

Councillor Tim Coleridge
Cabinet Member for Planning, Transport and Arts Policy
Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea
Town Hall
Hornton Street
London W8 7NX

23 January 2014

Dear Councillor Coleridge,

DRAFT SPD: NOTTING HILL GATE
The Kensington Society response

I am writing on behalf of the Kensington Society with our comments on the draft SPD.

We have prepared these comments with the benefit of input from our Planning Committee, a report we commissioned from Malcolm Reading Consultants (MRC) on behalf of The Kensington Society with contributions from the Cherry Trees Association and Campden Hill Residents' Association, and a workshop to discuss the draft report attended by representatives from all the leading associations with an interest in the future of Notting Hill Gate. I attach a copy of the report by Malcolm Reading Consultants which provides a background to our views below.

The SPD

The Society welcomes the Council's initiative in preparing this draft SPD, although we are concerned that it is in danger of being overtaken by the speed with which the developers, particularly the owner of Newcombe House, are preparing their own plans.

Our approach to the draft SPD has been to review the vision, the themes and the priorities in order to be able to deliver change that will better match residents' aspirations. We have used the draft SPD as a starting point for discussion, reviewed the ingredients and priorities and produced a strategy that better meets the needs of the residents of the area who look to Notting Hill Gate as an underperforming district centre, a major public transport interchange and a place that needs to be transformed without losing what is unusual/special about it.

A Vision for Notting Hill Gate

The vision that we have put together is Notting Hill Gate as a more user-friendly, better performing town centre with a stronger and positive sense of place and which retains its special character and builds on its strengths in its retail, entertainment and cultural offer. Notting Hill Gate could benefit greatly from a new focus for community activity – something that will develop the attraction for local people to come back. In addition the public realm needs to change from being an unfriendly thoroughfare to Central London to a friendly and attractive place.

Patron His Royal Highness The Duke of Gloucester, KG, GCVO

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Vice Presidents The Rt Hon the Earl of Snowdon, GCVO
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Priorities:

A phased comprehensive approach

The Society recognises that there is a need for a comprehensive approach, but the reality is that in practice only a part of the area has any realistic expectation of redevelopment and that the strategy will need a phased approach, backed up by the transformation of the public realm/streetscape to make it a more attractive place to visit and spend time. We propose a phased approach with the first phase to be produced quickly and timely to meet the demanding developer schedule.

The first phase will consist of the Newcombe House site extending down to Kensington Place and west along Notting Hill Gate to include Hobson House, David Game House and the LUL substation. Also in this phase would be The Book Warehouse.

Phase two would include other properties on the North side and Astley House.

Phase 1: Redevelopment of Newcombe House

The Society recognises that there are hopes riding on this site to provide shops, offices and housing, and, in the draft SPD developed by the planners, an aspirational major cultural hub. In our analysis we have adopted priorities, which are;

- **A new focus for Notting Hill Gate: a new public space**
This new public open space would act as a focus for community and local activity with links to Notting Hill Gate, Kensington Place and, most importantly, open to Kensington Church Street, which could also accommodate the weekly farmers' market;
- **Community facilities** including a new primary health care centre - GP surgery + pharmacy - and, perhaps, a small-scale cultural activity close to or in the new square;
- **a new entrance to the underground station**, set far enough back from Notting Hill Gate to facilitate **step-free access to the station concourse – paid for by TfL**
- **a replacement for Newcombe House** with shops on the ground floor, six floors of offices to ensure replacement of office floorspace and housing above. This should be a permit-free and car-free development. A tall building, but not much more than current Newcombe House.

This scheme omits the suggested major cultural hub. The Society considers that this would be a high-risk proposal with no real local support and which would make demands on the development (2,000sqm of space costing £8m of S106) **its omission or considerable scaling down** would greatly reduce the pressure for an 81m high building.

Transforming the Public Realm

The Society considers that there is need for a more ambitious programme of public realm improvements paid for TfL and RBKC (Parking Reserve Account), rather than any of the developers. It would include parts of Kensington Church Street and Pembridge Road.

Town centre management

The town centre management initiative at Notting Hill Gate should cover Notting Hill Gate plus Pembridge Road to the beginning of Portobello Road and Kensington Church Street as far as Bedford Gardens. Notting Hill Gate District Centre will need a town centre partnership to steer the centre through a period of major transition.

Tradeoffs

The Society considers that the priorities combined with potential sources of funding demands a more pragmatic approach and a clear presentation of priorities for S106 and other funding, recognising the trade-offs – we have produced a new table to convey our priorities and who should be expected to pay.

There is confusion between priority and who should pay in current draft – for example:

- **Public realm improvements** – is high priority for the strategy overall, but will be low priority for funding through S106 – the main source of funding RBKC (Parking Reserve Account) and TfL funds for highways
- **New public space** – absolutely essential – but designed in/funded through Newcombe House
- **Cultural facility** – large: no priority; small: low priority – funded entirely through Newcombe House
- **affordable housing** – important, Newcombe House will be main provider
- **town centre management** – revenue contributions based on rateable value/floorspace
- **public art** – part of S106 tariff
- **primary health care etc** – essential – premises/shell from Newcombe House, fit out from S106 tariff health pot
- **underground station** – TfL, including receipts from development of substation and station/interchange funding

NB: This table is critical in conveying not only our priorities and trade-offs, but who should bear the costs.

I attach a copy of the report by Malcolm Reading Consultants which has helped inform our proposals and which presents our recommendations for future actions.

Finally, we look forward to presenting our proposals to you, ward councillors and to key officers in the Planning Department.

Yours sincerely,

Amanda Frame
Chairman
Kensington Society

Cc: Councillors Campbell, Campion, Weatherhead, Ahern, Buckmaster and Freeman
Jonathan Bore, Jonathan Wade, Joanna Hammond
Notting Gate Improvement Group
The Kensington Society Affiliated Societies