

Press release

02 July 2003

Transformation of Trafalgar Square

This afternoon London's Mayor, Ken Livingstone, and Norman Foster will officially re-open Trafalgar Square following its recent dramatic transformation. The major changes restore Trafalgar Square to its rightful position as one of the nations most important civic spaces, rescuing it from its long and undignified history as a traffic roundabout. The Squares regeneration makes it a safer and more enjoyable environment.

Lord Foster commented:

The transformation of Trafalgar Square is a cause for great celebration. It is the culmination of years of work to improve the heart of Britains capital, giving it a new lease of life. The improvements recreate this major civic space, turning an undignified traffic roundabout into a truly public space, to be enjoyed by Londoners and visitors alike. It is the result of a careful balancing act between the needs of traffic and pedestrians, the ceremonial and the everyday and the old and the new.

Working with WS Atkins and Space Syntax, Trafalgar Square is the first phase of World Squares for All, the masterplan designed by Foster and Partners to improve the historical heart of Central London including Parliament Square, Whitehall and the river frontage between Hungerford and Westminster Bridges, creating a more civilised setting for its world-famous buildings, monuments and spaces.

The removal of traffic from the north side of the Trafalgar Square connects the National Gallery with the heart of the square through a broad flight of steps, replacing the cramped pavement with a generous pedestrian space the new North Terrace. This not only provides the National Gallery with an appropriate plinth, greatly improving its architectural composition, but also transforms the Square from an isolated traffic island into a truly grand urban space. Below the North Terrace a new café and free lavatories provide much-needed facilities for visitors to the Square.

The pedestrian space around the King Charles I statue on the south side of the Square has been significantly enlarged, creating both a suitable setting for this wonderful statue and a safe vantage point for the best views along the Mall, Whitehall, Pall Mall, Northumberland Avenue and the Strand. Wider pavements with upgraded materials, additional seating, improved lighting and consolidated traffic signage have been introduced to Charing Cross Road, Northumberland Avenue and Pall Mall. The pedestrianisation of St Martins Place (between St Martin's Lane and Trafalgar Square) creates a much more dignified setting for the Church of St Martin in the Fields and a new gateway to Covent Garden and Soho from the south.

The architecture of Barrys Trafalgar Square is bold and simple; the interventions continue this design ethos. Wherever possible, traditional materials have been used in the redesigned square and North Terrace. The walls and balustrade flanking the new grand stair and those at the entrance to both new

For further information
please contact Katy Harris at
Foster + Partners,
T +44 (0)20 7738 0455
F +44 (0)20 7738 1107
E press@fosterandpartners.com

facilities have recycled the historical nineteenth-century granite that was originally part of the North Terrace retaining wall. Many new features employ York stone, granite and cast bronze in their construction.

Every aspect of the Squares redesign incorporates features to improve universal access and the needs of people with disabilities. Two new lifts link the Square with the North Terrace and there are now baby-changing facilities and disabled lavatories. Strong visual and textural contrasts have been incorporated within the upgraded paving and steps making the square more accessible to people with visual impairments.

The project has been realised with close collaboration with Transport for London, the GLA, English Heritage, City of Westminster and other members of the client team.

Spencer de Grey, Partner in charge of the project added:

Making the connection between the National Gallery and the middle of Trafalgar Square was vital. Crossing just one road, you can now walk all the way from Leicester Square through Trafalgar Square across the Jubilee Bridge to Tate Modern and on to St Pauls via the Millennium Bridge. For pedestrians, we are beginning to see joined-up thinking in London at last. I hope that this project will become a blueprint for the future.

Notes

Foster and Partners was awarded the commission to masterplan 'World Squares for All' in November 1996 following an international competition. Extensive research involved two major studies of traffic and pedestrian movement and consultations with more than 180 public bodies and thousands of individuals. This research led to the development of two possible strategies, which were launched at a public exhibition in Whitehall in November 1997. The response was an overwhelming support for change.

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