



Exhibition Road Cultural Group
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A City for All Londoners – Response from Exhibition Road Cultural Group

Thank you for your invitation to comment on your vision and ambitions for the next four years set out in “A City for All Londoners”. We are keen to work with you and your colleagues at City Hall as you review and develop the detailed strategies to implement this vision, particularly those that are of strategic importance to the cultural and educational organisations in South Kensington: The London Plan and the strategies for transport, culture and economic development.

About us: South Kensington – the home of science, arts and inspiration

The Exhibition Road Cultural Group (ERCG) is a partnership of 17 leading cultural and educational organisations in South Kensington: Natural History Museum, the Science Museum, Victoria and Albert Museum, Imperial College London, Goethe-Institut, Institut français, the Ismaili Centre, Kensington Palace, Royal Albert Hall, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, Royal College of Music, Royal Commission for the Exhibition of 1851, Royal Geographical Society (with IBG), Serpentine Galleries, The Royal Parks, the Design Museum, and Christie's South Kensington.

This is one of the world's most popular cultural destinations and home to an extraordinary cluster of cultural and educational organisations – each among the best in the world in their respective fields. These organisations, founded from the legacy of the Great Exhibition of 1851 as London's first planned cultural quarter, share much more than geography. They are united by a common mission: pioneering innovation and learning in science, design and arts for the benefit of society. Here we generate and share knowledge and inspire the engineers, designers, scientists, musicians and artists of the future and together we welcome over 20 million visitors each year.

The cultural and educational organisations in South Kensington work together with the aim of developing and promoting South Kensington as a world-class centre of learning, innovation and inspiration in the arts and sciences. The objectives of the Exhibition Road Cultural Group are to:

- improve how it feels to visit, work, live and study here by enhancing the public space as an introduction to the creativity and innovation within our institutions.
- Make it easier to find out what you can do here and to understand the story of this group of organisations by describing and promoting what this area has to offer
- Help each other promote innovation, inspiration and learning by addressing shared issues together and sparking new ideas.

Our current priorities are:

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- Promoting what is happening across our partner organisations – encouraging people to discover more of what is offer here.
- Working with Transport for London and local stakeholders to help make sure development plans for South Kensington station meet the needs of our users.
- Playing a leading role in shaping future development of public realm and neighbourhood of Exhibition Road and South Kensington.
- Encouraging a programme of high-quality public activities in Exhibition Road throughout the year that connect with the story and values of our group of organisations, including the Exhibition Road Commission – a collaboration with a major international artist.

A City for All Londoners

We welcome the priority given to culture within your plans for London. Encouraging exploration, engagement and participation has been a key principle here since 1851 and each of our partner organisations works to increase the breadth and reach of their audiences and students. Each of the cultural organisations in South Kensington will have views on how they can contribute to this and are keen to engage in detailed discussion as you develop the new cultural strategy.

The Mayor's strategic responsibility for planning and transport play a vital role in underpinning the success of the cultural and educational organisations that contribute to London's status as a world city, enabling them to thrive as assets for all Londoners and to continue to develop and reach new audiences. Collectively this is a priority for the members of the Exhibition Road Cultural Group and we are keen to work with you and colleagues at City Hall, and with the Boroughs and TfL as you develop your detailed plans.

Improving transport experience and accessibility

We welcome your commitment to step-free access and urge you to push Transport for London to bring forward plans for step-free access at South Kensington. This is long overdue: it is a disgrace that there is still no disabled access by underground to London's most popular cultural destination. With more families and pushchairs than any other underground, the lack of step-free routes here also adds to congestion, creating a significant deterrent to repeat visit and barrier to more visits from Londoners.

The quality of the 'visitor experience' on public transport plays a key role in supporting both the tourism economy and encouraging Londoners to come into central London to experience the cultural asset here. We welcome your ambition to make it easy to get around for "young and old, people with disabilities, people with small children, people carrying luggage. Congestion needs to be tackled and the planned investment to improve capacity, particular on the District & Circle Line and Piccadilly Line is essential. There is great potential within TfL's station development plans to contribute to the visitor experience within London, through thoughtful and creative design. First impressions really do count. At South Kensington, the station improvement plans should provide a fitting sense of arrival and ease of orientation. The pedestrian tunnel to Exhibition Road, used by the majority of visitors to the museums and Royal Albert Hall, must be integral to station improvement plans.

Investment in transport infrastructure in London should support areas of existing economic strength as well as new areas of growth. The proposed Crossrail 2 station in Kings Road, 10 minutes walk from South Kensington, connecting jobs here with homes across the region, will help us recruit and retain the people we need to continue to thrive. Long-term investment such as this is essential if South Kensington is to continue its strong contribution to London's economy through supporting tourism, creative industries and research innovation.

We also welcome measures to ensure pedestrian and cycle routes to the museums, universities and venues in South Kensington from major public transport interchanges are both environmentally attractive and safe. We are keen to encourage walking and also interested in using road space for different purposes at different times of day.

Planning framework that supports London's strategic cultural assets

Our leading cultural and educational organisations seek to continually develop their offer to remain among the best in the world, and compete globally for staff, students and visitors. Each of the major institutions are bringing forward innovative and ambitious plans to improve their buildings and facilities. The common themes that link all are improving services, increasing access and opening up the buildings, and promoting both economic and environmental sustainability. This development will increase the attractiveness of these organisations to millions of visitors from London, the rest of the UK and also internationally.

To deliver the future operational needs and the associated benefits that this brings both to London as World City – including the participation in culture by local communities – we seek continue strategic planning policy support from the Mayor through the cultural policies in the London Plan, including designation of Strategic Cultural Areas. This strategic planning policy support provides the necessary strategic planning framework within which local development planning policies can be formulated by the Boroughs, and also through Neighbourhood Forums.

We need a consistent and unified local planning policy framework given that the South Kensington Museum Complex/Royal Albert Hall Strategic Cultural Area is within both Kensington and Chelsea and the City of Westminster. Planning policy needs to strike the right balance between meeting the needs of local communities and whilst also supporting our national & international cultural institutions, which attract visitors both nationally and internationally, and our academic institutions in attracting students and undertaking research of global significance.

We are keen to work with you and your colleagues as you review the London Plan to develop an ambitious vision for strategic cultural areas and ensure these areas are protected and promoted as assets for all Londoners and for the UK.

Attractive, accessible and distinctive public spaces

We welcome your commitment to attractive, accessible and distinctive public spaces. Exhibition Road is an asset for London and has been greatly improved through the public realm improvements. Five years on, this public realm needs continued investment and attention to ensure it delivers its full potential and continues to provide an excellent experience for Londoners and visitors alike.

We would welcome your support and encouragement for improvements that encourage people to explore more of what's on offer here, with spaces for delight, and interaction, as well as places for respite, with an ease of movement into and across the entire quarter. We are working together on plans for a major installation along the length of Exhibition Road, which aims to bring in new audiences and create a landmark event in London's cultural calendar and would welcome your support for this. To remain at the forefront of international practice and to continue to reach new audiences, the museums in South Kensington have ambitious programmes of temporary exhibitions of national and international significance. Planning policy support to install outdoor works of art within Exhibition Road would bring this work to new audiences.

A City for All Londoners sets out an ambitious and exciting future for London. We look forward to working with you to achieve this.

Yours

Emily Candler
Executive Director