

26 August 2025

## **KINGSTON TO HOST *WHAT IF?* - A LONDON DESIGN FESTIVAL INSTALLATION ABOUT PEOPLE, PLACE & POSSIBILITIES**

- ***What If?* opens 13 September & runs 15-20 September in central Kingston**
- ***The event programme includes a pop-up Urban Room, talks and walks***

This September **Kingston Society** will be encouraging residents to shape where they live and work as they explore the week-long [\*What If?\*](#) installation in central Kingston.

Organised as part of both the London Design Festival's<sup>1</sup> annual series of city-wide events and Kingston 2025<sup>2</sup> celebrations, *What If?* invites those most affected by change to join the creative conversation and feel empowered to influence their community.

Over a thought-provoking programme that includes a series of talks and walks, visitors will be able to journey through Kingston's past, reflect on present development challenges, and discover their potential to influence the borough's future.

### ***WHAT IF?* INSTALLATION**

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Inspired by the concept of an Urban Room, Kingston College Creative Industries Centre's Penny School Gallery will be transformed into five creative zones exploring place and possibilities. In collaboration with local innovators, designers, artists and architects, these areas will cover heritage, art and design, architects, designers and the future Urban Room.

During their visit, people will be invited to contribute ideas to an evolving physical map of Kingston, engage with members of the Kingston Society in open sessions and leave behind drawings, stories, or questions of their own to feed into the future Urban Room design.

Sharing the inspiration behind *What If*, Kingston Urban Room Project Lead Peter Karpinski said: *"For many residents, development decisions seem to happen behind closed doors, so it's easy to feel shut out of the process or unaware there's even a way in. But it doesn't have to be that way. The built environment affects us all and good design is created with - not just for - people.*

*"Our 'What If' installation will show how, instead of treating public input as a planning formality, an Urban Room would recognise residents as valued voices and put people and their priorities at the heart of decisions that shape our borough's future."* he added.

### ***WHAT IF?* EVENTS PROGRAMME**

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To highlight the link between good design and local pride, and encourage people to connect with their surroundings, the free programme also includes themed walks and talks.

#### ***KINGS-TOWN TALK:***

**Discussion exploring the role of public art in urban spaces: Thurs 18 Sept (12.30-2pm)**

- Lunchtime debate in the Kingston College Creative Industries Centre as key creative voices - including local artists, council officers and Kingston organisations - debate the connection between public art, heritage and communities.
- The panel discussion will be followed by a Q&A session, where the audience can contribute their thoughts and questions around the social function of creative works in the public realm.

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<sup>1</sup> London Design Festival: [londondesignfestival.com/activities/what-if-15ec7733-b1c1-4c75-8842-987e29656974](https://londondesignfestival.com/activities/what-if-15ec7733-b1c1-4c75-8842-987e29656974)

<sup>2</sup> Kingston 2025: <https://www.kingston.gov.uk/kingston2025>

## GUIDED WALKS:

### Public Trail - Art in the Open: Tues 16 Sept (10.30am-12.30pm)

- With the town centre home to a wide range of outdoor art, this guided walk will reflect on around 20 artworks, each portraying a different side of Kingston's character and revealing how past and present Kingston are connected.
- Starting from the Penny School Gallery, and finishing at the Stanley Picker Gallery, the tour will cover the evolution of local art, from the newest additions to historic landmarks, including some that have been lost along the way.

### Historic Kingston - Footsteps Through Time: Thurs 18 Sept (2.30-5pm)

- 2025 marks the 1100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of King Athelstan's coronation – a perfect moment to reflect on legacy, identity and change on a walk where every stop has a story to tell.
- This journey through the town's colourful past will start from the Coronation Stone at Guildhall before taking in medieval bridges, coaching inns, and places once at the heart of local justice, from former prisons and correction houses to militia barracks and stocks.

### Coombe Conduit - The Palace Pipeline: Sat 20 Sept (10am-3pm)

- Follow the flow of history on this 3.5-mile walk tracing the ingenious Tudor route that channelled fresh water from Coombe to Court for 350 years; a route whose influence ensures it remains marked on Ordnance Survey maps today.
- The tour includes rare access to the hidden chambers of Coombe Conduit (where the walk starts), an hour's break for lunch (not provided) at All Saints Church, and free entry to Hampton Court Palace Gardens (where it ends).

At a time of great change across the borough, Kingston Society hopes aligning its *What If?* programme with one of the world's leading design events will spark wider interest and highlight how a permanent, visible space in Kingston would be a catalyst for greater local involvement.

Visit [kingstonurbanroom.org.uk](https://kingstonurbanroom.org.uk) for more information on the *What If?* installation

**Dates:** 13 to 20 September 2025 (excluding 14 September)

**Times:** Saturdays 13 & 20 September: 10am - 4pm  
Monday 15 – Thursday 18 September: 10am - 8pm  
Friday 19 September: 10am - 5pm  
Private viewing Monday 15 September 5pm - 7.30pm

**Venue:** Penny School Gallery, Kingston College Creative Industries Centre,  
55 Richmond Road, Kingston, KT2 5BP

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### About Kingston Urban Room

- Over the last 60 years, Kingston Society has spoken up for good design and pushed for well-managed developments that add value to the borough's character. Since 2017, it has been campaigning to bring an Urban Room to Kingston.
- Following positive feedback from its 4-week Urban Room trial (January – February 2023<sup>3</sup>), Kingston Society has continued to lobby for a permanent space where people can explore proposals, learn how decisions are made, share concerns, dream up alternatives and drive positive changes.
- Their original pilot demonstrated how Urban Rooms could foster climate awareness, so that communities can visualise and engage with their collective future. Kingston Society therefore believes the model could contribute positively to wider societal issues and promote a more sustainable future.
- More info: [kingstonurbanroom.org.uk](https://kingstonurbanroom.org.uk) / [instagram.com/Kingstonurbanroom](https://www.instagram.com/Kingstonurbanroom).

<sup>3</sup> <https://kts.org.uk/kingston-deserves-a-permanent-urban-room/>

**About Kingston Society:**

- Founded in 1962, The Kingston upon Thames Society is a volunteer-run membership group and registered charity (1097304) that exists to promote high standards of planning, conservation and design in the Royal Borough, including Kingston, Coombe, the Maldens, Surbiton, Tolworth and Chessington.
- Affiliated to the Civic Trust, Kingston Society is Kingston's major voluntary and independent organisation concerned with planning and conservation.
- A significant part of the Society's activity is to review and comment on planning consultations and applications across the borough. Kingston Society also recognises good local architecture and design through its Townscape Awards, held every two years.
- To find out more, join future events, or become a member from just £10 per year, visit [www.kts.org.uk](http://www.kts.org.uk) or follow us on [Facebook](#) and [X/Twitter](#).