

THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE of London



London continues to dominate the rankings as the world's most influential city and an international centre for business, finance and culture. To maintain that leading position, it has to preserve its heritage, constantly reinvent itself and remain an outward-looking capital. Reflecting its number one ranking in the Forbes' list of the 'World's Most Influential Cities', there is a real "sense of history with cutting-edge creativity". In this feature, we will be looking at some recent developments in the City of London, the big regeneration of King's Cross, and the issue of gentrification in places such as Dalston and Brixton.

The City of London: Conservation and Development

Let's start with the City, London's most ancient quarter and financial heart. It represents a tiny, very concentrated but dominant part of the metropolis, colloquially known as the Square Mile. History there goes back more than 2,000 years, punctuated by powerful periods when trade and commerce flourished as well as episodes of terrible destruction such as the catastrophic fire of 1666 and the heavy bombardments of the Victorian City during the Blitz. In the City, keeping the right balance between conservation and development has remained a constant challenge.

Walking the streets and alleyways around St Paul's Cathedral and looking at buildings in detail makes the beauty of this area apparent. The originality of the cityscape is strengthened by the various contrasts present everywhere. This diversity in architecture stems from the efforts to preserve the old and to integrate the modern. Even within the new buildings, the variety of styles, shapes and materials brings a special and unique character. For example, the juxtaposition of the glass façade of the Leadenhall building and the

steel, machine-like structure of the Lloyd's building is a truly unique sight. These two buildings, standing in close proximity to each other, were built 30 years apart yet stand together in perfect harmony.

The View of St Paul's

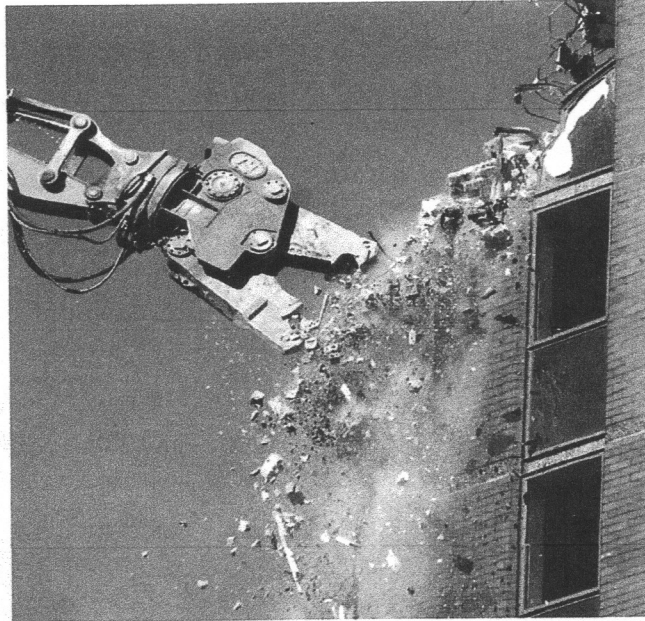
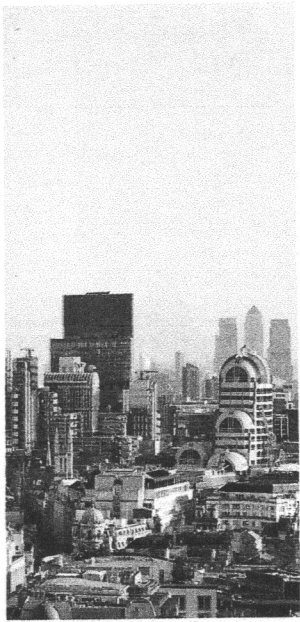
To maintain a harmonious scene, there are some sacrosanct rules, the most important of which is the protection of the various views of St Paul's Cathedral. The London View Management Framework is a key part of the Mayor's strategy to preserve London's character and heritage. It ensures that the setting of Christopher Wren's masterwork can be viewed from many locations, including Primrose Hill and Greenwich Park. The authorities scrutinise each new project, how it affects the cityscape, and how it can be better integrated into the environment. Each view is examined from different angles as if the scene had to be framed. "A building cannot lose the connections with the surroundings," explains Peter Rees, a Professor of Places and City Planning at UCL, during a recent tour of the area offered by From My City. Rees has led the City's planning and regeneration efforts for 30 years as City Planning Officer for the City of London.

New Office Buildings

The City is constantly under development. In the 1980s, the focus was on the construction of office buildings to sustain jobs in the area. Important office buildings were designed by 'starchitects' such as Richard Rogers, Norman Foster and Terry Farrell. As a result of this influence, the area is now home to some of the world's most striking modern architecture. One of the most iconic buildings is probably the 'Gherkin' (30 St Mary Axe), designed by Norman Foster in 2003. Since then, new buildings have received nicknames such as the 'Walkie -Talkie' (20 Fenchurch St) and the 'Cheesegrater' (Leadenhall building). "A building does not become an icon by itself only because of its particular shape," says Rees. People living in the city need to accept it. Rees explains that when people like and accept something, they give it a nickname; it's part of British tradition. Also, the plan of a building is never perfect from the outset: it has to evolve and adapt. In the case of the 'Cheesegrater', Rogers had to cut it back at an angle to leave certain views of St Paul's open.

Business and Leisure

The City has changed since the 1990s, diversifying away from the nearly exclusive



London Tourism Facts

Four out of five travellers say 'culture' is their main reason for coming to London

Cultural tourists spend £7.3 billion a year

Cultural tourism generates £3.2 billion for the economy

Cultural tourism supports 80,000 jobs in the capital

Source: www.london.gov.uk

“In the City, keeping the right balance between conservation and development has remained a constant challenge.”

office buildings. The Square Mile of the 21st century is becoming increasingly diverse, fun and attractive. In the past, the area would turn into a 'ghost town' when bankers and brokers went straight home from work. Now, people want to live and work in an enjoyable and interesting place with shops and entertainment nearby. “You can no longer separate business and leisure,” says Rees. These changes are in line with a global phenomenon described in Richard Florida's *The Rise of the Creative Class*. In his book, Florida illustrates how pedestrian-friendly neighbourhoods featuring mixed-use structures, bars, cafés and an active street life facilitate human interaction in big cities. Skyscrapers can be beautiful but they can also function as 'vertical suburbs'. The City is known for being an effervescent place where business is also conducted on the streets. Many deals are struck in the local pubs, instead of the corporate meeting rooms. In this spirit, in 2010, a new shopping centre was opened at One New Change, Cheapside, near St Paul's Cathedral. Designed by French architect Jean Nouvel, the venue is

open seven days a week, and features an amazing roof terrace, which gives spectacular views of St Paul's dome and the city. As part of the plan, there are no doors to access the premises, leaving the building and shops fully integrated with the streets of Cheapside. Known as a bustling commercial area since medieval London, Cheapside was recently revitalised thanks to various other enhancements, including doubling of the width of the footways.

In addition to new restaurants and cafés, residential buildings have also been added, such as the 46-storey Heron Tower, which provides a mix of office space and residential properties, restaurants and a sky bar. According to the City of London website, the Square Mile is home to more than 8,000 residents. Each day, over 400,000 City workers, visitors, and commuters come to the area. When a place like this has too many residents, explains Rees, it can be problematic; some residents may not like the changes, such as having loud nightlife at their doorstep, so the right balance needs to be found.

The London housing situation remains

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problematic and many residents are very critical of the 'buy to leave' phenomenon, with property purchased solely as an investment and left unoccupied for most of the year. From the terrace of One New Change, one can see many new high-rise buildings all over in the cityscape. Most of these buildings will be new apartment blocks in areas such as Battersea, Vauxhall, Canary Wharf, Stratford, Angel and King's Cross.

More Tourists in the City

London's tourism industry continues to grow. In recent years, more tourists have added the City to their itineraries. The City Information Centre on St Paul's Churchyard is already contributing to the experience. Architect Ken Shuttleworth designed the tent-like building in 2007 after he left Norman Foster & Co to start his own practice. Winner of the 2009 Royal Institute for British Architecture (RIBA) Award for Architectural Excellence, the venue has eco friendly features. Rainwater collected from the roof is used to irrigate the plants and to flush the toilets. Its unique look contributes nicely to the diversity of the cityscape.

This diversification of the area continues today with creative new projects, including a luxury hotel by Soho House in the former Midland Bank headquarters on Poultry. This Grade I listed building, designed in 1925 by Sir Edwin Lutyens, one of Britain's greatest architects, will keep some of its original features. A bar will be built in the impressive vault areas, previously featured in the James Bond film *Goldfinger*.

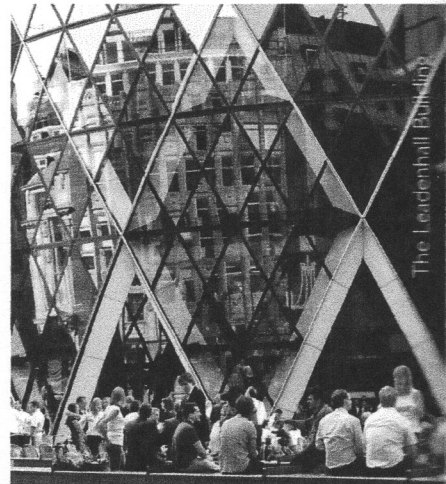
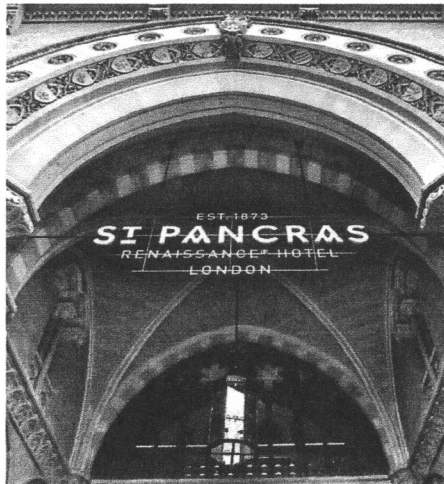
More Culture in the City

The collaborative network of world cities, the 'World Cities Culture Forum', describes London as one of the world's most cosmopolitan and tolerant capitals; a city that attracts a genuine diversity of people and is a source of creative ideas and energy. Street culture is also mentioned as a major source of strength. Many recent initiatives have contributed to this culture. One example is 'Sculpture in the City', a yearly open-air exhibition that takes place in July among the City's architectural landmarks. It is a unique collaboration between the City of London Corporation, local businesses and the art world, and engages new audiences with established and emerging contemporary artists.

Culture in the Square Mile is not new. The Barbican Centre, opened in 1982 as part of the Barbican Estate, is the City's cultural heart. This gigantic scheme, which transformed a bombsite into a brutalist architectural landmark, is one of London's most important Modernist sights. Architects Chamberlin, Powell and Bon worked on this controversial project for nearly 30 years, incorporating high-level walkways, residential towers, gardens, a lake and a large conservatory within the Barbican Centre. Flats in the estate have become very fashionable and are now in high demand. What makes the Barbican project so unique is the idea of having an arts and culture space in the middle of the urban environment. The Barbican's iconic building has proven an ideal venue where music, art, theatre and film interact. It is also a place where diversity and creativity are encouraged through both collaborations with theatre companies from all over the world and a strong creative learning programme open to the community. It is a place where boundaries can be challenged, and this has a huge impact on nurturing and stimulating creativity. The coming years will bring very exciting new developments as the City is planning to develop a 'Cultural Hub' in the area around the Barbican and the Museum of London by 2020. A new Rattle Hall has also been announced after the appointment of Sir Simon Rattle as Music Director of the London Symphony Orchestra, the resident orchestra at the Barbican. Rattle will take up his appointment in September 2017.

The New Crossrail

The Barbican area is expected to see many further changes over the next five years, including the arrival of Crossrail services at Moorgate and Farringdon in 2019. The



£14.8 billion Crossrail project was initiated to both counter congestion and the poor reliability of the London Underground. It aims to establish a 118km-long rail link with 37 stations across London, and is scheduled to open in 2018. Transport for London expects to increase London's rail-based transport capacity by 10 percent. Line 1 will connect the east and west London with the construction of a new tunnel and new stations at Liverpool Street, Bond Street and Paddington. Line 2 will connect the northeast to the southwest of London leading to the construction of a main section of tunnel in central London.

Underlining the history of the area, in March 2013 Crossrail engineers uncovered 25 skeletons alongside pottery dated to the mid-fourteenth century. Scientists then found traces of plague bacteria in the skeletons' teeth.

The Biggest Regeneration

The Crossrail project also seeks to support economic growth and regeneration in deprived areas such as the Paddington Basin, Park Royal and the Thames Gateway (Line 1), and Dalston, Hackney and parts of southwest London (Line 2).

The biggest recent regeneration project in London is the King's Cross area. It is often referred to as the largest area of city-centre redevelopment in Europe. Spanning a 67-acre (27 ha) site of disused railway, north of King's Cross Station has been transformed from a totally derelict area to a vibrant mixed-use neighbourhood. Thousands of people, including students, now live around the station.

Property developer Peter Millican, the founder of London's King's Place, foresaw these changes when he bought the land in 1999. He was one of the first to believe that the area would become a hub, and started building a space along the canal



bringing together commercial offices, two art galleries (one dedicated to sculpture), a restaurant and two remarkable concert halls. 'The Guardian' newspaper moved its offices there when it opened in 2008. Since then, many new restaurants have opened in the area. Central Saint Martins, part of the University of the Arts London, moved to the Granary Complex along the canal in September 2011, bringing an additional creative element into the new city quarter.

Conservation also played a big role in this area starting with the 2007 restoration of St Pancras Station and the former Midland Grand Hotel, two masterpieces of Victorian Gothic architecture. The hotel, designed by George Gilbert Scott, opened in 1876, but after 1935 was used as a railway office. Following years of restoration, it reopened in 2011 as the St Pancras Renaissance London Hotel, part of the Marriott group. More recently, another hotel, the Great Northern Hotel, opposite St Pancras International station, reopened after being derelict for many years. Dating from 1854 and designed by Lewis Cubitt, it was one of the first purpose-built railway hotels. Further developments are to be expected nearby along the high street of King's Boulevard, which links the station to Granary Square. During the transition, the developers de-



King's Cross Numbers

67 acres
 50 new buildings
 2,000 new homes
 20 new streets
 10 new public squares
 26 acres of open space

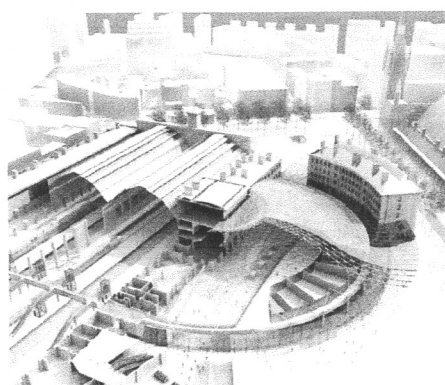
source www.kingscross.co.uk/development

erly brought in street food trucks into the new street giving the area a great vibe. Google will soon follow because it is expected to build its new UK headquarters building nearby.

Gentrification

Urban improvements demand a difficult balance; changes need to be made without disturbing the cultural mix and losing the local community. Gentrification continues to change many of London's areas. There is increasing interest in Dalston in the East End and Brixton in south London, two very diverse neighbourhoods brimming with authenticity and creativity. Both quarters have important African and Caribbean communities. After the Second World War, the British government encouraged mass immigration from the countries of the British Empire to fill shortages in the labour market. Brixton's main square is called 'Windrush Square' in commemoration of the first wave of immigrants (around 500) who arrived from Jamaica in 1948 at Tilbury Docks, on a boat called *The Empire Windrush*. In 2014, a new Black Cultural Archives Heritage Centre opened on the square.

Both Dalston and Brixton have excellent food markets. Ridley Road market in



Dalston sells vegetables, fish and meat at very good prices. It has a friendly atmosphere, the kind where a Caribbean woman standing with you in the queue may share her favourite recipes while you are waiting. Brixton's outdoor market sells the same types of products but is bigger and more diversified. Built in the 1880s, it was the first market street to be lit by electricity, hence the name of 'Electric Avenue' (later a hit single by Eddy Grant). Brixton's indoor markets are becoming the place for foodies from various parts of the city, with Brixton Village and Market Row both offering an amazing range of new cafés, restaurants and food shops.

In 1873, Dutch artist Vincent van Gogh lived in the neighbourhood in a nearby Georgian terraced house, and subsequently an Artangel art installation brought many visitors to the area. Brixton was already a shopping mecca at the start of the twentieth century and features many beautiful Victorian buildings. Some local residents expressed their concerns about recent gentrification last April during an anti-gentrification protest on the main square.

Dalston has also seen many changes. Lydia Bauman, an artist and art historian who has lived in Dalston for many years. She explained that: "Dalston has always been full of artists and that's what gave it its edge in the eighties and nineties. In

those years we set up our studios in E8 simply because rents were still affordable..." Then came the hipsters. Bauman further described, "As with New York's Soho district, where artists go, gentrification follows. So while there are still artists aplenty, there is also the new breed of hipsters, twenty-somethings, sons and daughters of well off professional middle class families, who dress in Beyond Retro vintage, groom their beards at local Turkish barbers and discuss their artsy, media, creative businesses over lattes and Apple Macs in shabby chic, recycled, reclaimed, independently run cafes."

There are many other developments that we can observe in the streets of London. Look out for the cultural regeneration of the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park in Stratford, the Olympicopolis and the new garden bridge across the Thames. In the next 15 years, London's population will reach ten million. The scale of its cultural scene is massive. If you take the time to wander around the city and seek authentic and engaging experiences you'll get a real sense of London's amazing urban creativity.

Sources

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Michèle Fajtmann is founder of From My City, an advisory and event management company providing opportunities for engaging deeply with urban creativity. FMC specialises in tailored art & culture tours and events in London. Find out more at www.frommycity.com.