

EARLS COURT REGENERATION AREA
CORE STRATEGY EVIDENCE BASE
DESIGN PRINCIPLES SUMMARY STUDY

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1.0 KEY POINTS SUMMARY

1.1 This study has been prepared for Capital & Counties on behalf of the Earls Court & Olympia Group. It forms part of the evidence base to support the allocation of Earls Court Regeneration Area within the Core Strategies for the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC) and the London borough of Hammersmith and Fulham (LBHF) and its purpose is:

1.1.1 To identify the relevant planning policy by way of context

1.1.2 To describe the vision for potential future development within the Earls Court Regeneration Area

1.1.3 To explain the design principles which would underpin the quality of future development and the public realm.

1.2 Using sound principles of design to inform the masterplanning and planning application processes the Earls Court Regeneration Area provides the opportunity to:

1.2.1 repair and reinvent an underutilised and physically divisive land area currently dominated by ailing building stock and significant railway infrastructure and by building on an existing well-known name transform it into a well designed desirable and significant London place with a vibrant public realm

1.2.2 build on and promote the connectivity of the Regeneration Area with its proximity to Earls Court, West Kensington and West Brompton stations (along with the adjacent A4/West Cromwell Road) and develop strong linkages to adjacent streets and local landmarks to create a well connected hub.

2.0 POLICIES AND BEST PRACTICE

2.1 Planning policy encourages high quality and inclusive design whereby development is intended to create attractive places and take the opportunities available for improving the visual character and quality of an area and that good design should contribute positively to making places better for people (PPS1, Delivering Sustainable Development).

2.2 Design principles which would underpin the masterplanning process for any proposals in the Regeneration Area would aim to address key existing and emerging policies at the regional and local level including seeking to:

2.2.1 Maximise site potential

2.2.2 Promote high quality inclusive design and create/enhance the public realm

2.2.3 Respect local context, history, built heritage, character and communities

2.2.4 Create development which is attractive to look at

2.2.5 Realise the value of open space and green infrastructure

2.2.6 Promote development of a high standard of design sensitive to and compatible with the scale, height, bulk materials and character of the surroundings

2.2.7 Promote development which conserves the inherited built environment and adds a legacy of equal quality

2.2.8 Create well designed buildings with active streets that respect their surroundings

2.2.9 Provide a street pattern linking one place to another, encouraging walking routes through areas.

2.3 Any regeneration scheme coming forward within the Regeneration Area should also aim to meet national best practice which sets out urban design objectives¹ for example:

2.3.1 **Character** - *To promote character in townscape and landscape by responding to and reinforcing locally distinctive patterns of development, landscape and culture*

2.3.2 **Continuity and enclosure** - *To promote the continuity of street frontages and the enclosure of space by development which clearly defines private and public areas.*

2.3.3 **Quality of the public realm** - *To promote public spaces and routes that are attractive, safe, uncluttered and work effectively for all in society, including disabled and elderly people.*

2.3.4 **Ease of movement** - *To promote accessibility and local permeability by making places that connect with each other and are easy to move through, putting people before traffic and integrating land uses and transport.*

2.3.5 **Legibility** - *To promote legibility through development that provides recognisable routes, intersections and landmarks to help people find their way around.*

3.0 VISION

3.1 London is made up of unique places and districts, each with their own character and history. The redevelopment of an area with the scale and importance of the Earls Court Regeneration Area provides an exciting opportunity to build on an existing well-known name to create a substantial new part of London that can become a pleasurable destination for work, living, the arts and urban life.

3.2 Comprehensive development within the Regeneration Area will permit a holistic approach to sustainable development. Key elements of any proposals coming forward will be the ability to integrate transport and planning to reduce the need to travel and provide local jobs and recreation areas close to where people live within inclusive neighbourhoods.

3.3 The Earls Court Regeneration Area is currently an island; a super-block with broken frontages; fragmented urban form; few externally facing uses; and no walking routes through its core. Any regeneration scheme coming forward within the Regeneration Area provides the opportunity to repair and reinvent an underutilised and physically divisive land area currently dominated by ailing building stock and significant railway infrastructure and transform it into a desirable and significant London place.

3.4 The vision for the Earls Court Regeneration Area would be to seek to:

3.4.1 Provide an inspiring destination that builds on the established reputation of Earl's Court as a major attraction and is of a gravitas and quality commensurate with the ambition afforded by the Regeneration Area's characteristics;

3.4.2 Repair broken connections and the fractured urban form and deliver a comprehensive, unique, high quality rejuvenated cityscape that builds on the

¹ Page 15, By Design: Urban Design in the Planning System: Towards Better Practice, CABE/DETR 2000

character of the old and can become one of London's great metropolitan destinations;

- 3.4.3 Accommodate a development of significant scale and intensity which respects important qualities of local character and the quality of views into and out of the Regeneration Area along important local and metropolitan vistas;
- 3.4.4 Provide strong east-west connections between the London boroughs forging new pedestrian links via routes that are currently denied by the presence of the railway lines and the Earls Court exhibition halls;
- 3.4.5 Deliver an integrated public realm that is rich in beauty, diversity and landscaping quality, providing appropriate space for a range of activities to take place, supporting local, civic and cultural daily life with a major public square as the community focus and civic heart of the Regeneration Area;
- 3.4.6 Provide an attractive, legible, safe and secure environment ensuring appropriate transition between areas of domestic, public and commercial scale.

4.0 DESIGN

4.1 Design Opportunities

4.1.1 The Regeneration Area is currently marginalised by a number of physical constraints, primarily as a result of existing buildings and railway infrastructure. However this presents a range of interesting design opportunities that can inform the development of any future masterplan. The opportunities include;

- (a) **Making use of topography** - *the level changes required to bridge retained railway infrastructure obstructions - generally grading down as one moves West from Warwick Road - means that a variety of levels can be designed into a new ground plane creating an interesting topographical street network, or a 'cloth of landscape' beneath which unsightly infrastructure, parking etc. can be concealed, thus improving the general attractiveness of the area and allowing buildings to sit on 'real' ground wherever feasible;*
- (b) **Orientation** - *the relative elevation of the eastern portion of the Regeneration Area allows for views west across London and public spaces to be orientated to catch the sun throughout the day;*
- (c) **Connectivity** - *the relative position of the existing underground stations and lack of coherent urban structure within the Regeneration Area allows future masterplan proposals to deliver appropriate street connections with the existing urban fabric based on natural desire lines.*

4.2 Design Principles

- 4.2.1 Consideration should be given to the development of proposals for the Regeneration Area that recognise its unique position (bounded by transit corridors and existing residential districts) and should seek to repair the fragmented nature of the urban form in this area, integrating new development seamlessly into a contemporary urban structure that better reflects the density of its metropolitan location and the intensity of the local urban morphology.
- 4.2.2 Design quality should be at the forefront in developing the masterplan for the Regeneration Area. Whilst there is an aspiration to deliver a place of metropolitan,

and therefore international, status there is also a need to ensure that proposals come forward that are locally appropriate. The scale of the Regeneration Area will demand a sensitive approach to design and construction.

4.2.3 Key to the success of any new development will be the ease with which the network of routes, spaces, landscape and infrastructure across the Regeneration Area can utilise the ground plane to connect into the local urban fabric.

4.2.4 Key design principles could include:

- (a) Establishing an appropriate density of development, concentrating higher densities and destination, commercial and metropolitan uses around major transport nodes;
- (b) Setting out a traditional street pattern hierarchy within a familiar language of urban grain that enhances pedestrian connectivity across the boroughs and makes the Regeneration Scheme an integrated part of the wider area rather than an isolated development site;
- (c) Developing entrances into the Regeneration Area and enhancing them around its periphery, the most significant of which would be the connection to Warwick Road, where the urban form allows for a gateway into the area which is at present occupied by the Earls Court exhibition halls;
- (d) Developing strong linkages to adjacent streets and local landmarks to generate the principle masterplan layout, repairing and improving existing 'broken' street frontages around the periphery of the Regeneration Area;
- (e) Providing active edges to the Regeneration Area boundaries and along publicly accessible routes within the Regeneration Area;
- (f) Placing residential buildings within a hierarchy of streets and squares and providing a mixture of dwelling types, tenure, and accommodation sizes;
- (g) Realising desire lines as major pedestrian boulevards between West Kensington, West Brompton and Earls Court stations, with their convergence determining the location of a new primary London square, which should become the 'heart' of the place;
- (h) Building on the best qualities of the locality around the edges of the Regeneration Area, which offer a diverse set of conditions between North End Road, Lillie Bridge Road, West Cromwell Road and Warwick Road. New uses could bind the Regeneration Area into these existing neighbourhoods by extending their influence into any new development;
- (i) Respecting the grain of the historic street patterns and outstanding building stock of the locale and seeking to develop urban form that reinforces the notions of continuity and enclosure, promoting continuous and unbroken street frontages, within perimeter urban blocks;
- (j) Concentrating areas of height around public transport nodes and potentially along the A4 corridor with a sympathetic scale and form of building and landscape design around the edges, with massing towards the core of the Regeneration Area which protects existing residential areas.

5.0 PLACE MAKING

5.1 Capitalising on Opportunities

- 5.1.1 Earls Court Regeneration Area already has the scale, accessibility and brand-name familiarity to be the home to major and minor destinations that would draw both from London and beyond. The relative accessibility the Regeneration Area and proximity to mass transit nodes makes it an ideal location for a metropolitan scale destination and a potential area for centering significant employment uses through the provision of a business/office district accessed off the A4/ West Cromwell Road corridor, with direct connections to the three surrounding underground stations.
- 5.1.2 In their current location the Earls Court exhibition halls (EC1 and 2) create an impenetrable barrier to movement across the Regeneration Area undermining any ability to create a strong gateway and new street connections between Warwick Road and North End Road or the local underground stations. As a key element of the rejuvenation of the broader Regeneration Area, the EC1 and 2 sites have a strategic role to play in the realisation of a comprehensive redevelopment; this is essentially the front door between the Earls Court station area of RBKC and the body of the Regeneration Area to the west in LBHF and is the key to the physical unity of the boroughs in this area.
- 5.1.3 The potential benefits of providing an International Convention Centre (ICC) within LBHF are acknowledged and (as explained in more detail in other studies) it is considered that the Olympia site represents the best-fit location given its connectivity, brand associations and proximity to complementary and ancillary products and services (such as hotels, retail, catering and offices).
- 5.1.4 Locating an ICC at Olympia would enable a masterplan to capitalise on opportunities to create a strong connected new place. Design considerations which do not support a potential ICC at the EC1 and EC2 location include:
- (a) Any potential ICC building is likely to be a complex and demanding building, with very particular requirements for site area, servicing, transport access, visibility, associated open space, security and other considerations. It is a building which needs to sit well with its neighbouring development. Conference and exhibition centres typically have long blank walls and significant servicing requirements which result in a big "back" that need to be carefully planned with adjacent uses. These challenging aspects of any potential ICC building would not be easily overcome on the existing EC1 and 2 sites, where blank frontages will be hard to design around and where there is the most complex pattern of Underground and Overground lines.
 - (b) As noted, a key design principle is to provide enhanced connectivity. In particular, the ability to create east-west connectivity between Warwick Road and North End Road is a major potential benefit. This key movement is currently blocked by the necessarily "secure/private" nature of the Earls Court buildings, and any ICC development on the same site would have similar challenges and would do nothing to remove this detrimental blockage to east-west permeability;
 - (c) A key design principle is for the existing EC1 and 2 sites to be utilised going forward to allow a better "scale transition" to the wider development to be appropriately planned. The scale transition is currently abrupt, from existing townhouses with gardens to service roads and the expansive, blank walls of

EC1 - effectively a 'black box' structure. By introducing a potential ICC here the opportunity for significant visual improvement is much more limited;

- (d) The area immediately west of Warwick Road is crossed by a complex network of underground tunnels, which create design and build constraints in relation to the construction of a modern ICC building with the potential for acoustic and vibration problems.

5.2 Public Realm

- 5.2.1 The ambition for the public realm should be to generate innovative, high quality and sustainable urban landscape design, blending green and hard spaces, along with zones devoted to promoting urban ecology, helping to create a memorable destination and much loved local places with open space employed as a means of promoting locally distinctive development form, character and culture.
- 5.2.2 As noted, a major new London public square could be provided as a focus of the new place, amongst a broader range of open space provision. It would be fitting for the design principles for the primary square to reflect the established tradition Earls Court has as a place of exhibition, celebration and entertainment, providing for example, flexible congregational space suitable for public events, street theatre, concerts, galas, markets, shows, sculpture, media screens, interactive landscape, eating and dining, along with places to sit, play, and relax. Any significant destination attraction proposed for the Regeneration Area should be located appropriately in relation to this major open space. Other quarters of the Regeneration Area could feature their own open space, with a character appropriate to the surrounding uses.
- 5.2.3 Street life and building use distribution should encourage an appropriate level of activity to support busy or quiet spaces. Ground level frontages along public routes should avoid blind facades and be designed to animate the street scene.
- 5.2.4 Key design principles underpinning the masterplanning of the public realm may include:
 - (a) Offering a hierarchical network of streets, squares and open space provision, with clearly defined public and private areas ranging from a major focal 'London' square and local gateway and perimeter squares to private amenity spaces providing variety in street widths, proportions and levels of activity dependent upon intended use;
 - (b) Seeking to encourage broader pedestrian and cycle movement across the Regeneration Area improving links between RBKC and LBHF and any existing local amenities including the possibility of a green link to West Brompton Cemetery which could provide a strong connection to what is already a cherished community asset;
 - (c) Exploring opportunities for complementary public realm landmarks aiding orientation and facilitating the transition between new and existing development, for example in linking the Regeneration Area to Warwick Road;
 - (d) Ensuring spaces have a direct relationship with the buildings that they address and, in turn, the buildings should offer appropriate surveillance to make such spaces feel safe and comfortable for their patrons;

- (e) Considering lighting, signage and street furniture as an integral component of the architectural and public realm design, arranging them to minimise clutter and physical and visual intrusion;
- (f) Designing a streetscape planting strategy to enhance visual 'greenness' and to increase urban tree canopy/coverage to help mitigate the impact of the thermal heat island effect.

6.0 CONCLUSION

6.1 Earls Court Regeneration Area is currently an island characterised by broken frontages, a fragmented urban form and no walking routes through its core. What is more, the existing exhibition halls present a significant barrier to enhancing connectivity between the boroughs and capitalising on the opportunity to establish an important gateway to the Regeneration Area.

6.2 Using sound principles of design to inform the Masterplanning processes the Earls Court Regeneration Area provides the opportunity to:

- 6.2.1 repair and reinvent an underutilised and physically divisive land area currently dominated by ailing building stock and significant railway infrastructure and by building on an existing well-known name transform it into a well designed, desirable and significant London place with a vibrant public realm.
- 6.2.2 build on and promote the connectivity of the Regeneration Area with its proximity to Earls Court, West Kensington and West Brompton stations (along with the adjacent A4/West Cromwell Road) and develop strong linkages to adjacent streets and local landmarks to create a well connected hub.