there is potential for that entrance to be accessed from both sides of whatever surface level structure is built.

Development proposals

15. Over the past few months, some residents have feared that the building of a station at King's Road would necessarily entail a large over-site development to help pay for the capital cost of the station. Although the consultation factsheet is concerned with the details of the station itself, rather than any related development proposals, it is now very clear that there simply would not be any scope for large over-site development above the Sydney Street station, which would be sandwiched between two existing buildings, that would remain. Of course, as the station scheme is refined, landowners like the Royal Brompton Hospital may come forward with development proposals in the vicinity of the station.
16. Whilst the work sites will, to some extent, provide an opportunity for some development following completion of the works, it would be quite wrong to think that this is a driving factor for the scheme, as has been suggested. In any case, any development on these worksites would be considered by the Royal Borough as planning authority, taking account of existing policy.
17. For example, the scale must not contravene the Council's policy on context and character and must respect the local context. The Royal Brompton Hospital draft SPD provides a clear indication of the acceptable storey heights for the Farmer's Market site. At the Jubilee Place worksite, the townscape is even more sensitive. We would anticipate any additional development to acknowledge the special architectural interest of the Pheasantry, a Grade II Listed Building, and not come forward at a scale or mass that is out of keeping with the adjoining conservation areas. The consultation factsheet on vent shafts makes clear that these would normally be two storeys high, and it is understood that there is some flexibility in the shape of the vent shaft cross-section – they do not need to be circular, if other shapes would better fit the local context.

Worksites

18. The loss of any buildings for the construction of the station is regrettable, but doubtless also unavoidable in an area such as Chelsea. Certainly, the Council has not heard any suggestions that the eastern worksite shown as Worksite B on the consultation factsheet could be better located elsewhere.
19. Worksite B comes very close to the Pheasantry, one of the King's Road's oldest and most prominent buildings. It is imperative that this and all other heritage assets nearby receive appropriate protection.
20. The building at 3 Jubilee Place is included in the Area of Surface Interest for the work site. Clearly, these areas would be finessed as work progresses and the Council would require that that all endeavours be taken to retain the property.
21. The temporary closure of Jubilee Place at the southern end would require careful management.
22. It is a positive step that, following some design amendments, construction of the station would now involve a smaller total area of surface construction, and in particular that some of the sites included in the 2015 safeguarding as Areas of Surface Interest would not be required.

The principle of the Crossrail 2 station

23. We note that in this consultation, TfL is not explicitly asking whether the idea of a station on King's Road is a good one. It is certainly not inviting views on alternative locations – this happened in 2014. And yet no firm decision has been taken to build the station, or any other part of the line. For as long as that remains the case, there will continue to be a debate about the merits of having a station at all. Senior TfL officers have been kind enough to come to a number of meetings in Chelsea in recent weeks, and have set out the TfL case for the station.
24. The Council has previously set out the benefits for Chelsea of a station on this new line. It would significantly improve public transport connectivity to Chelsea. This includes but is not limited to the nearly 5000 households in Chelsea that are currently more than 800 metres, or a ten minute walk, of an existing rail or Underground station. Improved rail access to Chelsea would be a fantastic opportunity to encourage a move away from road-based motor transport, reducing the congestion that blights Chelsea's roads and improving the poor air quality that is a factor in one in twelve deaths in the Royal Borough. The station would reduce journey times from Chelsea to central London, but also to important destinations such as Gatwick Airport, via Clapham Junction.
25. There has been some debate locally as to whether the station would in fact lead to reduced traffic and pollution, and of course, the Council would look very carefully at these points in the Environmental Impact Assessments that

would be carried out when the scheme reached the appropriate degree of maturity. As a matter of general transport policy and planning, the Council remains of the view that offering people better transport choices would lead to a shift away from less efficient modes.

26. Over the past couple of years, the Council has twice taken the opportunity formally to confirm, through your consultation exercises, the Council's support for the principle of a Crossrail 2 station serving King's Road. The current consultation does not ask, as the 2014 consultation did, whether there should be a station at all. Instead it seeks views on Transport for London (TfL)'s latest proposals, which are necessarily more detailed now than they were during the 2013 and 2014 consultations. That said, it is important for the Council to make clear that the principle of bringing Crossrail 2 to Chelsea is one that it continues to support.
27. There remains a strong case for the station, just as there was in 2013, when 70 per cent of residents who responded to a Council survey expressed support for the line, with a station in King's Road. In 2014, when TfL sought views on three options – a station on the Fire Station site, a "Chelsea West" station, or no station at all, the Fire Station was the single most popular site (32 per cent of respondents, compared to 24 per cent for the no station option, and 21 per cent for Chelsea West). It was also the least *unpopular*, in that fewer people (19 per cent) expressed opposition to that site than to either Chelsea West (26 per cent) or the No Station option (27 per cent). A substantial number of respondents did not comment, presumably because they were interested in stations elsewhere on the line.
28. Eighteen months on, and without prejudging the outcome of the current consultation, it is clear that the "No Station" option enjoys a good deal of support in Chelsea. There may be several explanations for the emergence of an organised campaign that proposes there should be no station at all in Chelsea, when only last year this no station option had relatively little support.
29. One explanation that has been suggested, is that until this year, most Chelsea residents were simply unaware of the proposals, or did not understand what they would mean in practice. In this analysis, it was only when a campaign was begun earlier this year, that the people of Chelsea realised that something they had previously not been aware of - or had not properly considered - was in fact something that they should oppose.
30. It is certainly true that there has been much more debate in the past year than previously. Such an analysis implies that, for some reason, in 2013 and 2014 those who were supportive of the station were more likely to be aware of, and to respond to, the consultations than those who would not have been supportive. In general, people are much more motivated to respond to consultations when they disagree with the proposals than when they agree with them.
31. This explanation also implies that in 2013 and 2014, people just did not think of the concerns that have been raised by the station's opponents for the past

few months. This seems implausible. When Chelsea residents said “yes” to a station back then, they must have known that a station would not be a simple thing to construct: there would of course be some construction impacts. And those people who are comfortable with Chelsea’s public transport provision today were presumably happy with it a year ago too, and could certainly have said so.

32. In 2013 and 2014, discussions about Crossrail 2 were not influenced by claims that a station in King’s Road would involve massive and disproportionate development on the station site, or that it would mean tens of thousands of passengers alighting onto the King’s Road each hour. It is difficult to know how far people have believed such claims. It will be very important that the analysis of consultation responses attempts to determine the extent to which they are coloured by inaccurate information and odd language. They were not told then that Crossrail 2 was a “mass transit” railway, somehow utterly different from the Tube that they know and use today. And they were not being told that the character of Chelsea would be ruined by the arrival of a station. There is no reason to think that a station would risk damaging Chelsea’s character. Indeed, insofar as it is claimed that a station would harm the residential character of Chelsea’s streets, the move to Sydney Street, which is already less residential than Dovehouse Street, must be seen as a positive move.
33. Inevitably, as the details of a proposal become clearer, there will be unwelcome news for some individuals. For example, residents and businesses that have now learned that their properties would be close to, or inside, worksites, will perhaps have a different perspective on the station than they might have had in 2013.
34. Conversely, the new information entering the public domain through the consultation contains news that most should welcome. The new information shows that it is possible to bring new transport connectivity to Chelsea without turning King’s Road into a second Oxford Street. It shows that having 250m long trains does not mean huge buildings at street level, or impossibly large numbers of passengers spilling onto King’s Road, let alone the beautiful and quiet side streets that link to it.
35. The Council’s reasons for wanting Crossrail 2 to come to Chelsea are the same as they have always been. A station at Sydney Street would improve journey options for residents, make it easier for employers to attract customers and workers, and ensure that, as the city grows, Chelsea would continue to play its part in London’s success and role as a global city.
36. Having said that, it is clear that there are many Chelsea residents, and some businesses too, that have not been persuaded by the case for the station. It is extremely regrettable that the debate in Chelsea has been held against a backdrop of hyperbole, and unsupported claims. Still, there are many residents who, while not necessarily believing everything they read in the newspapers, nonetheless do not share the Council’s view that Chelsea would benefit greatly from the station.

37. It is important that no-one prejudge the outcome of the consultation, and also that it not be treated as a referendum. The quality of the arguments made should be paramount. This Council will be reading the results of this consultation very carefully.

38. The Council thanks TfL for its engagement so far on Crossrail 2, and looks forward to further discussions in 2016.