

Coal Drops Yard, Kings Cross, N1C 4DQ

Temporary Interactive Design Installation to Eastern Coal Drop Viaduct

Heritage Statement

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1.0 Introduction

This Heritage Statement has been prepared by Malcolm Fryer Architects (MFA) to support planning and listed building consent applications for a temporary interactive design installation to the southern end of the Eastern Coal Drop Viaduct within the Coal Drops Yard development (CDY) of Kings Cross. The installation was commissioned by new CDY tenants UNIQLO to work in collaboration with students from the adjacent University of the Arts, London (UAL). MFA provided a summary of the heritage constraints and opportunities for the initial design brief and have been involved in the design development and pre-application process. This Heritage Statement provides a summary of the heritage context and assesses the impacts of the temporary installation on the various heritage assets. It should be read alongside the comprehensive Design that has been prepared by the design team.

Malcolm Fryer Architects are accredited in Building Conservation (AABC) and were the delivery conservation Architects for the Coal Drops Yard Development.

2.0 Heritage Context

The rich industrial heritage of the Kings Cross Goods Yard site has provided considerable opportunity as well as some minor constraints to the proposed temporary interactive design installation. The recent transformation of the Goods Yard has sought to balance the extraordinary history of the site with meaningful public access and amenity which respects and reveals the significance of the many heritage assets. As part of this transformation masterplan, Coal Drops Yard and its surrounding buildings were subject to a substantial and ambitious redevelopment for retail use between 2016 and 2018, designed by Heatherwick Studios. The development adaptively re-used the eastern and western coal drop buildings, their viaducts and a section of the Wharf Road Viaduct and included a substantial roof level development that linked the two coal drops buildings, and substantial new public spaces.

The location of the proposed temporary interactive design installation is on the Eastern Coal Drop Viaduct which was originally built as a railway siding alongside the Eastern Coal Drop Building. Today it serves as one of the important connecting public spaces within the Coal Drops Yard development. The proposed artwork site is located within the Regents Canal Conservation Area (sub area 3 Kings Cross Goods Yard) and is surrounded by various designated and non-designated heritage assets. The designated heritage assets include:

- Eastern Coal Drop (Grade II listed) and curtilage listed Eastern Coal Drop Viaduct
- The Granary Building (Grade II listed)
- The Gasholder Triplets (Grade II listed)
- Gasholder Park (Gasholder No. 8, Grade II listed)
- The Regent's Canal Conservation Area

Buildings and structures that contribute positively to the conservation area include:

- The Regents Canal
- Western Coal Drop and Viaduct
- Fish & Coal Offices
- Wharf Road Viaduct (now Bagley's Way)
- The listed buildings named above

The Regents Canal Conservation Area Appraisal summarises the Goods Yard Sub Area 3 as follows:

The buildings and the spaces of the Goods Yard have survived remarkably intact, and it is the totality of this historic urban grain, comprising both listed and unlisted structures, which contributes in large part to the unique character of the Conservation Area. The structures and surfaces on site are of interest in themselves but it is the experience of them as a group that is the essence of the character of the conservation area.

The complexity of this space is added to by the ramps which access the lower yard areas below the eastern coal drops and by the elevated sections of railway, which remain on the edge of the space. This adds a sculptural quality to the urban space between the existing buildings on the site and forms a very important part of the character of the Goods Yard.'

2.0 Outline History of Kings Cross Goods Yard and Coal Drops Yard

The Kings Cross Goods Yard was built in the 1850s, alongside the construction of King’s Cross Station, by Lewis Cubitt to store and distribute coal and other goods in and out of London and to interconnect with the road and canal distribution networks. The buildings share a utilitarian, Italianate architectural language, dominated by stock bricks, grey slate roofs and cast-iron structural elements. The form of the buildings was generally dictated by their individual functions, but they collectively formed a strong cohesive group along with the Canal and surrounding railway infrastructure. The Goods Yard spaces were never historically public spaces and were a highly secure compound owned by the railway. The context and spaces around the Goods Yard heritage assets are in many ways as important as the buildings themselves, as the form of the Goods Yard was to allow railway lines from the north to fan out and allow the transfer of goods from railways to canal and roads.



Fig 1 (L) Stanford's Map of 1871 showing the original Cubitt Buildings of the 1850s and the Canal basins defining the Goods Yard complex. The Eastern Coal Drop was the only Coal Drop Building within the large yard at this time.

Fig 2 (R): Lewis Cubitt's Watercolour perspective as exhibited in the Royal Academy in 1851, shows the unifying classical Italianate architectural language with the Granary Building as the centrepiece. The open arcading of the Eastern Coal Drop can be seen on the left-hand side of the image.

Like most of the Goods Yard, Coal Drops Yard and the structures that initially defined it developed in a piecemeal manner as the volume levels and technology behind coal distribution evolved. A summary of the history of the various elements that defined Coal Drops Yard prior to its recent redevelopment is illustrated below.

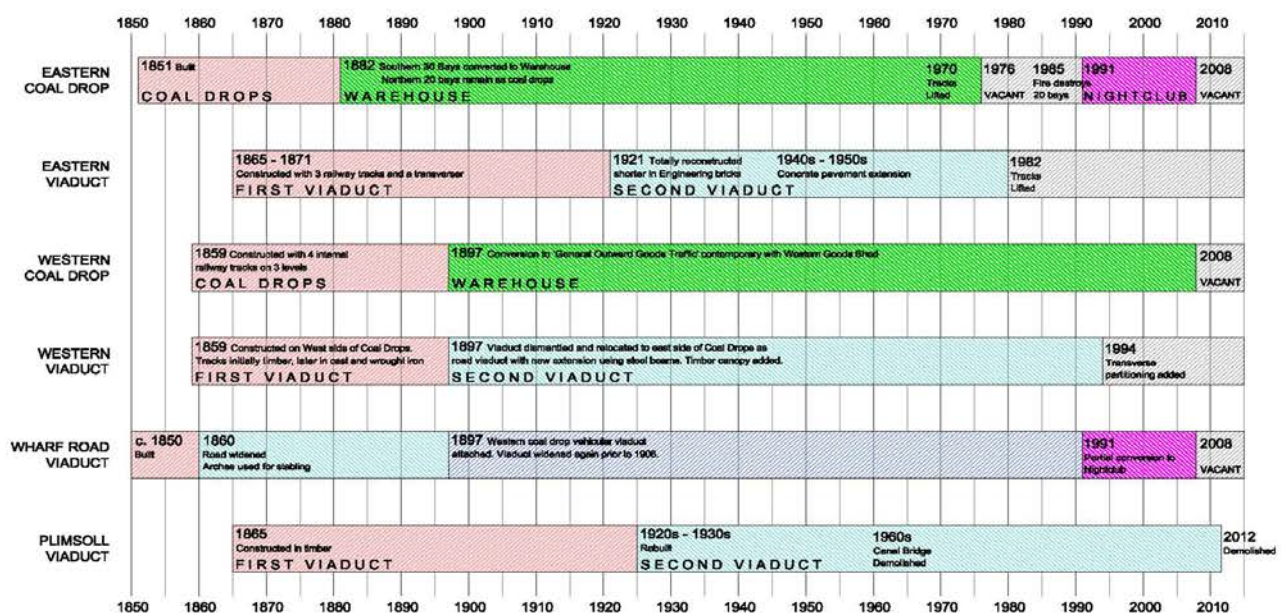


Fig 3: Historical summary of the development of the Coal Drop buildings and the associated viaducts within Coal Drops Yard, prior to the recent redevelopment

3.0 Outline History of Eastern Coal Drop and Viaduct

The Eastern Coal Drop Building was built in 1851, and the southern end was converted to 3 levels of warehousing in 1882. The northern end remained a Coal Drop until 1970 when the tracks were lifted. A fire destroyed the northern 20 bays in 1985. The remaining southern end was used as a nightclub (Bagleys) from 1991 – 2001. The brick and cast-iron structure originally carried four high-level railway tracks from which wagons discharged coal into storage bins on a mezzanine floor above cart-loading bays.

The Eastern Coal Drop Viaduct was originally built in 1865 but was rebuilt in engineering brickwork to its present segmental arched form in 1921 and widened in the 1950s. It was originally built to carry additional railway freight, though the tracks were lifted in 1982 for use as a road viaduct.



Fig 4: Aerial view of Coal Drops Yard c. 1960 showing the train wagons along the Eastern Coal Drop Viaduct. The development site has been highlighted in red

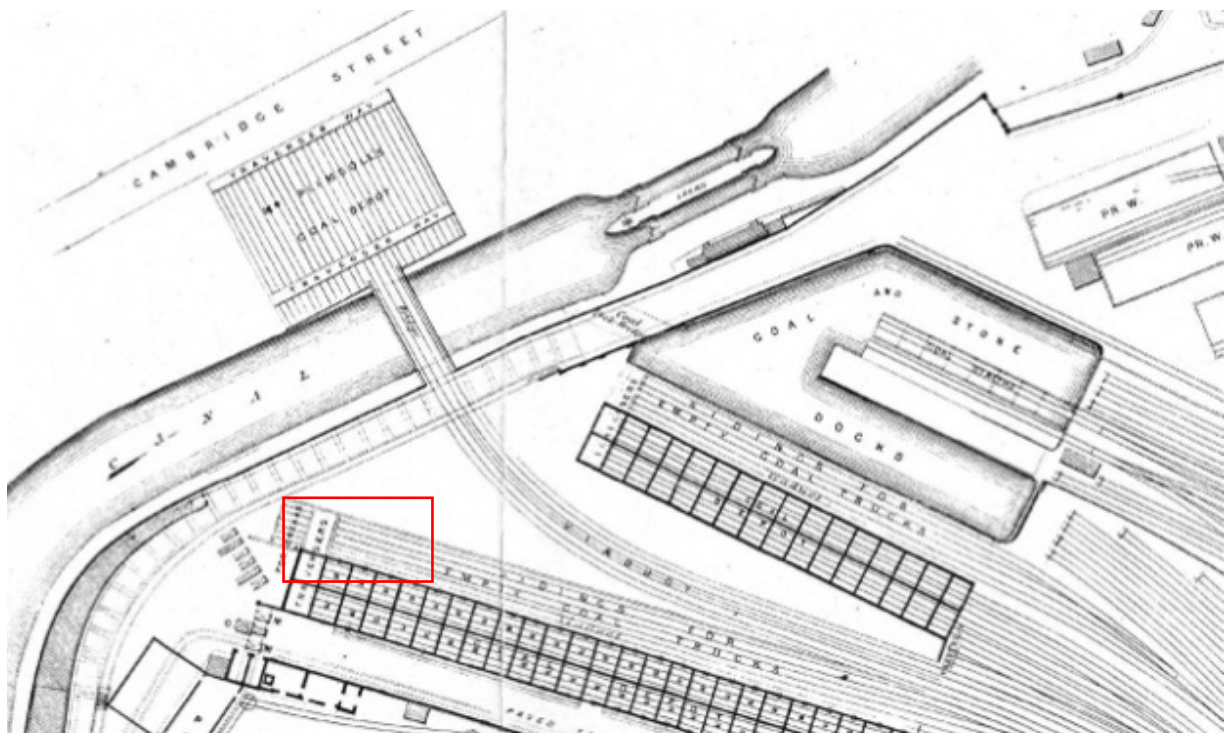


Fig 5: 1865 OS map. The development site has been highlighted in red



Fig 6: Coal Drops Yard looking north from the Wharf Road Viaduct in 1989 (left) showing the Western Coal Drop building (far left), Plimsoll Viaduct (left), the Eastern Coal Drop Viaduct (right) and the Eastern Coal Drop Building (far right)

4.0 Coal Drops Yard Retail Development 2016-2018

From 2016 to 2018 the eastern and western coal drop buildings, along with the eastern and western viaducts and a section of the Wharf Road Viaduct were transformed into a substantial new retail destination, designed by Heatherwick Studios. The adaptive re-use of the historic structures created approximately 60 units of varying sizes, providing public access to the buildings and wider site for the first time in its history.

The design extended the inner gabled roofs of the two coal drop buildings to link the two buildings at roof level and define the yard, as well as creating fluid patterns of circulation vertical and horizontal circulation. The flowing roofs, supported by an entirely new and freestanding structure, formed an entirely new floating upper storey and a large covered outdoor space to create a central focus for the entire site. The design sought to celebrate the very specific texture and history of the industrial buildings while creating 100,000 sq ft of new retail area, as well as significant new public spaces. The removal of 1920s Plimsoll Viaduct enabled strong north-south circulation through the yard and the creation of a public space between the buildings that widened to the south to create a much larger southern yard than had existed historically.



Figs 7 & 8: Coal Drops Yard in 1989 (left) and today (right), showing the removal of the Plimsoll Viaduct to enable the creation of a strong north-south circulation between the remaining viaducts.



Fig 9: Aerial view of Coal Drops Yard today looking north-west, showing the enlarged southern yard and the sweeping new 'ribbons' at roof level. New bridges now link the historic viaducts.

4.0 Key Views

The key views that include the Coal Drops Buildings and Coal Drops Yard have greatly altered in recent years, notably through the creation of Granary Square on the site of the historic Goods Yard basin, the opening up of new pedestrian routes over Wharf Road Viaduct (Bagley's Way), the removal of a section of the Eastern Coal Drop Viaduct to open up the yard, and the relocation of the Gas Holder Triplets. The Key views that include the Coal Drop Buildings and Coal Drops Yard which have been carefully considered in the proposed development site are:

1. From the south of the canal, looking north to the Granary, Fish & Coal Offices and Eastern Coal Drops
2. Along Stable Street, with brick arcading on both sides of the street
3. From Wharf Road Viaduct (now known as Bagley Walk) towards the two Coal Drops and the Heatherwick's roof extension between
4. From the north, towards the two gables of the Coal Drops and the new extension
5. From the ramp, with views of Fish & Coal Offices and the gables of the Coal Drops with the Triplets beyond.

Overleaf is an aerial photograph illustrating these key views in their wider context.

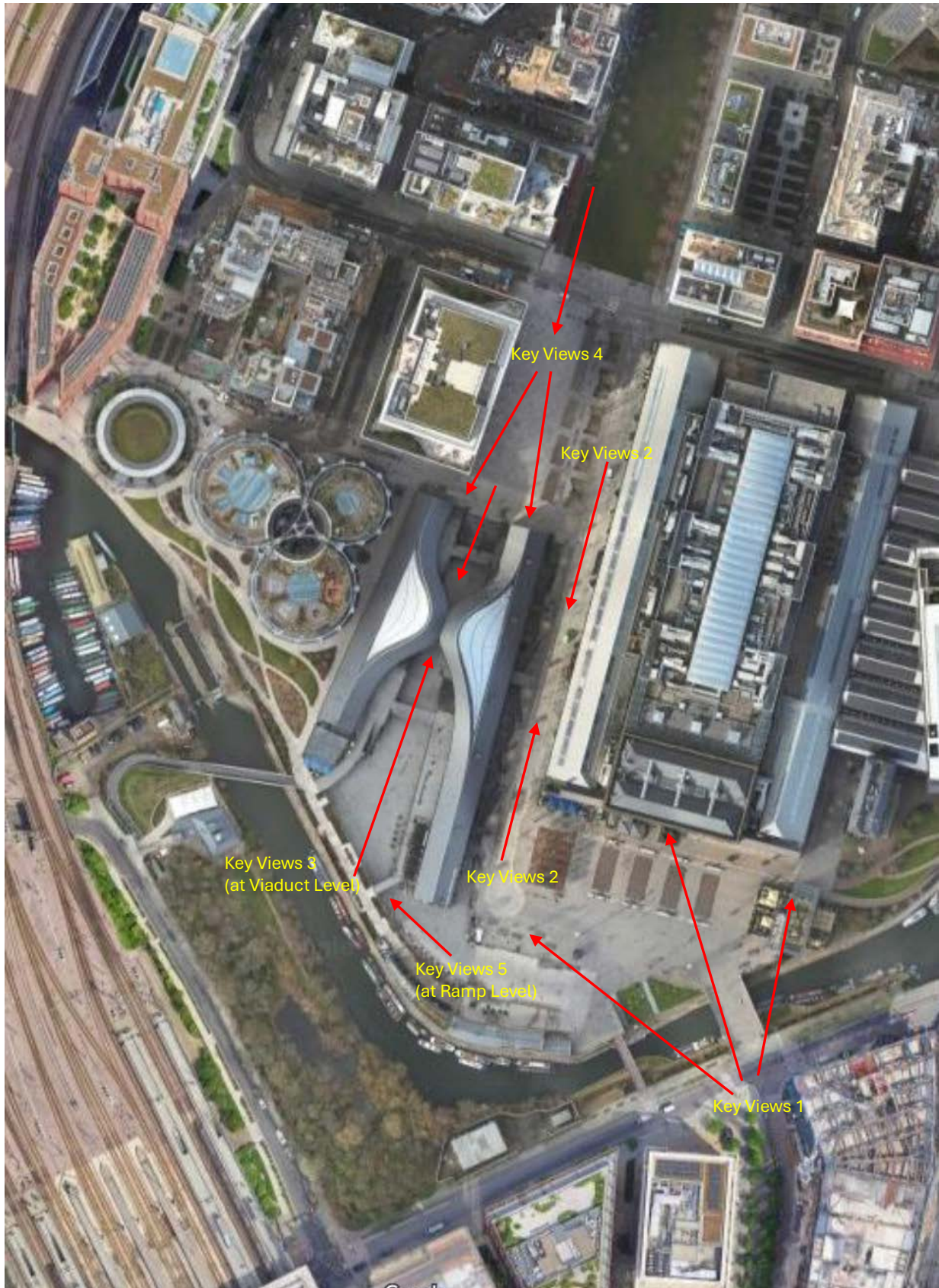


Fig 10: Key Views to and from the Coal Drops Yard development today

5.0 Heritage Considerations of the Proposed Installation Site

The Eastern Coal Drop is a Grade II listed Heritage Asset. The Eastern Coal Drop Viaduct is considered to be a curtilage listed structure to the Eastern Coal Drop Building. The proposed temporary design installation has been designed to be entirely reversible with no physical impact on the existing buildings. However, the temporary visual impacts of the proposed installation on the heritage assets were a key aspect of the design brief and the developed proposals to ensure that the temporary visual impacts on the heritage asset are acceptable. Reversibility of the proposed temporary installation has been central to the approach.

The wider context of the proposed site - now known as Coal Drops Yard - is located within the Regents Canal Conservation Area (sub area 3 Kings Cross Goods Yard) which has its own statutory protections. The planning permission for the proposed artwork will consider the visual impacts on the key views within the Conservation Area as identified above, primarily key views 3 from Bagley's Way looking north through the Yard. These views should maintain the understanding of the relationship between the Coal Drop Buildings as well as the clarity of the arcading to the west elevation of the Eastern Coal Drop at Viaduct level.

6.0 Heritage Constraints of the Design Brief

1. The installation must be fully reversible. (ie it should leave no trace on the building or viaduct when removed). Fixings must not involve any drilling into the Eastern Coal Drop Building or viaduct floor (which has an important waterproofing layer beneath the surface). The installation should be self-supporting, and any required fixings should be minimised and fully reversible.
2. The installation should maintain the clear views along the length of the west elevation of the Grade II listed Eastern Coal Drop Building.
3. The installation must not dominate the key views from Bagley's Walk to the South (ie it should not block them excessively or overly distract from them).
4. Lighting levels should not exceed the existing adjacent night lighting levels of the Yard.
5. The existing architectural lighting along the length of the elevation to highlight the regular arcading should not be overly obstructed.

7.0 Heritage Opportunities of the Proposed Installation Site

As well as providing the above constraints, the design brief for the installation also highlighted the heritage interpretation opportunities of the site. Like most industrial buildings, the strong structural grid and rhythm of the existing arcading that relate back to the original use of the buildings was highlighted. This structural grid is shared between the Eastern Coal Drop building and viaduct and is a key defining element of the character of the building and the wider CDY context. The arcaded openings adjacent to the proposed site are one of the few areas in which the original elevation of the original Coal Drop train shed remains relatively intact.

8.0 The Proposals

In response to the development brief, the proposals that have been prepared by graduates from the University of the Arts London (UAL) for UNIQLO are for a temporary interactive design installation that relates creatively to its immediate and wider heritage context at the southern end of the Eastern Coal Drops Viaduct.

UNIQLO and Central St Martins at UAL have a strong history of collaborative design. The partnership reinforces UNIQLO's strong commitment to the arts, sustainability, future of fashion and next generation talent. Since moving to CDY in 2024, UNIQLO are seeking to strengthen this relationship through a long-term partnership with their new community. The collaborative development brief for the site sought for graduates (via their consultancy course) to create a playful, sustainable and sculptural installation that invites all visitors to play and interact.

The proposals for a temporary (2 year) interactive design installation seeks to embody UNIQLO's core values (Simplicity, Comfort, Functionality, Adaptability) and effectively address both the project brief and the site context. The proposals seek to embody UNIQLO's commitment to thoughtful, purposeful design. The design was inspired by the historical use of the viaduct by highlighting the moments of pause for the wagons within the coal distribution process. These transitions, though brief, created a rhythm of stillness within motion. The design drew from this idea, incorporating deliberate pauses to emphasise reflection and transformation, mirroring the yard's balance of efficiency and contemplation.

The proposed installation comprises of a series of connected and interactive elements of furniture and sculptural forms in a variety of colours and material to a defined space on the southern 4 bays of the Eastern Coal Drop Viaduct and adjacent to 7 arcaded bays of the west elevation of the Eastern Coal Drop, immediately to the south of the UNIQLO entrance and outside of the main pedestrian circulation zones. A single element has also been included at yard level immediately to the south of the blank viaduct termination. The main elements of the design are a translucent metal framed arch, solid 'upside down arched' seating, a round table and seating, urban pillows with interactive openings and arched planters. The translucent arch has been carefully site to contain the space and to provide an important marker from yard level. The subtle material and colour palette has been derived from the immediate and wider context. Importantly the design has been developed to ensure that it reads clearly as part of the public realm of Coal Drops Yard, rather than relating directly to the UNIQLO retail offer, through being contained, distinctive and unbranded.

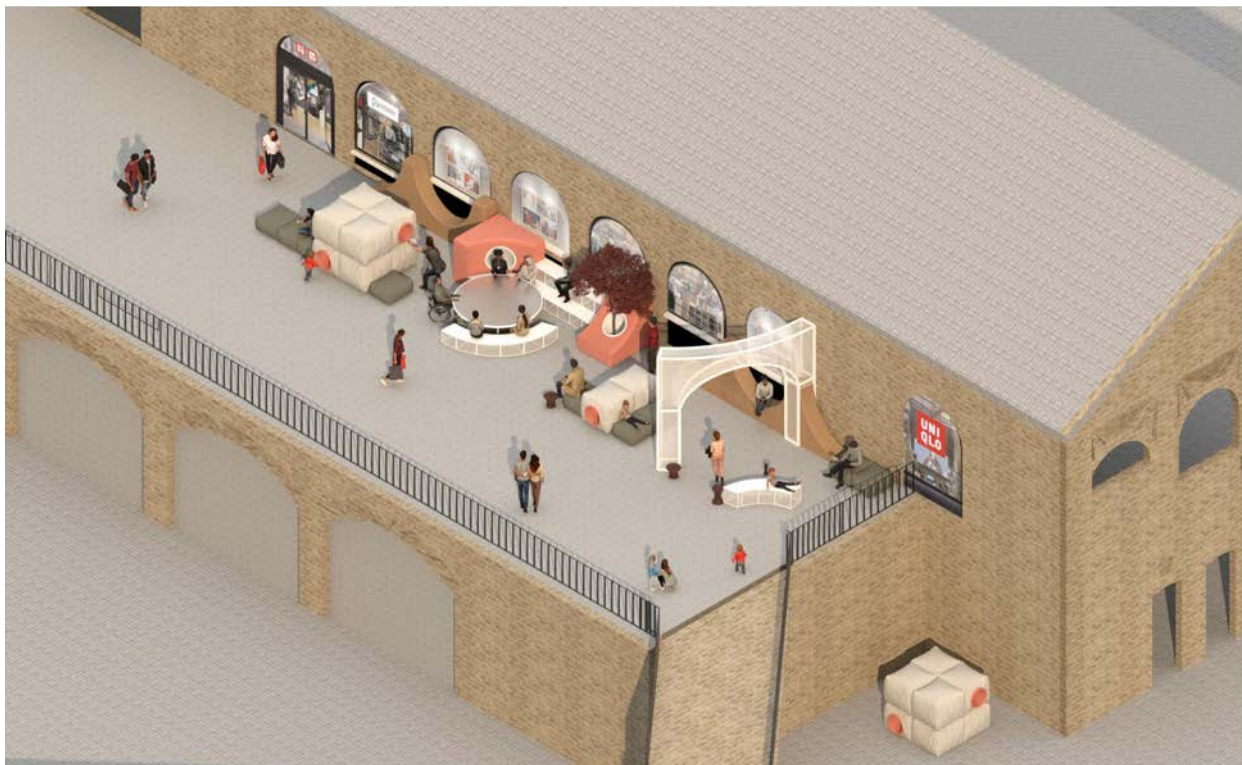


Fig 11: Aerial isometric view of the proposals from the south-west showing the containment of the proposals outside of the primary circulation

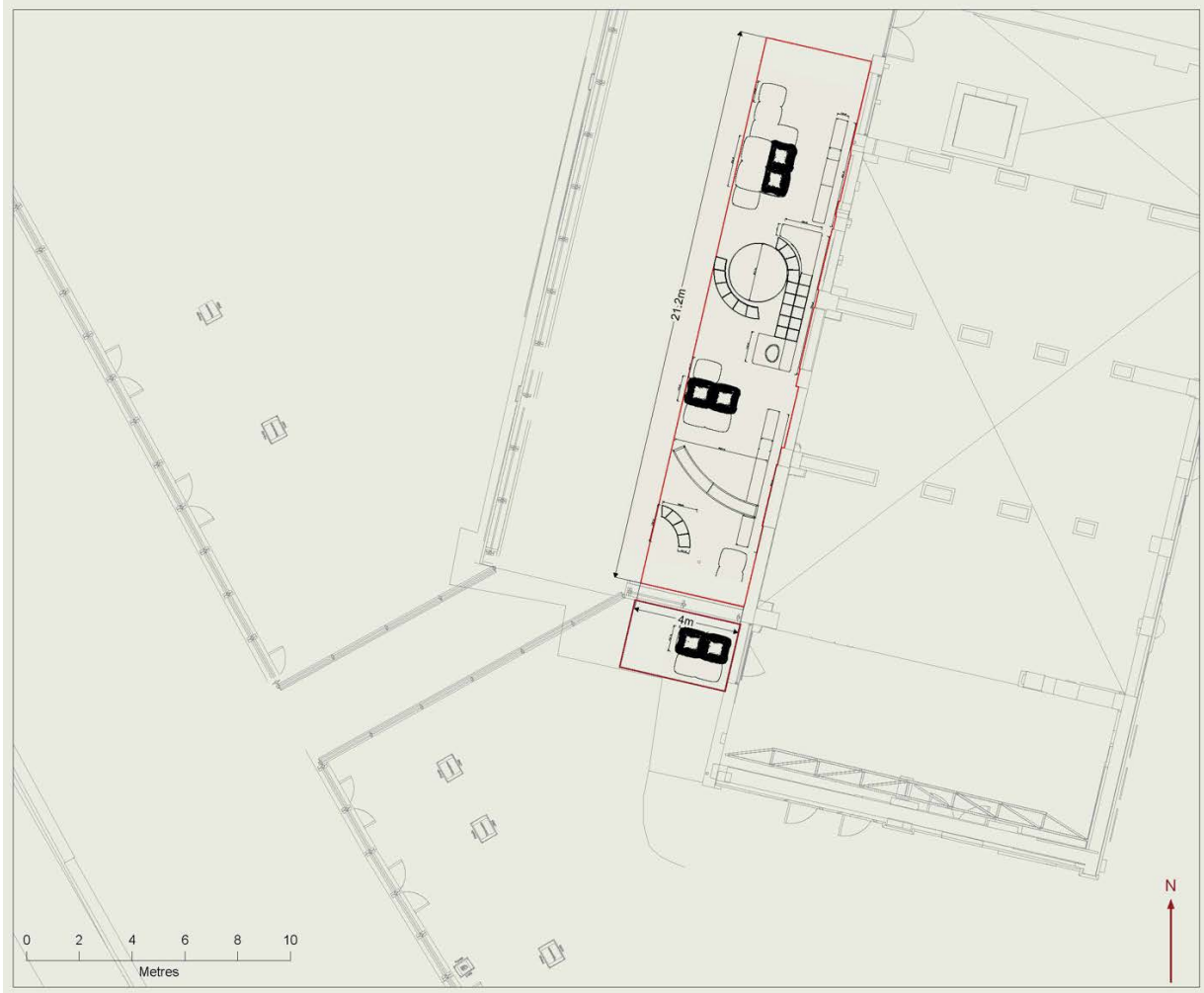


Fig 12: Plan of the proposals at both levels showing the geometry in relation to the building grid and containment of the proposals



Fig 13: Ground level perspective view of the proposals immediately from the south at yard level, showing the translucent framing arch at viaduct level and the interactive 'urban pillow' at yard level.



Fig 14: The main components of the design



Fig 15: Viaduct level perspective view of the proposals from the bridge approach immediately to the southwest showing the framing and welcoming nature of the proposed translucent arch



Fig 16: Viaduct level perspective view of the proposals from east showing the relationship of the proposed elements to the arcaded west elevation of the Eastern Coal Drop

9.0 Heritage Design Considerations

The submitted Design Statement has demonstrated how the forms, colours and materials of the proposals have sought to relate to the forms and materials of the heritage assets, particularly the arcaded forms to the west elevation of Eastern Coal Drop at viaduct level. It has also highlighted the importance of reversibility of the proposals for the conservation of the buildings and the importance of considering the key views as identified.

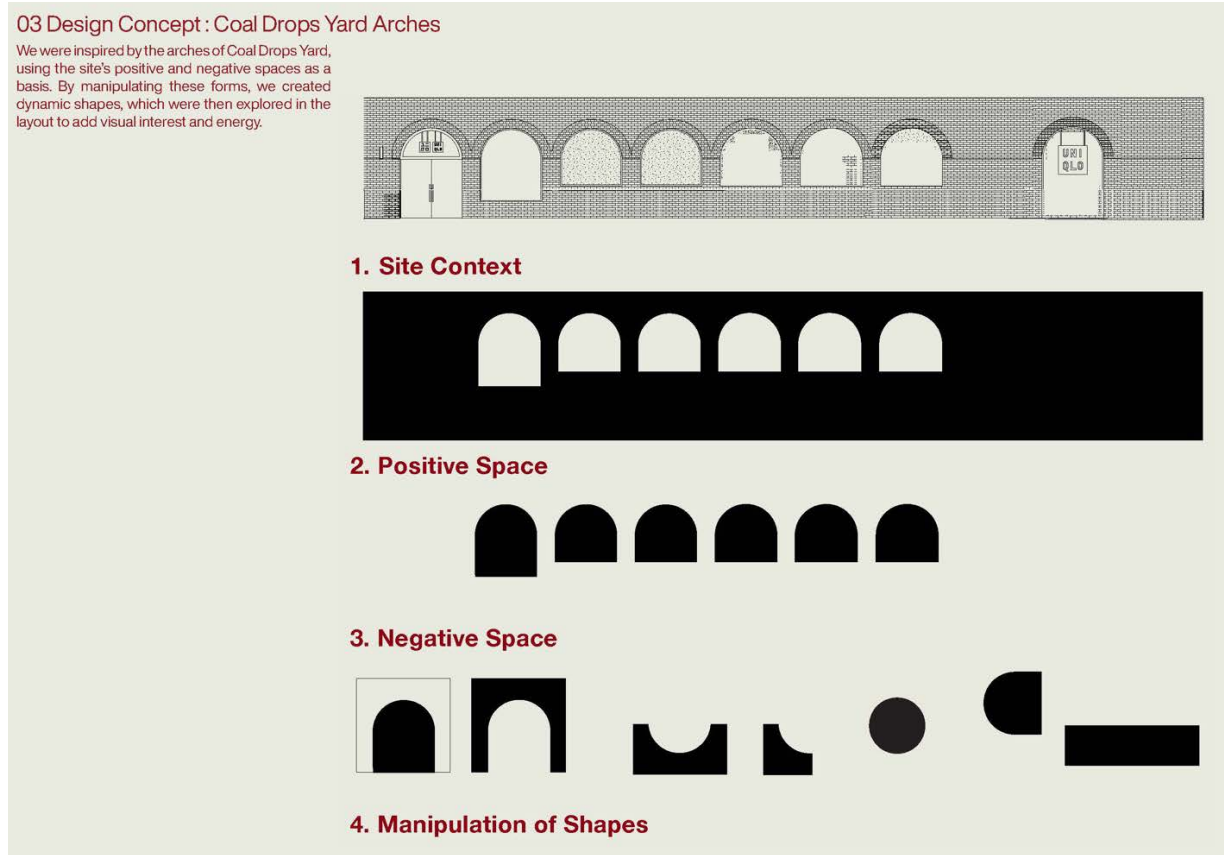


Fig 17: Design Concept diagram demonstrating the derivation of the proposed forms from the arcaded forms to the west elevation of Eastern Coal Drop at viaduct level

02 Site Context : Key Design Considerations

<p>Forms</p> <p>Responding to existing forms that exist in Coal Drops Yard through our design: Ensuring that our proposal fits within the site.</p>	<p>Materiality</p> <p>Through the use of colour and materiality we want to tell the story of both Coal Drops Yard industrial past and its vibrant and dynamic future (which includes its collaboration with UNIQLO).</p>	<p>Conservation</p> <p>Construction methods and the design must ensure that the heritage site is conserved. This means no drilling into the bricks and perhaps fabrication off site.</p>	<p>Views</p> <p>Key views of the site must not be impacted - instead they should be highlighted through the form of our proposal.</p>
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Fig 18: Design Statement extract demonstrating the key heritage considerations

10. Services and lighting

The location of the proposed development is already well serviced with power and data connectivity through a number of existing wall boxes housing power supplies along with several floor boxes within the existing paving. It is anticipated that all power and data requirements would utilise these existing external connections without the need for any new conduits, other than the small amount of temporary cable covers at floor level as identified on page 61 of the design statement.

Lighting has been integrated to promote enhanced access and nighttime visibility of the proposals. All new lighting to the new elements would be carefully contained within the temporary installations and would be of lux levels that would not overwhelm or detract from the rhythm of the existing lighting to the arcading along the elevation.

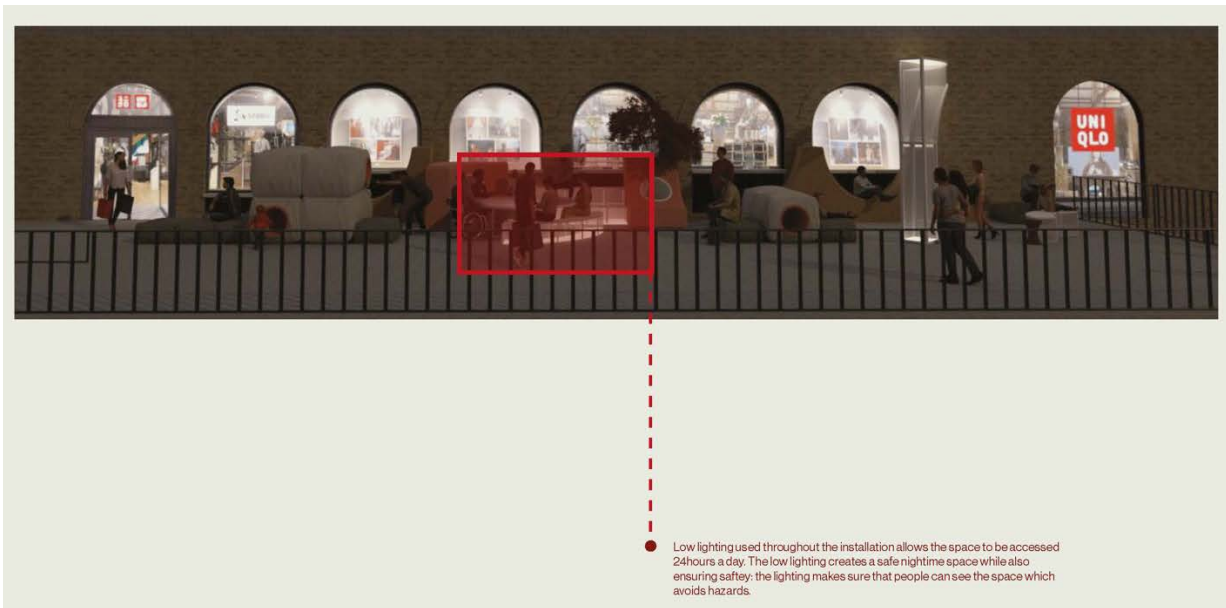


Fig 19: Design Statement extract demonstrating the lighting approach



Fig 20: Existing floor and wall power and data outlets in the proposed site location are to be utilised to avoid any new services interventions

11.0 Heritage Assessment

The proposals for a temporary interactive design installation to the southern end of the ECD Viaduct adjacent to the west elevation of the Grade II listed Easter Coal Drop are for a fixed period of two years and have been designed to be fully reversible with no impacts on existing built fabric. The heritage impacts of the proposed development will therefore be visual only and for a fixed period of two years before leaving no trace. This time limited, fully reversible approach provides significant general mitigation to all visual heritage impacts as outlined below.

The proposals are a highly creative and playful response to the enhancement of the public realm of Coal Drops Yard in a location that has a direct physical relationship to the heritage assets, yet which is contained and does not disrupt existing pedestrian flows around the site. The historical analogies to the historic use of the viaduct as a place of momentary 'pause' are powerful and well suited to the chosen location. This analogy serves to subtly reveal and reflect the heritage of the location, enhancing the understanding of the heritage assets.

The proposals have been designed to relate carefully to the existing arcaded openings to the west elevation of the grade II listed Eastern Coal Drop. While the elements touch the fabric to enhance this relationship, there are no physical fixings to the viaduct floor or external wall fabric, preserving the fabric of the heritage assets.

The proposed interactive elements immediately abutting the building have been creatively designed to relate directly to the forms and rhythm of the arcading of the west elevation of eastern Coal Drop, enhancing the understanding of the heritage asset. The physical relationships all appear well defined and intentional as outlined in the detailed design submission. The scale of the intervention is small in relation to the overall development of Coal Drops Yard, significantly reducing any visual impacts on the heritage assets.

The proposed arched element is central to the design in relating to the immediate heritage context whilst providing a sense of welcome from the bridge access from the south and containment from the north. The visual impacts of the proposals on the key views from the north and south are significantly mitigated by the translucent nature of this arched element (utilising steel mesh) as well as the avoidance of any elements across the arched window openings. This approach enables the continued appreciation of the full length of the arcaded west elevation of the Eastern Coal Drop from all key vantage points, preserving the character and setting of the heritage asset in the identified key views. As demonstrated in the submitted views, the temporary visual impacts of the proposals are mitigated through high quality design, and a careful consideration of scale, form and materials in relation to the surrounding heritage assets. These impacts are also strongly mitigated by the temporary nature of the proposals.

The chosen colours and materials subtly relate to the immediate and wider contexts, particularly the proposed use of heat-treated cork in relation to the London stock brickwork of the elevation. The proposed use of colour to reflect the immediate and wider contexts is subtle and muted, avoiding excessive distraction or visual clutter. The durability of the proposed materials has been carefully considered to ensure that the presentation of the installation remains of the highest quality throughout the 2-year period.

The proposals intend to make use of existing electrical and data installation in the proposed location so that no new connections will be required, preserving the character and fabric of the heritage assets. Lighting has been integrated to promote enhanced access and nighttime visibility of the proposals, though this would not overwhelm or detract from the rhythm of the existing lighting to the arcading along the elevation, preserving the appreciation of the character of the heritage assets at night.

The proposals are an important activation of an otherwise underutilised area of the public realm within Coal Drops Yard development. In their temporary nature, they are considered to be an important test case in the creative use of the public realm for the development of new community uses that fosters interrelationship between user groups across the Goods Yard site and the creative interpretation of the rich heritage context.



Fig. 21: The proposed interactive elements have been designed to relate to the arcing of the west elevation of eastern Coal Drop as well as to the colours and materiality of the wider context.



Fig. 22: The translucent nature of the arched element enables a continuity of the reading of the west elevation of Eastern Coal Drop.

12.0 Conclusion

The proposals for a temporary interactive design installation to the southern end of the Eastern Coal Drop Viaduct have sought to creatively reveal and enhance the heritage context of the site to enhance the public domain and provide an interesting place for pause and engagement. The proposals have addressed the heritage considerations of the immediate site and wider setting with confidence and clarity to produce a sensitive and contextual design of high quality that seeks to enhance the relationships between contemporary users across the wider site. The fully reversible approach and the fixed temporary time period (2 years) for the installation provides significant general mitigation to all visual heritage impacts.

The design has sought to recognise and reflect the totality of the historic urban grain and the spaces and interrelationships between the buildings that define the unique character of the Goods Yard and wider Conservation Area. The proposed installation is a highly contextual response to the design brief and addresses the significance of the designated and non-designated Heritage Assets through an appropriate but distinctive contemporary language which references the forms, colours and materials of the immediate heritage setting. The carefully developed forms have sought to relate sensitively to the surrounding heritage assets whilst introducing a more intimate sense of scale and tactility to the public domain that celebrates and reinforces the historic 'moments of pause' along the viaduct.

Importantly the design has been developed to ensure that it reads clearly as part of the public realm of Coal Drops Yard, rather than relating directly to the UNIQLO retail offer, through being contained, distinctive and unbranded. As demonstrated in the submitted views, the temporary visual impacts of the proposals are mitigated through high quality design, translucent elements and a careful consideration of scale, form and materials in relation to the surrounding heritage assets. These visual impacts are also strongly mitigated by the temporary nature of the proposals.

In accordance with Camden Local Plan (2017) Policy D2 (Heritage), the temporary proposals preserve the fabric, character and appearance of the Conservation Area and do not cause any harm to the significance of the surrounding heritage assets or their settings. In accordance with the guidance of the Regents Canal Conservation Area Appraisal, the design respects the scale of the location and complements the appearance, character and setting of the existing buildings and structures. Importantly, the proposals highlight the commitment of different users across the Goods Yard development to collaborate in the creative celebration of heritage for the benefit of the vast array of contemporary user groups.