

## Chapter 33 An Engaging Public Realm

# A sense of place, attractive streets, parks and outdoor spaces

### 33.1 Introduction

- 33.1.1 Kensington and Chelsea is distinguished by a high quality network of streets, squares and public spaces. The public realm is widely recognised and valued for providing the setting for our rich architectural heritage. This is a strategic matter for the Royal Borough, being central to our success as an attractive place to live, work and visit. Establishing a new street network, based on our historic patterns, will be at the heart of the successful regeneration of the north, and enhancing the public realm will be a key part of maintaining the success of the borough as a whole.
- 33.1.2 The public realm is not just the two-dimensional streetscape, although that is an important component. The public realm is the full three-dimensional space of streets and parks, and how they connect together and contribute to making our neighbourhoods and centres distinctive and memorable. It is the public realm therefore which gives the borough its strong sense of place. The way buildings relate to streets, and the way streets relate to one another, are thus as important as the management and maintenance of the streetscape and our parks and gardens.
- 33.1.3 An Engaging Public Realm is an integral part of the Local Plan's central vision of Building on Success. It is regarded as critical by residents to their quality of life, and also underpins the national and international reputation of Kensington and Chelsea.

#### **CO4 Strategic Objective for An Engaging Public Realm**

Our strategic objective for an engaging public realm is to endow a strong local sense of place by maintaining and extending our excellent public realm to all parts of the borough.

### 33.2 What this means for the borough

- 33.2.1 The streets, spaces and places provide a range of opportunities for external living, while making it easier and more attractive to walk, cycle and take public transport. They are also the location of the world renowned Notting Hill Carnival.
- 33.2.2 Open spaces support physical as well as passive activities, from playing sport to sitting and relaxing. They are places where people meet and come together. Paying particular attention to making the public realm safer and more enjoyable improves external living, while also enhancing the appearance of the borough.
- 33.2.3 The Exhibition Road redevelopment is a prime example of the Council's innovative approach to single surface and de-cluttering of the streets. The design principles of single surface rests on making drivers more aware of other road users and their surroundings, thereby lowering traffic speeds in the presence of pedestrians and improving safety. This approach has been modelled on Kensington High Street, which has received international praise for its groundbreaking approach to clutter reduction and streetscape improvements.
- 33.2.4 There is very high public satisfaction with the appearance and maintenance of our streets and public spaces, with success derived from inherent design quality, use of high quality

materials and craftsmanship, and regular maintenance. The Royal Borough is ranked third out of all London boroughs in terms of residents' overall satisfaction with the local area<sup>73</sup>.

- 33.2.5 However, there are parts of the borough where the public realm is of a lesser quality and in need of significant attention. Areas such as the Westway, Cromwell Road, the Earl's Court oneway system, Kensal, World's End and Latimer. Establishing a new and improved street network, drawing from the borough's historic patterns and public spaces, will be at the heart of the successful regeneration of these areas.

### 33.3 Planning Policies

*No changes are proposed to the existing Local Plan sections and policies on Street Network (Policy CR1), Three-Dimensional Street Form (Policy CR2) and Street and Outdoor Life (Policy CR3).*

#### Streetscape

- 33.3.16 Much of the borough lies within one of 38 conservation areas. The Council has a duty to ensure that new development within a conservation area preserves or enhances the character or appearance of that area. Street furniture, such as guardrails and signs, can both detract from this local character and hinder the safe passage for people with sensory and mobility difficulties.
- 33.3.17 The excellent quality of our public realm is constantly under threat from poorly designed or uncoordinated development and the paraphernalia used to control traffic and pedestrians, public utility equipment, street furniture and advertising. This undermines the very quality that everyone values. The Council's Renewing the Legacy: 21 Projects for the 21st Century included the creation of the Royal Borough Streetscape Guide. This sets out principles of good design, such as more white lighting, the use of York stone, less clutter, sensitively designed street furniture and more public art<sup>74</sup>.
- 33.3.18 Advertising hoardings and freestanding adverts can have a negative impact on visual amenity and can also have serious implications for public and road safety.
- 33.3.19 Front gardens offer a valuable contribution to the streetscape. The loss of front gardens to offstreet parking has long had harmful effects upon visual amenity and townscape quality. It can also reduce public safety.
- 33.3.20 Public art can promote civic pride and help create of a sense of place and promote local distinctiveness. To achieve high standards of design the Public Art Panel advises and comments on proposed public art projects in the borough.

#### **Policy CR4 Streetscape**

The Council will require improvements to the visual, functional and inclusive quality of our streets, ensuring they are designed and maintained to a very high standard, that street clutter is removed and that street furniture, advertisements and signs are carefully controlled to avoid clutter to support the Council's aim of driving up the quality of the borough's streetscape.

To deliver this the Council will:

<sup>73</sup> Provisional scores for the National Indicators via the Place Survey 2009

<sup>74</sup> RBKC Streetscape Guide 2012

- a. require all work to, or affecting, the public highway, to be carried out in accordance with the Council's Streetscape Guidance;
- b. require all redundant or non-essential street furniture to be removed;
- c. retain, and seek the maintenance and repair of, historic street furniture such as post boxes and historic telephone kiosks, where this does not adversely impact on the safe functioning of the street;
- d. require that where there is an exceptional need for new street furniture that it is of high quality design and construction, and placed with great care, so as to relate well to the character and function of the street;
- e. resist adverts that by reason of size, siting, design, materials or method of illumination, including on street furniture, harm amenity or public or road safety;
- f. resist freestanding structures such as telephone kiosks where the function for the display of adverts over-dominates the primary purpose for the structure, whether sited on streets, forecourts or roadsides;
- g. resist pavement crossovers and forecourt parking;
- h. require all major development to provide new public art that is of high quality and either incorporated into the external design of the new building or carefully located within the public realm. Where such provision is not appropriate, the Council may seek planning contributions for the provision of public art. New public art proposals should be designed in consultation with the Public Art Panel.

**Consultation:** Please provide your comments on the Draft Policies, supporting text and any options and alternatives (set out in respective Policy Formulation Reports) by completing the Consultation Response Form at <https://planningconsult.rbkc.gov.uk/consult/ti/LPPRD/>

### Parks, Gardens, Open Spaces and Waterways

- 33.3.21 The benefit of open space is wider than pure aesthetics, it also provides a valuable recreational resource, and contributes to wildlife habitats and biodiversity and has benefits in minimising noise and air pollution. The borough has a long history and tradition of high quality parks and gardens, such as Kensington Gardens, the Physic Garden, Holland Park, Royal Hospital and Ranelagh Gardens.
- 33.3.22 There are 100 garden squares within the borough. There are also 15 open spaces on England's Registered Parks and Gardens<sup>75</sup>, including Kensington Gardens, Holland Park, Brompton and Kensal cemeteries and Kensington Roof Gardens, the latter being the only roof garden on the national register.
- 33.3.23 The borough contains four areas of Metropolitan Open Land (MOL): Kensington Gardens, Holland Park, Brompton and Kensal cemeteries. These areas provide attractive breaks in the built-up area, provide open air facilities and contain features or landscapes of historic, recreational, or natural importance.
- 33.3.24 Holland Park and Kensington Gardens are the main public open spaces in the borough. Hyde Park, although entirely in the neighbouring borough of the City of Westminster, also makes a particular contribution to open space which is accessible to residents of the borough. However, much of the borough, particularly in the south, lies beyond a five minute (400m) walk to the nearest public open space. In spite of this, there is a strong green amenity to the area, with numerous garden squares and street trees.
- 33.3.25 The Parks Strategy, Local Biodiversity Action Plan, the Play Strategy and regular updating of Playable Spaces Audits provide both a qualitative and quantitative audit of play and open spaces in the borough. There are limited opportunities to create larger areas of public open

<sup>75</sup> Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in England compiled by English Heritage

space because of the location and potential size of development opportunities and the fact that many sites have constrained boundaries. Small areas of open space might be possible, but these are often better managed if they are communal<sup>76</sup> to the adjacent development, rather than public - as the garden square tradition of this borough demonstrates. The provision of new public open space is, therefore, not seen as a strategic issue for this borough, and will be assessed on a case by case basis, using the up-to-date information from on-going audits of play and open space. Planning contributions towards the maintenance of the existing public open spaces with appropriate play facilities will be sought from developers while communal external open space which can greatly improve the quality of life of residents, can be designed into quite small schemes. This will therefore, be the focus of our policy.

- 33.3.26 Maintaining open spaces ensures the ecological and biological diversity of the borough and contributes positively not only to wildlife habitats but also to the quality of life for residents and those visiting and working here. Optimising wildlife habitat ensures that the borough and London provides feeding, breeding and nesting areas for a variety of bird and mammal species, which are often marginalised by increasing development pressures.
- 33.3.27 In the north, the borough is bounded by the Grand Union Canal, which is currently viewed as a physical barrier to movement. However, it is a valuable public realm asset and its potential to provide for improved biodiversity as well as amenity space and pedestrian and cycle links should be exploited.
- 33.3.28 The River Thames forms the southern boundary, and like the Grand Union Canal to the north, the potential of the Thames as a leisure, recreation, biodiversity and transport resource remains under utilised. The River Thames is an important transport route, and with its foreshore and banks is a unique open space with a special environmental character. Permanently moored vessels or the extension of riverside sites into the river can have a detrimental effect and reduce the river's potential as a navigable waterway.

**Policy CR5 Parks, Gardens, Open Spaces and Waterways**

The Council will protect, enhance and make the most of existing parks, gardens and open spaces, and require new high quality outdoor spaces to be provided.

To deliver this the Council will, in relation to:

**Parks, Gardens and Open Spaces**

- a. resist the loss of existing:
  - i. Metropolitan Open Land;
  - ii. public open space;
  - iii. private communal open space and private open space where the space gives visual amenity to the public;
- b. resist development that has an adverse effect upon the environmental and open character, appearance and function of Conservation Areas, Metropolitan Open Land or sites which are listed within the Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in England, or their setting;
- c. resist development that has an adverse effect on garden squares and communal gardens, including proposals for basements;
- d. require development to make planning contributions towards improving existing or providing new publicly accessible open space which is suitable for a range of outdoor activities and users of all ages;
- e. require all major developments to provide on site external play space, including for under fives, based on expected child occupancy;

<sup>76</sup> such as a private garden square

- f. require all green open space to optimise biodiversity and wildlife habitat;
- g. protect the open spaces surrounding the Royal Hospital from inappropriate development both in the landscaped areas themselves and in the neighbouring streets.

**Waterways**

- h. require opportunities to be taken to improve public access to, and along the Thames and the Grand Union Canal, and promote their use for education, tourism, leisure and recreation, health, well-being and transport.
- j. resist permanently moored vessels on the river, except where they would not have:
  - i. a detrimental effect on the river as a transport route and its special character, including biodiversity;
  - ii. an adverse affect on the character or appearance of the existing residential moorings at Battersea Reach;
- k. permit residential moorings on the Grand Union Canal provided that:
  - i. there are adequate services for permanently moored vessels;
  - ii. other canal users (both water and landbased) are not adversely affected.

**Consultation:** Please provide your comments on the Draft Policies, supporting text and any options and alternatives (set out in respective Policy Formulation Reports) by completing the Consultation Response Form at <https://planningconsult.rbkc.gov.uk/consult.ti/LPPRDP/>

*No changes are proposed to the existing Local Plan sections and policies on Trees and Landscape (Policy CR6) and Servicing (Policy CR7).*

**33.4 Corporate and Partner Actions**

**Introduction**

33.4.1 Delivering the strategic objective of An Engaging Public Realm will take more than the planning policies above. A range of activities undertaken across the Council and by our partner organisations will also deliver this objective. This section sets out the main strategies and action plans that have been prepared that will play a part in delivering this objective. It sets out specific actions that will be undertaken to further the objective. Corporate or Partnership Strategies that will contribute to the delivery of the Strategic Objective.

*The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea Parks Strategy 2016-2025*

33.4.2 The Council’s Environment, Leisure and Residents Services Department (ELRS) has a 10-year Parks Strategy to improve and invest in its main parks. This Strategy includes a vision to ensure all residents will have easy access to a green, open space for relaxation, leisure and quiet reflection that is safe and pleasant to use. It also includes a rolling programme of consultation followed by a major programme of maintenance and park improvements over the lifetime of the Local Plan.

*The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea Streetscape Guide 2012*

33.4.3 The Transport and Highways Department has produced the Streetscape Guide which sets out the concepts of ‘streetscape’, policies and elements of streetscape design. The guide also includes detailed specifications for streetscape standards.

*The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea Tree Strategy 2015*

- 33.4.4 The Tree Strategy seeks to give greater emphasis to the relationship between trees in the Royal Borough and the built and historic environment. With careful consideration of planting position, spacing, selection of species and management, the strategy seeks to develop a more rigorous and coherent contribution by trees to the borough. The Council's Arboricultural Section are responsible for implementing the Tree Strategy.

*The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea Planning and Conservation Capital Programme 2013/14 to 2015/16*

- 33.4.5 The Capital Programme includes a number of local enhancement schemes including the refurbishment of Chelsea Bridge, the annual Street Scene Improvement Programme and the annual programme for Highway Improvements. The latter includes traffic management schemes and environmental improvements.

*Sport England Strategy 2016 - 2021*

- 33.4.6 In December 2015 the Government published Sporting Future: A New Strategy for an Active Nation. In response to this Sport England's Strategy 'Towards an Active Nation Strategy 2016-21' aims to increase the number of people who engage in sport and activity, not for its own sake but for the wider benefits it can bring, in terms of physical and mental wellbeing and individual, community and economic development.

#### **Corporate or Partnership Actions for An Engaging Public Realm**

1. The Council will work in partnership with Transport for London and the Council's Transport and Highways department to encourage streetscape improvements which remove barriers and improve access for local residents.
2. The Planning and Borough Development Directorate will work in partnership with the Council's Transport and Highways Department to implement the Local Implementation Plan.
3. The Planning and Borough Development Directorate will work closely with Tri-Borough Children's Services to help increase access to play and adventure facilities across the borough.
4. The Planning and Borough Development Directorate will work with the Council's Environment, Leisure and Residents Services Department to ensure the Implementation of the Streets and Physical Activity Strategy.
5. The Planning and Borough Development Directorate's Arboricultural Team will deliver the Tree Strategy.
6. The Planning and Borough Development Directorate's Arboricultural Team will continue the programme of street tree maintenance and replacement planting in accordance with good arboricultural practice.
7. The Planning and Borough Development Directorate will work in partnership with Sport England to help deliver its strategy, particularly in relation to providing community sport infrastructure.
8. The Planning and Borough Development Directorate will work in partnership with Natural England to help deliver improved Green Infrastructure.

9. The Planning and Borough Development Directorate will work in partnership with the Canal and River Trust and the Port of London Authority to help deliver improved 'blue infrastructure'.
10. The Planning and Borough Development Directorate will continue to work in partnership with the City of Westminster to achieve a shared vision for Knightsbridge and investigate the possibility of implementing public realm improvements in Montpelier Street.
11. The Planning and Borough Development Directorate will maintain existing street trees and will extend tree coverage across the borough.

