

**Old Kent Road Community Review Panel**

**Report of Community Review: Rail Bridge Public Art and Lighting Project**

Monday 16 October 2023

Treasure House, 682 Old Kent Road, London, SE15 1JF

**Group**

Gurmeet Sian (chair)  
Mohammed Bentaleb  
David Clarke  
Simon Donovan  
Hazel Flynn  
James Glancy  
Rebecca Lefort  
Mike Levitt  
Saidat Oketunde  
Sarah Osei  
Sydney Simms  
David Stoker  
Lin Vong

**Attendees**

Tim Cutts	London Borough of Southwark
Quyen Phan	London Borough of Southwark
Colin Wilson	London Borough of Southwark
Nicola McCaffrey	Kender Primary School
Lucy Block	Frame Projects
Abigail Joseph	Frame Projects

**Confidentiality**

This is a pre-application review, and therefore confidential. As a public organisation the London Borough of Southwark is subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOI) and, in the case of an FOI request, may be obliged to release project information submitted for review.

## **1. Project name and site address**

Old Kent Road Railway Bridge Public Art and Lighting

## **2. Presenting team**

Yinka Danmole	Studio Danmole
Peter Hudson	Light Space Colour
Halina Edwards	Independent Artist

## **3. Planning authority briefing**

Funded by the Future High Streets Fund grant from central government, Southwark Council has commissioned a creative team to design a public artwork and lighting scheme for the Old Kent Road Railway Bridge. The bridge is located at the southern end of Old Kent Road and is split between the London Boroughs of Southwark and Lewisham.

Refurbishment of the bridge is a key part of the Council's plan to revitalise the Old Kent Road. The vision is to create an inspiring piece of art, which local people and businesses can feel proud of. It is also important for it to be representative of the communities living and working around the Old Kent Road. This will be achieved through an intensive community engagement programme that will build upon existing relationships, established through the earlier stages of the project, to inform the final design for the public artwork.

Council officers would welcome the panel's feedback on the current designs, and on the design team's approach to engaging with and featuring local community hubs within the concept design. It would be helpful to hear the panel's comments on some of the featured places and community groups that are being considered for inclusion within the scheme.

## 4. Community Review Panel's views

### *Summary*

The panel supports the project and applauds the positive community engagement programme. It welcomes the proposal to improve the bridge and feels that the project will bring new life to this neglected structure. However, it questions whether the design concept and narrative will be apparent without explanation. Information boards, QR codes or screens could be considered to help explain how it has been developed, and how it relates to Old Kent Road and its communities.

The panel was unable to comment fully on the final mural design as the imagery shown was indicative. The use of fruit sticker emblems works well, but the panel would like to see more cohesion between the lighting scheme and the mural. Coordinating the colours of the lighting with the tones of the artwork could help achieve this. The panel also suggests bringing the mural down the sides of the bridge to allow pedestrians to engage with the artwork. Developing a maintenance strategy will be important to make sure the artwork and lighting are robust and have longevity.

Representing the different communities in the area is great, but the panel feels that the current approach reinforces the sense of segregation between ethnicities, ages, and faith groups, which it feels is not reflective of the area. Further clarity on how the various community hubs have been chosen should be provided. It also cautions against identifying specific hubs which are likely to be change over time. Although the artwork is intended to capture a moment in time, the panel highlights that the Old Kent Road is changing quickly with increasingly transient communities. The design could respond to this by being able to adapt and change over time.

### *Engagement process*

- The panel feels that the community engagement programme has been successful. It would be helpful to see documentation of the types of people engaged to date and the feedback they provided.
- The panel has concerns that the groups with whom the project has engaged are overly focussed on ethnic identity. It would like to see consideration of other community groups, such as the LGBTQ+ community which is one of the largest in London.
- The co-design process is a positive approach and will help to instil a sense of pride for the community. The panel suggests that this approach could act as an exemplar for other projects and developers, setting a benchmark for community engagement on other projects in the Old Kent Road area.

### *Community hubs*

- The panel understands the idea of identifying community hubs to capture the identity of the Old Kent Road. The panel would like to understand how many of these hubs could be represented and how the shortlist will be developed.

- However, the panel cautions that focusing on individual community groups may not represent the area accurately. There is a unique cohesion on Old Kent Road, where people from different backgrounds come together harmoniously. It would like to see whether this could be demonstrated more clearly through the artwork.
- The panel appreciates the desire to capture a moment in time, but it notes that for the artwork to have longevity the level of specificity should be carefully considered. Names of places and hubs are likely to change over time which would date the artwork, making it less appealing.
- Without explanation, the community hub concept and co-design approach may not be apparent. Providing information alongside the artwork through plaques, QR codes, screens or even audio speakers could be considered.

### *Mural*

- The panel is impressed by the amount of creative input into the mural design. It feels that the overlaying of shapes and colours works well, mirroring the busyness and layered character of the Old Kent Road.
- The panel would like to better understand the extent to which the final mural design will be curated or edited by the creative design team. It feels that this should be carefully balanced, to ensure that the community feels a sense of ownership while delivering a high-quality piece of work.
- However, the panel feels that restricting the art to the sides of the bridge limits the ambition of the project. It would like to see whether the mural can be enlarged by bringing it down the sides of the bridge. This would also allow pedestrians to directly engage with the artwork at street level.
- The fruit label concept is generally supported, and the panel feels that people can readily identify with the emblems. However, there were some concerns that these could feel tokenistic and too focused on Afro-Caribbean communities. This should be tested through community consultation.
- The panel would have liked to see more detail of the overall design development: for instance, whether alternative designs or options were considered as part of the original concept design.
- It suggests that integration of 'Old Kent Road' as branding could be used, as evident on bridges in other parts of London. This could also be rolled out onto merchandise, such as badges, tote bags or t-shirts.
- Building a narrative around local heroes or history could also be considered. This could help develop a collective memory of the place amid change, development and transient communities.

### *Lighting*

- The panel feels that the co-design element of the lighting design, developed with the older women's group, is positive.
- However, the panel suggests that the lighting and the mural feel like distinct projects, and it would like to see more cohesion between the two elements. Cohesion could be achieved through coordination of the colours used, additional highlighting of the mural itself, or bringing the artwork down the flank walls to directly engage with the lighting on the underside of the bridge.
- The panel suggests that it may be better to keep the lighting simple and calm, so as not to compete with the mural.
- However, the panel also feels that the lighting could be more dynamic. For instance, it could be designed to change as people walk past, or provide an opportunity to highlight colours that respond to key dates such as Christmas or Remembrance Day.

### *Programme and maintenance*

- Further detail about the programme for the ongoing consultation and delivery of the project would be welcome.
- The panel feels that it will be important to consider how the success and impact of the project can be measured, to assess whether it achieves its aims.
- A maintenance strategy should be developed to ensure that the artwork is kept to a high standard. Measures for preventing damage, such as from nesting pigeons or graffiti, should be considered.
- The panel questions the choice to paint the mural, noting the permanence and maintenance required. It suggests considering alternatives such as vinyl applications, which could reinforce the layering concept and provide an opportunity for the artwork to change, with additional stickers added over time.

### *Next steps*

- The panel looks forward to seeing how the project progresses and the development of the final designs.