

Leo Shapland

Meet King's Cross' new CEO, a global real estate leader passionate about placemaking who is now steering one of London's most iconic destinations into its next chapter.

“ Tell us about your career journey. What inspired you to pursue a career in real estate?

I've wanted to work with buildings and real estate from a very early age. I grew up admiring the transformation of disused warehouses on the Southbank – seeing them come back to life from their run-down state. As a teenager, a friend's mum was a developer, and I did some work experience labouring on one of her construction sites. Watching the transformation of the project from something run-down to a usable building was really inspiring, and seeing her role in it – across design, finance, legal negotiations and project management – looked like a varied and exciting role. I'm

really lucky to have had this experience – I love what I do.

Your career spans investment, asset management, development, and leadership roles across three continents. Looking back, what thread connects these experiences?

Probably two interwoven threads.... firstly, wanting to continually improve and learn more. I was always really conscious of not wanting to get boxed in in one particular discipline or sector, and wanted to understand as much as I can about the sector and industry as a whole rather than be a specialist. I've always tried close my knowledge gaps, and over time that focus has been on more general

leadership themes or skill sets outside of real estate. Secondly, I've been fortunate that people have taken risks and backed me to do new things that were sometimes outside my direct experience or skill set.

King's Cross is often cited as one of Europe's most successful regeneration projects. From your perspective, what makes it so special?

There are some foundational aspects in place that are typical of most successful real estate schemes – fantastic connectivity, good architecture and buildings that meet users' needs, and a commitment to sustainability. But I think King's Cross is special as it's more than just the 50 buildings. It's a really vibrant place that people from all walks of life want to spend time in to work, learn, shop and visit. The ground-floor vibrancy, facilitated by well-curated open spaces and events, a mix of heritage and modern spaces, and diverse people, creates an energy that's really positive.

You've joined at a pivotal moment for the estate. What excites you most about this new chapter for King's Cross?

We've got a lot of positives to build on. The opportunity is to take that momentum and positive perception, to go from the development phase of the Estate to improving it even further – accelerating our placemaking, community and customer engagement, and activation efforts to drive added value and impact across the triple bottom line.



What kind of culture do you hope to build at King's Cross under your leadership?

We want to co-create our culture, so this isn't just up to me – but I'd like to help create a high-performing environment with honesty, integrity, collaboration, customer centricity, a flat structure – and fun.

What was the biggest lesson from your decade at Tishman Speyer, working across London, San Francisco, and Seattle?

There are nuances to all markets – but fundamentally our customers want space that meets their rational needs and, increasingly, delivers on a range of softer or more emotional factors. Tishman Speyer is a truly excellent platform that sets really high standards, and it deserves its success.

Having seen markets across the US, Europe and UK, what are the most striking differences in how cities approach development and regeneration?

The most successful cities at regeneration encourage collaboration with developers, active participation in shaping the built environment, and strike a balance between shorter term needs (of the developer or prevailing politics) against the broader, longer-term socio-economic needs for the area or city. Where that gets unbalanced is where regeneration is fragmented, monolithic in use, or politics just prevents progress. San Francisco, for example, is incredibly difficult to develop in which has constrained growth and created periods of steep price increases for its constituents as a result. London isn't easy by any

WORDS OF WISDOM

If you could give your younger self one piece of advice from everything you've learned so far, what would it be?

Be pro-active with stakeholder management. Taking others' opinions throughout a process – especially those of key decision-makers – not only improves the chances of success, but offers up challenges that can often be uncomfortable at the time but lead to a better outcome.

What qualities do you value most in colleagues?

I actively seek – and look to hire – people around me that will give me straight feedback. I want people to tell me when they think I'm wrong or being tone deaf. No-one has all the answers, and we all have blind spots that need pointing out.

means – especially compared to some very-developer friendly US cities – but I think we end up with a better quality of design and urban fabric for all as a result.

What motivated your return to London?

It was a combination of personal and professional factors. I was in Seattle with Tishman Speyer and we had some setbacks in scaling up the business in the way we had planned. That combined with having a young family and wanting to be closer to family and network. And to get away from Trump!

You've navigated both entrepreneurial and institutional environments. What have you learned about leading teams in such different cultures?

Regardless of culture or organisation, people want the same things around purpose, motivation, rewards, feedback, transparency, work environment, fairness and trust.

What is your proudest achievement?

Professionally, it's my current role. I feel very fortunate to be the custodian of such a special place for London. More generally, I'm proud that I've tried to broaden my skillset and experience as much as possible, and taken active steps to do so.

Who have been the most influential mentors or role models in your career, and what lessons from them still guide you today?

I wouldn't want to name specific individuals as I've learnt things from everyone I've worked with. The role models I most look up to are those who empower their

teams, take on new challenges, don't shy away from challenging conversations, bring some humanity and personality to work (including the ability to have a laugh), and show integrity.

How do you bring a human touch to leadership?

Humility – we're all human and consequently need to have humility about ourselves and others. With that, we can all be a lot more open with each other, and open to the feedback that allows us to adapt and improve.

Honesty – being as transparent as possible with people helps build trust. Humour – we spend a lot of time at work and it's better if it's enjoyable.

Is there something you're passionate about outside of your career that people might be surprised to learn?

I love learning. It can be anything – a language, a new skill, something I know nothing about – but it's something I really enjoy.

If you weren't in real estate, what industry would you have worked in?

Can I say architecture? If not the built environment, then I think a foreign correspondent as a means to explore the world and improve my foreign language skills.

If you could spend a weekend anywhere in the world, where would it be?

I love travelling but am finding that with the internet and globalisation, the world is getting more and more homogenous. I'd love to go to somewhere off the beaten path like North Korea, Iran, or Bhutan for a really different experience ■ ”

PLACEMAKING

King's Cross is home to some of the world's leading creative and tech firms. How do you see the mix of uses and communities developing in the years ahead?

I'd find it really hard to definitively predict the long-term future, but creative and innovation industries will inherently innovate and change over time – and are doing so increasingly rapidly. Our job at King's Cross is to innovate and evolve with them to make sure we stay relevant not just to corporate occupiers, but their people, our visitors and our local community.

What does “placemaking” mean to you personally – and how do you measure success beyond the financials?

In many ways it's the opposite for us. Strong financial performance will come from successful placemaking – customer satisfaction, strong operational performance, footfall, brand prominence, positive perception, community engagement and so on.... they all create a special place, and the financials flow from that as a result of our success across these measures alongside the fundamentals of good-quality real estate.

What would you like your legacy as CEO to be – both for King's Cross and for the people you work with?

Really simple: I'd like people to say I left the organisation and place in a substantially better place than I found it. I'd like to have delivered material improvements for our place, our investors, the planet, our people and communities.

ESG and long-term stewardship are increasingly central to real estate. How do you see these principles evolving over the next decade?

Fortunately both of these are fundamental to what we're doing at King's Cross. We have a stable

investor base with long term outlook, and we're targeting sustainable long term value. It allows us to take a much more systematic and considered approach to driving performance and resilience.

The living, working, and leisure mix continues to blur. What do you think the “next generation” of mixed-use destinations will need to succeed?

Mixed use destinations, especially of scale, are more than just a collection of buildings – they're a place. If successful, that place becomes a community, with activation and a ground floor energy that makes people from all walks of life want to spend time there.

What trends or shifts in occupier behaviour are you watching most closely right now?

There are many, but a few stand out. How global asset values and the performance of equity and credit markets will influence pricing, capital flows and investment confidence. The rapid advancement of technology, from AI to robotics, is reshaping how offices and manufacturing spaces are used, driving new requirements around power, data, and cyber resilience. I'm also keeping a close eye on life sciences, where it's important to separate underlying data from the big headlines. Broader forces such as urbanisation, demographics, and shifting lifestyle preferences are changing what people want from where they live and work. Finally, the commitment of global and particularly US occupiers to ESG continues to evolve, all within a political and macroeconomic context that impacts values and decision-making. There's a lot to monitor!