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Community Guide to Influencing Planning and Development in Kensington and Chelsea

Designed for residents of the Royal
Borough of Kensington and Chelsea

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About this Guide

This guide is designed for residents of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC) who want to shape the future of their community by engaging in local planning and development. Led by the Kensington and Chelsea Social Council (KCSC) and supported by the Just Space network, this project provides essential tools and support for local residents, and community groups, to actively participate in the planning process. Here's an overview of the importance of planning, how Local Plans work, and how you can get involved.

Why is Planning Important for Communities?

Planning impacts nearly every part of community life, from housing and public spaces to environmental policies. Here are some key issues affected by planning:

- Housing and Affordability:** Ensuring homes are affordable and accessible.
- Public Spaces and Green Areas:** Creating welcoming, healthy environments.
- Community Facilities:** Supporting spaces for social, educational, and health services.
- Environmental Health:** Maintaining clean air, managing waste, and controlling pollution.
- Historical Conservation:** Preserving the unique character of heritage sites.

By engaging with the planning process, communities can ensure that developments meet their needs and reflect their vision for the area.



What are Local Plans?

A Local Plan is a document that sets out the guidelines for development and land use in RBKC, including where new housing, businesses, and facilities should be located. Local Plans shape the borough's future and directly affect decisions on planning applications.

Most people participate in planning by commenting on applications; however, having a say in the Local Plan itself allows for far-reaching impact. Local Authorities are legally required to create a Local Plan with input from the public. The Local Plan aligns with broader guidelines set by the London Plan (from the Mayor of London) and the National Planning Policy Framework (from the Government).

The Local Plan Process

Creating a Local Plan involves multiple stages, and community input is critical throughout. Here's a timeline of the current Local Plan development in RBKC:

October–December 2022:

Final consultation on the Local Plan draft

January–March 2024:

Consultation on the Inspector's modifications

February 2023:

Council submits the plan for government examination

July 2024:

Inspector publishes final report and required changes

April 2023:

Planning Inspector Louise Nurser appointed to review the plan

July 2024:

Local Plan adoption by the Council

June–July 2023:

Public hearings on the Local Plan

Our Project Aims and Support

Starting with a public meeting attended by over 50 participants, we held some workshops which helped to galvanise initial responses to the first draft of the plan.

Once the Council submitted the Local Plan to the Government for public examination, the project's goal was to support local community groups in RBKC as they made formal representations on the Local Plan. Through briefing papers and workshops, KCSC and Just Space provided guidance on the planning process, helped participants draft comments, and offered one-on-one support to strengthen their submissions.

Participants, including Trellick Tower Residents Association, Citizens Advice Kensington & Chelsea, Backdoor Housing Co-operative and St Mark's Housing Co-operative, raised specific local concerns and suggested changes to the Local Plan, contributing valuable insights and local knowledge to shape policies. A full list of participants can be found in the Credits section.



Community Feedback

To understand the community's experience, we gathered feedback on barriers faced and the benefits of participation:

Accessibility: Many found the process challenging but felt empowered with KCSC and Just Space support. It is a complex process over several years and very bureaucratic. A significant amount of learning is required to find out about the London Plan and RBKC planning documents.

Information Access: Clear explanations in workshops helped participants navigate the complexities. The Local Plan uses technical language and refers to a lot of documents that you need to be aware of.

Impact: Community voices had a direct effect on the Inspector's considerations, shaping key policies. Without our intervention, the process would have been dominated by developers and professionals.

Recommendations for Future Engagement

"Taking part gave the opportunity to connect with other people in the local community that share common goals, raising the profile of community led housing" (Jo Whelan)

"The process is daunting for a lay person and KCSC and Just Space helped navigate this. Pleased that the issue of contamination at Kensal Canalside was recognised by the Inspector." (Richard Crane)

"The earlier we engage in the process the better, as well as having the time to embed the basic principles of the planning process and our involvement with it" (Mark Macleod)

"More 1-1 sessions" (Jo Whelan)

"The Planning Inspectorate could provide Youtube videos and masterclasses in how to participate effectively" (Mark Macleod)

Key Changes Achieved

Through community advocacy, several important policy changes were made to RBKC's Local Plan. Here are a few highlights:

Public Participation: The Borough's Charter for Public Participation, created after the Grenfell Fire, is now central to the Local Plan, committing to community co-design and active involvement.

Trauma-Informed Practice: Recognising the Grenfell tragedy's impact, policies now require trauma-informed engagement.

Kensal Canalside Vision: The Local Plan prioritises community spaces and health measures for this area, ensuring it remains accessible and safe.

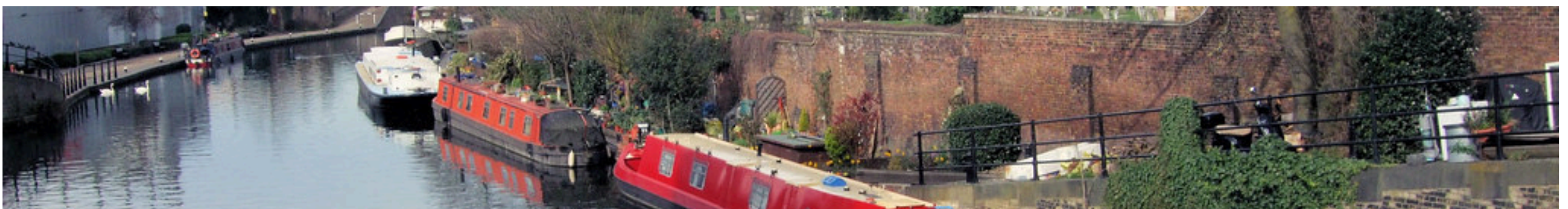
Community-Led Housing: New policies support small sites for housing and protect affordable homes in perpetuity.

Gypsy and Traveller Pitches:

Acknowledgement of the need for more pitches to support RBKC's Traveller community.

Fire Safety Standards: Policies now enforce stronger fire safety standards, addressing community concerns post-Grenfell.

These achievements reflect the community's dedication and commitment to shaping a borough that values safety, inclusion, and environmental stewardship. We encourage you to have a read of the appendix and check out the Local Plan.



Next Steps

KCSC will continue supporting community groups as they monitor the Local Plan's implementation, with an ambition to create a dedicated community planning network for North Kensington. This ongoing collaboration aims to ensure that the changes made through community input lead to positive, lasting improvements in the borough.

For more information:

Kensington and Chelsea Social Council
(KCSC): joe@kcsc.org.uk

Just Space: Contact Richard Lee, Projects Lead by emailing richardlee50@gmail.com and have a look at the Just Space website <http://justspace.org.uk>

This guide is a call to action for all RBKC residents to stay informed, engaged, and proactive in shaping their neighbourhoods. Together, we can build a community that serves everyone's needs and reflects our shared values.

Credits

The following community groups and individuals participated in the project:

Trellick Tower Residents' Association, Citizen's Advice Kensington and Chelsea, Backdoor Housing Co-operative, St Mark's Housing Co-operative, Isis Amlak, Richard Crane, Mark Macleod, Molly Dineen, Caitlin O'Hagan, P O'Donnell - Stable Way travellers, Simon Ruston.

Other community participants in the Local Plan examination included: St Quintin and Woodlands Neighbourhood Forum, Kensington Society, The Friends of Kensal Green Cemetery, Lots Road Neighbourhood Forum.

Apologies to any individuals, or organisations inadvertently missed off this list

Appendix: Making use of the RBKC Local Plan

As a result of the efforts of community participants, significant changes were made to the Local Plan. It is important that the community has knowledge of what was achieved, so that these changes are implemented and make a difference on the ground.

Council's Charter for Public Participation

Comment made by Kensington & Chelsea Social Council

To build trust, the vision must have a commitment to coproduction and co-design. The Borough's Charter for Public Participation is central to this and must be referenced in the Vision. The Charter for Public Participation is part of the Constitution of RBKC. It was drawn up as a direct response to a root and branch review of RBKC's governance structures in the aftermath of the Grenfell Fire and provides for greater use of participation and coproduction.

KCSC believe that there ought to be a framework to deliver the Charter, which commits to engaging the community as partners, that encourages participation at all levels, allied to community training and rigorous regular advertising of the Charter.

Where to find in the Local Plan Policy V1: Overall Vision for the Borough.

"We will ensure that engagement is undertaken in accordance with the Council's Charter for Public Participation and the Statement of Community Involvement."(paragraph 1.23a)

Stop Press.....RBKC are set to commence a review of the Charter in February to the end of March 2025. This is set to establish a new framework as KCSC have long requested. We urge residents to be involved.

Comment made by Citizen's Advice Kensington and Chelsea & Isis Amlak

Engagement should include co-design and consideration of trauma informed practice acknowledging the needs of our community affected by the Grenfell Tower tragedy.

Trauma-informed practice is an approach to health and care interventions which is grounded in the understanding that trauma exposure can impact an individual's neurological, biological, psychological and social development, that aims to empower individuals to re-establish control of their lives.

Where to find in the Local Plan Policy V1: Overall Vision for the Borough.

“Engagement to take account of trauma informed practice, acknowledging the needs of our community affected by the Grenfell Tower tragedy. This will work towards the Local Plan being inclusive, sensitive and supportive.”
(paragraph 1.23a)

Comment made by Richard Crane

Canalside House and the provision of affordable and suitable office and meeting space is important for groups sharing protected characteristics and the failure to secure them constitutes a failure for the Council to pay due regards to its equality duty. The existing community assets, i.e. Canalside House, must be protected and to encourage further provision of affordable and suitable community space.

A full decontamination of the Kensal site, supported by independent health assessments, is necessary before a planning application is considered and thereafter, a robust health monitoring system needs to be in place (Green and Blue Policy Contaminated Land)

Where to find in the Local Plan Place Vision and Site Allocation

“Kensal Canalside will prioritise the provision of community facilities and heritage assets, and any new location of Canalside House must be within the Opportunity Area in an equally accessible location.

Contaminated land surveys must be undertaken in line with best practice guidance and by a competent environmental specialist.”

Community led housing Policy

Comment made by Backdoor Housing Cooperative & West London Co-op Forum

Promoting and supporting the development of under-utilised buildings would help to meet our borough's identified need for housing. The sustained activities of St Mark's, Backdoor, Westminster and other short-life co-ops demonstrate how vacant properties can be transformed into community homes, but specific policy is essential to provide the necessary framework and support for this source of community housing supply to be fully realised.

The overarching benefit of community-led housing projects is that they provide actually affordable homes for the community to live in. The requirement for this benefit to be legally protected in perpetuity therefore prevents dwellings from becoming empty again.

Where to find in the Local Plan HO2 Small Sites

Community led housing and custom build housing have been added to the Local Plan.

Gypsies and Travellers

Comment made on behalf of the Stable Way Gypsy and Traveller community

Boroughs should undertake an audit of existing local-authority provided gypsy and traveller sites and pitches, working with residents occupying these, identifying: 1) areas of overcrowding 2) areas of potential extra capacity within existing sites 3) pitches in need of refurbishment and/or provision of enhanced infrastructure (including utilities, open space and landscaping). Boroughs should make site allocations within the plan. No audit has been undertaken. The site at Stable Way is overcrowded, and is in need of enhancement. There is opportunity on adjacent land to provide additional pitches. The needs of many of those in bricks and mortar, and a number of Stable way site residents have not been accounted for.

The figure of 9 pitches within the London Plan should be used in the interim. The Borough have failed to allocate any land for Gypsies and Travellers for many decades.

Where to find in the Local Plan Housing Policy HO8

Gypsies and Travellers need 9 additional pitches in the Borough, including for those who have ceased to travel but culturally identify as Gypsies or Travellers. A study of provision at Stable Way is needed.

Comment made by Kensington and Chelsea Social Council

The Council's inability to manage and maintain tall buildings in North Kensington, as evidenced by Grenfell, questions the effectiveness of the policy. The most noticeable aspect of which is omission of a commitment to no single exit/access stairwells. This remains an inbuilt fear now for residents of Tower blocks – any block given consent in the borough must have more than one exit stairwell. All tall buildings should incorporate the findings of Phases one, and two when it arrives, of the Grenfell Inquiry.

Where to find in the Local Plan Conservation and Design Policy CD 15 (page 270)

“A Planning Fire Safety Strategy (PFSS) should contain the means of escape for all building users, suitably designed stair cores, escape for building users who are disabled or require level access and associated evacuation strategy approach.

The Council will use a planning condition to ensure that relevant parts of the PFSS are adhered to. Any consideration of fire safety should be undertaken in a sensitive way given the profound impact on the Borough's communities of the Grenfell Tower tragedy. Any recommendations (relevant to planning) from Phase 2 of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry will also be taken into account.”

Comment made by Trellick Tower Residents Association

Intensive development on this site of up to 14 storeys will further degrade this listed estate, which has suffered destructive interventions by the Council over the years which disrespect the original vision of the architect. We do not believe that a tall building on this site is justified. It will negatively compromise the social fabric of the existing — connected — community.

We propose that this site be renamed “Trellick Tower and the Cheltenham Estate” to accurately reflect the location within the footprint of the estate, which is itself Grade II listed. There is no mention of the estate in the Policy text.

Where to find in the Local Plan Edenham Way Site Allocation 7 [page 97-98]

Development at Edenham Way to be no higher than 6 storeys and undertaken in a holistic manner so as to respect the historic setting of Trellick Tower and the grade 2 listed Cheltenham Estate.

A. The site will deliver a high-quality residential development with some social and community use. The development must be consistent with and sensitive to the original vision of the architect and be undertaken in a holistic manner which should not compete with the existing heritage assets.

- D. Building heights no higher than Block B of Trellick Tower, or 6 storeys, so as not to detract from the setting of Trellick Tower.
- E. A suitable setting for the designated heritage assets including the Grade II* listed Trellick Tower and Grade II listed Cheltenham Estate.

The following policies in the RBKC Local Plan are also important and worth making use of. They were achieved through the input of community members.

- Major development must show that renewable energy has been maximised on site as part of delivering net zero carbon. This should minimise the use of carbon off-setting Green – Blue (GB) Policy 4 Energy and Net Zero Carbon (pages 131-132)
- All new development should improve existing air quality (air quality positive approach) recognising disproportionate impacts of poor air quality (eg on young children) Green - Blue (GB) Policy 6 Air Quality (pages 144-145)
- The Council has committed to develop an Empty Homes Strategy. 1 in every 8 homes in the Borough is unused. Policy HO1 Delivery and protection of homes (page 188)
- Deletion of London Affordable Rent as a category of genuinely affordable housing Policy HO3 Community Housing (page 199)
- Redevelopment of social rented housing estates will only be allowed as an exception, with a compelling case that must provide a net increase in community housing, guaranteed right of return to the renewed estate, high quality environment that promotes health and well-being and provides community space Policy HO7 Estate Renewal (page 216)
- Tall buildings in suitable locations only, the Council to provide evidence of building heights, greater reference to the significance of 20th Century architecture and its contribution to the Borough's heritage Conservation and Design Policies CD1, CD2, CD7, CD8 [pages 224, 228, 239-240, 241]
- Social infrastructure to include bespoke premises for voluntary sector and other valued uses that include community centres Social Infrastructure Policy SI 1 [page 319]
- Lancaster West estate vision to be co-designed with the community Places and Vision 3 Lancaster West and Notting Dale [pages 26 – 29]