

PUBLIC SQUARE TO BE BUILT ON DA VINCI CODE SITE

A part of the West End made famous by the Da Vinci Code is set to be transformed into a new public square in central London. Great Queen Street which sits at the crossroads of Covent Garden and Drury Lane, and was once a secret pathway used by royalty and coveted by the Brotherhood of Masons - will shed its mysterious past by being transformed. The work forms part of the continued enhancement of the West End to encourage people to walk between Lincoln's Inn Fields, Holborn, Covent Garden and Leicester Square.

Plans for the public square, which have been championed by the Clear Zone Partnership between Westminster City Council and Camden Council, and supported by Transport for London, will see it enhanced into an oasis in the heart of the city where people can appreciate the fine architecture and sit beneath newly planted trees. Councillor Chris Knight, Camden Council's Executive Member for Environment, said: "The new square will transform a lacklustre junction into a new public square that will improve residents' quality of life and benefit businesses and visitors in central London."

The scheme was designed by the Clear Zones Partnership - made up of Westminster City Council, Camden Council and the City of London - working together to reduce congestion, air pollution and noise, and encourage sustainable modes of transport in Central London. The Freemasons wanted to build a square on the street so that they could enhance the setting of their headquarters which sits on the corner with Wild Street. Both the street and the Freemasons' building have been immortalised after being included in Dan Brown's best selling book The Da Vinci Code. Great Queen Street was originally created in the 1600s as a royal private lane for Queen Anne, King James I's wife, to use as a secret cut through to Lincoln's Inn Fields.

On its corner is The Freemasons' Hall which is one of London's few unaltered grand buildings from the 1930s, still used for its original purpose as the headquarters of the Masons in England. The new square's construction will cost £640,000 and should be completed by the summer. The pavements in Great Queen Street will be widened and laid with York stone, the parking bays are being paved with granite setts, the traffic lights and guard railings will then be removed, and step free crossings built to make it easier for people using prams, wheelchairs and just walking to get around.

NEW WEBSITE LAUNCHED FOR WCHCD

The Worshipful Company of Hackney Drivers is delighted to announce the launch of their new website. As a thriving Livery Company in the City today, the WCHCD website has been designed to be easy to use and contain news of the Company. It can be found at www.hackneycarriagedriverscompany.com so log on and find out more about the Livery Company for London's cab trade. Whilst many of the members today are from London, some hail from outside the metropolis and include hackney carriage drivers from as far afield as Edinburgh, Liverpool and other areas of the country. The website also has links to The Magical Taxi Tour, one of the charitable endeavours for which The WCHCD is famous.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor

Having read John Kennedy's article in Taxi Globe outlining 9 major points he would like addressed, I wish him well in his quest, if half of them were to be granted tomorrow then the cab trade as a consequence would be much better off. Although the article is well meaning the difficult thing to achieve would be to have all cab drivers singing from the same hymn sheet and displaying a bit more respect for their fellow drivers. I've been a badge holder for some 18 years now and at no time have I seen it worse than it is now with regard to the lack of etiquette practised by cab drivers towards each other on the road. Sometimes it seems to be a dog eat dog environment, I'm not saying all drivers are guilty, it may be a minority it may not, all I know is that I'm out 6 days a week and most of the grief I get is not from mini cabs, but greedy, impatient cab drivers nicking jobs after you've let them out of a side road, or just pulling out in front of you anyway which seems to be a popular little stunt nowadays or from under your nose while you've been ranked up for 45 minutes. Then you have the tailgaters the list goes on & on, I'm sure most of you have experience of this & all know where I'm coming from. This behaviour, especially in these lean times has a bad effect on the morale of those of us that try to "play the game", like the job isn't hard enough. I know this to be the case because I've spoken to many other drivers who feel the same as I do, yet we are powerless to do anything about it because the trade we work in seems to condone it. The licensed taxi trade needs to address this issue, there are things that can be done. For starters, trade papers could draw up something like an "etiquette charter" or such like that gives advice and information, I know it would be difficult but at least you'd be doing something about what is a serious problem. The people who engage in this behaviour know nothing will happen to them, they seem to be thick skinned, so a bit of abuse doesn't bother them, so why not take their numbers and send them to trade mags, try and shame them into a bit of decency. This would work because if there was a "cabwatch" (for want of a better phrase) addressing this problem the same number plates would be coming up time and time again from different locations reported by different drivers, it wouldn't take long, a matter of months before the hardcore culprits are identified, all it needs is the will to work. Until this problem is at least addressed, the cab trade will always be fragmented simply because those of us that try to earn an honest living and play by "the rules" will always be less better off than those who display no moral regard or respect for their fellow cab drivers. Finally if this fragmented cab trade of ours had acted earlier and addressed these issues I'm sure this type of behaviour wouldn't be half as widespread as it is today. Yeh, ok mini cabs are a problem, so are pedi cabs so are all the traffic regs but from what I see on a daily basis so are quite a few of our own fraternity.

G. Hurst