Welcome
Your chance to help shape a unique cultural experience

We are embarking on a journey to transform a mile-long series of tunnels that have been kept in relative secrecy for nearly 70 years, into a new world-class immersive experience, capable of welcoming up to two million people per year. Known simply as ‘The London Tunnels’, the experiences would be curated by partnerships from the biggest names in entertainment and technology, to inspire exploration and imagination and to tell the true ‘inside story’ of this corner of the capital and its contribution to London’s place in world history.

This is your opportunity to help shape the experience by giving us your feedback before a planning application is submitted later this year.
You can do this in a number of ways:

- Speaking to a member of the team here today
- Filling out a feedback form
- Visiting www.thelondontunnels.com to find out more
- Emailing londontunnels@londoncommunications.co.uk
- Or calling our freephone 0800 092 0485

Who we are

The London Tunnels team is a group of investment specialists led by Angus Murray, the founder of Art for Preventable Extinction and previous President of Macquarie Bank USA Inc. in New York. The team has a proven track record of managing assets across various investment asset classes, including the not-for-profit Art for Preventable Extinction project, which is dedicated to preventing the extinction of the world’s animal species. Art for Preventable Extinction works with globally recognised artists who allow their work to be used in helping with preventing the extinction of the world’s animal species.

The London Tunnels Ltd will be working with a range of experts across the arts, technology, architecture, and business:
History

From a Second World War bunker to home of 20th Century espionage and host of the telephone exchange connecting the White House to the Kremlin during the Cold War, The Kingsway Exchange Tunnels offer the ‘Inside Story’ of London’s place in world history. They are without a doubt one of London’s best kept secrets and a forgotten icon of the 20th Century.

Provided below is a snapshot of its history – or at least what we know of it, before we tell you our exciting plans for its future.

The history of The Kingsway Exchange Tunnels

Together, the Kingsway Exchange Tunnels span an area of 8,000 sqm and stretch up to 76 meters in diameter, equal to the width of three London buses. They were kept virtually secret for nearly 70 years as part of the Government’s Official Secret Act, and only removed from the register in 2007.

The 'Kingsway Telephone Exchange' is an intentionally misleading name to hide its true location under Chancery Lane tube station. It is one of 10 planned bomb shelters that were commissioned following the start of the London Blitz when the UK Government decided, in October 1940, to construct a system of deep-level shelters linked to existing tube stations (of which only eight were completed).

The tunnels became the inspiration for James Bond’s ‘Q Branch’ following Ian Fleming’s experience working as the Admiralty’s liaison officer with the Special Operations Executive, which was located in the tunnels from January 1944 until May 1945.

Following the end of WW2, the Government recognised vulnerabilities on “long-distance terminals” and significantly expanded the size of the complex, with new tunnels added that made the largest subterranean structure ever built specifically for people within a metropolitan area. This work was completed in 1952.

By the late 1950s, the Kingsway Exchange was home to 5,000 trunk cables, capable of taking many thousands of calls each day, which were handled by 200 Post Office staff. In its peak, it dealt with 15% of London’s trunk traffic and also housed the famous ‘hot line’ that connected the United States and Russian presidents directly.

Under the British Telecommunication Act 1985, British Telecom took over the tunnels in the 1980s, creating the deepest licensed bar in London and a games room that included two snooker tables and a tropical fish tank, all for the enjoyment of its staff.
Creating experiences worthy of the stories they aim to tell

The London Tunnels will use the history hidden beneath our feet to deliver new experiences that inspire exploration and imagination.

Imagine being able to walk in the actual tunnels, built by the British and designed to protect Londoners during the Blitz of 1940. To able to see and experience what it was like for our grandparents and their parents to have lived through this period of time and the courage shown by the British people to come together during this period.

There could, for example, be a full-size model of a Spitfire Plane in the tunnel with high resolution screens displaying the images of the bombs falling on London with the noise and vibrations – all brought back to life so we can better understand our own history; the history of generations previous, and those that gave their lives to save Britain.

With their vast scale and long, near empty corridors, there is an opportunity to not only restore but recreate; allowing people to experience things that they may never get to and to explore broader topics across the arts, nature and sciences.

Bringing the experience to life

The history of these tunnels, along with their scale and location at the intersection of London's West End and the historic Square Mile, make them ripe to be one of the most exciting destinations for people the world over. They could also play a key part in helping further bolster the capital’s cultural and heritage offer, attracting up to two million people each year.

In order to bring the tunnels and their history to life, the vision for the project is to transform the Kingsway Exchange into one of the world’s most unique underground immersive experiences.

We can’t say at this stage what exactly these technologies will be and what other experiences can be offered as we have some way to go before we open. For now, we know that the tunnels are capable of hosting expansive high-resolution large-scale curved immersive screens – with multi-sensory experiences, interactive structures, scent-emitting technology and hundreds of acoustic pinpoint speakers.

Working with a range of partners to curate the experiences

Our plan is to work in partnership with everyone from major technological and entertainment giants, to local artists and curators, to create experiences exploring topics in history, science, nature and the arts. Owing to the scale of the tunnels, multiple experiences could be hosted at any one time.

What you see here today are just examples of the breadth of what is possible in these tunnels, with the experiences to be guided by the curators themselves.

We’ll also look to partner with global cultural institutions as well as universities, schools and labs to share knowledge, test new technology and ideas and host events on the latest immersions.

Connecting culture across the capital

The London Tunnels sit at the intersection between the City of London and Camden – two distinct boroughs, but both with significant and important cultural ambitions.

The project aims to collaborate with like-minded partners, museums and universities across both boroughs, to bring them together and act as London’s underground connector between the different parts of the capital.

Artists impressions of the experiences that could be created here

Our ambition for this project:

1. Preserving The London Tunnels and the part they played in history by giving them a renewed sense of public purpose

2. Capturing the Imaginations of people the world over, whilst respecting those who live and work here right now

3. Delivering tangible economic benefits to an area still rebuilding from the pandemic

4. Ensuring that The London Tunnels can be an experience shared by people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds
Preserving The London Tunnels and the part they played in history

We have already undertaken an extensive digital mapping exercise so that we can capture in detail the tunnels exactly as they were left when last occupied in the late 20th century.

Going forward, we will continue to work with heritage experts to preserve and bring to life many of the objects inside such as the telephone exchange, generators, and underground bar, which could all form an essential part of the experiences.

We are committed to:

- Investing an initial estimated £140 million into restoring, preserving and fitting out the site, with a further £80 million allocated to installing the immersive technology.
- Preserving objects that reflect the tunnels’ history, including the Trunk Exchange and Generators.
- Allowing thorough exploration of the tunnels by historical groups and societies before any modifications are made.
- Having regular experiences dedicated to the tunnels and their history.
- Reinstalling “the deepest licensed bar in London” – an existing feature of the tunnels dating back to the 1980s – for everyone to enjoy as part of the experience.
Capturing the imagination of people around the world, whilst respecting those who live and work here

In an average year, we believe we could welcome around two million people to the tunnels. While naturally much of this activity will be below ground and unknown to those in the streets above, we are committed to ensuring that visitors are managed carefully to limit any impact on those living and working nearby.

Managing visitors and entering the Tunnels

We are proposing a single main entrance to the tunnels on Farnival Street with a separate ‘back of house’ entrance at 31–33 High Holborn. A double decker lift would transport visitors down to the tunnels to begin their experience.

With only a limited food and beverage offering within the premises, it is our desire that they help to fill the existing range of bars and restaurants in the area rather than dwell and gather in and around the site.

A pre-paid booking system will limit any queuing along Farnival Street and we are also proposing street improvements for pedestrian comfort and safety.

Travelling to and from the experience

The tunnels are fantastically well-located to a range of public transport options and will be a ‘bar free’ experience, save for school trips who can be accommodated at an existing coach parking bay on High Holborn.

Chancery Lane, Holborn, Farringdon, City Thameslink and Blackfriars are all located within a 15-minute walk (or significantly less), meaning there are easy connections to tube lines and national overground services. This is further supplemented by local bus services and cycle hire schemes, all just a stone’s throw from the site itself on High Holborn.

Our operational hours will be mindful of peak travel times, opening to the public from 10am–8pm to avoid both morning and evening rush hour.

A sensitive above-ground development

We want to make sure that the tunnels rich history, as well the character of the local area, is reflected in the design of the above-ground buildings.

Our plans include the sensitive reinterpretation of 39 Farnival Street to provide a welcoming entrance for visitors as well as redevelopment of 40 Farnival Street to create the visitor exit.

We’ve drawn inspiration from the local area to develop a design for 40 Farnival Street that forms a counterpoint to the materials and colour palette at no.39, with a lighter and more open facade.
Delivering tangible economic benefits to an area still rebuilding from the pandemic

The area around High Holborn was heavily affected by the effects of the pandemic, with shops, offices and cafés having to close over lockdown. Two years on and changing work patterns have meant footfall has not yet returned.

Our ambition is to drive footfall back to the area and provide a much-needed boost to the local economy. Making the tunnels a place to share and develop skills and knowledge, and for local partners and business to collaborate, will ensure that this prosperity is shared by all.

Provided below are just some of the tangible social and economic benefits that could be delivered by this scheme:

- Increasing local spending by between £60m and £80m per year.
- Supporting at least 40 jobs onsite, at a range of skill levels.
- Maximising opportunities to support local jobs and apprenticeships, working with Camden and the City of London to advertise job opportunities locally and plan for future jobs and training.
- Paying all staff the London Living Wage.
- Offering free school trips for all 10,000 primary school children in Camden and the City of London.
- Hosting work experience placements for local schools.
- Working in partnership with local community centres and groups.

Bringing direct local benefit to Camden, the Square Mile and beyond

The retail and local businesses in this part of London are struggling, especially when compared to the neighbouring West End and financial district in the City of London. This is most obvious on the weekend as offices close and footfall drops.

In line with the principles of the City of London’s Destination City ambitions and its Cultural Strategy we consider that this project will play a vital role in breathing new life into the neighbourhood, attracting a more diverse range of audiences, for more of the week, and driving investment that can spur further development and boost its position as a destination.

Going forward we would be looking to work with local Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), to create bespoke programmes that will help to encourage better collaboration and networking between local business to ensure that this prosperity is shared by all.

Skills and educational opportunities

We are keen to explore how we could work with local educational partners to bring forward bespoke and specialised training opportunities on new ideas and technologies within the immersive field – which the tunnels will be at the forefront of.

This would facilitate skills and knowledge transfer to the local workforce with some of these opportunities reserved for those living and working nearby. This will in turn provide a further boost to the local economies here and across Camden and the City of London.
An experience that can be shared by all

It is our ambition that everyone, regardless of their economic circumstances, is able to enjoy such a significant London landmark. We are therefore committed to offering free tickets to school children through schools and setting up a daily ballot for complimentary tickets. We also hope that students can then experience the many other cultural attractions nearby as a full day out.

Our commitments:

1. Offering free tickets for all primary school children in Camden and the City of London.
2. Exploring opportunities for discounts to those who need them most, such as Universal and Pension Credit holders, emergency service workers and carers, teachers, students and young people.
3. Exploring partnerships with local, UK-wide and global cultural partners to create cost-saving packages for visitors.
4. Discounts to those who live and study nearby.

The importance of accessibility

We are committed to ensuring that the Tunnel is fully accessible, including to wheelchair users or parents with prams, and the safety of these groups has been a key part of our design work so far.

All experiences will also be multi-sensory and designed to be enjoyable to those with learning difficulties or sensory impairments. Staff will also all receive equality, diversity and inclusion training.
What comes next?

Thank you for taking the time to review our ambitious plans for The London Tunnels. We are committed to working closely with you on our proposals as they continue to develop.

We believe this is a once in a lifetime opportunity to deliver this exciting project – bringing the Tunnels back into use with a new sense of purpose and capturing the imagination of people around the world.

Leave your feedback

We’d love to know your thoughts based on what you’ve seen today and would appreciate it if you could take the time to complete our feedback form so that we can consider your thoughts before we submit a planning application later this year.

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Thank you