

Design and Access Statement – The London Bookbarge

A description and history of the existing site

With the completion of the Regent's Canal in 1820, King's Cross was linked to major industrial cities in the north of England, with cargoes collected and unloaded via the new canal system. The area's growing industrial importance was underpinned by the arrival of the Imperial Gas Light and Coke Company, which opened the Pancras Gasworks to the south of the canal in 1824.

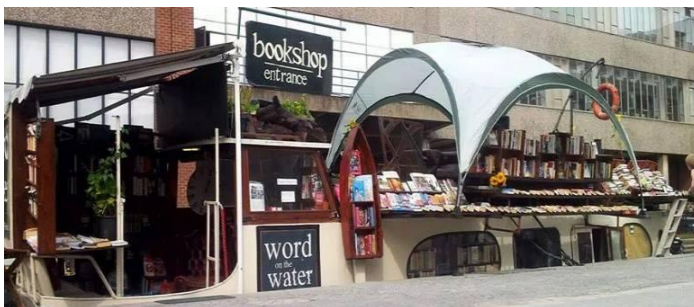
The original Granary Square complex was designed by Lewis Cubitt, and completed in 1852. The complex comprised the Granary Building, the Train Assembly Shed, and the Eastern and Western Transit Sheds. The buildings were aligned to the axis of the Copenhagen tunnel through which the newly-invented trains arrived from the north. The Granary building was used predominantly for the storage of Lincolnshire wheat for London's bakers, while the sheds were used to transfer freight from or to the rail carts.

As the industrial use of the site diminished, the area developed a reputation for more disreputable activities, and the northern hinterland of King's Cross station became associated with prostitution and drug-use. In the 1990s, a vibrant but chaotic nightclub scene developed around the disused Granary building, with the famous Bagley's club housing up to 2500 people on Saturday nights. All this was swept away when, in June 2012, the new Argent development of the site was first opened. The site, which carefully preserves the design of the original industrial buildings, now comprises Central St. Martins Art College, the Museum of Illustration, coloured fountains and a host of retail and entertainment outlets. The site where the canal barges had unloaded their cargoes two hundred years before has been replaced with an amphitheatre of raked steps that draw the visitor down to the canalside towpath. It is on this spot that we are proposing situating Word on the Water, The London Bookbarge.

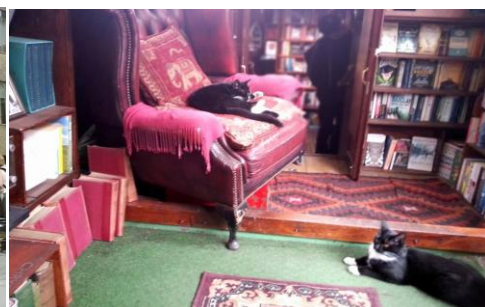
An explanation of the design principles and concepts behind the proposed development

Word on the Water, The London Bookbarge, is an antiquarian and secondhand bookshop situated in a Dutch barge dating from the 1920s. Comprising woodstained outdoor presentation displays and an interior designed to resemble a nineteenth century library, with a living flame fire and antique Chesterfield armchair on the back deck, the project is intended to create a sense of an historic reading room, in which the public are invited to sit and linger, reading to their children or quietly becoming absorbed in a book. The gentle music and calm atmosphere are intended to offer an oasis of contemplation in the midst of the high-speed hubbub of London's streets.

Wherever possible, we have attempted to augment the original lines and design principles of working barges from the time that the boat was first constructed. Greens and browns ensure that the barge fits perfectly in a countryside context, and the canopy roof ensures the view of the far side of the canal is not obscured. The roof is festooned in foliage and greenery. The project aims to evoke a sense of history, Britishness, calm, culture and friendliness, and to remind visitors of the original purpose for which the canals were constructed and invite them to reflect on what living and working aboard may have been like.



Front view of the barge



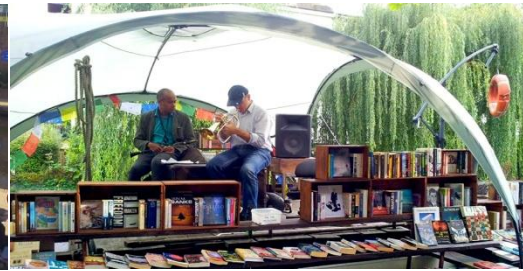
The back deck

A description of the intended use of the proposed development

The intention is to use the site for a permanent independent bookshop, providing affordable, curated titles – many of which have been sourced through partnerships with charity shops and donations from the general public. One of the strengths of the Granary Square development, in comparison with other similar privately-funded projects in the city, is that it offers a wealth of free activities and events for those on any income, and we hope to further augment this. In addition to our range of books, we also run occasional literary events, such as poetry slams and book launches from our roof stage, and host live acoustic performances of classical, folk and jazz music. Summer 2016 will also feature the first of our Word on the Water literary festivals, with readings and book-signings by prominent authors. The shop was recently featured in The BBC's Arts Night, with the Booker Prize-winning author Ben Okri choosing to use the barge as a venue for his piece about the 2015 nominations, and authors Robin Hobb, Stephen Fry, Meera Syal and Penny Arcade have all attended events in recent months.



The barge in situ at the Granary Square site



Jazz musicians on the stage roof

A description of the layout of the proposed development

The Bookbarge is 16.76m in length and 3m wide at its widest point, with 10m of front display space which ensures that customers can peruse the books without blocking the towpath and that those with mobility problems are still able to view the best of the stock. Entrance to the shop is via the back deck, where a broad gangplank leads to steps down into the back deck. Within the boat there are three discrete areas comprising the back deck, the fiction/non-fiction room and the children's room. The back deck and the children's room both offer sofa seating so that elderly customers or those wishing to read to their children are able to relax in comfort. The shop has operated in a continuous cruising capacity for five years – ie. dismantling and moving to a new location every fourteen days -, and thus the displays are designed to ensure that no part touches the towpath or creates an obstruction. Similarly, all signage is situated on the barge itself.



Exterior display



Fiction/Non-Fiction room



Children's room

Details of the scale of the proposed development

The Barge is 16.76m in length, 3m wide and 2.74m high from the level of the towpath, or 3.35m when the optional rain canopy is erected. Our displays extend 76cm out over the towpath.

An explanation of how local context has influenced the overall design

In the five years that the project has been operating, and indeed from the outset, it was clear that, above all else, the canals and towpaths of London would be the backdrop to the shop, and that it was important that the Bookbarge should always enhance, rather than undermine, that. We have endeavoured to combine the 1920s aesthetic of a traditional working barge with that of a village bookshop from the same era. The decor is in fact constructed from scaffolding planks and found materials, and the intention was to create a sense of this era rather than slavishly (and expensively!) recreate in exact detail the characteristics of a historical working barge.

Granary Square represents a particularly appropriate site as the Bookbarge's final permanent home, as it combines both the principles which the development as a whole is guided by, a respect for the tradition and history of the area, and a modern, bustling, event-filled public space. The production of *The Railway Children* still currently running nearby, and the recent Steam Fair both indicate the type of attractions that have been considered appropriate for the space, and we feel that our project fits very well within this conceptual framework – exciting, engaging experiences designed to evoke the Victorian industrial history of the site, able to offer something for family and tourist audiences. The Canal Museum – with whom we have an ongoing relationship – are nearby, and it seems perfect that, in addition to the reminders of the railway heritage already present, the Bookbarge would be able to call to mind the prior origins of the site in the early 19th century, as a canal dock. The Barge would be situated at just the place that the original working narrowboats would have loaded and unloaded their coal, grain and ice cargoes, and the fact that we are a bookshop and occasional performance space reflects the way that the site's focus has moved from industry to culture in recent years. Art, Illustration and music are already amply represented on the site, with Central St Martin's, The Museum of Illustration and the live events spaces, and the presence of the London Bookbarge to represent literature and writing, and providing an additional attraction for children, would round the area off very well. The proximity of the Guardian Newspapers offices further creates this linkage, and we believe we have achieved sufficient stature in recent years to have earned the accolade of a permanent home in this centre of culture. Indeed, the readership of the Guardian themselves voted Word on the Water one of the 'Ten Best Independent Bookshops in the World' in June of this year:

<http://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2015/jun/19/the-10-best-independent-bookshops-in-the-world-readers-recommend>

We hope that, for a small project of very modest means, with our books, literary events, children's attractions, music and appearance we can bring a large amount of cultural capital to the Granary Square site.



Details of the proposed access to the development site and how equal and convenient vehicular and disabled access to buildings, spaces and the public transport network will be ensured and maintained

Access to the proposed site for the Bookbarge on foot is via the towpath from the east (from Camden) and the west (from Caledonian Road). There are multiple existing access points down on to the towpath for wheelchair users or those of restricted mobility in the area by means of ramps and slopes that have been built in tandem with steps access. A third route to the site is down the Granary Square steps.

Vehicular access is already in place as part of the Granary Square development via the sliproad that bisects Goods Way. As with all the other attractions that make up the development, the roads are privately owned, and security staff are on site to prevent vehicles from lingering in the square or using it for parking.

The barge itself cannot provide wheelchair access due to its design – even if a chair could be manoeuvred onto the back deck, the cabin door that provides access to the boat’s interior is too small to allow access without a comprehensive rebuild – which would be both structurally and financially unfeasible. However, we ensure that much of our display is accessible on the outside of the shop, and displayed at waist height, so that wheelchair users are able to browse in the same way as other customers. All those manning the shop are also advised to offer tailored support to disabled customers, seeking out titles that do not appear on the exterior displays and sourcing them from inside the shop if required.

