Summary

Heythrop College, on Kensington Square, is closing in December 2018. The Jesuits, who own the site, are selling it in order to release funds to help secure the long term future of the college elsewhere.

The Council intends to produce a supplementary planning document (SPD) that would set the parameters for the redevelopment of the site.

This document explores some of the site constraints and looks at some issues and options to be considered in response to any development proposals.

This document will be consulted on for four weeks between 20 October 2015 and 17 November 2015. Residents, businesses and any other interested parties are invited to comment. The responses will be considered in drafting the final document.
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1 Introduction

Purpose

1.1 This issues and options paper has been prepared to give the local community an early opportunity to comment on how the site could be redeveloped.

1.2 The next stage will be to produce a supplementary planning document (SPD) to be used by the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea to inform decisions about future development of the site.

1.3 This will set out the relevant planning policies that should be addressed by proposals for the site, any planning and design issues specific to the site, and some of the key information that an applicant should include in any future planning application.

Background

1.4 Heythrop College is a theology and philosophy college which forms part of the University of London. Student numbers have been falling in recent years as students struggle to afford tuition fees and accommodation locally; the buildings themselves are costly to run. As a result the college will cease to operate from this site in December 2018. The site is owned by the Jesuits who acquired it in order to try to secure the long term future of the college.

1.5 A supplementary planning document must be produced with regard to current national policies, the London Plan and the Local Plan policies and the Council’s other SPDs.

1.6 Proposals for the development of this site should seek to further the objectives of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The NPPF emphasises the importance of delivering a wide choice of high quality homes and creating sustainable, inclusive and mixed communities. It attaches importance to good design and enhancing the historic environment.

1.7 The NPPF says that “SPDs should be used where they can help applicants make successful applications... and should not be used to add unnecessarily to the financial burdens on development.” (para.153)

1.8 The development plan for the area consists of the London Plan (2011, as revised 20153), the Council’s Consolidated Local Plan (2010, as revised 2015). The Local Plan sets out the strategic vision for the Borough. It was adopted in 2010 and is the Council’s principal development plan document.

1.9 The adopted SPD will provide planning guidance for development management purposes and be considered as a material consideration in the determination of any planning applications for the redevelopment of the site.

1.10 The site comprises a number of buildings and houses a variety of social and community uses as well as student accommodation. The main use of the site is as a residential institution (Class C2 in the Use Class Order).

1.11 The Heythrop College building (23 Kensington Square) and the adjacent 24 Kensington Square are Grade II listed buildings. The listed status of the buildings on site and the need to preserve their setting means that any work must receive listed building consent as well as planning permission. It also means that there are constraints to the development of the site in terms of the height and scale of any new development.
2 Site Description

Site Location and Context

2.1 The site, currently the Heythrop College campus, lies just off busy Kensington High Street in a much quieter residential area. It fronts onto Kensington Square behind the Barkers Building towards the eastern end of Kensington High Street. It is very accessible, located 200m from High Street Kensington Underground Station and a five minute walk from Kensington Gardens. The site is approximately 1 hectare (10,000 sq.m) and sits within the Kensington Square Conservation Area.

2.2 The construction of the buildings forming Kensington Square began in 1685 and was completed by around 1700. The square was the first one to be built outside the centre of London and it is the sixth oldest square in the capital.

2.3 The existing college buildings are located mainly to the north and south of the site with a large open landscaped garden area and enclosed sports court set between these two developed zones. To the north the main college buildings form the southwest corner of Kensington Square.

2.4 A four storey convent building and chapel facing onto the square form the eastern site boundary. To the west the site is bound by the London Underground Circle and District Lines set in a deep cutting with retaining walls.

2.5 West of the railway cutting the surrounding buildings are generally large scale and comparatively tall, with the Copthorne Tara Hotel being particularly dominant at 13 storeys and 120m in length.

2.6 To the east and south the surrounding context is generally smaller scale consisting of three to four storey terraces and mews with the historic street pattern largely intact.
1. Aerial view of the Heythrop College site
2. View looking west across the sports court towards the Copleston Wing
3. Rear of main building (23 Kensington Square)
4. View from the rear of the main building looking towards the centre of the site
5. Looking towards the Convent and Cottages and vehicular access to the site
6. View of Alban Hall
7. View of Convent and open space at the centre of the site
Site Summary

Strengths

• The site is well connected to the wider area through public transport. It is less than five minutes walk to High Street Kensington Underground Station and close to a number of bus routes on Kensington High Street.
• It is located close to a number of major headquarters in the borough including Sony, EMI, Mulberry Group and The White Company.
• There is a large area of green open space within the site, providing good visual amenity, which features a number of mature trees.
• The Chapel of the Assumption and 24 Kensington Square are both listed buildings. Together with the main college building, these contribute positively to the character and appearance of Kensington Square and the wider conservation area.
• It is a quiet enclave which is unusual in central London.
• It is within a highly sought after area.

Weaknesses

• Access to the site is extremely limited. There is one vehicle access point via South End, which is not wide enough to accommodate a significant increase in traffic or large lorries.
• The site is very insular with no frontage onto streets aside from the main college building on Kensington Square. Whilst it happily accommodates a college campus with a relatively small number of students who generally use public transport, the site may be unsuitable for more intensive use.
• The mid-20th century buildings adjacent to the railway are of poor quality and out of keeping with the townscape found in the rest of the conservation area.

Opportunities

• There is an opportunity to make better use of the site, by replacing or renewing the buildings to the rear of the site with high quality architecture that is more sympathetic to its historic setting and could make a positive contribution to the conservation area.
• The blocks to the rear of the site could be replaced with buildings to support new uses on the site.
• The site is large and could accommodate a higher density development, taking into account the sensitivities and constraints presented.
Threats

- An inappropriate use, particularly one that increases traffic in the area could have a significant impact on the amenity of local residents.
- New development on the site could have a negative impact on the character of Kensington Square and the amenity of residents, particularly those living in the low rise housing at South End and South End Row.
- The listed buildings on site and heritage value may limit the extent of development achievable on the site.
- Loss of open space could threaten the ecological and biological diversity of the site and compromise some of the mature trees.
3 Issues and Options

3.1 If the site is developed, the following constraints on development will need to be carefully considered and addressed:

1 Heritage

• The impact on the amenity of the existing neighbouring dwellings. The proximity of the buildings in South End, South End Row and Kynance Place will make significant increases in height along the southern boundary of the site challenging (Policy CL5, Chapter 34, RBKC Consolidated Local Plan).

• The proximity of listed buildings and heritage assets will affect the scale and nature of new development (Policy CL3, CL4 and CL12, Chapter 34, CLP). Any redevelopment of the site will be expected to acknowledge the historical context of this site (NPPG Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment, paragraph 4).

• Building heights will need to be justified from a townscape perspective in accordance with Policy CL2 (Chapter 34, CLP) and the Building Heights SPD.

2 Land Use

• The main use of the site is as a residential institution (Class C2 in the Use Class Order). This use class comprises residential care homes and sheltered housing where there is an element of care, hospitals, nursing homes, boarding schools, residential colleges and training centres.

• Any proposed change of use would need to satisfy Policy CK1 (Chapter 30, CLP), which protects social and community uses. The policy provides a sequential test and lists the circumstances by which land can be converted, or in extreme cases lost, to provide alternative uses. In all cases, this must be to the overall benefit to social and community provision within the borough.

• Subject to meeting the requirements of Policy CK1, a modest amount of enabling residential development may be acceptable on the site where this provides a greater benefit to social and community provision in the borough.

• Certain uses may not be suitable, particularly where these may result in an increase in vehicle movement and traffic congestion around the site.

3 Access

• The site has a single point of vehicular access via quiet residential streets and new development will need to prove it does not contribute any unacceptable additional pressures on traffic congestion or parking. This will affect the scale and nature of development on site (Policy CT1, Chapter 32, CLP).

• A transport assessment will be required as part of any planning application for new development. Any new development would not qualify for additional on street parking permits (Policy CT1, Chapter 32, CLP). A car free development should be promoted, particularly where vehicle movements would be increased in South End (Policy 6.13, The London Plan, March 2015).

• Any proposals for residential development will be required to be car-free (Policy 6.13, The London Plan, March 2015) (other than for limited disabled parking) unless it can be shown that vehicular numbers will not exceed those currently entering the site via South End.

• Should significant development occur, the Council will require a Construction Traffic Management Plan to ensure the works are undertaken in a considerate manner in line with our Code of Construction policy for major projects.

4 Open Space

• The mature trees on the site are protected. This may constrain the development of new buildings (Policy CR6, Chapter 33, CLP).

• The sports courts within the grounds provide a much needed resource for local schools and clubs that lack sufficient outdoor space. Preservation of the use of this facility or one like it will need to be considered in future plans for the site (Policy 3.6 of the London Plan; Policy CR5, Chapter 33, CLP).
1 Heritage

The site is in Kensington Square Conservation Area and sits within the context of the Grade II listed buildings on Kensington Square.

- Is redevelopment of the buildings to the rear of the site an acceptable option?
- What scale of development is appropriate in terms of building heights?

2 Land Use

The site is currently in social and community use.

- What uses would be appropriate on the site?
- Would some residential development be acceptable subject to the requirements of CK1 being met?

3 Access

The site is isolated with vehicle access only from South End.

- Should vehicular access remain from South End?
- Would you favour a car free development?

4 Open Space

The site contains a large area of open space, including play space, and numerous mature trees.

- How important do you consider retention of play space?
- Could part of the open space be developed?

Is there anything else that you think should be considered?

What happens next?

We will consider all the comments that are made either in writing or during consultation events. In order to process your written comments more easily we kindly ask you to submit them via the Council’s website. A consultation event will be held on Wednesday 28th October at 6:30pm in Committee Room 1, Kensington Town Hall.

From this and any new evidence on opportunities and constraints on the site we will write a draft planning and design brief for the site. We will ask for your views on the new document, probably late in 2015 and early in 2016.

We will then produce a supplementary planning document to be adopted, which will become part of the Council’s planning guidance.