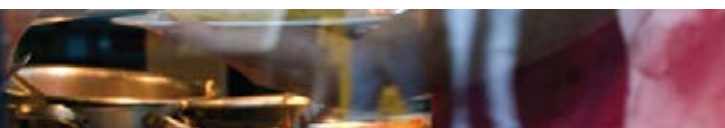
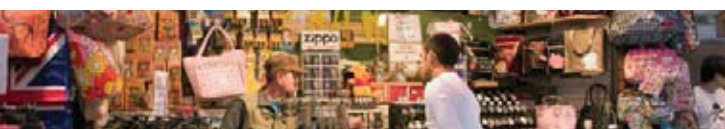


Design Strategy for Chinatown, London

Executive Summary



Introduction

On the 1st November 2007, TRH The Prince of Wales and Duchess of Cornwall visited Chinatown in London with a small, distinguished delegation from mainland China. Later that evening at the Pearl Awards, held at the Royal Festival Hall, HRH The Prince of Wales gave a speech in which he announced that his Foundation for the Built Environment had kindly been invited by Westminster Council to build on existing work and assist in the improvement of Chinatown;

'My Foundation for the Built Environment is, for example, pursuing a project to help restore the traditional Hutongs in Beijing to ensure that these wonderful examples of traditional Chinese architecture are indeed kept for future generations.'

Earlier today in Gerrard Street I saw the beautifully crafted stone pots, which have just been shipped from China by the London Chinatown Chinese Association and David Tang, and thought how uplifting it was to see traditional Chinese craftsmanship that provides a real enhancement in the heart of Chinatown.

My Foundation will work with Westminster City Council and the London Chinatown Chinese Association to find ways to build on this and other recent improvements to Chinatown by encouraging the use of traditional Chinese architectural practices and by drawing on the expertise and skill of craftsmen in China and the United Kingdom to help Chinatown to become more authentically Chinese.'

HRH THE PRINCE OF WALES, NOVEMBER 2007

A two-day 'Enquiry by Design' workshop, involving key stakeholders from the local area and community, was organised by The Prince's Foundation in close coordination with Westminster City Council and hosted at The Prince of Wales Theatre (Piccadilly Circus) on the 15th and 16th May 2008. The purpose of the workshop was to learn what was already happening in the area, what is planned for the future and to explore opportunities for building on the positive elements to enhance Chinatown's social, economic and environmental performance.

The aspiration that emerged was quite simple; for London's Chinatown to be 'the best Chinatown in the world' and to recognise Asian culture and diversity.

The full report explains how that might be achieved and, with the recent adoption of the Supplementary Planning Guidance, these aspirational strategies may be implemented. This executive summary highlights the key findings of the full report.

Key findings

If London's Chinatown is to realise its potential as the world's best Chinatown, it needs to be better integrated into the surrounding movement network.

A series of strategies are set out on the report to document how Chinatown could be made more visible and the visitor's experience improved.

Solutions for improved accessibility

The Soho/Leicester Square Link

Currently, the two thriving hubs of Leicester Square and Soho are cut off by the long block to the south of Gerrard Street. A visible link aligning with Macclesfield Street would enable pedestrians to easily move between three extremely busy and distinct areas of intense activity. It would be premature to specify where and how this link might be achieved, but it is recommended that the owners of a number of buildings on the south side of Gerrard Street be approached to see whether this strategic link can be made.

Newport Market

There would be considerable merit in creating an arcade through the Newport Sandringham building at ground-floor level to link Gerrard Street with Charing Cross Road (through Newport Place) to draw in people from the northeasterly/Oxford Street direction.

London Underground: The Chinatown Exit

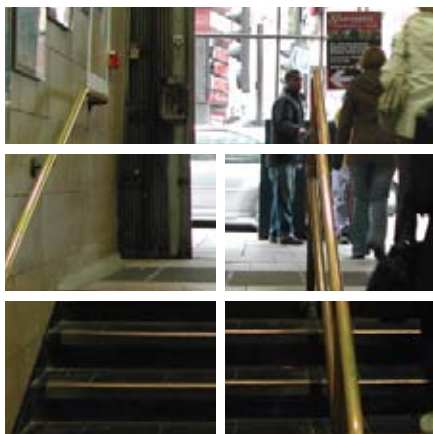
As part of the workshop process, it was noted that there is a closed entrance to the Leicester Square underground station on the corner of Little Newport Street and Charing Cross Road. The site is currently used as a 'Eurochange' currency exchange business. It was suggested that reopening this access point as the main entrance to Chinatown would greatly enhance access to the area and improve the overly congested entrance to the south. Even with an additional entrance and exit, due to the increased amount of visitors to Leicester Square tube station since this entrance was closed off, the entrance itself is likely to need to be enlarged to be viable.

Solutions for improved visibility – 'The 9 Dragons'

During the workshop, the idea of having a simple, popular and meaningful connection to Chinese cultural heritage was explored. It was thought important that this should appeal to all age groups, be easy to see and understand and should improve people's understanding of the origins of Chinese culture. For those with greater interest, this theme would act as a portal to the deep and complex world of ancient Chinese symbolism.

One of the simplest and most compelling suggestions put forward by a member of the local community was the concept of the nine Dragons. This has a special place in Chinese cultural heritage, as not only is the number nine considered auspicious, being the largest single number, but various legends state that the Dragon is composed of nine creatures, that there are nine species of Dragon and that the Dragon has nine sons.

Ancient Chinese Dragons are the ultimate symbols of cosmic Chi (energy). They are said to be the most potent indicator of good fortune in the Chinese pantheon of symbols. As one of the four creatures of the world's directions, the Dragon represents new beginnings. The Dragon also has the power to release water to parched lands, which in turn stands for abundance and relief. Continued success, high achievement, and prosperity are also listed among the Dragon's arsenal of good qualities, which rank it as one of the most popular and important of Asian signs.



It is proposed to hold a competition in collaboration with the LCCA, the wider community and business representatives to design a strategy for a dragon wall and then, if appropriate, dragons to adorn the nine main entrance points to Chinatown. This needs careful research to ensure that any strategy is correctly implemented.

Solutions for improved streets, squares and alleys

Gerrard Street

Gerrard street is the heart of Chinatown and already lively and successful. It is therefore a case of enhancing and consolidating existing activities rather than changing them. It is proposed this is done by;

- ♦ *Making a better interface between the street and building at ground-floor level*
- ♦ *Coordinating the colours of buildings to enhance the existing composition*
- ♦ *Reflecting the uses on the upper floors of buildings by the use of signage*

The street is roughly split into four quarters; northeast, northwest, southeast and southwest. It is proposed to trial the design strategy for Gerrard Street on the northeast and southeast quarters. Once complete, the improvements should be reviewed and then either extended to the other quarters or refined.



Lisle Street

Lighting

Lisle Street has a range of particularly fine Georgian buildings to the north side but is dominated by the backs of cinemas to the south, which not only deadens the street but creates an uncomfortable scale.

Street trading/market

Whilst the blank walls of the cinemas to Lisle Street are unpleasant, they do offer themselves as a possible backdrop for a range of activities, provided that escape routes are kept clear. Street activities need careful planning with a robust management strategy. Rather than to predict what form this might take, it is better to test a series of one-off street markets to test which approach will be the most successful. These activities could include street trading by existing businesses on Lisle Street or by themed businesses, such as: Chinese tourist gifts/artefacts; Asian art & crafts; literature; clothes; music; and youth culture.



Newport Place

Newport Place is currently blighted by the uniform character of the gigantic Newport Sandringham building, the van parking, car park entrance and refuse depot access, all of which need to be fundamentally addressed if Newport Place is to have any chance of becoming a world-class space. Rather than maintaining the existing qualities of the location, it is felt that this space needs healing. From this, the idea of Newport Place becoming somewhere to promote 'well-being' emerged.

Danseey Place and Horse & Dolphin Yard

Work has already begun to turn Horse & Dolphin Yard from a service alley into a pleasant set of market stalls and small shops. There are also plans to create visible access and windows into the restaurants that back onto this space, enlivening it further. Danseey Place, whilst housing a few unique little shops, is blighted by exposed refuse storage and poor surface treatment and drainage. Danseey Place should be redeveloped in a similar manner to Horse & Dolphin Yard, once refuse and drainage problems have been resolved.



We would like to thank the following consultants who provided technical support to the Prince's Foundation during the workshop: Space Syntax, WSP and The Feng Shui Agency. The Prince's Foundation for the Built Environment would like to thank all of the local stakeholders who attended the workshop for their time and expertise, which was crucial to the development of the proposals contained in this document.



London
Chinatown
Chinese
Association



Shaftesbury PLC

Rosewheel

Charing Cross Road

The Newport Sandringham Building, including the Vale Royal House above, looms along the western frontage of Charing Cross Road. The colonnade at ground-floor level, with its heavy brick-clad columns and set-back shop frontage, creates a dark and uninviting space. The colonnade is cloaked in shadow and poses a security issue with its inactive frontage on Charing Cross Road. It has, in effect, transformed this part of Charing Cross Road into an undefined, forbidding stretch of neither successful public realm nor dedicated retail space.

The ground-floor and mezzanine shop frontage to Charing Cross Road could be pulled forward (possibly to the building line or perhaps three or four metres back from the remodelled columns, which would be thinner and rounded). In addition to treatment to the Newport Court elevation, the existing colonnade and ground-floor elevation should be remodelled in a manner that reflects the proposed changes to the façades in Newport Place.

Implementation

The strategy has many strands and each initiative is to have a small working group and a lead organisation responsible for developing a business plan and implementation strategy. It is proposed that all the major stakeholders involved in the workshop will take the lead on at least one initiative, to indicate that the sum of collective action will total more than each of the parts.

With consideration of the long-term vision for Chinatown, a care and maintenance strategy needs to be established for the planned improvements throughout Chinatown.

Each initiative will be funded from a variety of sources, and a management regime will be developed for each scheme.



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