

ROYAL BOROUGH KENSINGTON & CHELSEA
URBAN DESIGN STRATEGY - DRAFT SPD

Background Report 01

Audit & Analysis

JULY 2006



THE ROYAL
BOROUGH OF



KENSINGTON
AND CHELSEA



The Royal Borough of Kensington
and Chelsea
GOLBORNE
ROAD, W.10.



Background Report 01

Audit & Analysis

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ABOVE: Figure 1 – Plan of the Borough

01

INTRODUCTION



In Autumn 2005 the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea commissioned Urban Initiatives to prepare a Draft Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) - Urban Design Strategy for the Royal Borough. As part of this work a series of reports were produced which led to the preparation of the Draft SPD. These reports were summarised into three Background Reports that provide with detailed guidance and additional information as background to the SPD document.

This report is Background Report 01 – Appraisal and Analysis. It summarises working stage 1 and covers policy context, urban design analysis, a survey of character areas and a brief transport analysis of the Royal Borough.

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HISTORICAL CONTEXT



The patterns of urban development, which characterise the Royal Borough today, have to a great extent not been changed since the late 19th century.

Early development in the borough in the 17th century was largely concentrated along a number of radial routes running into the City of London and the Royal Palaces of Westminster from the west. These routes still remain the only continuous through routes across the Borough and have become vital arteries of the metropolitan area.

The subsequent development of residential estates in the 19th century established a fine grain of streets and spaces between these corridors. The estates evolved separately and show an internal organisation, which generally revolves around a set of garden squares. Although neighbouring estates joined their streets together, they largely failed to provide a new network of connecting streets on a wider Borough scale. This piecemeal development and the lack of an overall plan accounts in particular for the limited north-south connectivity within the Borough and puts pressure on the historic arterial routes as only thoroughfares. However, the Georgian and Victorian development structures proved robust with buildings being adapted to meet today's needs, and streets and spaces largely coping with modern requirements. More than one and a half century later many of the urban quarters in Kensington and Chelsea represent one of the most desirable residential living environments in central London, and 70% of the Borough are designated as conservation areas.

With the Grand Union Canal in the north, the Creek and later West London Railway Line in the west and the River Thames in the south, physical barriers make up the majority of the Borough boundaries. With only a limited number of bridge-links into neighbouring areas, these border zones developed into typical fringe locations with a concentration of industrial and other peripheral uses such as cemeteries.

With the building of the railway and underground network development was concentrated and intensified around stations. These places became local centres and activity hubs and remain focal areas until today.

From mid 1850s onwards some of the main streets began to develop into attractive shopping destinations, particularly with the arrival of major department stores, such as Harrods, Harvey Nichols, Peter Jones and Barkers in Knightsbridge, Sloane Square and High Street Kensington. During the same period the Borough saw the development of local theatres, cinemas, major museums and later exhibition centres, which still today attract millions of visitors in the Borough every year.

With the opening of 'Bazaar' in the mid-1950s and the consecutive establishment of numerous exquisite fashion boutiques, Kings Road began its rapid transformation from a local high street into a place for the rich and beautiful. This laid the base for the particular cultural image and identity of Chelsea as exquisite and affluent living and shopping area. Notting Hill with Portobello Market and the yearly Notting Hill Carnival developed an equally strong identity and became important visitor attractions.

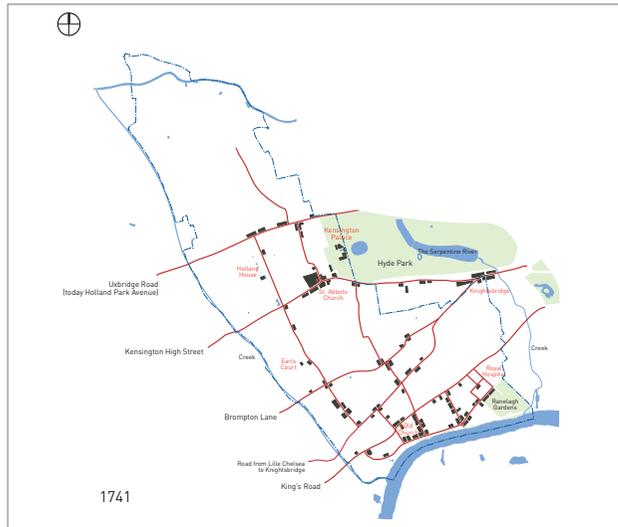
The built fabric and form of the Borough was to a large extent complete by the early 20th century. However it has continued to absorb change. War damage, the decentralisation of industries along the rail and waterways and slum clearance projects have led to the development of a number of large social housing estates in the Borough, particularly in North Kensington and

Kensal. Built in modernist style these often included high-rise residential towers. Equally in other areas parts of the Borough the stock of large Victorian and Edwardian townhouses was subdivided into smaller flats to satisfy changes in market demands and lifestyle requirements.

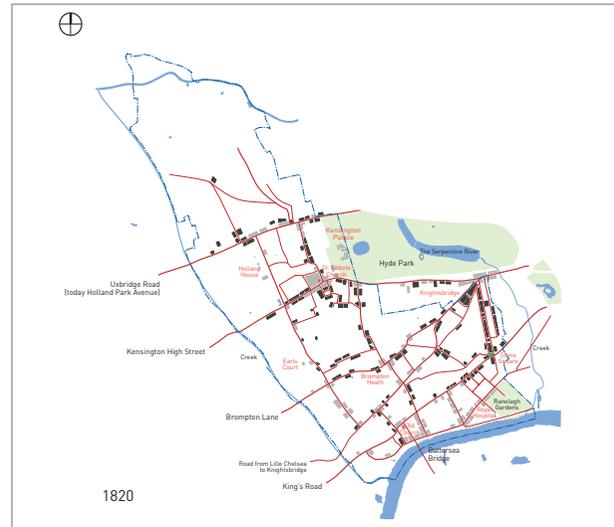
During the past decades the Borough developed an increasing social polarisation between some of the sub areas. Large parts in the centre and south of the Borough became very affluent residential areas, registering in some parts the highest property prices in the country. Other parts towards the edges and especially in North Kensington are home to some of the most deprived and impoverished communities in England (index of deprivation 2004).



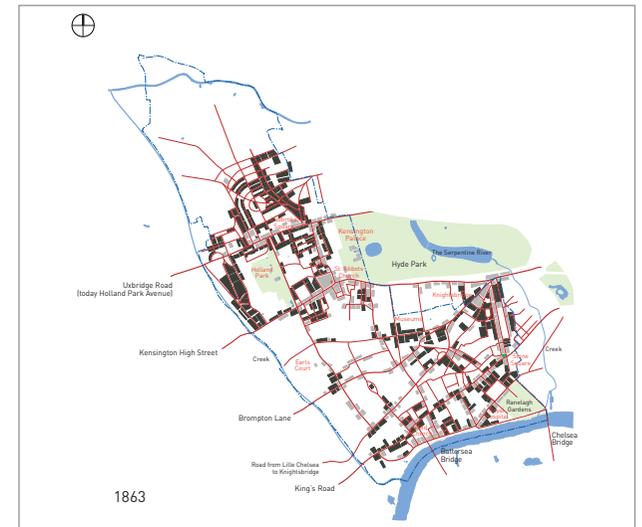
ABOVE: Mary Quant's shop Bazaar on the Kings Road, photographed by John Bignell, 1959; Copyright: RBKC Libraries



ABOVE: Figure 2 – Built Form 1741



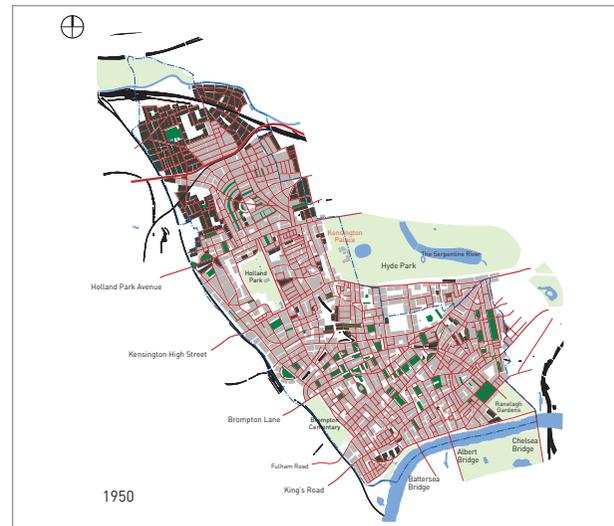
ABOVE: Figure 3 – Built Form 1820



ABOVE: Figure 4 – Built Form 1863



ABOVE: Figure 5 – Built Form 1900



ABOVE: Figure 6 – Built Form 1950

04

URBAN DESIGN ANALYSIS



SUMMARY

- n Except for small pockets the urban fabric of the Royal Borough is developed. Large parts of the borough are characterised by a coherent and fine grained historic street pattern with an outstanding building stock primarily from the Georgian, Victorian and Edwardian period that comprise of semi-detached and terraced town houses and mansion blocks. Some quarters are perceived as the most desirable residential areas in Central London. Other neighbourhoods especially in the north comprise of a series of large housing estates and are home to a number of deprived and impoverished communities.
- n The Borough boundaries to the south, west and north are formed by major physical barriers. The areas along the railway corridors in the west and towards the grand union canal to the north particularly suffer from their fringe location with less intensive development patterns and lower value uses. Entrance routes into the borough are heavy trafficked and do not represent attractive gateways in to the Borough and Central London. Often areas on either side of the barrier condition face similar issues and may benefit from being addressed through an integrated cross border initiative.
- n A number of east-west streets divide the Borough into different segments. On a metropolitan level these routes function as key access and transit corridors. Additionally they perform a significant shopping and retail function on a local and metropolitan scale. On some of these routes traffic has an adverse impact on the pedestrian environment. These areas are less attractive and perform below their potential. These corridors will be identified as improvement or showcase projects.
- n North-south connectivity across the Borough is poor and less direct. This impinges on legibility of the Borough as contiguous entity and need to be addressed as part of this strategy.
- n Although the borough has many small communal gardens and garden squares most are not open to the public and there is a shortage of public accessible open spaces. The majority of major open spaces are either located at the edges or beyond the boundaries of the borough. Some of them suffer from poor or illegible access. There is opportunity to create a network of legible green routes that connect the open spaces and integrate them into a system of interlinked spaces.
- n The majority of the Royal Borough comprises of low to medium rise development with building heights typically ranging between 2 to 6 storeys. The study however recognises a number of taller buildings across the Borough that are loosely confined to the vicinity of tube stations or form part post war residential development schemes.



4.1 INTRODUCTION

The Borough is a diverse place. It is composed of a variety of sub-areas with different characters and individual patterns of development. Given the strategic character of this work the urban design analysis takes a borough-wide approach. With the exception of particularly significant streets and places this study will not focus on individual spaces in great detail. The key aims are to identify on a strategic level the structural deficiencies and opportunities of the Borough. In the following work stage 2 these findings will inform the preparation of the urban design strategy for the Royal Borough.

The area is appraised using the urban design objectives as set out in "By design: urban design in the planning system: towards better practice". These include character, continuity and enclosure, quality of the public realm, ease of movement, legibility, adaptability and diversity. In regard to these objectives the following aspects of physical form area assessed:

- n Urban Structures
- n Urban Grain
- n Density, Mix and Land uses
- n Green and Public Spaces

Scale: Height and Massing

FIGURE 7: Urban structure

4.2 URBAN STRUCTURE

The urban structure is the framework of routes, spaces, infrastructures and waterways that characterise and form the backbone of an area in terms of access and movement. The layout has a considerable impact on legibility and the character of an area.

Figure 07 shows the analysis of the urban structure for the Royal Borough.

The Borough stretches from the Grand Union Canal in the north to the River Thames in the south. Its western border with Hammersmith and Fulham largely coincides with the West London Line. The eastern boundary is less distinct and follows the pattern of local streets. With three borders formed by major physical barriers the Borough divides into central and peripheral areas. The zones along the canal and the railway lines are typical fringe locations with poor accessibility and lower activity levels.

A number of east-west corridors intersect the Borough and divide it into various sub-parts. From north to south these key routes are the following:

- n Paddington Railway Line
- n Westway together with the elevated Hammersmith and City Line
- n Holland Park Avenue
- n Kensington High Street

- n Cromwell Road
- n Old Brompton Road
- n Fullham Road
- n Kings Road
- n Chelsea Embankment

Chelsea Embankment is part of the orbital ring road around central London. The route continues along the West London Line towards the north and joins with the Westway. In the southern part this corridor divides into one-way south- and northbound sections along separate streets. From north to south the corridor includes the following streets: West Cross Route, Holland Road; Warwick Road, Finborough Road, Gunter Grove (north-bound); Earl's Court Road, Redcliffe Gardens & Edith Grove (south-bound). The orbital route and Ladbroke Grove are the only two significant routes that connect the Borough in a north-south direction.

Some of the above routes are in themselves major physical barriers and cause severance between neighbouring quarters. With the partial lack or inconvenience of crossing points and a traffic dominated adverse environment these corridors also act as mental barriers and do not encourage pedestrian movement across or along. North Kensington is particularly affected. It is enclosed and dissected by a web of major barriers: the Grand Union Canal, the Paddington Railway line, the East

London Line, the West Cross Route, the Westway and the Hammersmith and City Line. Similarly along the western edge, a large area is contained between the West London Line, the orbital road (southbound) and the River Thames. These areas will need particular attention as part of this study.

While the Royal Borough is well served by east-west routes, it lacks connectivity in a north-south direction. Although adjacent sub-areas are usually well linked by a network of secondary streets, there is a substantial lack of continuous primary routes in a north-south direction that connect more than two neighbouring sub-areas. This creates a poor relation between the northern and southern part of the Borough and has significant implications for legibility. The lack of primary routes makes orientation and navigation difficult. In some parts the Royal Borough is only perceived as a collection of fragmented subparts and not as a cohesive entity. This study offers the opportunity to propose measures that can improve legibility and better link the various parts together.

Both Holland Park and Kensington Gardens are major structuring elements and the centre of the Borough. All other major green spaces are located along or beyond the boundaries of the Borough.



FIGURE 8: Urban Grain

4.3 URBAN GRAIN

Beside the key elements of the urban structure the layout of an area is determined by the pattern and arrangement of streets, blocks and plots. The concept of “urban grain” gives an indication of the degree to which an area’s pattern of blocks and plots subdivision is respectively small and frequent (fine grain), or large and infrequent (coarse grain). The urban grain significantly impacts on the permeability of an area and the choices to move around. It similar has an influence on the extent of adaptability, diversity and inclusiveness an area can offer as a base for development.

Figure 08 shows the analysis of the urban grain for the Royal Borough.

The size of urban blocks varies across the borough. To a large extent the central areas are of a fine urban grain. In contrast most areas along the western and northern edge are of a coarse, very coarse or extremely coarse urban grain, and in parts reflect the industrial use pattern These places have a lower permeability and are affected by severance.

The analysis identifies a number of urban blocks with particular large grain, from north to south these include the following:

- a. North Kensington on either side of the railway line to Paddington
- b. White City – border with Hammersmith and Fulham on either side of the West Cross Route

- c. Holland Park Area, with Holland Park inhibiting east-west movements
- d. Western Border area along the West London line from Holland Park Avenue in the North and the River Thames in the South, including Warwick Road, Earl's Court Exhibition Centre, Bromton Cemetary and Chelsea Football Club
- e. River Thames including Royal Hospital and Ranelagh Gardens

KEY ISSUES

The border areas to the neighbouring boroughs of Brent, Hammersmith and Fulham and Wandsworth (a, b, d, e) comprise of a very coarse urban grain due to layout, natural barriers or infrastructures. Connectivity and permeability in these areas and between the boroughs is extremely low. These areas would benefit from greater accessibility and opening up. With similar issues affecting adjacent areas in neighbouring boroughs these border zones should be addressed as part of integrated cross-border initiatives.

Holland Park and Kensington Gardens (c) both constitute large urban blocks, which although permeable for pedestrians, are largely impermeable for other movement modes. Both restrain connectivity between Notting Hill and South Kensington and largely inhibit east west movements through the Holland Park area.

The analysis identifies other localised areas in the Royal Borough that comprise of larger block sizes. Although they may impinge on permeability and legibility in these areas, this study may not offer the scope to address these on this strategic level.

4.4 DENSITY AND MIX OF LAND USES

The density of an area is represented by the amount of development on a given piece of land, the mix indicates the respective range of uses. Density influences the intensity of development, and in combination with the mix of uses can affect a place's vitality and viability. The type and mix of land uses determines the activity patterns in a place and has an impact on the attractiveness, vitality and character of an area.

Relating to the scope of this work and in absence of a comprehensive height survey of the Borough the following indications of densities are broad brush only and based on partial site visits and photographic surveys.

Apart from pockets in the urban structure and some areas adjacent to the railways and the Westway the Borough is developed throughout. Densities are linked to building height, form and footprint of development. Average heights in the Borough range from 2-3 to 5-6 storeys, and therefore densities vary across the Borough. In most areas of the Borough the urban street block is the dominant development form. In some of these blocks the inner courtyards are built over. Depending on building height these very compact development patterns result in medium to high dense areas. Parts of Notting Hill, Kensington, South Kensington and North Chelsea are of a higher to high density with plot ratios well above 2:1. All remaining parts range from lower to medium density with plot ratios of about 2:1 or below.



FIGURE 9: Land uses

There are a number of post war housing estates that show different development forms. Comprising stand-alone developments with surrounding leftover, green and parking spaces, these developments compensate their smaller building footprints with greater development heights. In some cases they accommodate tall residential towers. Across the Borough the density of these estates is considered medium to high.

The land use pattern is shown in Figure 09. This survey is (equal to the previous one) indicative only and based on a number of information sources, including shopping and employment areas as listed in the UDP document and a map survey on location of social, cultural, educational, hotel, leisure and health facilities supported by various site visits.

The borough is predominantly residential. Large areas are made up of historical estates, which accommodate an outstanding stock of some Georgian and mainly Victorian town houses and mansions. The unique arrangement of streets and places together with the flexibility and adaptability of the historic housing stock prove a successful combination for continuous residential uses: over the past two centuries large parts of the borough have been able to adapt to changing living and lifestyle requirements and have only seen minimal structural change. At present parts of the borough are regarded as the most desirable living environments within central London, which is reflected in high property prices.

In stark contrast to a large affluent resident population living in the central and southern parts, the Borough houses a number of poorer and deprived communities. While a few smaller social housing estates are also embedded across the Borough, the majority of these communities live in North Kensington towards the northern and western boundary, and in the south-west corner of Chelsea. The index of multiple deprivation for the Borough (2004) highlights that some of these neighbourhoods are particularly deprived. Often located in fringe location enclosed or bordered by impermeable barriers access is constrained, sometime provision with public transport is poor.

The layout of the often post-war housing developments is often fragmented and poorly integrates with the surrounding street-pattern. Connectivity and legibility are low, public spaces are of a poor quality; often lack enclosure and passive supervision. Some of these estates are poorly served by local shopping facilities. This applies in particular to the areas along the western borough boundary and in the surrounding of Latimer Road Tube station. A number of these areas are described in more detail in section 5 - character analysis.

The Borough comprises of a relatively small amount of office floor space compared to neighbouring boroughs. Not enough information could be obtained to identify the precise location of office uses. It is assumed that concentrations of medium to larger offices can be found around the main underground stations and along key corridors.

A number of designated employment zones are located in the vicinity of the western boundary, in North Kensington and South-West Chelsea. Some of these areas are not fully utilised and often accommodate low value land-uses.

In common with much of Central London the borough accommodates a large number of hotel visitors. The UDP states that about 30000 visitors stay in the Borough every night. The majority of these hotel uses are concentrated in the Earl's Court area and Courtfield area.

Besides local high streets and shopping centres the borough contains a number of shopping streets of metropolitan importance. With larger retailers and specialised retail they attract visitors from other London Boroughs, nation-wide and abroad. These include Kensington High Street, Knightsbridge, Fulham Road, Kings Road and Sloane Square. Another large metropolitan shopping centre is being built at White City being built just across the Borough boundaries in Hammersmith and Fulham. This may have a negative effect on retail expenditure patterns and visitor numbers particularly in shopping streets that comprise of a comparable market orientation.

Portobello Road is one of London's most famous street and antique markets. Starting nearby Notting Hill Tube Station the market extends all the way up to Golborne Road in North Kensington. The market is particularly popular with tourists and reaches its climax on Saturday.

With Portobello Road the Royal Borough accommodates one of London's most famous street and antique markets. Starting nearby Notting Hill Tube Station the market extends all the way up to Golborne Road in North Kensington. The market is in particular popular with tourists and reaches its climax on Saturday.

The Borough is rich in visitor attractions. Between South Kensington Tube Station and Kensington Gardens/ Hyde Park lies one of London's densest concentrations of Museums and cultural institutions. It accommodates the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Natural History Museum, the Science Museum, the Imperial College and the

Earl's Court Exhibition Centre, Olympia Exhibition Centre and Chelsea Football Club Stadium are located on either side of the West London Line (the latter two in neighbouring Hammersmith and Fulham). At the southern end of Holland Park the Commonwealth Institute is located, another (now disused) congress and exhibition centre.

KEY ISSUES

The predominant land use in the Borough is residential. There are however extreme contrasts in social and income structures between various sub areas of the Borough with very deprived neighbourhoods located adjacent to affluent areas with the highest property prices in the country. This disposition disadvantages to a large extent poorer residents. Affordable retail and leisure facilities often are replaced by higher-priced ones; the increasing numbers of privately provided education and health services reduces the demand and lowers provision-density of public facilities. Poorer residents hence must travel much greater distances and will find only a limited number of facilities they can afford. Many deprived neighbourhoods concentrate in North Kensington and along the western borough boundary in areas that generally are poorly served by public transport and may also suffer from physical segregation and poor integration into the surrounding.

In most parts of the Borough the built fabric is compact and building densities are medium to high. There is however a significant mismatch between spatial and population density in the Borough. In affluent areas increased spatial requirements and higher living standards of residents mean that higher spatial density is not necessary correlated with a greater number of residents. The significant share of irregularly inhabited second-homes in these areas adds to this phenomenon. Contrary in impoverished and deprived parts of the Borough residential densities might be higher than spatial densities, due to intensive use of homes with more inhabitants living in a place than common living standards

would suggest. This has an effect on vitality and viability of certain areas, particularly for the provision and dimension of services and facilities.

While in large historical areas the scope for change is quite limited, some of the post-war developments may benefit from a restructuring of uses through infill- or re-development, particular when these developments would improve some of the inherent structural shortcomings of these schemes and improve the urban environment

The present UDP indicates that the Borough aims to protect the residential profile of the Borough and not to intensify office accommodation. However, mixed-use opportunities may arise in which small office accommodation could form part. A greater mix with offices uses would contribute to local employment and reduce the need to travel. Further it may help to offset some adverse activity fluctuations, which are inherent to residential areas, and contribute to higher and more balanced activity levels.

Current employment zones will need to be critically assessed. Opportunities should be explored to redefine allocations and premises with vacant land or floorspace on low uptake, to create areas, which better relate to the needs of the community and market demand.

The Borough is home to a number of well-known shopping streets of metropolitan importance. With the building of other retail destinations in the West, particular the White City Shopping Centre, these traditional outdoor shopping streets may experience

changes in expenditure patterns. One of their main disadvantages is their location along historical routes into central London, which nowadays are heavily trafficked thoroughfares and transit corridors. As on Kensington High Street some improvement schemes have been already implemented and have proved successful. Other areas are in equal demand for improved and safer pedestrian environments, such as Notting Hill Gate, Knightsbridge, the Earls Court Area and Kings Road. An appropriate balance has to be found between the needs of pedestrian and the requirements of these roads as part of the strategic road network, car traffic should not be generally doomed since it may contribute to the vibrancy and vitality of these streets. The entire Borough will fall into the congestion charge zone when current plans go ahead. This is envisaged to ease some of the traffic pressure on these routes. There may be opportunities to further explore traffic management schemes, which would reduce private car access at peak shopping times, yet allows free access for the remaining time. Such measures could significantly improve pedestrian qualities particularly along Kings Road and Portobello Street in peak-times.

4.5 GREEN AND PUBLIC SPACES

Figure 10 shows the green and public space provision in the Royal Borough.

There are eight major green spaces within or just beyond the Borough boundaries, two of which are cemeteries. From north to south these are:

- Kensal Green Cemetery and St. Mary's RC Cemetery (regulated opening times, restricted use)
- Little Wormswood Scrubs Recreation Ground (openly accessible land, Hammersmith and Fulham)
- Wormswood Scrubs (openly accessible land, Hammersmith and Fulham)
- Kensington Garden (regulated opening times) and Hyde Park (openly accessible land, City of Westminster)
- Holland Park (regulated opening times)
- Brompton Cemetery (regulated opening times, restricted use)
- Royal Hospital Gardens (regulated opening times, restricted use)
- Battersea Park (regulated opening times, Borough of Wandsworth)

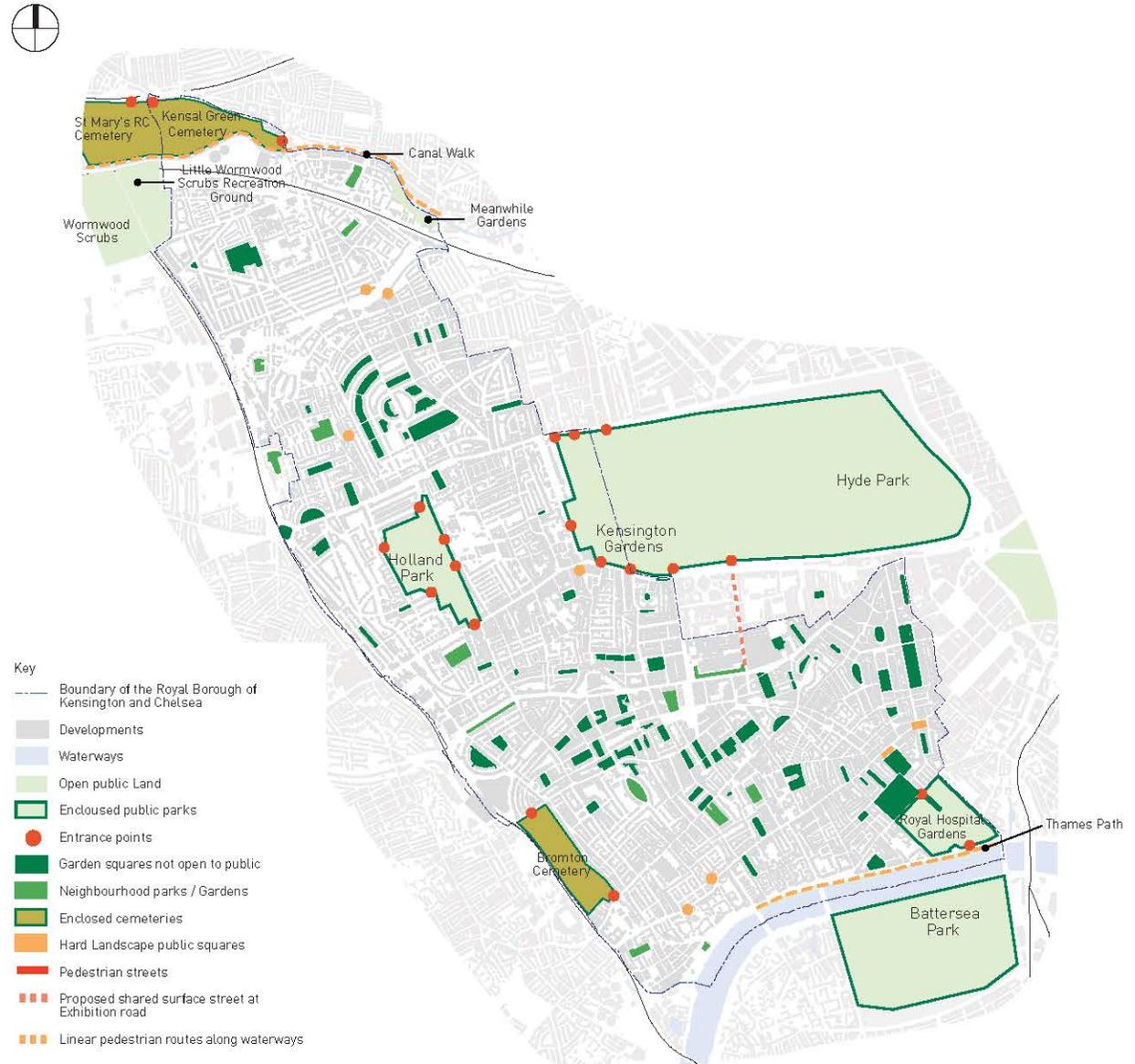


FIGURE 10: Green and public spaces

A river path accompanies the River Thames and allows access to the water edge. It follows Chelsea Embankment and stops opposite Worlds End. Another path accompanies the Grand Union Canal and offers an alternative pedestrian and cycle route from Little Venice towards Park Royal.

The Borough comprises a variety of smaller local neighbourhood spaces with a large concentration of communal garden spaces and garden squares in the South Kensington/ Chelsea area and Notting Hill. The majority are not open to the public.

There are only a few urban public spaces within the Royal Borough, the most prominent being Sloane Square. There are however a small number of built-out pavements or pedestrianised streets that allow for primary pedestrian activities. Overall the Borough lacks civic public spaces.

KEY ISSUES

Overall the borough suffers from a shortage of public space. This is identified in the UDP p.283 deficiency map.

Although they contribute to atmosphere and character in these areas the majority of communal garden spaces and garden squares in Notting Hill, South Kensington and Chelsea are not open to the public and fail to provide recreational spaces to the wider community. This increases the shortage of recreational and civic spaces in the Borough.

There are a number of neighbourhood spaces, which are in ownership by RBKC. These provide valuable recreation space for the community. However, most of them occupy leftover spaces between developments and are difficult to find (i.e North Kensington, South Kensal Town, Chelsea Creek).

Except for Holland Park all the larger open green spaces are located at the edges of the borough or in neighbouring boroughs. Most of them are enclosed and allow access only within strictly defined time periods. Access points are limited and sometimes difficult to find. This impinges on the accessibility, legibility and attractiveness of these spaces – although they might be next door the next entrance could be a long walk away. There is opportunity to create legible and green routes, which link these spaces and respective entrance points with each other and with the wider neighbourhood. The opening of additional entrance points should be explored, in particular for Holland Park.

Due to its particular location the Little Wormwood Scrubs Recreation Ground is primarily used by residents of Kensington and Chelsea although it belongs to the neighbouring borough Hammersmith and Fulham. This mismatch is reflected in the poor layout of the space and a limited provision with amenity features.

Access to the waterfront from Chelsea is difficult and involves the crossing of the strategic road along Chelsea Embankment. Heavy traffic flows on the embankment create an adverse environment in terms of noise and exhaust fumes, which considerably reduces the attractiveness of the Thames River Path.

The route along the Grand Union Canal does not integrate in the common network of routes and spaces across the Borough. Entrance points are not easily found and the presence and amenity of the canal are not fully exploited.

The Royal Borough lacks appropriate urban public spaces as places for civic formal and informal activities. Sloane Square, as the only hard surface space of significant size, is detrimentally affected by traffic circulation, which isolates the central space and makes it sparsely used. There are only a few other small public spaces and pedestrianised street sections across the Borough. Around transport nodes such as underground stations, where pedestrian flows are especially high, public spaces can help to mitigate congestion and allow for orientation, meeting and breathing space. The Borough lacks these types of spaces.

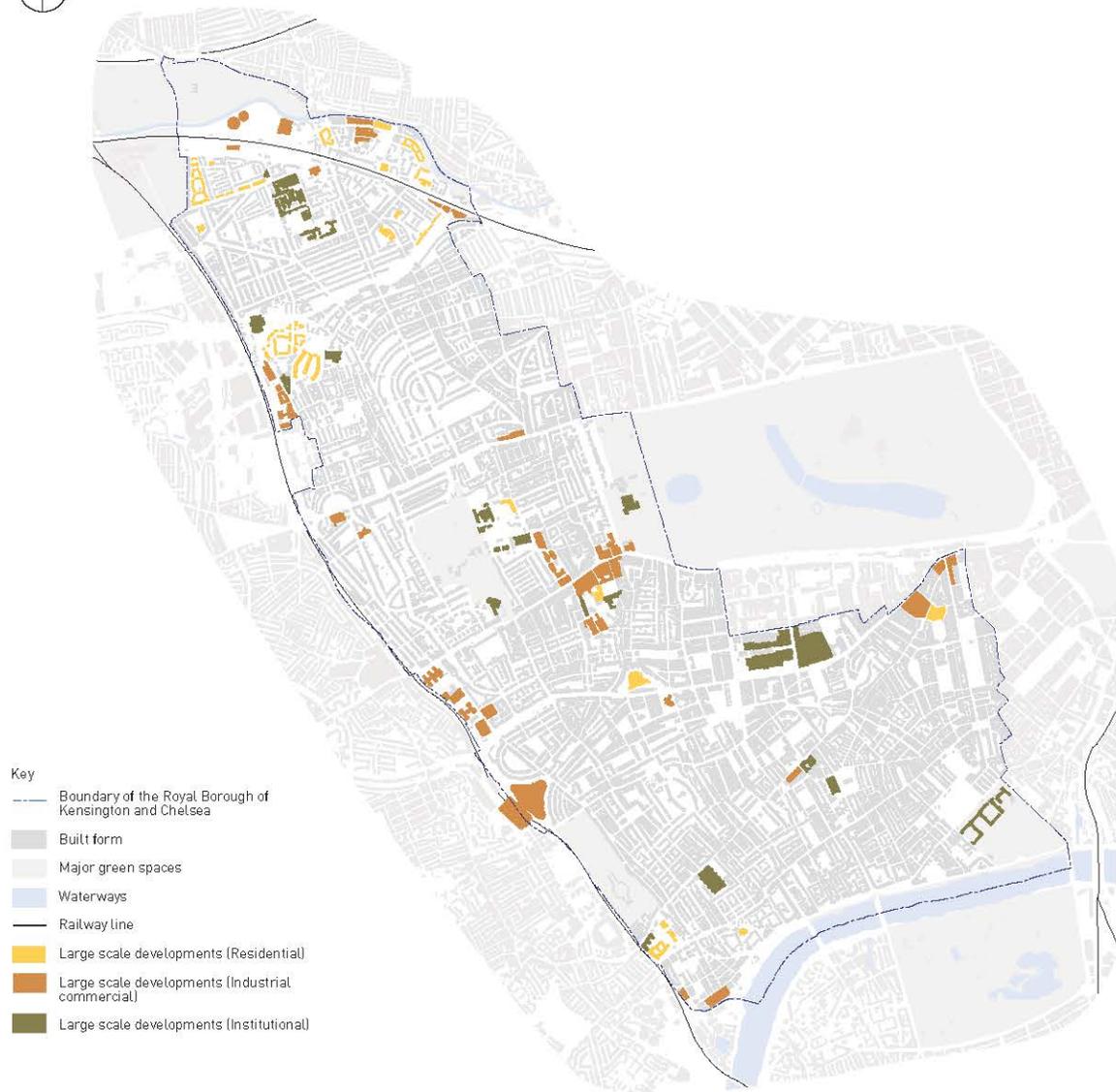


FIGURE 12: Massing

There is another group of towers, which although situated east of the West Cross Route, are actual part of the neighbouring Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham. These towers form part of a residential estate and significantly impact on the skyline of the Royal Borough.

Two buildings have more than 25 storeys. The first is the widely visible residential Trellick Tower at Golborne Road in North Kensington by the acclaimed Architect Erno Goldfinger. This 98m tower is listed as building of particular architectural interest. It forms a unique landmark, which assists orientation and contributes to the identity of this area.

The second tower is the Holyday Inn Kensington Forum Hotel Tower in Cromwell Road close to Gloucester Road Tube station. This 116m tall building appears out of scale and does not relate to its immediate context. Across Cromwell Road the slightly lower West Point development feels similarly out of place.

With the exception of a few single developments (particular along Kings Road) high buildings in the Borough tend to cluster in groups. Towers above 10 storeys are often accompanied by other higher developments of 7-9 storeys in its surrounding. The following groups of high buildings are identified:

