

Site Context

Overview

2.0 This chapter gives a broad overview of the physical, economic and social nature of the OA today. It is intended to provide the background information that will be needed to understand the rest of this SPD. This chapter is structured around four broad themes:

- strategic context;
- existing urban form and topographical conditions;
- existing land uses; and
- heritage assets.

2.1 The OA comprises 37.2 hectares of land split between LBHF and RBKC, incorporating land within the Earl's Court Ward (RBKC), the North End Ward (LBHF) and the Fulham Broadway Ward (LBHF). The OA boundary is defined by Warwick Road and the West London Line to the east, West Cromwell Road (A4) to the north, North End Road to the west and Old Brompton Road/Lillie Road to the south.

2.2 The Seagrave Road car park is a parcel of land within the OA situated south of Lillie Road bounded by Seagrave Road and the West London Line. 27.8ha of the site is contained within LBHF and the remaining 9.4ha is contained within RBKC comprising the Earl's Court 1 Exhibition Centre, some vacant land along the railway and some buildings associated with Clear Channel advertising.

Strategic Context

2.3 Figures 2.1 and 2.2 show the strategic context of the OA. The A4, along the north of the OA, is identified in the London Plan (2011) as the 'western wedge'. The Mayor of London has aspirations that this wedge will develop into an important commercial corridor, linking London's largest airport (Heathrow) and the two important commercial centres of The City and the West End.

2.4 The White City Opportunity Area, Park Royal Opportunity Area and Kensal Opportunity Area, all north of the OA, are likely to undergo significant regeneration or redevelopment over the next twenty years.

Figure 2.1: The OA Strategic Context

Figure 2.2: The OA Strategic Context

Urban Form

2.5 The OA is dominated by the Empress State Building and Earl's Court Exhibition Centres, which are major landmarks on the West London skyline. It is made up of large, impermeable land holdings that lack connections into the surrounding area. The built form, whilst mixed in terms of age and type, is characteristically different from that found in the surrounding areas. For example, many of the buildings in the OA are stand alone structures with large footprints, which create a very different environment from that created by the terraces and mansion blocks found in the surrounding area. This is illustrated in the plan in figure 2.4.

2.6 Furthermore, there are a number of significant barriers to movement within the OA. For example, the West London Line, which runs along the boundary between LBHF and RBKC, forms a physical barrier to movement from east to west and the A4 stops pedestrians who wish to pass from north to south.

2.7 The OA is surrounded by significant heritage assets, including 19 conservation areas, numerous listed buildings and Brompton Cemetery, which is a conservation area, the setting of listed buildings and monuments, a registered 'park and garden' of special historic interest (Grade I listed) and Metropolitan Open Land. For further detail, please see page 39

2.8 Figure 2.3 illustrates the boundary of the OA and the current land ownerships within it. Capco own the freehold for both Seagrave Road car park and the Empress State Building and have a lease on the Earl's Court Exhibition Centres. After the 2012 Olympics the Earl's Court Exhibition Centres and the Seagrave Road car park sites are likely to be redeveloped. Transport for London (TfL) and LBHF are currently discussing the possibility of including land within their ownership within the redevelopment site.

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Figure 2.3: Major Land Owners in the OA

Figure 2.4: Urban structure of the OA and its Surroundings

Heritage Assets

2.9 There are 19 conservation areas in and around the OA. One of these is Brompton Cemetery. It forms the setting of listed buildings, a registered 'park and garden' of special historic interest (Grade I listed) and is Metropolitan Open Land.

2.10 There are Character Profiles or Conservation Area Proposals Statements available for each of these conservation areas (with the exceptions of Walham Green, Turneville/Chesson and The Billings). These describe the special interest, character and appearance of each area and in many cases they also include constructive design guidelines to help to preserve or enhance them. Therefore, proposals for the OA will be expected to demonstrate due regard to these documents. Furthermore, in light of the significant heritage assets surrounding the OA, particular attention must be paid to Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment (2010).

2.11 The conservation areas in and around the OA are:

- A Philbeach Conservation Area;
- B Nevern Square Conservation Area;
- C Earl's Court Square Conservation Area;
- D Earl's Court Village Conservation Area;
- E Courtfield Conservation Area;
- F Brompton Cemetery;
- G The Boltons Conservation Area;
- H The Billings Conservation Area;
- J Sedlescombe Conservation Area;
- K Walham Grove Conservation Area;
- L The Walham Green Conservation Area
- M Barons Court Conservation Area;
- N Queens Club Conservation Area;
- O Turneville/ Chesson Conservation Area;
- P Olympia and Avonmore Conservation Area;
- Q Dorcas Estate Conservation Area;
- R Fitzgeorge and Fitzjames Conservation Area;
- S The Gunter Estate Conservation Area; and

T The Edwardes Square/Scarsdale & Abingdon Conservation Area.

[Figure 2.5: Brompton Cemetery](#)

[Figure 2.6: The Boltons](#)

[Figure 2.7: Queens Club Gardens](#)

[Figure 2.8: Surrounding conservation areas, listed buildings and Brompton Cemetery monuments](#)

Historical Development

Earl's Court's Origins

2.12 The OA and its surroundings were once significant landholdings held by notable families such as the De Veres, the Copes, the Rich family and the Edwardes family. The name 'Earl's Court' has been in use since land ownership passed to the Rich family in 1614. The members of this family included the Earls of Warwick and Holland and their estate was governed from a manorial courthouse in the area.

2.13 The area had rural beginnings, as it once comprised of market gardens, brickfields, potteries and nurseries. Housing and other development commenced around the 1770s, following the development of Chelsea to the south.

2.14 The Counter's Creek was one of the tributaries running into the River Thames from Kensal Green. Its alignment ran along what is now the West London Line. Since medieval times it functioned as a natural border, with few early crossings.

Early Development & Enterprises

2.15 One of the first development initiatives was the transformation of the Counter's Creek into Kensington Canal in 1828. However, by the time it was complete the canal was already obsolete as the train had become the preferred mode of transporting freight. The West London Railway was developed in 1844, connecting the area with Clapham Junction. It had a chequered early history, closing due to insufficient patronage after 6 months, only to be re-opened solely to transport coal in 1845, then re-opening as a passenger service in 1863.

2.16 Brompton Cemetery was also an early development in the area. Its grounds were laid out in the 1830s and consecrated in 1840. It features a domed chapel at its southern end, reached by long colonnades and catacombs. The Cemetery was designed to give the feel of a large open air cathedral. It occupies 16.5 hectares of space and is owned and managed by The Royal Parks. It contains a number of Listed Monuments.

2.17 A significant tide of mostly residential development occurred between the 1860s and mid 1890s, which saw some 60 acres of land being redeveloped. Lillie

Road and Fulham Palace Road represented the western edge of this new development in 1893.

2.18 Residential development in the Earl's Court area was supported by the arrival of rail transport during this time. The District Line was the first to arrive, with West Brompton Station opening in 1866, Earl's Court Station in 1871 and Fulham North End Station in 1874 (later to be re-named West Kensington Station). The Piccadilly Line opened in 1906 at Earl's Court. The OA has long been the site of a rail depot and repair sheds (since the 1870s) and the distinctive crescent form of development at Philbeach Gardens and Eardley Crescent were informed by the curving rail tracks of the District and Piccadilly lines.

Figure 2.9: Map of the OA and its surroundings in the 1840s

Figure 2.10: Map of the OA and its surroundings in the 1870s

Figure 2.11: Map of the OA and its surroundings in the 1890s

The Exhibition Centres

2.19 Exhibitions and shows have taken place on the Earl's Court site since the 1880s. These were largely in the form of travelling shows. Temporary halls were built to accommodate them, and these were demolished and rebuilt in 1894 as the Empress Hall and the Empress Theatre.

2.20 Of note from these early exhibitions was the Earl's Court gigantic wheel, erected in 1895. At 300 feet high it was almost as big as the London Eye is today and its 40 wooden cabins carried 1,200 passengers at a time. Although it was widely popular it was demolished 12 years later.

2.21 Earl's Court Exhibition Centre 1 was completed in 1937. It was designed by American architect Charles Howard Crane, and was Europe's biggest structure by volume spanning 250 feet. Its distinctive art deco facade fronted onto a generous forecourt at Warwick Road and still forms a recognisable feature today.

2.22 In 1991 Earl's Court Exhibition Centre 2 was completed. This facility is physically linked with Earl's Court Exhibition Centre 1 and is situated on part of the former Lillie Bridge.

[Figure 2.12: The view along Longridge Road showing the Earl's Court gigantic wheel in 1895](#)

[Figure 2.13: Earl's Court 1 \(EC1\) today](#)

[Figure 2.14: Earl's Court 2 \(EC2\) today](#)

Twentieth Century Development

[2.23 The Twentieth Century saw the influence of the motorcar on development as well as the effect of the opening of Heathrow Airport on connections between the western periphery of London and its centre.](#)

[2.24 Lillie Road replaced Star Road and Greyhound Road as the main thoroughfare across Fulham when motorised buses were introduced in 1906. In 1957 West Cromwell Road Bridge was built, linking Talgarth Road with West Cromwell Road and creating a stronger connection between Central London and West London. This was strengthened further in 1961 with the construction of the Hammersmith Flyover.](#)

[2.25 The Empress State Building was completed in 1961, originally designed as a hotel. The building was renovated in 2003 and another three floors were added.](#)

[2.26 The Gibbs Green estate was built in 1961 and the West Kensington estate was built between 1972 and 1974.](#)

Transport and Accessibility

2.27 The OA is a transport dominated site with a mix of transport infrastructure adjoining or running through and under it. These include the strategically important West Cromwell Road, which runs along the northern edge of the area and the Earl's Court One Way System (ECOWS) which borders the area on the east (both are part of the Transport for London Road Network (TLRN)). Below street level the West London Line (part of the London Overground Network) runs through the site, separating communities in Hammersmith and Fulham from those in Kensington and Chelsea, whilst around this are the London Underground District and Piccadilly lines.

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2.28 The local transport facilities play an important role in connecting Earl's Court to the rest of London and the UK as a whole but at a local level they do create significant severance, which impacts on local quality of life and accessibility to goods, services and employment.

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2.29 As is the case in most of London there is an extensive pedestrian footway network along existing local streets and roads. However there are some areas where the quality of this network discourages walking, with poor maintenance, excessive street clutter, inconvenient pedestrian crossings and an inappropriate balance between the needs of pedestrians and vehicles. This, along with the severance caused by the West London Line, the District line and the Earl's Court Exhibition Centres, creates a barrier to north-south and particularly east-west pedestrian and cycle movement through the OA. This isolates the OA, reduces the attractiveness of walking and cycling and restricts access to local public transport. West Cromwell Road, running along the north side of the site, creates severance between the OA and the residential areas to the north.

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2.30 Once off the busiest primary roads the majority of streets surrounding the OA represent a safe and attractive environment for pedestrians and cyclists, although the system of one-way local roads, designed to discourage vehicles from rat running, does cause inconvenience for cyclists and cycle parking facilities are inadequate.

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2.31 The OA is served by three London Underground stations; Earls Court, West Brompton and West Kensington. These stations provide access to the District and Piccadilly lines. West Brompton is also served by the Overground network. The edges of the OA are thus well served with a high Public Transport Accessibility Level (PTAL), but the centre has a low PTAL of just 2.

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2.32 The London Underground lines serving the OA are some of the most congested in London, with crowding levels in excess of four people per square metre in some sections of both the District and Piccadilly lines in the AM peak. Significant increases in capacity are planned and funded for the District and Piccadilly lines as part of the London Underground upgrades. The District line upgrade is planned to be complete by 2018 and will increase capacity by 24%. There is no definite date for the upgrade of the Piccadilly line, which would provide a capacity increase of 25%, although it is expected to be complete prior to 2031. Crossrail is planned to open in 2018, which will release capacity on the Central line, which in turn will draw passengers from the Piccadilly line, thereby releasing some limited capacity.

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2.33 All services on the West London Line currently suffer from a high level of crowding during the AM peak period with all northbound services and southbound services having crowding levels in excess of four people per square metre. This level of crowding will remain the same in 2031, despite significant capacity and frequency enhancements. In addition crowding will increase to over three people per square metre on all southbound services to West Brompton.

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2.34 All the boundary roads carry very high levels of traffic and operate at, or near, capacity in the peak periods. The dominant traffic flows are east-west on West Cromwell Road (around 6,000 vehicles in the peak periods) and north-south on the ECOWS (around 2,000 southbound and 1,000 – 1,500 northbound). The majority of traffic signals in the area operate on the SCOOT system to better optimise junction capacity, although, given the dominance of east-west traffic on the local road network, priority is given to this movement at the junctions along West Cromwell Road.

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2.35 There are a significant number of traffic delay hotspots in and around the OA, including at all four corners of the site, during both peak periods as well as the weekend. This is particularly apparent at the West Cromwell Road junctions with Warwick Road and North End Road, the whole length of which is subject to delays. Delay is generally highest during the PM peak period, particularly on West Cromwell Road between the Warwick Road and Earl's Court Road junctions.

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2.36 Both West Cromwell Road and the ECOWS have negative impacts on the ease and attractiveness of pedestrian and cyclist movement, residential amenity, access to bus services and the townscape of the areas through which they run, including the OA.

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2.37. The existing site includes 2,500 car parking spaces, primarily for the use of exhibitors and visitors to the Exhibition Centre although some public parking also takes place. On-street in Kensington and Chelsea there is a mixture of residents' and pay and display parking with limited spare capacity. In Hammersmith and Fulham the available parking for visitors is greater because dual use parking bays are provided.

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Figure 2.15: Public Transport Infrastructure in and around the OA

Topographical and Environmental Conditions

2.38. The OA has some very distinctive changes in ground levels, often as a result of the railway infrastructure. There is a significant change in ground level from the east of the OA to the west in order to provide clearance over the West London Line. The ground level is highest under Earl's Court Exhibition Centre 1 where the Wimbledon Branch of the District Line passes underground. There is also a significant drop in level along the northern edge of the OA, from the A4 flyover in the north east to the traffic junction in the north west. The Ealing Broadway and Richmond branches of the District Line are contained within a steep cutting that runs alongside the northern boundary of the OA.

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Figure 2.16: Diagram Indicating the changes in topography across the site

2.39. Much of the OA is located in an area of high flood risk (Flood Zone 3), as identified by the Environment Agency, and the area is susceptible to sewer/stormwater and potentially surface water flooding. Figure 2.17 illustrates the flood risk zones in the area.

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2.40. The OA is also within an Air Quality Management Area and currently includes some areas of poor air quality which are predominantly located along the roads surrounding the OA.

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Figure 2.17: Flood Risk Zones in and around the OA

Building Heights

2.41 There are three significant tall buildings within the OA; the 31 storey Empress State Building; Earl's Court 1 which is a maximum height of 63m AOD; and Earl's Court 2. These are located on the eastern side of the OA. Buildings of these heights are atypical in the immediate surroundings.

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2.42 Other buildings with significant height in the OA are dispersed more widely. Ashfield House to the north and the four council blocks on the west rise to between 9 and 11 storeys. The heights across the rest of the site are between 2 and 6 storeys and are more closely related to those prevailing in the surrounding area (figure 2.8).

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2.43 In the surrounding area, building heights are related to building typology. The important residential typologies found around the OA include town houses, terraced town houses, mansion blocks, mews houses and infill blocks.

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Figure 2.18: Building heights in the OA and its surroundings

Open Space

2.44 There is an identifiable pattern of open space in the OA's surroundings. This consists of:

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- formal **garden squares**, which are usually lined on one or two sides by buildings and are predominantly 'semi private' (accessible only to those who contribute to their upkeep). However, they do provide important public visual amenity;
- **Communal gardens** which are usually located between two terraces and shared by the residents of the terraces that define them. As either end of the communal gardens are left open to the street, they also provide public visual amenity; and
- **Private rear gardens** relating to specific dwellings and accessible only to their inhabitants.

2.45 These contribute to the urban structure of the area, creating a rich rhythm of terraced buildings and open spaces.

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2.46 Of further note is the Counter's Creek, one of London's 'lost rivers'. This former natural stream was first artificially channelled in 1827, when it started to become an integral part of London's sewerage infrastructure, and is now fully culverted.

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Figure 2.19: Open spaces in and around the OA

2.47 Within the OA there is one identified area of biodiversity importance; a semi-natural green corridor running alongside the West London Line (more or less on the boundary between LBHF and RBKC). It has been classified as a Site of Nature Conservation Importance (Grade 1) in LBHF, although some of the corridor straddles the boundary into RBKC.

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2.48 Figure 2.20 shows the sites of nature conservation importance in the vicinity of the OA.

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2.49 Figure 2.21 illustrates that there is significant deficiency of publicly accessible open space within the OA itself.

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Figure 2.20: Sites of Borough and Local Importance in and around the OA

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Figure 2.21: Open Space distribution in and around the OA

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2.50 In terms of existing public provision, Normand Park, which is located to the south west of the OA, provides two hectares of public open space. To the south east of the OA is Brompton Cemetery. Whilst this is publicly accessible, it cannot be regarded as recreational open space in the usual sense and is therefore not considered to contribute to combating open space deficiency. Within the OA itself are several small pockets of publicly accessible open space, which are used for leisure and some children's play. These spaces are small, fragmented and are of a poor quality as they are incidental space left over following the design of the estates in the 1970s. The Core Strategies for both local authorities identify much of the OA as deficient in publicly accessible open space, as shown in Figure 2.21. This deficiency reflects the lack of a large publicly accessible local park in this area.

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2.51 Existing play provision is limited to the western extremities of the OA. Facilities for under 5s in the area are generally poor, consisting primarily of provision on housing estates, with the exception of the playspace in Normand Park. Two of these play spaces are on the West Kensington and Gibbs Green estates, which would be lost if estate redevelopment were to occur. Play provision for 5-11s is generally good. Two of the play spaces are on the West Kensington and Gibbs Green estates, which would be lost of estate redevelopment were to occur. The provision for over 12s is good, consisting of the play spaces at Normand Park and two basketball courts on the West Kensington and Gibbs Green estates, which would again be lost if estate redevelopment were to occur. Of all the 8 play spaces in the vicinity of the OA only the play spaces at Normand Park and Alice Gilliat can be considered genuinely public, with the other six contained within housing estates.

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Table 2.1: The play spaces that serve and are accessible to the OA

Land Use

2.52 Figure 2.22 shows the current ground floor land uses in and around the OA.

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2.53 The 31 storey Empress State Building is situated immediately to the west of Earl's Court 2 and is the tallest building within the OA and indeed in much of West London. The building is currently occupied by the Metropolitan Police. To the north of Earl's Court Exhibition Centre 2, the TfL Lillie Bridge Depot covers a substantial area of 7.3ha comprising marshalling yards, engineering workshops and Ashfield House, a 9 storey training facility that dominates the northern boundary of the OA.

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2.54 The West Kensington and Gibbs Green housing estates lie to the west of the Earl's Court Exhibition Centres and the TfL Lillie Bridge Depot. The larger West Kensington estate, containing 604 properties, was built between 1972 and 1974 and includes several slab blocks of 9, 10 and 11 storeys along with low rise flats, maisonettes and terraced houses. The smaller Gibbs Green estate features 98 properties built in 1961 comprising 7 medium-rise blocks. The estates have poorly arranged internal roads and irregular placement of buildings surrounded by poorly utilised open space, particularly on the West Kensington estate. On-street and forecourt parking spaces dominate the streetscape of the estates. The overall proportion of social rented housing on the estates is 78 percent.

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2.55 To the south of the OA is the Seagrave Road car park, which is a parcel of land situated adjacent to the West London Line. It covers an area of 2.9ha featuring a small number of temporary and semi-permanent utility structures.

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2.56 There are a number of other smaller and/or ancillary land uses within the OA, namely:

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- Gibbs Green school, which was previously a primary school but is currently being used to temporarily house Queensmill Special School;
- private residential houses, flats and maisonettes on Empress Place, Lillie Road and Seagrave Road;
- Registered Provider properties located around the West Kensington and Gibbs Green estates;
- a range of A1–A5 uses along Lillie Road, North End Road, Old Brompton Road and Seagrave Road, some with converted residential flats on the upper floors;
- a hotel, community centre and telephone exchange north of Lillie Road;
- a small area of commercial and light industrial uses to the south of Lillie Road;

- a bus turning and waiting facility on Lillie Road immediately adjacent to Earl's Court2 and the Empress State Building; and
- the Clear Channel buildings and hoardings, plus laundry and mannequin- making facilities located south of West Cromwell Road.

| Figure 2.22: Ground floor land uses in the OA and its surroundings

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Housing

2.57 The area surrounding the OA is typically characterised by Victorian terraced housing and Edwardian mansion blocks, which are generally owner occupied or privately rented. There are also some post-war housing estates located to the east and north of the OA and some modern, purpose built residential premises to the north.

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2.58 Within the OA, existing housing is primarily located within the West Kensington and Gibbs Green estates. Some properties are now leasehold or freehold having been purchased under the 'right to buy' scheme. Some private residential accommodation is also located to the south of the OA, on Empress Place, Lillie Road and Seagrave Road.

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2.59 The West Kensington Estate was built between 1972 and 1974 and contains 604 dwellings. This consists of 463 flats and 141 terraced houses. 476 of the dwellings are socially rented, 89 are leasehold and 39 are freehold. The majority of dwellings are a mix of 1 and 2 bedroom flats, along with some larger 3 and 4 bedroom maisonettes and houses.

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2.60 The Gibbs Green Estate was built in 1961 and contains 98 flats and maisonettes. 42 of these dwellings are leasehold. The remaining 56 dwellings are socially rented. All of the dwellings are 2 and 3 bedroom units.

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2.61 In addition to the estate properties, a number of Housing Associations own property within the OA. Family Mosaic owns 42 homes in Dieppe Close, Lerry Close and Thaxton Road; London and Quadrant own 9 properties in Aisgill Avenue and Marchbank Road; and Shepherds Bush Housing Association own 7 properties in Garsdale Terrace. All of the Housing Association properties in the Opportunity Area are social rented.

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2.62 Altogether, social rented housing comprises 78% of the total number of properties on the estates and Housing Association land. The rest of the properties (22%) have been bought by residents under the 'right to buy' scheme.

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2.63 Table 2.2 shows the existing housing provision on the West Kensington and Gibbs Green Estates, along with other Housing Association provision in the area. Table 2.3 shows the tenure profile of the estates compared to other geographies.

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Table 2.2: Housing Size and Tenure within the existing estates and Registered Provider properties
Source: West Kensington and Gibbs Green Estate Profile July 2010

Table 2.3: Comparison of tenure profile
Source: West Kensington and Gibbs Green Estate Profile July 2010 for Estate Data. Census 2001 for all other geographies.

Figure 2.23: Photograph of a housing block within the West Kensington Estate

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Figure 2.24: Photograph of a housing block within the Gibbs Green Estate

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Social and Community Facilities

Education

2.64 Figure 2.15 shows the locations of nursery, primary and secondary education provision within the vicinity of the OA. The former Gibbs Green primary school is located within the OA. This is currently being used as accommodation by a special school. There is an independent nursery to the south of the estates called the Kiddi Karu Nursery. LBHF's Infrastructure Study 2010 shows that current primary and nursery school provision in the area is at capacity.

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Health

2.65 Figure 2.26 shows the locations of hospitals, health centres and GP facilities within the vicinity of the OA. Within the OA itself there is a GP facility located at 82 Lillie Road which provides 10 consulting rooms. As part of NHS Hammersmith and Fulham's Estate Strategy, a new Centre for Health has opened on North End Road opposite the OA. This facility provides 1,200sqm of health floorspace and 10 consulting rooms and has been provided in order to facilitate the relocation of other GP facilities in the borough rather than increasing healthcare capacity in order to meet the needs of any regeneration proposals in the area.

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Figure 2.25: The locations of nursery, primary and secondary education provision within the vicinity of the OA

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Figure 2.26: The locations of hospitals, health centres and GP facilities within the vicinity of the OA

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Retail

Figure 2.27: Retail centres in the vicinity of the OA

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2.66 Figure 2.27 shows that there are three shopping areas within the vicinity of the OA. The largest of these is Fulham Town Centre, which is designated as a Major Town Centre in the London Plan (2011) and extends to within the OA boundary. To the east of the OA is Earl's Court Road, designated in RBKC's Core Strategy (2010) as a Neighbourhood Centre and in the London Plan (2011) as a District Centre. To the north-west of the OA is the North End Road (West Kensington) Key Local Shopping Centre. To the north-west of the OA is the North End Road (West Kensington) Key Local Shopping Centre and to the east of the OA is Old Brompton (West) Neighbourhood Centre.

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2.67 Fulham Town Centre is situated at the southern end of North End Road and extends from Lillie Road to Fulham Broadway. Its main activity shopping (including the busy North End Road Market) and services for the local Fulham community. The centre has traffic congestion and car parking problems and has suffered from competition with surrounding centres (including Kensington High Street and Putney) and out of centre stores in Cromwell Road (Waitrose), Townmead Road (Sainsbury's) and Warwick Road (Tesco's). It has lost not only elements of its retail business, particularly at the northern end of the centre, but also recreation and entertainment uses. Despite this situation, the centre has managed to attract a number of new retailers, food and drink establishments and cinemas and continues to provide an important focus for many residents.

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2.68 Earl's Court Road is designated as a Neighbourhood Centre within RBKC's adopted Core Strategy (2010); a designation which recognises its scale and its primary function of serving the day-to-day needs of local people and those visiting the Exhibition Centres. It remains a vibrant centre providing a diverse range of shops, restaurants, cafes and pubs. However, the centre has an 8.9% vacancy rate, which is higher than some other centres in the borough.

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2.69 The North End Road (West Kensington) Key Local Shopping Centre also has a local function, providing a range of convenience shops and other services. In 2008, 54% of the uses within the centre fell within the A1 Use Class and there was a 12% vacancy rate. There is also some out of centre retail along the west side of North End Road, linking Fulham Town Centre with North End Road (West Kensington).

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2.70 Old Brompton Road (West) is designated as a Neighbourhood Centre within RBKC's Core Strategy (2010). This centre is predominantly linear, running along Old Brompton Road between the junctions of Warwick Road and Earl's Court Road. The centre caters for local need, although it also provides a specialist comparison role in the form of DIY and interior design shops. The centre is generally attractive, with well kept shopfronts, wide pavements and limited street clutter. However, there is currently a 10% vacancy rate.

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2.71 Further away from the OA there are several very important and successful higher order centres, such as Shepherd's Bush (including Westfield), Hammersmith, Kensington High Street, Notting Hill and King's Road. In addition to the local convenience function, these centres are also important comparison shopping destinations with a catchment that includes the OA.

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Socio-Economic Conditions

2.72 In 2007 most of the OA fell within the 30 percent most deprived areas in England as indicated by the Index of Multiple Deprivation (figure 2.28). The North End and Fulham Broadway wards are both ranked within the 10 percent most deprived wards in England with respect to income levels and barriers to housing and services. In particular, the Gibbs Green and West Kensington estates are both in the 10 percent most deprived neighbourhoods in LBHF, experiencing the highest levels of income and employment deprivation and very significant housing and services deprivation.

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2.73 Neighbourhoods within the Earl's Court Ward by comparison are significantly less deprived on average, although this represents one of the lower income wards in RBKC outside of North Kensington.

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2.74 The OA also suffers from higher unemployment than surrounding areas, with 22 percent of residents on the Gibbs Green Estate and 28 percent of residents on the West Kensington Estate claiming welfare benefits, compared to a LBHF average of 14 percent. There are also more long-term unemployed residents, with approximately 40 percent of unemployed residents claiming benefits for a period longer than 6 months compared to the LBHF average of 30 percent.

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2.75 With regard to health, the residents of the Gibbs Green and West Kensington estates suffer from below average health outcomes and the area generally suffers from health deprivation.

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2.76 Educational attainment on the West Kensington and Gibbs Green estates is significantly lower than the ward averages, with almost one third of adult residents having no qualification at all. LBHF audits of the Gibbs Green and West Kensington estates show that in 2008, 30 percent of the working age population had no educational qualifications and only 31 percent in the Gibbs Green Estate and 20 percent in the West Kensington Estate had university level qualifications (level 4 and 5 qualifications).

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Figure 2.28: Index of Multiple Deprivation ranking in and around the OA

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Culture

2.77. The culture, leisure and entertainment value of the OA is provided within the Earl's Court Exhibition Centres One and Two. Over the years the Exhibition Centres have hosted numerous nationally and internationally renowned events / shows (such as the Motor Show, London Boat Show, Royal Agricultural Show, 'Crufts', the Royal Tournament, Ideal Home Show, BRIT Awards), musicians / bands (such as Take That, Pink Floyd, The Rolling Stones, Madonna, Queen, David Bowie, Kylie Minogue, and many more) and opera (such as Carmen and Aida). The Exhibition Centres will host the indoor volleyball during the 2012 Olympic Games.

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2.78. Earl's Court Exhibition Centre 1 has an exhibition area of approximately 40,000m², with a maximum capacity of 30,000 people. Earl's Court Exhibition Centre 2 has an exhibition area of approximately 17,000m², with a maximum capacity of 12,000 people. The two centres also provide additional smaller exhibition, meeting and conference space in separate accommodation within the buildings.

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2.79. The Exhibition Centres attract approximately 3 million visitors and 30,000 exhibitors each year. This major attraction makes a significant contribution to the local community, benefiting local hotels, restaurants, bars, taxi firms and local business who have adapted to cater for the needs of the exhibition centres.

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2.80. Figure 2.19 shows the location of hotels in and around the OA. There is a high concentration of hotels within the vicinity of the OA and one hotel located within the OA itself at 295 North End Road.

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Figure 2.29: Existing hotel provision in and around the OA

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Deleted: Figure 2.20: (Left) Brompton Cemetery

¶
2.62 · There are 18 conservation areas in and around the OA. One of these is Brompton Cemetery. It forms the setting of listed buildings, a registered 'park and garden' of special historic interest (Grade I listed) and is Metropolitan Open Land.

¶
2.63 · The conservation areas in the area surrounding the OA are:
A · Philbeach Conservation Area;
B · Nevern Square Conservation Area;
C · Earl's Court Square Conservation Area;
D · Earl's Court Village Conservation Area;
E · Courtfield Conservation Area;
F · Brompton Cemetery;
G · The Boltons Conservation Area;
H · The Billings Conservation Area;
J · Sedlescombe Conservation Area;
K · Walham Grove Conservation Area;
L · The Walham Green Conservation Area;
M · Barons Court Conservation Area;
N · Queens Club Conservation Area;
O · Turneville/ Chesson Conservation Area;
P · Olympia and Avonmore Conservation Area;
Q · Dorcas Estate Conservation Area;
R · Fitzgeorge and Fitzjames Conservation Area; and
S · The Gunter Estate Conservation Area.

¶
Figure 2.21: Surrounding conservation areas and listed buildings

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Historical Development

¶
Earl's Court's Origins
2.64 · The OA and its surroundings were once significant landholdings held by notable families such as the De Veres, the Copes, the Rich family and the Edwardes family. The name 'Earl's Court' has been in use since land ownership passed to the Rich family in 1614. The members of this family included the Earls of Warwick and Holland and their estate was governed from a manorial courthouse in the area.

¶
2.65 · The area had rural beginnings, as it once comprised of market gardens, brickfields, potteries and nurseries. Housing and other development commenced around the 1770s, following the development of Chelsea to the south.

¶
2.66 · The Counter's Creek was one of the tributaries running into the River Thames from Kensal Green. Its alignment ran along what is now the West London Line. Since medieval times it functioned as a natural border, with few early crossings.

Early Development & Enterprises

¶
2.67 · One of the first development ... [1]

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Early Development & Enterprises

2.67 One of the first development initiatives was the transformation of the Counter's Creek into Kensington Canal in 1828. However, by the time it was complete the canal was already obsolete as the train had become the preferred mode of transporting freight. The West London Railway was developed in 1844, connecting the area with Clapham Junction. It had a chequered early history, closing due to insufficient patronage after 6 months, only to be re-opened solely to transport coal in 1845, then re-opening as a passenger service in 1863.

2.68 Brompton Cemetery was also an early development in the area. Its grounds were laid out in the 1830s and consecrated in 1840. It features a domed chapel at its southern end, reached by long colonnades and catacombs. The Cemetery was designed to give the feel of a large open air cathedral. It occupies 16.5 hectares of space and is owned and managed by The Royal Parks. It contains a number of Listed Monuments.

2.69 A significant tide of mostly residential development occurred between the 1860s and mid 1890s, which saw some 60 acres of land being redeveloped. Lillie Road and Fulham Palace Road represented the western edge of this new development in 1893.

2.70 Residential development in the Earl's Court area was supported by the arrival of rail transport during this time. The District Line was the first to arrive, with West Brompton Station opening in 1866, Earl's Court Station in 1871 and Fulham North End Station in 1874 (later to be re-named West Kensington Station). The Piccadilly Line opened in 1906 at Earl's Court. The OA has long been the site of a rail depot and repair sheds (since the 1870s) and the distinctive crescent form of development at Philbeach Gardens and Eardley Crescent were informed by the curving rail tracks of the District and Piccadilly lines.

Figure 2.22: Map of the OA and its surroundings in the 1840s

Figure 2.23: Map of the OA and its surroundings in the 1870s

Figure 2.24: Map of the OA and its surroundings in the 1890s

The Exhibition Centres

2.71 Exhibitions and shows have taken place on the Earl's Court site since the 1880s. These were largely in the form of travelling shows. Temporary halls were built to accommodate them, and these were demolished and rebuilt in 1894 as the Empress Hall and the Empress Theatre.

2.72 Of note from these early exhibitions was the Earl's Court gigantic wheel, erected in 1895. At 300 feet high it was almost as big as the London Eye is today and its 40 wooden

cabins carried 1,200 passengers at a time. Although it was widely popular it was demolished 12 years later.

2.73 Earl's Court Exhibition Centre 1 was completed in 1937. It was designed by American architect Charles Howard Crane, and was Europe's biggest structure by volume spanning 250 feet. Its distinctive art deco facade fronted onto a generous forecourt at Warwick Road and still forms a recognisable feature today.

2.74 In 1991 Earl's Court Exhibition Centre 2 was completed. This facility is physically linked with Earl's Court Exhibition Centre 1 and is situated on part of the former Lillie Bridge.

Figure 2.25: The view along Longbridge road showing the Earl's Court gigantic wheel in 1895

Figure 2.26: Earl's Court 1 (EC1) today

Figure 2.27: Earl's Court 2 (EC2) today

Twentieth Century Development

2.75 The Twentieth Century saw the influence of the motorcar on development as well as the effect of the opening of Heathrow Airport on connections between the western periphery of London and its centre.

2.76 Lillie Road replaced Star Road and Greyhound Road as the main thoroughfare across Fulham when motorised buses were introduced in 1906. In 1957 West Cromwell Road Bridge was built, linking Talgarth Road with West Cromwell Road and creating a stronger connection between Central London and West London. This was strengthened further in 1961 with the construction of the Hammersmith Flyover.

2.77 The Empress State Building was completed in 1961, originally designed as a hotel. The building was renovated in 2003 and another three floors were added.

2.78 The Gibbs Green estate was built in 1961 and the West Kensington estate was built between 1972 and 1974.