



# Earls Court's next big act

By Mel Flaherty | 07 May 2025

Like all good urban regeneration projects – and most bad ones – the planned replacement of the former Earls Court Exhibition Centre with a new £10bn, 44-acre mixed-use neighbourhood has been a long time in the making.



Rob Heasman, chief executive of Earls Court Development Company (ECDC), does not tempt fate but he is hopeful the scheme is on the cusp of taking a big step forward. No date has been confirmed yet, but Heasman believes the masterplan, which straddles London boroughs of Kensington and Chelsea and Hammersmith and Fulham, will go to a local planning committee this summer, alongside the detailed application to Kensington and Chelsea for the first phase. All being well, enabling works for the infrastructure and vertical build are scheduled to begin by the end of 2026 and the first residents are expected to move in by 2030.

“There’s been a change in London; there seems to be more togetherness, with national and local government focused on driving economic growth,” he says. “A project like this, we believe can deliver £3bn of growth per year to the UK, so everyone is super-focused on getting it going.

“There’s an acute focus now on delivering homes and economic growth and you’ve got a site here that is shovel-ready, with great backers behind it.”

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ECDC is owned by Earls Court Partnership Limited (ECPL), a joint venture (JV) between developer Delancey, Dutch pension group APG and Transport for London (TfL). In 2012, ECDC announced plans to attract £5bn of investment to fund 2.5m sq ft of climate-friendly office and lab space. While there have been no more announcements, ECPL has appointed Richard Jackson to support its capital-raising strategy. As co-founder and former managing director of Apache Capital and its single-family rental housing development and operation arm Present Made, he has form in this area.

Getting going and moving closer to a return on investment is, naturally, high on the list for ECPL, which bought the site for £425m in 2019. Locals and visitors to the area have also been keen to see it come to fruition, having long waited to see the site reused, even before it was levelled in 2015.



ECPL bought the site from Capital & Counties (Capco), TfL's former development partner, for the plot within the Earl's Court/West Kensington Opportunity Area. Capco first acquired a 50% share in the site in 2007, bought the rest in 2010 and in 2013 gained outline approval from then London mayor Boris Johnson for a controversial masterplan that included 6,000 new homes alongside shops, offices and leisure facilities.

ECPL tackled the most contentious aspect of Capco's plans as soon as it took control, by selling the West Kensington and Gibbs Green housing estates earmarked for demolition back to Hammersmith and Fulham council.



ECDC has since worked with the local community to ensure the plans meet the needs of residents and support west London's wider growth. To help breathe new life into the consultation process after Capco's plans were scrapped, ECDC ran an ongoing series of light installations, public art displays and pop-up events. Activities that have been held on site include BBC Earth Experience and Come Alive! The Greatest Showman Circus Spectacular, a live spin-off of the hit movie. Leisure operator Padel Social Club has five padel courts and a wellness centre there.



Heasman says offering activities at this stage has the dual benefit of bringing people to the site as well as allowing ECDC and operators to try out activities that could have a long-term future at the development. Flexible cultural venues – the exact nature of which is yet to be determined – will play a prominent role in the rejuvenation of the site, which is famous for its long heritage of public entertainment, from the pleasure gardens of the late 18th century to iconic gigs and exhibitions in its more recent history.

In addition, there is the community hub near the housing estates, which is open daily. ECDC is conducting ongoing consultation with ECDC's Public Realm and Inclusivity Panel of paid representatives from a diverse range of local people.



## Focus on character

ECDC has its office in a building at the main entrance to the site, as well as its 'Con Corner' building on Lillie Road, housing a tabletop model of the whole masterplan. It features a detailed wall model of phase one alongside CGI images of the six buildings it encompasses. These will be built within three of the masterplan's seven 'character' areas: Warwick Crescent, Aisgill Gardens and Empress Place – and will provide 1,500 homes for rent and sale, including student accommodation and later living. In addition, they will establish an east-west connection, creating the framework for a network of accessible public spaces.

One significant result of all this consultation was the updating of the masterplan in 2022 to increase the affordable housing element to 35%. The latest plans also reduce overall development by 10% and increase green space by 20%. Boosting the amount of open space in the area was top of the wish list for local people, Heasman says.

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During the pandemic, ECDC opened up a 'safe route' for invited visitors to be able to access the site. This gives access to the foundations of the former second exhibition hall, now known as The Table and set to become the 4.5-acre Table Park. This is the centre point of a new public realm and green open spaces connecting West Kensington station at the north to the site through what will become Lillie Sidings Square – envisaged as the scheme's equivalent to Granary Square at King's Cross – across to Earl's Court station at the east and Victoria Brompton station to the south of the site. It also gives a great view of the entire plot, otherwise visible only from the air.

Easily visible to the north west is another major regeneration project, Olympia, connecting West Brompton by the Mildmay Overground line, with Shepherd's Bush one stop being served by Westfield White City and the fast-growing White City Innovation District.

"What's happening in west London is a movement every bit as big as what's been happening in the east over the past 15 years," says Heasman. "Earl's Court has always been a fundamental part of London, but when you marry in the Overground it's increased and that's before mentioning Old Oak [Common] and everything that's going to be built there. Joining those bits together, it's quite a sizeable transformation of west London."





The unique location and Earl's Court's place in the broader west London transformation referred to by ECDC as "a new westside story" – was one of the three design principles. The architects of the phase-one buildings were asked to consider. The other two were to be "good ancestors" with exemplary standards of sustainability and to create "an Earl's for everyone" by addressing inclusivity.

Heasman is determined for the development to leave a positive legacy for generations to come. "I believe passing the baton on mega projects is one of the most important universal rules that needs to happen," he says. "Where you have very big successful projects like King's Cross – that has been done really well." He admits this is a challenge for long-term schemes like this, which could be affected by the evolution of everything from demand to innovation.

As the scheme prepares for the delivery phase, Heasman says he is increasingly thoughtful about this aspect, including consideration of everything from procurement charters to over waste management that might apply to retailers. He adds that with 7.5m sq ft of floorspace planned over the scheme, it will be "every bit as significant" as King's Cross, Stratford and Battersea.

Heasman himself has been involved with his fair share of major projects. In the past years, these all happen to have started with 'E': Elephant and Castle, Euston and now Earl's Court.

"It hasn't been 'E'asy," he quips, pointing out the biggest difference between this and previous big schemes is the fact that he started this one during the Covid pandemic. Working with masterplanners to prepare a scheme that provided for future living, work and cultural needs at a time when no one could foresee the long-term effects of what was happening in the world was "overwhelming and almost energising", he recalls.



Barring any further unseen circumstances, Heasman should begin to find out relatively just how well they overcame that and all the other challenges the Earl's Court site has faced over the years.

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