The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea

Characterisation Study 2019 – 2020

Service Specification

* 1. **PROJECT SUMMARY**
  2. The Council is commissioning an evidence-based study that will consider both the character of the borough and the potential for delivering development to meet its housing need and the wider needs of London. It will investigate opportunities for intensification across small and larger sites. There is a pressing need for significantly more homes to be delivered in the borough, particularly affordable homes in the context of the new Local Plan, the new London Plan and the Government’s housing delivery test. Geographically, the borough is the smallest in London (approximately 4.8 sq miles) but is intensively built up, much of which comprises of an outstanding Victorian townscape.
  3. The new draft London Plan provides strong support for increasing housing delivery on both large and small sites with the introduction of a policy promoting housing development on small sites. This reflects the position in Kensington and Chelsea that is characterised by small sites that are contextual. The Mayor’s design guidance sets out design principles for small housing developments across London. However, there is an expectation that boroughs will supplement this with design codes of their own. The study will establish character areas and produce high-level advice for these areas to inform specific site planning briefs and/or design codes. The first stage of the study will define the existing character across the borough, divided into appropriate areas. The second step of the study will be to provide guidance that will identify, promote and co-ordinate development across the borough.
  4. Given the nature of the borough, its small size, and land values, which are the highest in the UK, opportunities for intensification are not widespread or easy to implement so the study will need to go into detail to find suitable sites. These are limited within the conservation areas, but opportunities do exist.
  5. **INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**
  6. Kensington and Chelsea grew throughout the nineteenth century to provide homes for the newly wealthy middle and upper classes. This period of growth has left a legacy of Georgian and Victorian terraces laid out in a network of streets, often with garden squares, of the highest quality. Edwardian mansion blocks followed allowing buildings to be slightly taller and of higher density. As a result, there are over 4,000 listed buildings and approximately 74% of the borough is within a designated conservation area including some of metropolitan importance such as the Thames, Royal Hospital and the South Kensington Museums conservation areas.
  7. However, much of the north of the borough has a different character. In North Kensington in particular there are social housing estates built in the post war period, often replacing Victorian terraced housing that was no longer regarded as offering quality housing. The street layout is less defined and the general uniformity, which characterises other parts of the borough, is less pronounced.
  8. Following the Grenfell tragedy in June 2017 the Council made the decision to halt plans for estate redevelopment in the borough, which means previous plans for comprehensive redevelopment of estates were stopped and will not be resumed. Instead, the Council made a positive commitment to taking a more collaborative approach to working with communities in the provision of new homes. On existing estates this might manifest itself in terms of some infill development but comprehensive redevelopment is not an option. However, the potential for infill sites should be investigated throughout the borough given that suitable land is in short supply. The potential for areas where additional storeys on buildings could be appropriate should also be examined. Given the limited land supply, the study will need to take a more fine grained approach than similar exercises that may have taken place in other London boroughs.

* 1. There are three Employment Zones in the borough, which are outside conservation area designation where industrial, warehousing and office uses are concentrated. They are recognised as highly dynamic employment areas that are popular with creative industries. It is the Council’s intention that these areas become innovation districts of the future allowing them to provide a wide range of premises to attract the widest range of businesses and occupiers.
  2. An all borough Article 4 direction coupled with a restrictive policy resisting the loss of employment floorspace to other uses means that there is an expectation that there is no net loss of business floorspace as part of any redevelopment proposal. However, given the built up nature of the borough the possibilities of mixed-use development as part of land intensification in the borough’s Employment Zones is a realistic option and will play a significant role in boosting housing supply. There is little vacant land available in the borough so it is envisaged that much of the Council’s future housing land supply will come from redevelopment of existing sites at a higher density.

1. **PROJECT BRIEF**
   1. The overall aim of the study is to provide an understanding of the characteristics and attributes that make the Borough what it is today, how these vary across the borough and how this local distinctiveness might inform future approaches to embracing and managing growth and change.
   2. The key objectives of the study are:

* To **review** the borough’s urban structure and character, including its growth patterns.
* To identify the **key features** of different types of development in the borough, how these relate to different parts of the borough, contribute to local distinctiveness and define character areas.
* To **identify** where intensification may occur; where taller buildings may be suitably located; and where intensification and tall buildings may not be appropriate, and what infrastructure or other interventions would be required to optimise the growth opportunities.
* To provide a **first step** towards the identification of land that could be considered for redevelopment, but acknowledging that any development moving forward would need to be informed by policies in the Development Plan and extensive engagement with residents and businesses in the area.
* To make **recommendations,** based on existing development types and character areas, providing a vision for the future for further work, new policy directions and guidance to help the Borough meet its housing needs.

**Review**

* 1. The review should take note of existing work, but it will require a refresh of approach and acknowledgment that the borough needs to deliver a growth agenda. Most of the Borough’s conservation areas have been the subject of new Conservation Area Appraisals (CAAs). The CAAs provide a comprehensive history for the 74% of the Borough that lies within conservation areas. They will form a good basis for the initial analysis. There is also an existing Building Height SPD, which can be used to inform the study. However, given the constraints in the Borough, and the fact that the SPD was adopted in 2010, it should not be used as a blueprint for characterisation and taller buildings. A new approach is required which in the first instance should not be constrained by existing policy or this SPD. A list of relevant background documents is set out in the table below:

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| **Document** | **Link** |
| Conservation Area Appraisals | <https://www.rbkc.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/heritage-and-conservation/conservation-areas/conservation-area> |
| Local Plan Partial Review and Consolidated Local Plan | <https://www.rbkc.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/local-plan/local-plan> |
| London Plan | <https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/planning/london-plan/current-london-plan> |
| Building Heights SPD | <https://www.rbkc.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/supplementary-planning/building-height-supplementary> |

As part of the review process, the appointed design team may wish to meet with the Council’s Officers to discuss their concerns and priorities regarding growth. Any meetings should be factored into the fee for this work stage.

**Key Features**

* 1. Townscape has formed a key consideration for planning decisions in the Borough in recent times, and more often than not it has been the determinant factor in decisions on the largest and most important proposed developments despite the acute need for housing, particularly affordable housing. This study must develop a deep understanding of the Borough’s townscape and land uses in order to identify realistic locations for growth and investigation.
  2. The study should identify the building typologies that make up the Borough. This will be important in appreciating how this has influenced recent development and where intensification is possible.
  3. The study should also define character areas and areas of local distinctiveness. The character areas should focus on both positive and negative aspects of the townscape, providing a clear understanding of the variance in townscape quality across the borough.
  4. The Borough’s Conservation Areas and Estates should be included in both the typology and character area work.

**Identify**

* 1. The study should clearly define areas of opportunity for good growth based upon the character areas and typologies identified. The study will identify areas that can accommodate tall buildings. Given the increased pressure on housing delivery these locations should not be confined to the strategic sites identified in the Local Plan, smaller infill sites must be included. An innovative approach to site identification will be necessary to achieve the housing numbers required in the Borough. For instance, this could include the existing employment zones within the Borough as the LPPR has a more flexible policy position on housing delivery within these areas.
  2. Equally, the study should be clear where growth and development would not be appropriate and where taller buildings would have a harmful impact on the Borough’s historic townscape. The purpose of the study is to acknowledge the Borough constraints and give a clear focus for growth while protecting the Borough’s existing distinct character.
  3. The study will identify opportunities for growth in Conservation Areas. The Conservation Area Appraisals should closely inform this element of the study.
  4. As stated earlier, the Council will not consider wholescale re-development of our housing estates. However, the study should identify opportunities for infill and extension.

**Recommendations**

* 1. The study will form the basis of a broader growth strategy for the Borough. This may include planning briefs or SPD’s for key sites, but could also influence Local Plan policy going forward. The study will therefore make recommendations around policy approach, where site-specific briefs would be beneficial and any other key changes required ensuring the Borough delivers the homes it needs.
  2. The study should review the Borough’s definition of a tall building. This may vary on a site-by-site or character area by character area basis.

1. **PROJECT MILESTONES**
   1. The Borough would like to have a final study complete within 12 weeks of appointment. Key indicative milestones for the study are set out below:

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| **Activity** | **Timeframe (from appointment)** |
| Review of existing RBKC documents and existing Borough Context complete. | Weeks 1 - 2 |
| Key features and character areas defined and mapped. \* | Weeks 3-6 |
| Draft proposals for areas for growth and areas for no growth, including other infrastructure requirements. \* | Weeks 7-9 |
| Final proposals for growth / no growth and draft recommendations for policy changes and site-specific briefs. \* | Weeks 10-11 |
| Final Study complete. | Week 12 |

* + - The Council will require 3x progress meetings at the end of these work stages. All other meetings must be clearly set out within the quotation

1. **REPORTING**
   1. The appointed team should provide a pdf and editable version of the final report in Adobe InDesign. We do not require printed copies. We will also require editable versions of all drawings and diagrams, RBKC can have access to all the Adobe Creative Suite and AutoCad. Outputs must be compatible with this platform. Any 3D modelling should be compatible with Sketch up, Auto cad and the VU City.

* 1. If necessary, consultants will need to attend meetings with RBKC to discuss assumptions, methodologies and conclusions. The consultant will be required to treat all information in strictest confidence. The consultant will be required to confirm that they have no conflict of interest in respect of the instruction.
  2. Where additional costs may occur, the consultant will require authorisation from the named contacts at RBKC prior to undertaking any work not included within the original budget or work not specified in this brief.