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Spotlight on Kings Cross

Our property expert Sara McConnell looks at the rise of King's Cross, from dodgy dive to the slickest transport hub in London

All dressed up and ready to go

King's Cross is the Eliza Doolittle of London. Once the area was down at heel, full of pimps and prostitutes, but now it's gone all glamorous. There's an edgy cultural mix, a very smart continental railway terminal with smart shops, plus restaurants and apartments taking the place of derelict railway buildings and land.

And the property faint-hearted have been converted. They like what they see, says Alec Pappasava of estate agent Frank Harris (020 7387 0077). "King's Cross was an area to avoid but now people actually ask for it. There are a lot of positive changes. It looks so bright and airy now, there is definitely a sense of place about it — it is now somewhere to invest in and enjoy."

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A GLITTERING DESTINATION

At the top of the list of positives is the transformation of St Pancras station into a glittering destination for Eurostar trains from Paris and Brussels. Now complete, the focus has shifted to the railway lands behind King's Cross station, where the King's Cross Central Partnership is developing a 67-acre site with 2,000 homes, a hotel, shops, offices and restaurants, as well as two new parks in one of London's most densely built-up areas.

North of the Regents' Canal, a new campus for Central St Martins College of Art is taking shape in a former granary building, and this September, 6,000 students will move in to the premises. King's Cross Central Partnership says: "This will be a key milestone in the development."



THE BIG MIX

Properties: Houses are rare in King's Cross, although King's Cross Central Partnership is planning houses as well as flats in a bid to attract more families. Properties are a mixture of low-rise ex-local authority blocks, mansion blocks, warehouse conversions and loft apartments. There are new-build apartments by the Regent's Canal, with a scattering of flat-fronted period conversions around Caledonian Road.

The area attracts: City workers who can walk to work; the arty and creative who like living in a constantly changing area; students studying at the universities and medical schools in nearby Bloomsbury whose parents are paying; ripples from more pricy Blooms-bury, Clerkenwell and Islington.



Barging in: the London Canal Museum brings much colour to the locality

Featured properties



£435,000: Guilford Street, WC2

A bright, refurbished two-bedroom flat in a Georgian property conversion.



£325,000: York Way, N1

A one-bedroom loft-style apartment in a Victorian school conversion.



£295pw: Gray's Inn Road, WC1

A one-bedroom flat with a balcony in an Art Deco building.

Rarity value: King's Cross has few good family houses but some of the neatest are in [Keystone Crescent, N1](#)

Staying power: King's Cross has a loyal core of local residents and its own news website, [www.kingscrossenvironment.com](#), run by volunteers. But many people move further out when they have families in search of schools, space and a less frantic pace of life.

Best postcodes: There is no single dominant postcode in King's Cross, which is carved up between WC1 (Bloomsbury) south of Euston Road; N1 (Islington) east of York Way; and NW1 (Camden) west of St Pancras Road, which includes the council estates of Somers Town. Price differences are less important to locals than defining what constitutes King's Cross, or being part of Islington, Camden, Finsbury or Bloomsbury.

Best streets: The best parts of King's Cross are in the redeveloped Regent Quarter between York Road and Caledonian Road, with smart flats overlooking preserved cobbled yards of shops, offices and restaurants, and in neighbouring York Central, where a former British Legion poppy warehouse is now loft apartments. Ice Wharf, a 1990s development on the Regent's Canal, is also sought-after.

Up-and-coming areas: Much of King's Cross is still social housing and not for sale but you can find some ex-local authority flat bargains. Check out streets close to the Grand Union Canal such as Rodney Road and Calcot Street.

New developments/regeneration: The magnificent red-brick St Pancras Chambers, threatened with demolition in the 1960s, then left to rot, is being restored and a 244-bed hotel is set to open there next year. The top two floors have been converted into flats. On the opposite side of St Pancras Road, the Grade II listed Great Northern Hotel, behind King's Cross station, is being refurbished as a 90-bedroom luxury boutique hotel.

Schools: "Schools aren't an issue in King's Cross because this isn't much of a family area," says David Salvi of Hurford Salvi Carr (020 7250 1012). The only secondary school in King's Cross itself is South Camden Community School in Somers Town, which languishes at the bottom of the borough of Camden's league table.

SHOPS GO UPMARKET

Shops, bars and restaurants: the Regent Quarter and St Pancras station have brought new upmarket shops and restaurants to the area, with long established shops such as Housman's radical bookshop thriving next to them. The south side of Euston Road is much seedier, though, full of fast-food joints and money-changers.



Sweet smell of success: the once grubby Caledonian Road is cleaning up its act

Transport: It's one of the best connected places in London, and the only one with European connections. Tubes: Piccadilly, Northern, Victoria, Circle, Hammersmith and City lines, plus trains to almost everywhere in the country north of



Destination area: the revamped St Pancras International has trains from Paris and Brussels



£380pw: Manor Gardens, N7

Recently refurbished and with two double en-suite bedrooms, this penthouse duplex is close to great transport links.

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King's Cross.

Council: Camden council (no overall control), Band D council tax £1,332. Islington (no overall control), Band D council tax £1,272.

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Photographs by Barry Phillips

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Latest gardening update

Pattie Barron: "There's always work to do in the garden - but if weather prevents, like this last week or so, there's always work you can do FOR the garden. Which is why I find myself washing last summer's mud off grubby DVDs (I mean grubby in the old-fashioned sense) so they're ready for action in the veg garden this spring..."



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