RBKC Local Plan Partial Review: Issue 3b: Mix of uses in town centres

Diversity within Town Centres

The Council is seeking to:

- secure the success and vitality of our town centres by protecting, enhancing and promoting a diverse range of shops, by ensuring that these uses will be supported, <u>but not dominated by</u>, a range of complementary uses

This is about managing the mix of a town centre as a whole, not just specific frontages.

To deliver this the Council will:

- protect all shops and shop floorspace in primary and secondary frontages of higher-order town centres, all shops within neighbourhood centres (Policy CF3 (a), (b) and (d);
- maintain a critical mass of retail uses <u>in town centres as a whole</u> (31.3.25-27), but particularly in primary frontages (80%) (31.3.26 and CF3 (a)) and in secondary frontages, “while still being <u>mostly</u> shops, contain a greater diversity of town centre uses” (31.3.26 and CF3 (b))
- ensure that an over concentration of such uses [restaurants and drinking establishments] does not harm the function of an area [should that be “centre”?] (31.3.28) - no clear policy
- maintain strong neighbourhood centres (31.3.29 and CF3(d))

Proposed Changes:

31.3.26: Line 4: Delete “serving non-shopping needs of visitors”

> The “message” would appear to be that “visitors” are the priority that drives the mix. In many of the “higher order” centres, secondary frontages are primarily occupied by services to local residents and people who work there, rather than visitors. Even if a major centre attracts a large number of visitors, the secondary frontages primarily serve the needs of local residents.
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> Following the major “give-away” in South Kensington in the 2010 Local Plan this looks like a rerun: changing the balance of centres from meeting local or borough needs to meeting those of a minority in most centres – visitors. The extreme case is, of course, South Kensington, although there has been a marked increase in “food and beverage” uses, even in primary frontages, such as in Kensington High Street.
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> Most centres in the Borough, even Kensington High Street, primarily serve residents, either those who walk into the centre from the surrounding area or from elsewhere in the borough. Residents may indeed be the main customers of those other non-shopping uses – A2 (banks, building societies, estate

agents, betting shops), A3 (cafes and restaurants), A4 (bars and pubs) and A5 (take-way hot food).

31.3.26: After the penultimate sentence, add:

> **"However, there has been a marked increase in changes of use using permitted development rights from shops to estate agents, cafes and restaurants and banks, even in primary retail frontages. In secondary retail frontages, especially in Notting Hill Gate, Kensington Church Street and Harrington Road, as well as some local centres, such as Gloucester Road North and Holland Park Avenue, there are growing concentrations which are beginning to dominate these frontages. The Council is monitoring these concentrations and will seek to limit them if they become excessive."**

And/or change or expand 31.3.30 to:

- **expand the list of places with emerging over-concentrations of estate agents – see above and**
- **list also emerging concentrations of cafes and restaurants in primary frontages (Kensington High Street) and secondary frontages, such as Brompton Road. There are growing concentrations of food and beverage uses, such as cafes, restaurants, and "takeaway" food and drinks, not just in South Kensington, but also Portobello Road, Notting Hill Gate, Gloucester Road North and South**

Identifying the issue now will help with any future A4D (see RBKC proof para 4.7)

NB: Problems in primary frontages in major centres eg Kensington High Street

Paragraph 31.3.27: Line 4: Change "an area" to "a centre"

Policy CF3 (a)

This policy is about the success and vitality of our town centres as a whole, seeking to manage the mix and diversity of uses. This is the thrust of the leading paragraph – to ensure that success and vitality of a centre by shops are supported but not dominated by a range of complementary town centre uses.

The problem, especially in South Kensington, is that that these non-retail uses – especially "food and beverage" uses – are not complementary to its district centre function but are in direct competition for premises with retail uses. The centre, especially the secondary frontages, is already dominated by these uses at the expense of its main district centre function.

In short, by looking at the individual frontage rather than the centre as a whole, the Council is not looking at the wood but at individual trees. The existing degree of dominance, as is evident in South Kensington, should have been the first consideration before looking at the individual frontage. The problem is that the Council is not focusing on the “big picture” but micro-managing the detail.

Objection to Policy CF3 (b)

The Society **objects** to change to Policy CF3 (b) which would reduce the minimum proportion of retail uses from 66% to 50%.

This is at odds with 31.3.26 which suggests that secondary retail frontages will still be mostly shops – in plain English “mostly” means mainly, for the most part, largely, chiefly or even predominantly, but in any case significantly more than half/50%. The Society is concerned that the Council is making a substantial change in policy, driven perhaps by the extreme case in South Kensington where there has already been a substantial shift to food and beverage uses.

The Council may see it as accommodating current trends, especially as a result of permitted development rights, rather than to manage the mix and tackle issues of overconcentration. The proposed change is a sell-out which is inconsistent with the lead policy statement in Policy CF3, but more particular it will expose our town centres to a degree of competition that will drive out shops that mostly support the local convenience shopping and services of the local community and undermine the diversity in retail terms of the town centre.

Whilst it may appear pragmatic to reduce the minimum proportion of A1 uses in secondary frontages to the level of the worst case (South Kensington) this amounts to choosing the lowest common denominator. This will justify or even precipitate change which is contrary the Council’s overall objective for managing the mix in town centres.

The Society considers that reducing the minimum level of retail in secondary retail frontages to 50% is in direct conflict with Council’s stated aim and will prove a self-fulfilling prophesy. It would be major change in the goalposts to move the Council’s current requirement from 66% to 50%.
NB: not 60% as at para 4.17 of RBKC proof – but Table 1 uses 66%

Table 1 if we stick to 66% - there is still a headroom of 44 units

Reducing it to 50% means that in many centres there would be scope for further major change in some centres

What alternatives were considered?

Proposal: Change 66% to 60%

Business Uses (Policies CP1 and CF5)

Q5. Need

To what extent has higher occupation densities due to lower space/desk + hotdesking and homeworking been factored in?

The LOPR assumes over the next 15 years average densities across the stock will fall to 11.3sqm (net) – what does that mean when higher productivity is applied to whole stock?

How real are outstanding permissions and allocations? Kensal & Earl's Court

Q6. Restriction on losses of offices

The Society strongly supports the Council's policy of resisting the loss of offices and of applying for an Article 4 Direction.

The levels of vacancy are unhealthily low – less than 2%!

What happens if Article 4 Direction not accepted and exemption expires?

If no

Q7: Housing in Employment Zones

Society strongly supports mix-use/co-location of employment and housing provided no reduction in employment floorspace

Q8: Protection of Warehousing:

Q9: Additional retail in museums

Sensitivity about expansionary aspirations of South Kensington Museums – increasing entertainment/function space, proposed pedestrianisation and commercialisation of Exhibition Road, and need for them to consume their own smoke – provide catering for visitors.

400sqm seemed like a generous amount of additional floorspace for expansion in any single museum – more than that might impact local bookshops, art card shops in South Kensington.

Q10: Hotels

Part of the borough's role within London