

Great Northern Hotel, Pancras Road, London, N1 Heritage Impact Assessment

Great Northern Hotel

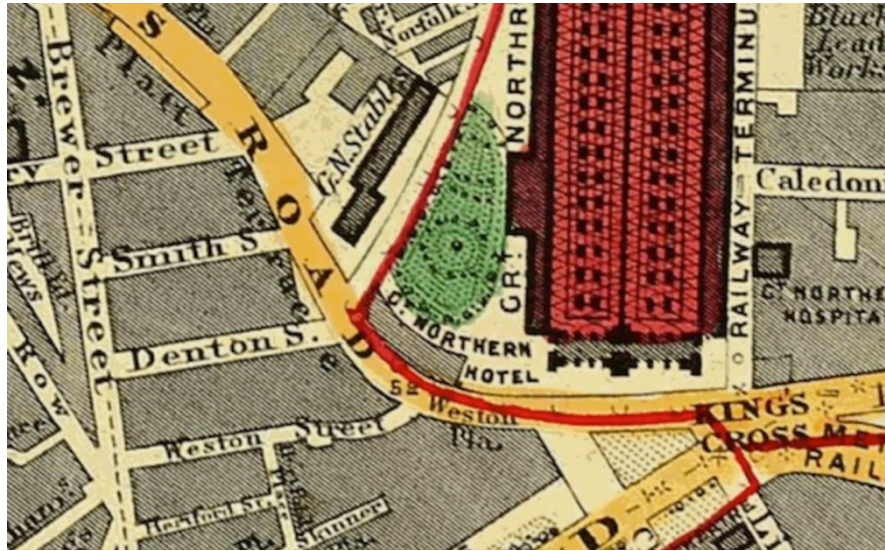


Figure 1: Map 1862

- 1.1 The Great Northern Hotel is listed Grade II and was built in 1854. Designed by Lewis Cubitt – also the architect of the adjacent King's Cross Station, it opened just two years after the completion of the station.
- 1.2 At the time it opened as a terminus for the Great Northern Railway, King's Cross was the largest station in England and is the earliest great London terminus still intact. The Great Northern Hotel was its 'railway hotel'.
- 1.3 The hotel's shape was partly due to the original curved orientation of Old St Pancras Road (which itself was so-shaped to follow the banks of the old Fleet River) and was designed so that its east façade related directly across to the station's original ticket office – as is illustrated in the Map of 1862 above.
- 1.4 Sometime after 1872 Pancras Road was 'straightened' alongside St Pancras Station (as it is now found) leaving the hotel at its anachronistic curve.
- 1.5 The hotel is Italianate in style, with classical details, being more elaborate than its station. It has a hipped slate roof with tall chimneys. It is built of yellow stock brick with stucco details. The image below – a postcard from c.1900, further illustrates how the hotel was originally orientated to the east with a small, enclosed garden between its entrance and the Station's booking hall.



Figure 2: Great Northern Hotel c.1900

- 1.6 When opened the hotel was one of the first to include rooms on the 'continental system' with bedrooms en-suite with sitting rooms. The company prided itself on the fireproof construction of the hotel, with thick dividing walls and with the corridors constructed of brick arches supported by iron girders.
- 1.7 The eastern elevation has a six-window central bay and five-window outer bays, separated by staircase bays with tripartite windows, slightly projecting. The treatment of windows is progressively simpler from the first floor up.
- 1.8 There are stucco string courses between the ground, first and second floors and there is a deeply moulded main cornice with dentil course above the top floor.
- 1.9 The west elevation is longer than the eastern elevation and is similar. It has seven bays of windows in the central section with five bays to the sides. The rear staircase bays are set forward from the hotel's building line and have rusticated pilasters. The corners have deeply moulded quoins.
- 1.10 The end elevations have rectangular windows with mouldings.

King's Cross: Recent History of the area and hotel

- 1.11 Post World War II the area around King's Cross went into decline and by the late 20th century the 'railway lands' had become a symbol of blight and decay, with derelict and disused buildings, railway sidings, warehouses and contaminated land.
- 1.12 King's Cross was known for its nightlife and was a hub for artists and creative organisations but problems of crime, unemployment and a poor-quality environment undermined the area.

- 1.13 It was also recognised that King's Cross Station needed to be much improved. By 1972 the station had 11 platforms and British Rail had built what was intended as a temporary structure at the front of the station to accommodate the greater passenger throughput. However, by the turn of the 21st century it was clear that the station needed a significant upgrade to cope with projected demand and provide a better interchange for passengers.
- 1.14 This also coincided with the decision to move the Channel Tunnel Rail Link from Waterloo to St Pancras – which formed part of the impetus to regenerate and redevelop the whole area around the two stations and the creation of the 'King's Cross Opportunity Area'.
- 1.15 John McAslan's award-winning restoration, transformation, and extension of King's Cross Station played a key role in creating the gateway to both the station and the Opportunity Area to the north.
- 1.16 The position and shape of the Great Northern Hotel had a profound effect on the ensuing design, and it also provided the catalyst for its own restoration. This included the opening-up of the ground floor to create a pedestrian arcade that opens directly into the new station Western Concourse and the total refurbishment of the hotel to provide 93 guestrooms, together with public bar, retail and ancillary facilities and the refurbishment of the external elevations.
- 1.17 Subsequent alterations and refurbishment have ensured the continued status of the hotel and its facilities, but overall the hotel has remained largely as re-conceived as part of the objectives to establish a fitting gateway to the wider development and regeneration area, optimising the use of land close the public transport interchange and securing highly attractive and legible public spaces around the two Grade I listed stations¹.

Heritage Significance

- 1.18 The Great Northern Hotel was listed Grade II in July 1984². It lies within the King's Cross Conservation Area.
- 1.19 There are a number of highly listed buildings in the immediate vicinity, most notably Grade I listed King's Cross Station and St Pancras Station & former Midland Grand Hotel. Other listed buildings include Grade II listed 26 Pancras Road (the German Gymnasium) and the Stanley Buildings to the north.
- 1.20 The Council's Conservation Area Statement was published in 2003, so in many aspects is now much out of date, however this notes that the two stations *'together with the Great Northern Hotel...reflects the power of the Railway age and is of notable historic value. It is the most important group of railway buildings in Britain'*.

¹ King's Cross Central Development Framework 2006

² Historic England List Description LEN: 1113244

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- 1.21 The Statement goes on to state: *'the hotel is an important component in a group with the stations. It also has its own strong, but not overbearing presence. When viewed from areas south east of King's Cross station, including looking west from Gray's Inn Road, the south east elevation can be seen directly. Views of it are also framed between the two station, forming a strong ensemble. It is also visible in views from streets perpendicular from Euston Road, where this view is framed'*.
- 1.22 The hotel contains considerable special historical and architectural interest as a Grade II listed building.
- 1.23 As described above, the hotel is an important element of the historical significance of the impact of the railways – not just in this particular location, but in Britain and its wider economic empire.
- 1.24 In terms of Historic England's 'Conservation Principles' the building provides us with 'evidence about past human activity' and by means of its fabric, design and appearance communicates information about its past. The hotel is an integral element of understanding the evolution and influence of the railways in Britain and despite the massive changes that have taken place in the immediate vicinity of the hotel, this physical link has not been severed – if anything it has been further integrated through the construction of the new Western Concourse at King's Cross Station.
- 1.25 It is also clear that the hotel has 'architectural' and 'artistic interest' (NPPF) or 'aesthetic interest' (Conservation Principles). In respect of design, 'Conservation Principles' says that 'design value... embraces composition (form, proportions, massing, silhouette, views and vistas, circulation) and usually materials or planting, decoration or detailing, and craftsmanship'.
- 1.26 Despite the huge surrounding change, architecturally the building's overall form, appearance and status has been maintained— its curved form is still a prominent feature – influencing the form of the new Western Concourse structure which embraces its eastern elevation.
- 1.27 Perhaps the most fundamental physical change that has taken place to the hotel in more recent years was the creation of the ground floor pedestrian arcade, and associated alterations – which has opened up part of the ground floor to the station concourse – ensuring its relevance and integration with the new station.
- 1.28 This intervention has, however, fundamentally changed the physical ground floor relationship between the hotel and station in comparison to that shown in Figure 2 above. The 'inner' eastern side at ground level is now a secondary internal elevation whilst the entrance is centred on to Pancras Road.
- 1.29 Internally the hotel now operates primarily from the first floor and above with alterations previously consented to allow it to operate effectively and efficiently.

- 1.30 Overall, the hotel still has considerable historical and architectural interest, despite the extent of change that has taken place, particularly at ground level. The changes that have been made have been sympathetically detailed in a manner and style that is commensurate with that of the 'original' hotel building.

The Proposals

- 1.31 The proposals are outlined in the documentation prepared by Studio KKD. They comprise the following:
- Proposed kiosk/grab & go
 - Proposed relocation of existing reception to the first floor

Proposed Kiosk

- 1.32 The proposed kiosk will be created by the adaptation of one of the existing doors on the eastern 'inner' elevation of the hotel. Currently the fenestration has obscured glazing creating a 'blank' elevation to the station. This wall, opening and timber structure/doorway are entirely modern – dating to the regeneration of the hotel and station western concourse. They are, nevertheless, of high quality and contextual to the architectural language of the hotel building.
- 1.33 The proposals allow for the retention of the main element of the framework and simply replace the central 'french doors' with a kiosk opening and fixed panel below. The architectural proportions and surrounding glazing and frames will remain unaltered. The addition of a heater and trellis will not affect any historic fabric and is within a contemporarily created space.
- 1.34 The benefit of the kiosk will be to provide animation and activity to an otherwise largely 'blank' elevation, creating a more meaningful relationship between the hotel and the station on its eastern side – as was historically the case.
- 1.35 Similarly it is proposed that currently sealed window/door units to the northern elevation of the existing reception area will be altered to make them 'opening'.
- 1.36 From a heritage perspective this aspect of the proposals will have little physical impact but it will, however, create a more active frontage to the ground floor of the hotel on its southern and eastern side – both of which could be regarded as positive in re-instating a meaningful connection between the hotel building and the station to its east.

Relocation of the hotel reception to the first floor

- 1.37 Whilst the changes proposed above should positively activate the ground floor of the building, in reality the reconfiguration and refurbishment of the hotel at the beginning of the 21st century re-orientated the hotel operation up to the first floor.

- 1.38 As well as creating a more visible hotel entrance, the proposals seek to create a more welcoming reception space at first floor level in close proximity to both the main staircase and also the lifts.
- 1.39 It is intended that a small element of the spine corridor will be removed – in the form of an ‘archway’ to allow for the plan form to still be read, whilst lightweight partitions will delineate the reception space behind.

Summary

- 1.40 Overall the proposals have been conceived to ensure the status and quality of the hotel and how it sits within the wider Kings Cross Station area are enhanced through a series of interventions which should not alter the overall heritage significance and sensitivity of the listed building or its conservation area context.
- 1.41 We believe that the special interest of the listed building will be preserved along with the character and appearance of the conservation area.

Compliance with legislation, policy & guidance

- 1.42 The conclusion of our assessment is that the proposed scheme, preserves the special interest of the listed building, the setting of nearby listed buildings and the character and appearance of the King’s Cross Conservation Area and thus complies with S.66(1) and S.72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

The National Planning Policy Framework

- 1.43 This report has provided a description and analysis of the significance of the site and its heritage context, as required by Paragraph 207 of the National Planning Policy Framework. In addition, the report describes how the proposed scheme will affect that heritage significance.
- 1.44 The proposed scheme complies with paragraph 214 of the NPPF – it certainly does not lead to ‘substantial harm to or total loss of significance of a designated heritage asset’. We believe it also complies with Paragraph 215 for the reasons given above – following an assessment of heritage context the proposals will not affect the identified special interest or significance of either the listed building or conservation area.
- 1.45 For similar reasons we believe that the proposals are in accordance with the Council’s Local Plan Policy D2, relating to heritage.

The author of this report is Nick Collins BSc (Hons) MSc MRICS IHBC.

Nick is a Director of Portico Heritage. He has thirty years experience in the property sector, including working with KMHeritage and as a Project Director in the conservation team at Alan Baxter & Associates.

Nick spent nine years at Historic England where he was a Principal Inspector of Historic Buildings & Areas leading a specialist team of historic building inspectors, architects, and archaeologists on a wide range of heritage projects in East & South London. Previously a Conservation Officer at the London Borough of Bromley, Nick began his career at real estate consultancy Jones Lang LaSalle as a Chartered Surveyor.

Nick is a member of the Institute of Historic Building Conservation and the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors and sits on the Historic England London Advisory Committee.

Phone +44 (0) 7899 895 194

Email nick.collins@porticoheritage.co.uk

Website www.porticoheritage.co.uk
