

STREETSCAPE



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Introduction



THE ROYAL BOROUGH OF
KENSINGTON
AND CHELSEA

“HAVE NOTHING IN YOUR HOUSES WHICH YOU DO NOT KNOW TO BE USEFUL OR BELIEVE TO BE BEAUTIFUL”

These words of William Morris, founder of the Arts and Crafts Movement, epitomise the Royal Borough’s philosophy for our streets.

Our streetscape has no place for the useless or ugly.

Everything placed on our streets must add to its surroundings by serving an essential purpose or by adding beauty.

The first edition of this Streetscape Guide was published in 2004, following the completion of the Kensington High Street scheme. This award winning street was the springboard for the development of the Royal Borough’s Streetscape Policies and formed the basis for the Guide.

Since that date we have continued to develop our streetscape policies and have now revised this Guide to reflect new demands. This edition includes updates of the sections included in the 2004 edition, together with new sections covering the co-ordination of street furniture; non-illuminated and LED signs; entry treatments and raised tables; Legible London signage; speed indicator signs; single surface schemes; vehicle crossovers and non-traffic signs.



WHAT IS STREETSCAPE?

Streetscape is all that we see in the street – the total picture.

Streetscape is defined not only by the buildings around us but also by the scale and proportion of the spaces between those buildings. The quality of paving, the design of lighting and street furniture, general lack of clutter and an air of good maintenance can determine whether the scene is pleasing to the eye or an assault on the senses. These elements of the street scene, paving, street furniture, lighting and signing, when designed well and carefully co-ordinated, can be used to enhance the built form, giving greater emphasis to the qualities of particular buildings and landmarks, and bringing out the character of residential areas.

In Kensington and Chelsea there are many examples of world-class architecture and these fine buildings should be complemented by streets designed and maintained to the same high standards. Nowhere in the Royal Borough should be excluded from a thoughtful approach to the treatment of streetscape that seeks to bring out the best in an area.

It is important to remember that streets are places in their own right, not just routes from one location to another, and are central to giving identity to an area and structure to a city.

Holland Park Avenue, for example, with its full canopy of London plane trees, is an important route into Notting Hill Gate and on to Kensington Gardens and Hyde Park.

The King's Road, whilst of a very different character, is equally interesting to walk, cycle or drive along, with Sloane Square at its eastern end acting as a landmark location emphasised by the iconic Peter Jones store. In the case of both roads and, indeed, all roads in the Royal Borough, it is the role of street management to enhance their qualities.

In contrast to what is often a low-key approach to complementing the street scene, street management has a further, more visionary role, of recognising opportunities to develop initiatives which bring about a dramatic improvement to a particular location. Such initiatives might include the redesign of a traffic management scheme to introduce a less complicated layout that would strengthen the sense of identity of a location.

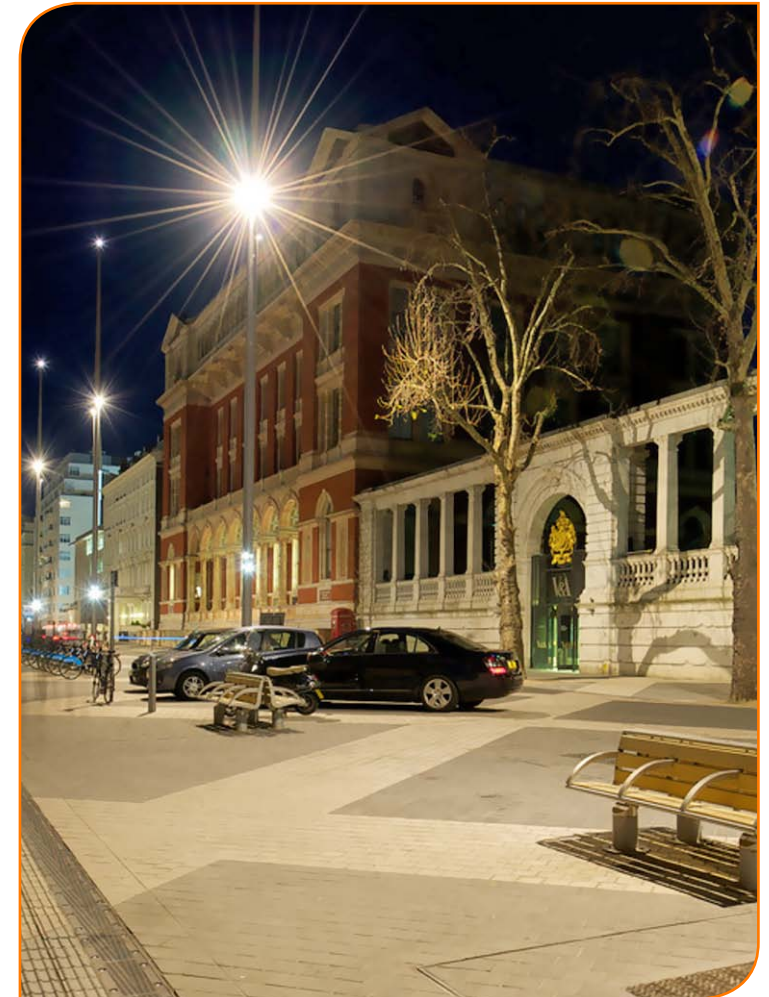


MAIN PRINCIPLES

The Council's main principles for good Streetscape are:

- Preservation of the historic fabric of the Royal Borough
- Respecting and enhancing local character
- Willingness to consider innovative design
- Experimentation – a willingness to see what works
- Reduction of clutter
- High quality materials
- Minimum palette of materials
- Simple, clean designs
- Co-ordination of design and colour
- Equal and inclusive access for all road users
- Maintaining the existing and improved environment

We initially adopted and tested these principles with the award winning Kensington High Street scheme. After designating a streetscape pilot area in which to test them further we were able to establish policies and guidelines for future use. We have since adopted these principles in subsequent streetscape ward reviews, in new schemes such as Exhibition Road, Tetcott Road, Hans Crescent and the Chelsea and Westminster Hospital, and in maintenance work throughout the Royal Borough and will continue to do so.



THE PURPOSE OF THE GUIDE

The Council recognises that the management and design of its streets and public space – the public realm – is a vital part of improving and maintaining the streetscape of the Royal Borough.

In producing the first edition of the guide we recognised the problems associated with raising the standards of street design which had been identified in many reports and national publications over the preceding ten years. Although difficult to remedy we realised that this can be achievable.

Streets are far more complex to design and maintain than a single building or group of buildings in single ownership. No single authority or agency has control or responsibility for the presentation and management of the street. In the Royal Borough the Council took the view that raising the standard of street design is important and that the Council is best placed to take on this role. We start by recognising the existing qualities of a particular streetscape, its landmarks, street trees, buildings, and then move on to develop proposals for its improvement.

This guide does not provide all the answers to those dealing with streetscape design. Unlike many manuals, it is not prescriptive. The purpose of the guide is to set clear parameters that will encourage new ideas and experimentation. In most situations, there are a number of possible solutions. Our designers are encouraged to look for imaginative and innovative solutions rather than simply accepting the standard traditional ones.

This guide forms a reference manual of good practice for all concerned with the design and implementation of traffic schemes and the maintenance of the highway. It will also be of assistance to statutory undertakers and developers and, we hope, of interest to many others, especially those living and working in the Royal Borough.

Whilst we believe the ‘less is more’ approach should be adopted widely, our particular choice of materials is considered appropriate for the Royal Borough, where most of the development took place during the Victorian era over a relatively short period of time. In other boroughs, which have developed over a longer period, a wider range of materials may be more suitable.

The guide covers those roads within the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea for which the Borough is the Highway Authority. The responsibility for the A4, A3220, A3212 and A40 lies with Transport for London (TfL). To ensure consistency throughout the Royal Borough we would recommend that TfL should adopt the same principles for these roads.

This guide is published in two parts:

Part one introduces the concept of streetscape and explains the policies and standards adopted by the Council. It goes on to deal with individual elements of streetscape design and their application in traffic schemes.

Part two contains detailed specifications and standard details.



DEVELOPMENT OF THE ROYAL BOROUGH

The Royal Borough's greatest natural feature is the River Thames. This marks the southern boundary and creates a splendid setting for Chelsea's historic riverside buildings. The other rivers that have shaped the Borough are the Westbourne and Counters Creek and although these cannot be seen, they are two of London's "lost rivers" and have had a lasting legacy on the character of the Borough.

Throughout medieval times, Kensington Church Street was a narrow twisting lane between the small villages of Kensington and Notting Hill Gate. Beyond Notting Hill Gate, Portobello Road wound northwards to Portobello Farm and until well into the nineteenth century much of the northern extremity of the area remained inaccessible. Chelsea was a small fishing village within a swampy area liable to flooding and was also inaccessible owing to the tidal nature of the River Thames.

Sir Thomas More was one of the first notable residents of Chelsea, moving to the area in 1520. He built a house facing the river just west of the parish church, where Beaufort Street stands today. After More's execution, Henry VIII took possession of the house and built a Royal Palace nearby.

During the early part of the seventeenth century Kensington and Chelsea become increasingly popular as wealthy people from London sought rural retreats, a short ride from the city. However, it was when King William brought his court to Kensington in 1689 that the surrounding area became "the" place to live. The nation's best architects were commissioned to transform Nottingham House (built in 1661 for the first Earl of Nottingham) into a Royal Palace. The New Kensington Palace was built by Sir Christopher Wren and eventually became the birthplace of Queen Victoria.

Although there are surviving residential streets from the early eighteenth century, perhaps the first modern commercial housing developments began in 1780's when William Phillimore created the Phillimore Estate in Lower Phillimore Place and Hornton Street and Sir Hans Sloane was developing Hans Town. These developments marked the beginning of a process whereby the great estates would shape much of the Royal Borough's distinctive street layout and open spaces. Although private land, the garden squares of the estates have made a significant contribution to the appearance of the public realm. Similarly, the many mews in the Royal Borough contribute to its distinctive streetscape.



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It was during the reign of Queen Victoria that most of the Borough's streets and buildings were developed. At the time of her birth, the population of Kensington was 12,000; at the time of her death it exceeded 176,000. The rural idyll of Queen Victoria's childhood had become covered with terraces of houses built in the Italianate, Gothic and Queen Anne Revival styles, and with shopping parades, spectacular churches, museums, hospitals, theatres and other public buildings.

The Great Exhibition of the Arts and Industry of All Nations, held in Hyde Park in 1851, was the first world fair and proved to be a catalyst for the development of South Kensington. The profits of the Great Exhibition were used to buy 90 acres of land stretching southwards from Kensington Gore. The area is still dominated by the museums, colleges and learned institutions, which continue to demonstrate the aspirations of the Great Exhibition. The improvements to Exhibition Road in 2012 completed the project.

As South Kensington is world renowned for its museums, so Knightsbridge, the King's Road, Kensington High Street and Portobello Road are renowned for shopping. Harvey Nichols was founded in 1813 as an emporium for the sale of linens and silks and Harrods began modestly in 1849.

In the twentieth century, development of the Borough was influenced by the Domestic Revival style of architecture. Both aristocratic town houses, in parts of Knightsbridge and modest houses in the St. Quintin's area in the north of the Borough were built in this style. In 1919, the Council embarked on a project to build 202 cottages and cottage flats for 'returning heroes' from World War I. The estate, in the north of the Borough was completed in 1926 and displayed an idealised country vernacular using the 'Garden City' principles to create a picturesque form of town planning.

By the 1960's, prefabricated houses and tall buildings were widely accepted as the way to accommodate large numbers of people in affordable housing. Trellick Tower (1968-1972) by Erno Goldfinger is perhaps the most famous symbol of this era in the Royal Borough.

The Greater London Council, which was the highway authority for many roads in the Borough, was abolished in 1986. The Greater London Authority Act of 1999 provides a new strategic London-wide authority. While the Council of the Royal Borough continues to be responsible for most highway matters, the GLA is now responsible for red routes and public transport.



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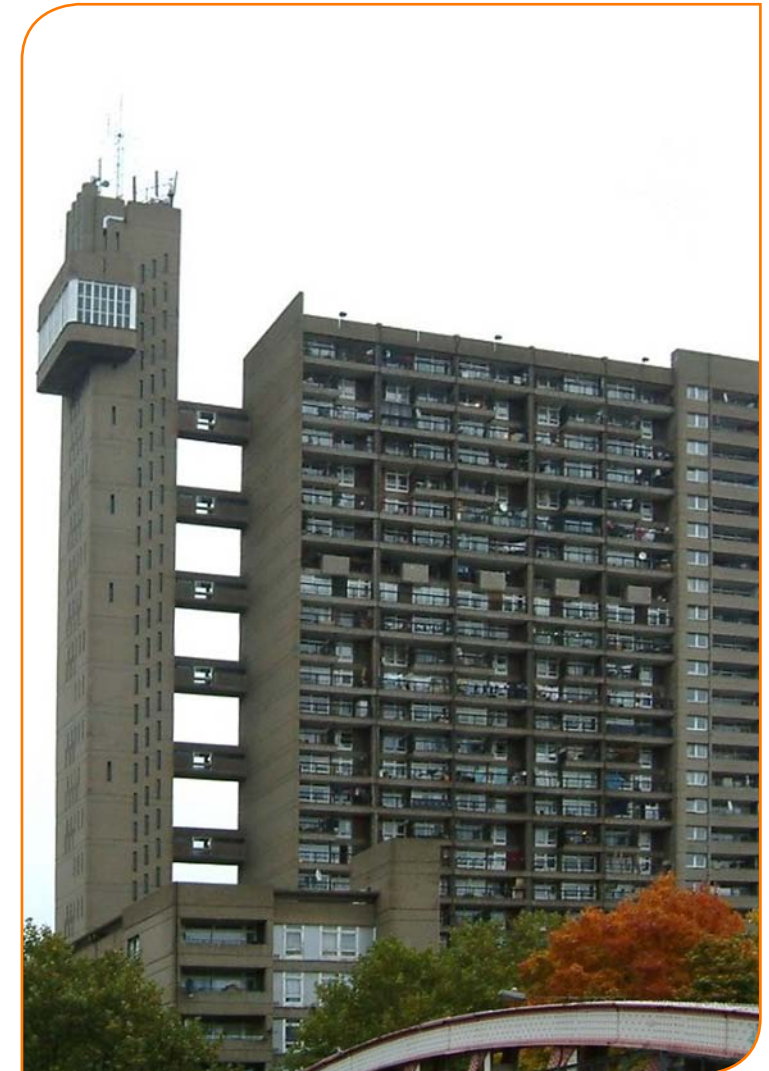
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Today the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea is a borough of extremes. It is home to royalty and to some of the world's wealthiest people and yet some of the Borough's wards are within the 10% most deprived wards in the country. The Borough has an extraordinary ethnic and cultural diversity with nearly half its residents born outside the UK, representing 90 countries and speaking over 100 different languages. The Council is very aware of its key role in safeguarding the environment and restoring the grandeur and beauty of the public realm in Kensington and Chelsea. It believes that environmental improvements should enhance local distinctiveness and reinforce those qualities that make an area special.



Barkers' Building – Kensington High Street



Trellick Tower – Kensal Road



STREETSCAPE – THE APPROACH

For a number of years, the conventional approach to street management has been based on a ‘one is good, so more must be better’ approach. This accounts for the increasing plethora of signs, markings and street furniture supporting traffic schemes of dubious benefits. The Royal Borough challenges this approach with its streetscape philosophy of ‘less is more’. The Council’s philosophy is based on the introduction of minimalist schemes where there is a proven need based on evidence, not automatically following convention or guidelines.

Many streets in the Royal Borough were built during Victorian times when very little equipment was placed in the street. Great care was taken in both design and setting to ensure that it complemented the overall streetscape. Sadly, that is no longer the case. The collective impact of various statutory services and information technology boxes, telephone kiosks, control boxes and other equipment has generated unprecedented pressure on footways, undermining the sense of visual order and hierarchy that once prevailed.

The cumulative effect of traffic schemes introduced over the years has affected the character and appearance of a number of roads. In many cases this has created a confused clutter of signs, posts, and other items which has impaired the visual harmony of the street. Nonetheless, there are still demands for measures to reduce traffic speeds, for improved access for those with disabilities, and to provide bus priority measures and cycle lanes. This intense competition for road space between different users presents new challenges to streetscape design that need a thoughtful and imaginative approach to resolve them elegantly.

This guidance follows through the aims of the Royal Borough’s Core Strategy and complements the technical advice on Transport Standards, published as Supplementary Planning Guidance.

