



THE OLD POST OFFICE (TOPO)

**Proposals by the Kingston upon Thames community
for community use**

<http://e-voice.org.uk/topo>

Web-version, May 2014

CONTENTS

TOPO is a consortium of local community groups and organisations working together to establish a sustainable community hub in central Kingston hosting a number of social, creative and environmental enterprises. Our first choice of space is The Old Post Office listed building(s) on Eden Street, hence TOPO.

1. Summary	Page 3
What the TOPO consortium is proposing and offering	
The current social and economic context	
What, and who, is TOPO?	
2. Responses to "Have Your Say"	Page 4
3. The TOPO proposal	Page 5
4. Inspirations and models	Page 7
+ The Portas Review	Page 9
5. Business, funding and governance	Page 10
6. The spatial plan – summary	Page 13
7. TOPO history	Page 14
8. Appendices	
Site plan	Page 17
Expressions of Interest, spatial requirements	Page 18
9. Notes and references	Page 19

"It is almost a law of nature that the infrastructure of the industry of the past gets reinvented as the framework for the culture and leisure of the present, and maybe the next revolution is that instead of doing it retroactively we can start doing it proactively."
Danish architect Bjarke Ingels on the future of cities in "The Strand", BBC World Service (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p014hl1j>)



Third unabridged edition May 2014

Note: this document will be regularly updated as information emerges. If you are reading an edition that is more than a year old, please find the current version at <http://e-voice.org.uk/topo>. A shorter printed version is available on request.

1. SUMMARY

What the TOPO consortium is proposing and offering

- A well worked out and attractive plan for community gain from a possible future development in central Kingston
- A central Kingston community cultural hub, offering a unique local venue for creative, social and environmental enterprises
- An imaginative addition to Kingston's developing cultural quarter, useful to the town centre, the wider community and the Council in its sustainability objectives and its intention to become "a destination of choice" (see pages 5-6)
- Events and activities that would widen the cultural capital and offer in Kingston, and a welcoming meeting space opening into the evening, thus increasing dwell time as well as diversity in the town centre (see pages 5-6)
- Sustainable, creative and productive use and conservation of a neglected Grade-2-listed local landmark, built in 1875 (see pages 5-6)
- Wide community engagement and support for a venue that would enhance central Kingston (see pages 4, 15-16)
- A venue that intends to pay its way (see pages 10-12 and Appendix B, page 18);
- A space that actively facilitates, supports and mentors - in employability, skills enhancement, innovation and entrepreneurship.

The current social and economic context

- The recession short-term, on-line shopping long-term, and competition from out-of-town shopping centres are all taking their toll on the retail sector. Most observers now recognise that retail expansion cannot go on for ever, may not be a sustainable basis for local economies, and tends to produce "clone towns" and low-paid, insecure jobs.¹
- The consensus seems to be that in future there should be less dependence in town centres on shopping, and more stress on other local employment opportunities, creativity, diversity, social spaces, entertainment, the arts and culture.²
- Every town centre, including Kingston, needs and wants to build on and promote its own distinctive character, townscape, history and local culture - and needs a "Unique Selling Proposition" if people are going to continue to visit, shop, and spend leisure time there. Community groups may be better placed than businesses or local councils to deliver that distinctiveness.³
- Kingston has a successful shopping centre and vibrant night life, but the TOPO proposal offers an opportunity to become known for more than consumerism and clubbing.
- Kingston has an attractive compact medieval street plan, historic market places, some ancient buildings, and a pleasant riverside, but it has lost much of its heritage and some characterful buildings over the years. The Grade-2-listed former post office buildings have now been empty and neglected for a decade and at least one of them is now on the English Heritage "At Risk" register.
- Cross-rail will not help Kingston at all, and transport is generally a problem (no underground connection, too many cars), though bus connections into the town centre are very good and provision for cyclists improving. The increasing need for access by public and sustainable transport and "walkability" will tend to favour town centre venues.
- There is a chronic lack of affordable space in Kingston for the voluntary sector and for the next generation of creative businesses, at a time when these sectors are likely to grow.⁴

What, and who, is TOPO?

TOPO is a consortium of community groups and organisations (see page 14 for more about the consortium and its story) interested in developing and running the neglected Old Post Office on Eden Street – or, failing that, another central Kingston space – as a community hub. It is a typical Asset Based Community Development⁵, for which there is a world-wide knowledge base and an institute. The consortium began with the following supporters, some of whom are members of the TOPO steering group and sub-groups that produced parts of this prospectus:

- Creative Youth ■ Fusion Arts ■ Greener Kingston ■ Kingston Eco-op ■ Kingston Environment Centre ■ Kingston Environment Group ■ Kingston Fairtrade Group
- Kingston Green Radio ■ Recovery Initiative Social Enterprise ■ Save the World Club
- Transition Town Kingston...



2. RESPONSES TO "HAVE YOUR SAY!"

*"What a great project! The main thing that young theatre makers need is space that is big enough and warm enough to work in. Space that doesn't have a precious, expensive floor or restrictions on its use. As a theatre maker, you want a room that you can stick things on the wall with *Blutack*, that you can throw things on the floor (and clear up!). It needs to be an empty, useable space. To be honest, my favourite rehearsal rooms are the ones that are a bit shabby."*

"This is a handsome building and should be turned into some type of exhibition space/community based hub where all members of Kingston's wonderfully diverse residents mix and share."

"I think using the post office as a multi-arts space would further cement that Kingston really is an up and coming place to test new work, to trial new ideas and to play with innovations in art and performance. Particularly for young people, there needs to be a space between the process and the finished product where it's OK to try and OK to discuss and I think this would have a really positive effect on the community. It would start to forge ideas of open creative discussion across all different kinds of arts."

"I think it has the possibility to become all the things mentioned and most importantly to create employment and training opportunities leading to paid work for the many currently excluded from economic independence."

"I really think the building if taken over by the community should have a focus on innovation, entrepreneurship and start-up businesses. At a time when young people are really struggling with employment, it is those with the ability to turn ideas into reality with creativity that will succeed."

"Rather than building a new multi-arts space, it would good to re-use and re-new an older space where the history and roots of the building itself become an attraction too. For me, the perfect case study of how this can be done really well is at the Battersea Arts Centre (BAC) in Clapham. This building is the old Town Hall and parts of the building date back to 1893. This is one of the best examples I can think of a multi-arts space that is respectful of the charm and history of the building but is incredibly innovative in its approach to the arts."

"I believe the old post office can be the heart of the community with multiple groups residing there which would create an atmosphere of collaboration and creativity. Spaces and places become alive and organisations shine when we work together, push each other, learn from each other – I think its especially important the dynamic is created with lots of different sectors residing together so that there is a collaborative, positive exchange between sectors such as the arts, environment, social support, innovation and entrepreneurship."

"I believe that the Old Post Office could be a brilliant and vital space for my company and others like mine. It could act as a much needed base for us, as an office space and/or a performance space. A room could be turned into a small venue for us to showcase the young performers that we work with both locally and from further afield. When not in use as a performance space, it could act as a rehearsal space for young local musicians and performers."

"The local community would benefit most obviously from the increase in cultural activity in the centre of town and with many more performance, exhibitions and installations to go and see. Perhaps we could introduce something where the studios and spaces are open 3 out of the 7 days a week and the general public can go in to the Post Office, grab a coffee and then have a wander through the studios and see what is going on."

3. THE TOPO PROPOSAL

The various community groups and enterprises involved propose:

- A permanent and visible base for a public-facing and economically sustainable Kingston Environment Centre, bringing resources, information, education and training on environmental issues into the mainstream, where they need to be to deliver the borough's sustainability objectives
- Attractive and sociable meeting and drop-in space(s), with wi-fi and quiet area(s) where minority groups, young people under age for pubs, community groups, campaign groups, local charities and advice and support groups, clubs and societies, could meet and/or interact with the public and each other, and small and start-up businesses could meet each other and their clients*
- Affordable, flexible spaces for regular or "pop-up" shops, classes, workshops or events*
- An organic-vegetarian café that would be the heart of this community hub and which could specialise in local food and Fairtrade where practicable, and stay open in the early evening. Ideally it would be licensed, could be hired out for private/community events, and the kitchen would be large enough for occasional cookery courses and demonstrations*⁶



A visualisation of the café at the heart of this community/arts/environmental hub, by Alex Dean

- Affordable work and office spaces/hot-desks, with storage and wi-fi, for small businesses, sole traders⁷, start-up enterprises, local charities and support groups...*;
- Affordable art and craft studios/workshops, and space to exhibit and sell – providing new local opportunities for creative industries, local artists, art students and art graduates*, and increasing Kingston's cultural capital
- Shared storage space and other facilities for a range of enterprises
- Affordable larger multi-purpose meeting room(s) for rehearsal and performance space, public meetings, film shows, exhibitions... to satisfy local demand for mid-size venues and events, and for secular spaces where people of all faiths and none can feel comfortable*
- Conservation and sustainable use of local landmark, heritage buildings, Grade-2-listed and at risk according to English Heritage⁸, rather than continued neglect and disuse and, perhaps, eventual demolition – with displays about the history of the building and site as be part of the development, and the building(s) demonstrating how to retrofit old or historic buildings and adapt them to contemporary uses and needs
- As part of the larger development of the site, a piazza or "pocket park" with access from adjoining streets to draw the public in and provide a pleasant outdoor recreational space, which could be planted and maintained by Kingston Environment Centre as a model sustainable garden

Many of the above could offer employment or training or work experience opportunities for local people. Most of them would benefit from co-location and cross-fertilisation (something that the highly successful Google calls "serendipitous interaction").

* These would generate income (see section 5).

Benefits to Kingston of a vibrant and mixed-use community hub could include:

- A creative contribution towards a more attractive and welcoming town centre
- A community attraction that would fit well in the proposed redevelopment of the Eden Quarter
- Positive impacts on local tourism and culture
- A more diverse daytime and evening culture – and more and different footfall
- A public-facing informal space for delivery of health, environmental, cultural and other Council and community messages and support, as well as increased visibility for some voluntary sector services
- A sociable and sustainable community hub taking advantage of the synergies between the arts (visual and performance), crafts, leisure and work spaces, and environmental concerns. It would be different from, but complementary to, other proposed central Kingston "community hubs" and venues, most of which have their own distinctive functions and ethos (e.g. some are religious, others commercial, few are as mixed-use as the TOPO proposal)
- Employment/self-employment/apprenticeship/mentoring opportunities



Left and right: Reclaimed and refurbished chairs and tables, as in this canal-side café-bar and the Rose Theatre café, can provide attractive and inexpensive furniture, in keeping with a sustainable ethos, as well as employment and skill-sharing opportunities.



Left and right: skill-sharing at Kingston Environment Centre



Our "Big Ask":

- The former Post Office and Sorting Office buildings restored to a sound, habitable state, with all utilities and services fit for purpose and in good working order
- The buildings transferred to the TOPO consortium on a long lease for a peppercorn rent, as planning gain, to enable management by and for the local community with an emphasis on affordability for all

4. INSPIRATIONS and MODELS

The enthusiasm and creativity of our team and participants in our open meetings have provided most of our ideas, and the centre we are proposing will no doubt be a unique building and venue based on a unique collaboration. But we have also visited and observed other communities and venues that have achieved similar ends to ours, to the benefit of their villages, towns and cities and often without recourse to public funding, also our aspiration. Other communities have created and supported similar enterprises - why shouldn't we?

ArtsBank, Saltburn

<http://www.artsbank.co.uk/>

A substantial Victorian property, the old HSBC bank (*pictured right*), in the heart of Saltburn-by-the-Sea, has been converted by a privately funded initiative into a gallery and arts centre, which aims "to involve people from all backgrounds in the cultural life of the region, and to raise the cultural profile of an often-neglected area...to inspire new creative work... especially from the young... Classes and workshops will be run, developing ArtsBank's association with schools, colleges, community groups and national organisations..."



The Avenue Halls, Kew

<http://www.avenuehalls.com>

This former church (*pictured left*) is owned and run by the Kew Community Trust, an independent trust and registered charity. Hire fees for events, parties, meetings, classes... contribute directly to the running and upkeep of The Avenue Club, a social club for the whole community, but especially for the elderly.

Battersea Arts Centre

<https://www.bac.org.uk>

The former Battersea Town Hall, built in 1893 (*pictured right*), was threatened with demolition and a local campaign was formed to save the building, resulting in a Grade 2 listing in 1970. In 1979 the building was saved from closure again and became an independent Arts Centre, which includes a café-bar, spaces for hire and a play-space, as well as hosting hosts pioneering theatre productions.



Geall Gallery and Artisan Café, North Yorkshire

<http://www.chrisgeall.com>

A small privately-run café and gallery (*interior pictured left*) in a tourist village, selling the usual refreshments, plus paintings, pottery and other local crafts, with an artist's studio at one end.

Halton Mill, near Lancaster

<http://haltonmill.org.uk>

A new environmentally friendly and ethical business hub opening in late spring 2013, based in a historical industrial building and offering "a vibrant and inspiring environment in which small businesses, social enterprises, community based organisations, artists, craftspeople, and freelancers can flourish. We aim to minimise the environmental impact of our working activities and to encourage the sharing of resources, skills, opportunities, ideas and facilities. Green Elephant, a not for profit cooperative, will manage the Mill."

Kingston Environment Centre

<http://kingstoneco.org.uk>

From 2008 to early 2013, Kingston Environment Centre (now based in New Malden) acted as caretaker-tenant of the former Fairfield Nursery on Fairfield East, designated for redevelopment as a new Quaker Meeting House. While there they created a permaculture garden (*pictured right*), hosted events and meetings, acted as a source of environmental information, and offered space for skill-sharing, courses, community groups and social enterprises.



Landmark Centre, Teddington

<http://landmarkartscentre.org>

Just across the river from Kingston, this redundant church (*pictured left*) was rescued after a passionate campaign by local people and others interested in preserving Victorian architecture. It has become an independent charity that receives no statutory funding towards core operating costs, and is supported by ticket and drink sales, classes, donations and legacies, events, and its volunteers.

Living Green Centre, Morden Hall Park

<http://www.sustainablemerton.org/projects.htm#LGC>

A new environmental centre and community outreach project based in the UK's most energy-efficient historic building, an old stable block in the park (*pictured right*), owned by the National Trust. It includes a café, exhibition space, offices and craft workshops. Sustainable Merton hosts drop-in advice sessions on sustainability.



Matthews Yard, Croydon

<http://www.matthewsyard.com>



Run as a business on the site of Croydon's first brewery and a former jail-house, it was conceived after the 2011 riots as a space that "was truly for everyone - for gigs, book groups, meetings or just to relax and read the Sunday papers". It comprises a coffee shop and canteen, a lounge, low cost co-working space, and a 70-seat theatre/performance space/ art gallery/ live music venue (*pictured left*).

Old Cardigan Police Station and Court House

<http://www.4cg.org.uk/index.htm>

A community benefit society, set up to raise the money needed to buy the old Police Station and Court House: " the buildings could be used to promote tourism, events, conferences, local foods and crafts and provide local jobs. More immediately the buildings will be available for local community groups to hire as office space and hold events. Coupled with the income from renting out additional car parking spaces, the site should be more than able to service current loans and with sufficient additional share funds we would look to forecasting an interest rate return on investment to all shareholders..."

Old Fire Station , Oxford

<http://www.oldfirestation.org.uk/about-us/>

Reopened in 2011 as an arts centre run by charity and social enterprise Arts at the Old Fire Station (*pictured right*), including a shop, gallery, theatre, studios and café, as well as a centre for training homeless people run by Crisis Skylight Oxford.



Selby Trust, Tottenham

<http://www.selbytrust.co.uk/about-us>



The Selby Trust was set up as a charity in 1992 by local people who recognised the need for a multi-purpose centre led by the community and third sector organisations. It operates in former school premises (*pictured left*) which the Trust manages as a multi-purpose community and social enterprise centre, with a 25-year lease from LB Haringey. It includes offices, meeting rooms, training facilities, sports and events halls and a large car park. Over 70% of funding is self-generated.

Sumac Centre Nottingham

<http://www.veggies.org.uk/sumac/welcome.html>

A large terrace house (*pictured right*) was bought in 2001 by a co-operative to provide a social venue and resource centre for everyone concerned with global issues, animals, people and the environment, with radical library, internet access, club/function room, gardens and vegan community café, which now manages the premises. Rent from two upstairs flats helps to finance the centre.



THE PORTAS REVIEW: an independent review into the future of our high streets*

The 2011 Report from the independent review of high streets and town centres by Mary Portas highlighted the value of culture and community centres and their benefits to business and retail. There is much worth reading and considering in this review, with its basic message to high streets and town centres of "adapt or die".

"...The new high streets won't just be about selling goods. The mix will include shops but could also include housing, offices, sport, schools or other social, commercial and cultural enterprises and meeting places. They should become places where we go to engage with other people in our communities, where shopping is just one small part of a rich mix of activities..."

...High streets must be ready to experiment, try new things, take risks and become destinations again. They need to be spaces and places that people want to be in. High streets of the future must be a hub of the community that local people are proud of and want to protect...

...My vision for the future of high streets is of multifunctional and social places which offer a clear and compelling purpose and experience that's not available elsewhere, and which meets the interests and needs of the local people. We need to start a conversation about what we need and what we want our high streets to be. To put the heart back into our high streets, inspire that connection between local people and their home town, and instill pride in belonging to a unique place..."

"The most vibrant town centres offer a wide range of locally responsive services that create a comprehensive retail, cultural and community hub. This is crucial for the future of the High Street as it is an offer that its competitors struggle to match. Future Government policy must acknowledge this, not treating retail in isolation, but empowering councils to integrate the shopping offer effectively alongside other cultural and community services."

Local Government Association response to The Portas Review

* <http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/BISCore/business-sectors/docs/p/11-1434-portas-review-future-of-high-streets.pdf>

5. BUSINESS / FUNDING / GOVERNANCE

The Grade-2-listed Old Post Office buildings will not be cheap or easy buildings to equip, maintain and manage, but we have had enough enthusiastic Expressions of Interest (summarised in Appendix B) to give us confidence that there are, and will be for the foreseeable future, enterprises and organisations keen to use and pay for a community space in central Kingston, and that this could be as popular and financially sustainable as other similar venues (see *Section 4*).

The venue will differ from most commercial venues for arts and community activities in that it is intended to encourage users from a wide range of backgrounds, some of whom, like young artists, will be on low incomes. Therefore a range of funding options as well as private self-funding is being considered, to allow for affordable participation across the community.

PLAN A (based on occupation of all buildings on the site) Operating budget estimate: Income

Schedule A: Full cost or discounted services (possibly, but not necessarily, subsidised from donations, sponsorship or project-based funding):					
Tenant / hirer	££ per hour	££ per day	££ per week	Frequency per year	££ per year
Café/restaurant					16,000
Eco-op workshop					25,000
Exhibitions			250	x 10 days	2,500
Hall hire for events (<i>full charge</i>)		500		x 20 days	10,000
Hall hire for events (<i>community charge</i>)		200		x 20 days	4,000
Hall hire for events/rehearsals/classes/pop-up restaurants...(<i>full charge</i>)	50			x 2 hours x 100 days	10,000
Hall hire for events/rehearsals/classes (<i>community charge</i>)	20			x 2 hours x 100 days	4,000
Meeting room hire (<i>full charge</i>)		100		x 2 hours x 100 days	10,000
Meeting room hire (<i>community charge</i>)		50		x 100 days	5,000
Meeting room hire (<i>full charge</i>)	15			x 2 hours x 100 days	3,000
Meeting room hire (<i>community charge</i>)	10			x 2 hours x 100 days	2,000
Consulting room/studio/office (<i>average rent</i>)			100	x 14 rooms x 52 weeks	72,800
Pop-up shops		100		x 50 days	5,000
Distribution space for veg boxes	7.50			x 4 hours x 24 days	720
Market stalls		35		x 6 stalls x 12 days	2,500
Schedule B: Costs met from sponsorship, project-based funding and donations					
Studio/workshop rent (6 spaces)					12,000
Club Incubator space/hot desks for start-ups (SME/enterprise funding)					5,000
Co-worker hub workspace/hot desks for young enterprise (Young Enterprise funding)					750
Local authority sponsored crèche/children's centre					5,000
GROSS ANNUAL INCOME to TOPO management					195,270

Some imaginative income ideas



A café can be furnished with renovated antiques which are also for sale.



Coming this Autumn/ Winter

*The Artisan Café
Secret Supper Club*

@ The Geall Gallery Grosmont

What is a Supper Club?

It is a different dining experience more like a dinner party than restaurant style dining, based in a relaxed art gallery setting.

What to expect!

Maximum of 12 diners; advance booking essential; everyone sits together to enjoy good home-cooked food, seasonal and organic where possible in a relaxed friendly atmosphere. There will be a complimentary glass of fizz or a cocktail to welcome you. We're not licenced, so diners need to bring their own booze; so bring plenty!



The menu is a set one but special dietary requirements can be catered for with advance notice.

Ticket Price is £25 per head

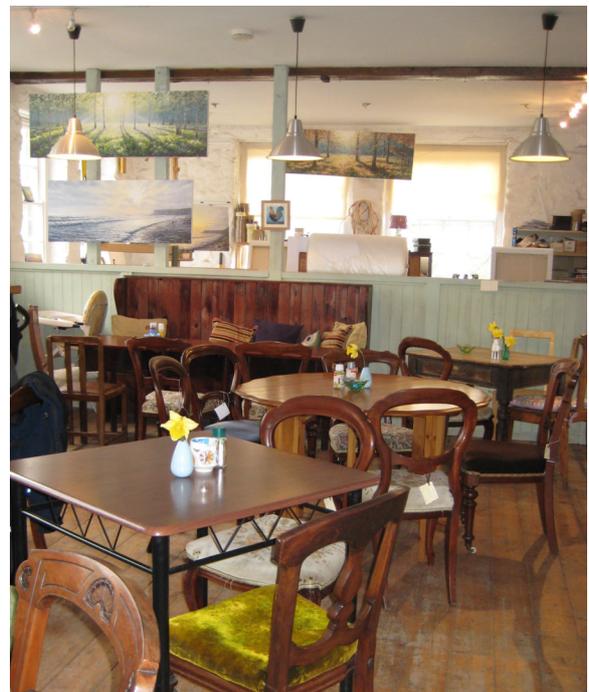
Enquires & Booking please ring:
01947 895007 or 01947 810820

Email: jayne.harrison.03@gmail.com

Visit our Artisan facebook page



Pop-up supper clubs



Art is created and sold in this café, as well as small affordable items such as cards.

Operating budget estimate: Expenditure

- Rent – payable to landlord in accordance with lease
- Business Rates – to be negotiated with RBK
- Utilities – to be paid by the FM (facilities management) company* against income from sublets, etc
- Insurances etc – to be paid by the FM company* against income from sublets, etc
- Maintenance of building and common parts, interior redecoration etc – to be paid by the FM company* against income from sublets, etc.
- Café/restaurant and Eco-op etc to look after own cleaning and decoration

Feasibility and capital funding requirements

We anticipate that we will need one-off funding for:

- | | |
|---|----------|
| • Start-up / organisational costs (Steering Committee) | £2,500 |
| • An options analysis by a qualified consultant | £5-8,000 |
| • A feasibility study by a qualified consultant with input from building professionals | £25,000 |
| • Unless landlord pays, capital funding for repair and restoration of the building respecting its listed status (to be costed in feasibility study) | |
| • Interior decoration, shop fitting, office equipment and furniture, wi-fi etc (to be costed in feasibility study) | |

Operating budget estimates: Notes

1. Income estimates: the income streams (2012 - 2013 rates) are envisaged as potential ways of meeting running costs. However, all these figures remain rough estimates until we have more information about the space available. Our estimates assume use of all the buildings on the site by many of the enterprises that have expressed interest in the project (see *Appendix B, page 19*) or similar future enterprises, and allow for some subsidised users.

2. Potential income from sale of goods/services/commission in addition to the income streams listed, could include:

- Weekend crèche 11am-4pm, Saturday and Sunday, £7.50 (per hour)
- Commission on sale of artworks on Sale or Return, 10%
- Branded merchandise, cards etc from café shop (and possible trade stalls)

3. Free services: subsidies/full cost funding from the income streams listed could enable the following:

- Free wi-fi in the café/restaurant area to facilitate occasional use
- Free sponsored crèche from 11am - 2pm, five days a week (commercial at the w/e)
- Free community room available on a booking system for non-profit organisations
- Free rehearsal space for e.g Creative Youth
- Free Club Incubator space for start ups (limited period)
- Free facilitated co-worker-hub workspace for young enterprise

GOVERNANCE AND STRUCTURE

TOPO will need a vehicle for fundraising, fund-holding, and, eventually, facilities management (FM) of the venue, and we expect that the start-up and options analysis funding will help us to choose the right structure for our not-for profit purposes. This could be a co-operative, a charitable trust with a board of trustees, a Community Interest Company or Industrial Provident Society for the benefit of the community, a limited company...

Co-operatives UK *Select-a-structure* tool⁹ is also useful for community groups wishing to determine the most appropriate legal structure for their venture.

6. THE SPATIAL PLAN: SUMMARY

TOPO needs a building that is safe, weather-proof, fit for community use and with all necessary utilities and services: up-to-date wiring, plumbing, a kitchen, toilets, insulation and, if permitted in a listed building, double glazing. TOPO could be a useful, publicly accessible, model of how to retrofit an old building to modern-day standards of comfort and energy-efficiency.

Preliminary assessment (January 2012) of the nature and quantity of the spaces that would, ideally, be required*:

i) A café/bistro on the ground floor of TOPO having street frontage. Say, incl kitchen	170 m ²
ii) A crèche – on the ground floor (professionally managed)	80 m ²
iii) The Environment Centre containing office, meeting room, radio studio, storage	75 m ²
iv) 2 no. workshops @ 25 m ² each	50 m ²
v) 4 no. studios @ 25 m ² each	100 m ²
vi) 6 no. offices @ 20 m ² each	120 m ²
TOTAL	595 m²
vii) Plus for circulation, toilets, etc. 15 %.	90 m ²
TOTAL	685 m²
viii) Plus the rear top lit sorting shed – area presently unknown. This to be used as an event, rehearsal, production space. If available the single storey adjoining space could be used for a pottery kiln or other use that requires heavy equipment and would need to be on the ground floor.	
ix) Plus the other listed building, the former telephone exchange/sorting office, for use as workshops and studios for repair and restoration enterprises, artists and artisans.	

Necessary flexibilities:

- We do not know which building, or how much of it, we could be offered. The possibilities include: the main Post Office building and adjacent sorting shed; the listed old telephone exchange/sorting office on the Wheatfield Road side of the site; all the listed buildings on the site; a purpose-built or converted, state-of-the art, energy-efficient community hub on another central Kingston site.
- The many Statements of Interest we received from a range of potential users (see Appendix B, page 18) represent demand in 2012 - 2013. We cannot predict how many of these groups or enterprises will still want space in five or ten years' time, but are working on the assumption that other groups and enterprises, both similar and different, will be around then and needing central Kingston community space.
- Many of the demands from potential users overlap and many of the spaces will need to be adaptable/multi-purpose, e g, a large space could be used for daytime rehearsals by one group and for an evening event by another; the cafe could double up as exhibition/pop-up retail/informal meeting space; some office space could be given over to "hot-desks"...
- No one from TOPO has seen the entire building(s) from top to bottom, or had access to floor plans, or been able to carry out any kind of survey, but we could and would adapt our proposals to the space available. For example:

PLAN B (based on tenancy of the old Sorting Office)

In October 2013 (the month that we published edition 1 of the TOPO Prospectus) the Sorting Office (5,892 sq ft /548 sq m, pictured right) was offered to let. Members of the Steering Group viewed it and thought, that though it offered less than our initial proposals required, it still had potential as an exciting (if challenging) community cultural space/cafe. Meetings of the Steering Group, stakeholders and supporters held in October-November 2013 generated ideas for a *Plan B*, which could be revived and adapted if only part of the building became available to the community.)

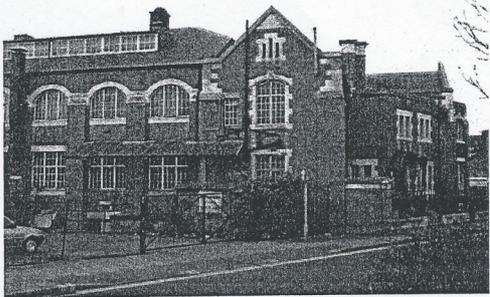


7. TOPO HISTORY

Over the decade or so that The Old Post Office has been empty and disused, various local groups have expressed interest in and some concern about the Grade-2-listed buildings on the site. At least one of these listed buildings is now on the English Heritage At Risk register where the main building is described as follows:

"Former Head Post Office, 42 Eden Street, Kingston upon Thames, Kingston upon Thames, Greater London. Post office built in 1875. Three storeys in red brick with stone dressings. Works for internal improvements and weather proofing were carried out in 2008/2009 in preparation for leasing out. However, the reuse of the building has been delayed due to wider considerations relating to the Council's aspirations for town centre renewal as set out in the K+20 Area Action Plan."

Kingston upon Thames



English Heritage Register of Buildings at Risk 2006

Kingston upon Thames	Kingston Sorting Office Ashdown Road, Kingston upon Thames
Priority	C (C)
Designation	Listed Grade II
Condition	Fair. Vacant
Ownership	Company
Summary	Purpose built telephone exchange. Built in 1907 and opened in 1908. Arts and Crafts style in asymmetrical plan. Refurbishment proposals expected.

Contact Tony Hall (LA) 020 8547 4652

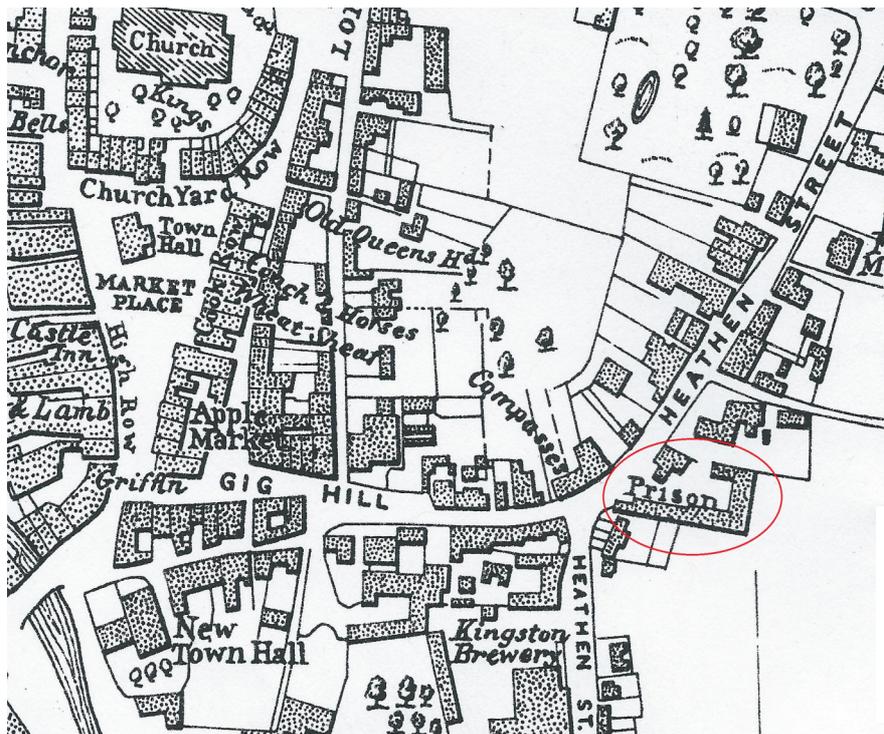


Kingston upon Thames	Head Post Office 42 Eden Street, Kingston upon Thames
Priority	C (C)
Designation	Listed Grade II
Condition	Fair. Vacant
Ownership	Company
Summary	Post office built in 1875. Three storeys in red brick with stone dressings. Refurbishment proposals expected.

Contact Tony Hall (LA) 020 8547 4652

From English Heritage website

The site, as well as the listed buildings currently on it, has an interesting history.



Extract from 1813 map of central Kingston showing a prison on the site of the Old Post Office; with thanks to Kingston Local History Room.

In 2012, Kingston Environment Centre, inspired by its need to find permanent new premises and to bring environmentalism into the mainstream, brought together a wide range of residents, community and arts groups to discuss ways of conserving and reviving these buildings for community use. Two public meetings¹⁰ in July and October, and a "Have your say" initiative (see page 4 and next page) generated much enthusiasm and many attractive and creative ideas that could bring something new and interesting to Kingston and provide a flexible and sociable base for many groups, activities and enterprises that can currently encounter difficulties in finding appropriate spaces in the town centre. Participants also suggested "blocks" and "bridges" to progress.

Some of these groups and potential users could contribute to making a community hub financially viable; others need low cost or free space (such as a tolerant cafe) where they can get together. Out of the second public meeting, in October 2012, a Steering Group of volunteers representing a range of stakeholders was formed to work on Phase 1 of this community project.

Phase 1

Currently TOPO consists of a small Steering Group of representative stakeholders/potential users, with some *pro tem* agreed terms of reference¹¹ and a wider network of supporters. The Steering Group has met almost monthly since December 2012 to undertake research and make progress on practical plans and strategies, with the help of specialist working groups and volunteers, some of whom have experience and expertise in fund-raising, running a business or creative enterprise, architecture and development, or campaigning, with Kingston Environment Centre taking a lead role.

"In our search for a new base we have ranged widely over the Borough. We have investigated old cricket pavilions, hunted down derelict pubs and considered commercial buildings. None appealed to our sense of a growing community of sustainability engineers as much as did the Old Post Office, a beautiful building strategically located and crying out for reinstatement for community use. At the same time many organisations are struggling, feeling that they could contribute more if only they were more visible to the public on the street."
Jean Vidler, Director,
Kingston Environment Centre

The Steering Group has set up a free community website (<http://e-voice.org.uk/topo>) and a Facebook page, is investigating funding sources and a feasibility study, and as early as possible would like to survey the buildings and site.



Consulting the community, July 2012

Phase 2

The Steering Group will evolve into a more permanently constituted entity, capable of fund-raising, fund-holding and negotiating with other interested parties. There are numerous forms this entity could take (see page 12) and it will be a Phase 1 - 2 transition task to select the best model for our purposes.

Phase 3

This entity would eventually take on the responsibilities of managing the venue and its facilities: acting as a landlord and facilities management; ensuring that income covers outgoings, hiring staff, overseeing maintenance...

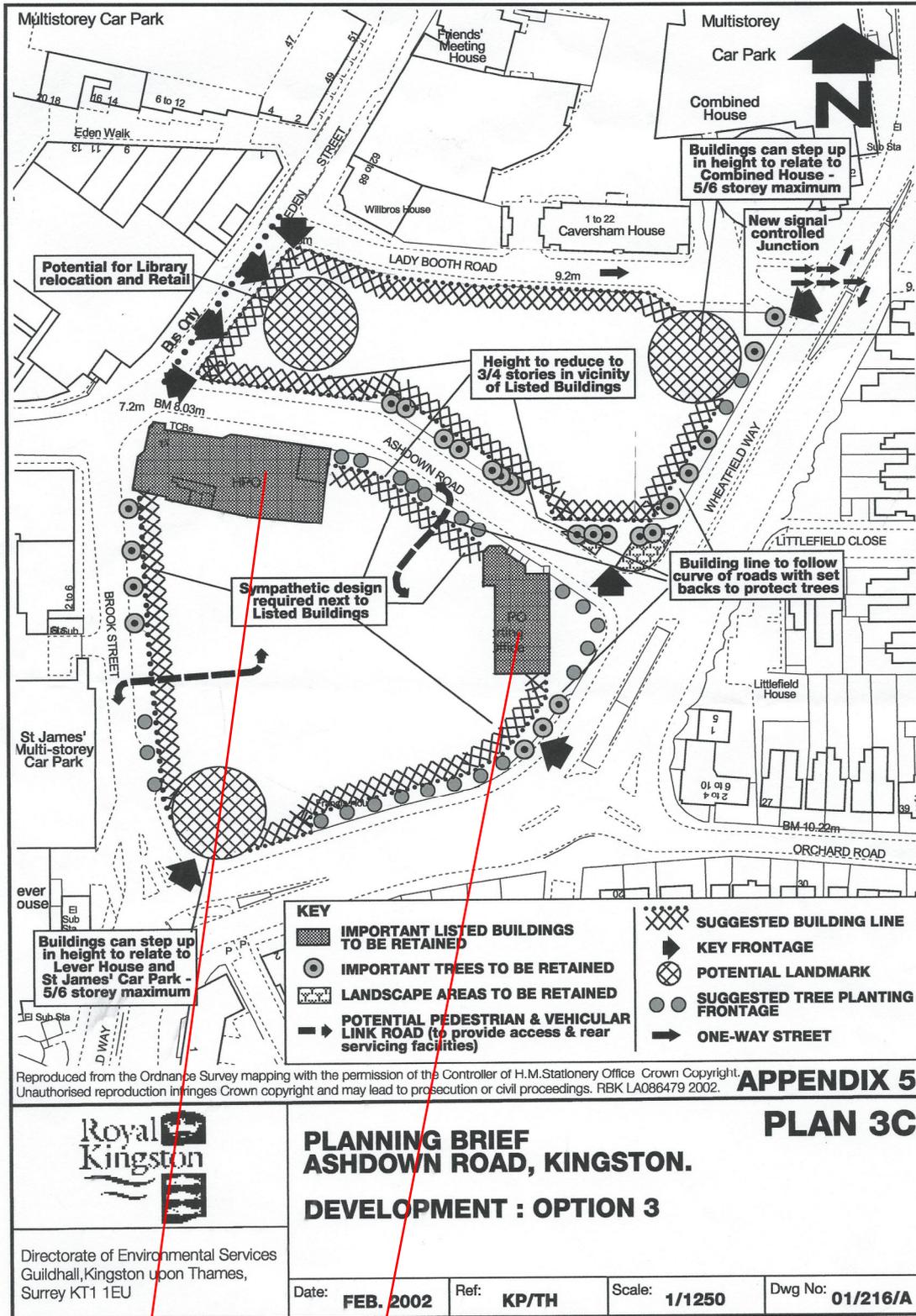
“Hedonistic Sustainability – the idea that sustainability is not a burden, but that a sustainable city in fact can improve our quality of life.”

Architect Bjarke Ingels on TEDxEast

(http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ogXT_C17KRU&feature=player_embedded)

8. APPENDICES

Appendix A: Site plan



The old post office and sorting hall

The old telephone exchange/sorting office

Appendix B: Expressions of Interest, spatial requirements, 2012-13

We have had specific expressions of interest and requests from various community groups and creative enterprises, which would broadly fit into the spatial categories below. We understand that this is a long-term project and that, while some of these might not exist or will have found other venues by the time TOPO is available, there are many others that will still exist or will have started up by then, with broadly similar requirements.

SPACE and type of use	Expressions of Interest / possible users, 2012-13
OFFICE space(s) or hot-desks , various sizes and plans, storage	Project Green Room Recovery Initiative Social Enterprise Kingston Environment Centre Green Radio (sound-proofed space) Anagio Ltd Web Design Creative Youth Community Film Unit
CRECHE (ground floor)	Work Free
EVENT/ WORKSHOP / REHEARSAL / EXHIBITION SPACE (large)	Euphonix community choir rehearsals Recovery Initiative Social Enterprise events Yoga classes (Hannah Rose Tristram) Community singing sessions Dance classes (Hannah Rose Tristram) From the Ground Up veg box collection Transition Town Kingston events Kingston Environment Centre events Stitch in Time workshops (+ storage) Creative Youth rehearsals Exhibitions Circus Suburbia classes Moonlight Theatre Company rehearsals and workshops Kingston Artists Open Studios
CAFÉ, informal meeting space Kitchen Pop-up retail space Display – walls, shelves	Social enterprise café Adam Lewis (of The Lamb pub) - youth training café-bar Pop-up supper club All, including general public, classes and workshops Recovery Initiative Social Enterprise Transition Town Kingston Training, From the Ground Up cookery classes Kingston Artists Open Studios, WOW, other local artists and craftspeople Fusion Arts Local artists Kingston Environment Centre and other local environmental and community groups Kingston Council
WORKSHOPS and studios	Local artists and craftspeople, Kingston Artists Open Studios Save the World Club Kingston Eco-op
TOILETS	All

9. NOTES AND REFERENCES

¹ BBC Radio 4's "The Report" (Feb 2013) on high street closures and their knock-on effects is one of many such reports - see <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01qfjdn>.

² See, for example, "There's more to life than shopping", in *The Observer* (20/1/12), a useful summary of much recent comment on the changing face of the high street at <http://m.guardian.co.uk/business/2013/jan/20/retail-hmvgroup> and reports and presentations from a September 2012 Kingston University conference on "The Future of Town Centres: Death or Evolution?" at <http://www.kingston.ac.uk/services-for-business/cei/events/> and "Town centres need to be reinvented for the 21st century. How we buy has changed for ever, and towns need to trade on their history and quirkiness to attract us to visit them." Janet Street Porter in *The Independent on Sunday*, 2/6/13

³ '...The retail expert Paul Turner-Mitchell... said ... the majority of councils were not capable of delivering the dynamic change needed to revive UK high streets. Mr Turner-Mitchell, a director of Rochdale-based retailer 25 Ten Boutique, said: "It's disappointing that, given this unique opportunity to try something different, many councils have wasted funding on the usual bureaucracy of meetings, expense claims and consultants..." (Report on Portas Pilot Town scheme in *The Independent* Feb 2013, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/business/news/portas-pilot-towns-wasted-grants-on-items-like-a-1600-peppa-pig-costume-8494026.html>) See also <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/10m-fund-to-save-uks-high-streets-goes-on-stunts---or-in-the-bank-8533383.html>: "£10m fund to save UK's high streets goes on stunts - or in the bank... Public money handed to local councils to revitalise their high streets has been spent on apparently frivolous items... Retail expert Paul Turner-Mitchell, who uncovered the FOI data, said: 'It's hard to see how council spending from this fund is encouraging innovation. Councils are continuing to throw taxpayers' money at the same stale ideas they've been peddling for years. They really are just fiddling while Rome burns and the fact that it's being done under the banner of 'innovation' adds insult to injury'..."

⁴ Cities around the world have found economic and social benefits in promoting and supporting creative enterprises:
- Montreal, Canada, is the world city with the highest creative industries employment: 13.3% (*World Cities Culture Forum* report, October 2013), and has nurtured world famous acts such as Cirque du Soleil and Arcade Fire. The city has a cultural development policy, *Montréal, Cultural Metropolis*, http://ville.montreal.qc.ca/portal/page?_dad=portal&_pageid=4517,7008932&_schema=PORTAL, and many very affordable rehearsal and studio spaces.
- Vancouver is another Canadian city with a *Culture Plan* (<http://vancouver.ca/parks-recreation-culture/culture-plan-2008-2018.aspx>) and a policy of creating cultural spaces (<http://vancouver.ca/parks-recreation-culture/creating-cultural-and-performance-spaces.aspx>), because: "...Cultural spaces and cultural facilities are essential to any community, and they are key to the economic health of our city. Our cultural spaces serve residents, attract tourists, maintain businesses, and enhance our quality of life, yet ensuring access to appropriate and affordable cultural spaces is challenging. To ensure that artists and arts organizations can afford to remain in Vancouver, the City works to sustain and enhance Vancouver's cultural infrastructure."

⁵ See <http://www.abcdinstitute.org/abcd09/>

⁶ Some restaurants already do this, though generally at the upper end of the market - see, for example, <http://www.squaremeal.co.uk/feature/best-restaurants-cookery/14872>. There seems to be a gap in the market for basic thrifty cooking skills, vegetarian cookery, preserving and jam-making, learning to cook with leftovers etc.

⁷ According to a [Parliamentary Briefing on Small Businesses in the UK](#), in 2012, 4.6 million or 96% of all businesses were micro-businesses employing 0 - 9 people. Many of these will be sole traders who would prefer to work in an environment where they could share facilities and ideas, keep work and home separate, and meet other workers and clients.

⁸ See <http://risk.english-heritage.org/register.aspx?id=931&rt=1&pn=1&st=a&ctype=all&crit=post+office>

⁹ See <http://www.uk.coop/our-work/select-structure-tool>

¹⁰ For outcomes and ideas generated at initial exploratory public engagement meetings see http://e-voice.uk/topo/files/index?folder_id=8168904

¹¹ See TOPO Steering Group constitution/terms of reference at http://e-voice.uk/topo/files/view/TOPO_SG_CONSTITUTION.doc