



THE CHELSEA SOCIETY

Sir Merrick Cockell,
Chairman,
Crossrail 2 Growth Commission
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5th August 2016

Dear Sir Merrick,

GROWTH COMMISSION REPORT ON CROSSRAIL 2

The Chelsea Society, as you will know from your time as leader of the Royal Borough Council, was founded in 1927 to protect the interests of all those who live and work in Chelsea, and to safeguard the unique character of this part of London for ourselves and future generations. We support Crossrail 2, but are opposed to the proposal for a King's Road station. We have published our reasons at <http://chelseasociety.org.uk/crossrail-2/> in response to the TfL consultation.

We were interested therefore to read the report of the Growth Commission on Crossrail 2, and particularly section 4.6.2 about the proposed station. This paragraph refers to assessments of housing growth in the surrounding area, but does not address the crucial question of whether such growth would be dependent on the construction of the station - or whether it could be expected to occur anyway.

We have established in correspondence with the Director of Planning of RBKC that they do not claim that the station would "generate" the 3,500 homes to which they have referred. He replied to us on 19th July 2016 that "Crossrail 2 could support the delivery of up to 3,500 homes over 40 years, which equates to an average of 87 a year across an area within a 2km diameter centred on the proposed station. **Many of these may of course occur irrespective of whether Crossrail 2 has a station in Chelsea.**" In our view, even if they were all attributable to the station the number is so small as to fall far short of justification for spending more than a billion pounds to divert the line and build the station, especially as TfL think that a direct route from Clapham Junction to Victoria would make more sense in transport terms.

The Borough Council have said that the average value of these new dwellings would be £1.7 million each, which are clearly not affordable by local people; and that they would be achieved by the sale of part of the Council's existing stock of social housing. They have published a map showing the housing estates in the vicinity of the proposed station which they believe might be subject to redevelopment in this way.

A policy of redeveloping social housing estates by selling off parts of them for luxury apartments for foreign buyers would of course be politically controversial, as that is not the purpose of the government's housing policy, and irrespective of its merits it is irrelevant to the issue of a Crossrail 2 station in the King's Road. The main constraint on building new dwellings in Chelsea, where land



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prices are among the highest in Europe, is the availability of land, not the demand for housing or transport. Chelsea is one part of the route where a station is not needed for urban regeneration

TfL's lower figure of 1,000 new homes is referred to as a net increase, but they have provided no evidence about where these homes could be built, whether they would be in the private or public sector or why they would not be built in the absence of the station. As you say in your report, "the overall scale of growth within King's Road would remain relatively limited compared to other parts of the route."

There is a similar lack of clarity in the claim by RBKC, which you also mention in your report, that a station would result in additional retail spending and employment in the King's Road area. Chelsea is not an area of high unemployment, and there is certainly no lack of retail spending. Any such predictions are in any event highly speculative and are critically dependent on wider assumptions about economic growth and consumer habits. They would seem to be premised on the replacement of the present small shops and businesses by high volume chain-stores of the type found in Oxford St., to which local people have easy access anyway.

The prospect of such a change in the character of one of London's iconic streets is one reason why local public opinion is so massively against the proposed station, and why over 80 local enterprises have also expressed their opposition. The Chelsea Society too would regard this as a wholly negative development. Visitors do not come to Chelsea for high volume chain stores - they come for the slightly quirky retail offering and atmosphere for which the Kings Road is famous. This in our view would be destroyed if the station were built.

May we also make a general point on forecasting for up to 44 years into the future? That is the equivalent of a 1971 forecast of the housing market today. Over that period we have seen the oil price shock, the 1990 property crash, the rise of China, the huge growth in international demand for property in up-market locations in a few cities where Anglo-Saxon conventions of property law prevail, and finally the 2007/8 collapse which has created an entirely new, debt-based, ultra-low interest global economy. How can consultants seriously attempt to give us 44-year property forecasts, and how does anyone know what rates of stamp duty will be over that timescale? Most people would surely agree that such a calculation is without value, and is certainly no basis for spending more than a billion pounds.

Would you be willing to receive a small delegation from The Chelsea Society quite soon, in view of the likelihood of an early decision on this important matter?

Yours sincerely,

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