

KNIGHTSBRIDGE ASSOCIATION

Representations re Knightsbridge and South Kensington.

Often, in making and implementing town planning policy, the setting of aims is comparatively easy and uncontroversial. The difficulty lies in finding the right balance between aims with the potential to conflict. The two chapters in Section 1, The Spatial Strategy – Chapters 12 and 14 – with which the Association is primarily concerned, are examples of this need to ensure that the Core Strategy will lead to a satisfactory resolution of aims dealing with quite different functions.

At **South Kensington** we have recommended a more explicit recognition of the need to take into account the residential function of the area (see our suggested changes to Policy CV11). As the Strategy makes clear the area contains a large number of institutions of great significance to London and the wider world. It emphasises the need to improve facilities and the public realm for those visiting South Kensington's institutions. What we seek is simply more explicit recognition that what a visitor needs will not always be the same as what a resident needs, so that as decisions are taken incrementally in the coming years the right balance between interests can be found.

In the case of **Knightsbridge** we have made more detailed representations. Here the functions of the area are even more complex. The International Shopping Centre, anchored by the two famous department stores, Harrods and Harvey Nichols, needs, if it is to stay ahead of other centres such as Bond Street, a greater supply of the larger modern units preferred by contemporary retailers. In addition, it would benefit enormously from an improved street environment for its shoppers. Yet two of the area's other functions severely limit the ability of the centre to make these advances. As the strategy recognizes the Centre is cheek by jowl with important and successful residential areas. In addition it has to cope with the use of Brompton Road by vast quantities of traffic and with a highly complex junction where Sloane Street, Knightsbridge etc join up.

In our view the Core Strategy as presently drafted offers opportunities for the reinforcement of the International Shopping Centre which are on the one hand unrealistic, offering to developers areas of search for expansion which are unviable, and on the other hand undesirable, because they risk unreasonable conflict with the residential areas behind the shopping frontages.

Our Recommendation 2 is to delete the northern frontage of Brompton Road between Montpelier Street and Brompton Square from the boundary of the International Shopping Centre. The strategy recognizes the markedly lower footfall in this part of the street and the disadvantages that the multi-lane highway and the change of pavement height present. They have resulted in this frontage being used as a location for banks, estate agents, hairdressers, showrooms, restaurants and

similar non-retail activities. There is only one shop that appears to rely on passing trade, rather than planned visits. The disadvantages of the location have been recognized by developers in recent decades. Whereas on the south side every opportunity has been taken to build the large modern shops that have attracted Emporio Armani and the like, no equivalent units have been built on the north side despite substantial redevelopment. It is impossible to avoid the conclusion that the frontage is unsuited to being part of the specialist International Shopping Centre. It is misleading for the planning system to designate it as such. We say this without any unrealistic expectation that the frontage might turn over to local convenience shopping. The non-retail activities which have located there have their own value and viability.

Our Recommendation 1 concerns Montpelier Street. Little needs to be added to our original representation. We have subsequently met with officials from RBKC and WCC and are grateful that there has been an offer to drop the possibility of alfresco dining from the text. We, like so many central London residents, have ample experience of the conflicts between alfresco diners, drinkers and smokers and the residents living above or adjacent.

But we would like to go further. There remain real possibilities that 'events' or indeed market stalls produce similar conflicts with Montpelier Street's residential function. These ideas should be deleted from the strategy. On the other hand we have no objection, indeed would welcome, if resources permit, a study of the use of the highway in Montpelier Street with a view to reducing or calming traffic movement.