

July 8, 2011 10:30 pm

Aga Khan to build cultural centre in London

By Daniel Thomas, Property Correspondent

The Aga Khan has signed an agreement to build a cultural and education centre at King's Cross, almost a decade after the spiritual leader of Ismaili Muslims had to abandon plans for an Islamic art museum at another site.

The Aga Khan Development Network, the charitable agency founded by Prince Karim Aga Khan IV, has finalised terms with owners of King's Cross Central to buy land for an 8m sq ft development behind King's Cross station. King's Cross Central is one of Europe's biggest redevelopment projects.

The Aga Khan is the Imam, or spiritual leader, of Ismailis, who constitute one of the main branches of Shia Islam. Prince Karim Al Hussein, the 49th Iman, succeeded his grandfather, Sir Sultan Mahomed Shah Aga Khan, in 1957 at the age of 20.

The new complex will not include a mosque, according to one person familiar with the agreement.

Under the deal signed at the beginning of the month, the first phase will include a new university building and student accommodation, as well as premises for the Institute of Ismaili Studies and the Aga Khan Foundation.

There will also be homes, offices and additional space for exhibitions and concerts in future phases, which will showcase the group's history and culture.

The project was supported by the previous Labour government. Plans to build a museum of Islamic art on land owned by St Thomas's Hospital and King's College in south London collapsed almost a decade ago.

In a statement, the Aga Khan Development Network confirmed it had entered into a series of agreements to develop a number of buildings over the coming years with the King's Cross Central Limited Partnership.

"The agreements provide for the Aga Khan Development Network and King's Cross Central to work closely together in the design and construction of each building, which will include educational, office, cultural, retail and residential uses.

"This will initially lead to the relocation of the existing activities of the Aga Khan University, the Institute of Ismaili Studies and the Aga Khan Foundation from their leased premises on nearby Euston Road and the relocation of related student accommodation."

The Aga Khan Development Network will work with the owners of the King's Cross

Central, which include developer Argent, on the detailed designs for the buildings. The plans for a cultural centre are at an early stage, and no architects have been appointed.

There are plans for more than 8m sq ft of buildings on the 67-acre London development, including offices, shops, homes and other university buildings. The Aga Khan's plans account for about 6 per cent of the total space in the scheme.

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