

27 February 2023

REPRESENTATIONS TO THE FIRST DRAFT OF THE KINGSTON LOCAL PLAN (REGULATION 18) ON BEHALF OF KINGSTON FIRST

We write on behalf of our Client, Kingston First in response to the consultation on the first draft of the Kingston Local Plan under Regulation 18 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012.

These representations have been organised as follows:

- Introduction
- Environmental challenges and objectives
- Social challenges and objectives
- Economic challenges and objectives
- Our Neighbourhoods
- Transport
- Detailed comments on relevant policies (table)

Introduction

Kingston First is the UK's first Business Improvement District, representing the interests of 700 businesses and organisations. It therefore represents the voice of the business community within Kingston. Kingston First seeks positive change within Kingston Town Centre and its remit extends from promoting Kingston to seeking to enhance public spaces and provide a welcoming experience for visitors, employees and residents. Kingston First understands the needs of the town centre and its representations to the draft Local Plan should be given due attention as a stakeholder that closely understands the needs of its customers, providers and visitors.

Kingston First supports the general ethos of the draft Local Plan, in particular with regards to the important role that Kingston Town Centre plays within the Borough. One recurring suggestion, relevant for many parts and ambitions of the Local Plan that Kingston First has, is to introduce a mechanism to empower stakeholders and partners who have an in-depth knowledge of the Borough to be able to stimulate the right development in the right place, in partnership with the Council. While cross working is alluded to in the draft Plan, specific mechanisms and details of how the Council will work with such partners and stakeholders is omitted.

The draft Plan should include a mechanism for relevant stakeholders, including Kingston First, to be able to apply to use allocated monies from CIL and S106 to safeguard or provide certain uses under set terms and partake in a relevant committee meeting where this is discussed. Stakeholders such as Kingston First are best placed to understand the requirements of the Borough in certain respects and their involvement would relieve the resource of the Council, while ensuring the right uses are provided in the right places. Integrated working across the Council and such stakeholders would be an effective way to ensure the provision of important services and facilities such as health, community, social and leisure services.

If this is not achievable, Kingston First requests that they and other stakeholders are invited to advise on the use of these monies at relevant committee meetings to ensure that they go to the most appropriate places and for the required uses.

Throughout these representations, this is referred to as '**suggested mechanisms**'. In turn, the suggested mechanisms would support the requirement of the Infrastructure Delivery Plan, which recognises health and social infrastructure as critical and essential. It is noted that the delivery mechanism for much of the social infrastructure in the IDP is cited as 'TBC' and we therefore request that the suggested mechanisms are included in policy with the draft Plan.

Kingston First would welcome the opportunity to discuss this further with the Council.

Kingston First also considers that the Local Plan represents a real opportunity to address transport as a key area of change within the Town Centre. With the significant amount of new development coming forward within Kingston, emphasis should be placed on the crucial requirement for affordable, efficient and reliable public transport; transforming the current reliance on the gyratory; and ensuring a realistic, achievable and deliverable transport plan for the Town Centre.

Environmental Challenges and Objectives

Paragraph 1.47 refers to Environmental Challenges in the Borough. These include the effective use of land, in a way that makes as much use of Previously Developed Land as possible and directing significant developments to the most sustainable locations. It also refers to poor air quality across the Borough; and to traffic congestion.

Environmental Objective 3 refers to Green Infrastructure, including protecting green spaces and waterways. Kingston First considers that the Local Plan presents the opportunity to improve connections to green spaces, including through blue infrastructure, and ensuring that the special characteristics of these spaces are preserved. This is discussed in relation to the relevant policy in the table below.

With regards to Environmental Objectives 6, Kingston First considers that there is a significant opportunity through the local plan to effectively support genuinely sustainable travel choices, from the area wider than those open to cycling and walking etc. The current interchange between bus and train is ineffective and includes a large land take around the station area. The Local Plan provides the opportunity to greatly improve the interchange to allow genuinely accessible and effective sustainable transport choices through aligning one bus interchange with the station. This would appeal to customers, visitors and businesses coming into the Borough, as well as releasing previously developed land within the town centre. This is discussed in relation to the relevant policy below.

The Environmental Challenges also refer to Kingston's heritage assets, including conservation areas and listed buildings. It states that development must preserve these assets, ensuring that they are a focal point of regeneration. This is echoed in Environmental Objectives 7 and 8. While Kingston First is supportive of heritage preservation in Kingston town centre, it is important that there is strengthened and obvious policy support for the re-use of heritage assets. For example, the internal conversion of a Listed Building to make it fit for an office or retail unit should be supported in order for it to remain in its optimum viable use and therefore ensuring its long term preservation. The correct consents and permission would still be required but visible policy support would encourage users into such buildings in the town centre.

Social Challenges and Objectives

Paragraph 1.47 sets out the social challenges in the Borough. Kingston First is in strong agreement that health inequalities need to be addressed, including access to good

healthcare. Social Objective 2 aspires for residents to be able to access an appropriate range of services, experiences and facilities to maintain a high quality of life and that new development is supported by the necessary social and cultural infrastructure.

Kingston First requests that the suggested mechanisms above are put in place to stimulate healthcare, social, community and leisure facilities as ground floor uses within the town centre alongside the retail, food and services offer. Local stakeholders such as Kingston First should be empowered by involvement and liaison with the Council in order to ensure sufficient provision of such services.

Social objective 4 seeks to protect and promote cultural assets. Kingston First would like to strongly support this, and one example of an important space is Kingston's Ancient Market Place. The market is an important part of the town's heritage, but its cultural heritage is being eroded through the permanent installation of uses. The market is an important cultural and community hub and measures should be included in planning policy to ensure its correct preservation and usage, maintaining the traditional and historic market ethos. This is covered in more detail in the relevant policy section below.

Economic Challenges and Objectives

Kingston First supports the recognition of the effect that COVID-19 has had on town centres and strongly supports the high level economic objectives set out in this part of the Local Plan. In particular, Kingston First supports objective 4, which seeks to ensure a wide variety of uses and high-quality, connected and safe public spaces in high streets and town centres so that local communities can meet, shop, work, enjoy culture and spend leisure time. Please see Kingston First's comments regarding the Ancient Market Place as an example of the opportunities for better public spaces.

Kingston First has concerns regarding the long term retention of the night time economy and cultural facilities and seeks through these representations to present a means by which the continuation of these uses could be stimulated, encouraged and enhanced. This is detailed under the relevant policy below and again is something that could be achieved through the suggested mechanisms outlined above. This would ensure that Kingston maintains and enhances a varied and successful cultural scene and will accommodate the range of uses as set out in paragraph 1.47.

Kingston First agrees with paragraph 1.39 that significant housing development in the town centre allows for residents to benefit from good access to shops, services and good public transport links. However, as set out throughout this statement, the stimulation of a varied town centre, in conjunction with empowering stakeholders to help achieve this, is integral to those shops, services and facilities to remain and to be enhanced.

Our neighbourhoods

Kingston First strongly supports the aspirations in relation to Kingston. However to achieve these objectives, stakeholders such as Kingston First should be engaged and empowered to make real change and meet these aspirations. For example, the suggested mechanisms could be implemented to effectively 'breathe new life into Kingston town centre and support its regional appeal by expanding its appeal as a retail, cultural and leisure destination'; as well as meeting the aim to create a new leisure facility or arts/theatre venue and providing the right supporting infrastructure for new development.

Kingston First particularly supports the reference to the unique features of Kingston including the riverside. However, this should be more strongly drawn out in policy. The Riverside plays a major role in visitor experience and quality of life for visitors to and residents of the Borough and the opportunity to enhance this should be maximised. The River presents the opportunity to improve connectivity which in turn would stimulate uses along and on the River and this should be emphasised in the local plan.

Detailed Comments on Relevant Policies

These representations provide Kingston First's comments on the relevant draft policies in the draft Local Plan:

Policy Reference	Comments	Suggested Action
K1 A	Kingston First welcomes the commitment to working proactively with stakeholders	Include the suggested mechanisms within Policy or supporting text
K1 F	Kingston First supports the objective to support the delivery of all types of infrastructure across the Borough. However, this should include engagement with and empowering of stakeholders to facilitate the delivery of such infrastructure by those who are best placed to understand what is needed and where.	Commit to a mechanism to meaningfully involve partners and stakeholders
K2	The general approach to Kingston Town Centre is supported. It is noted that the Council is committing to working with its partners, local communities and developers to ensure the development potential of the area is delivered. As set out above, this could be strengthened through the further empowerment of stakeholders and partners.	The above suggested mechanism would help to empower stakeholders and partners and this should be included in policy. Kingston First, as the BID and as a representative of 700 town centre businesses should be a named stakeholder in this policy.
K2 C	The reference to the Riverside is supported, however Kingston First considers that the role of the river should be emphasised and exploited.	The policy should be reworded to place greater emphasis on the opportunities presented by the river.
KC2 B	The approach to air quality is supported, but a balance is required to ensure development is not halted through the requirements.	Allow for flexibility within the policy for development such as changes of use
KC10 A	The retrofit of existing buildings is supported but the interplay with the heritage policies needs to be recognised. For example it may not be possible to meet heritage aspirations and also retrofit a Listed building.	
KC10 B	This requirement refers to all development, however this is an onerous requirement where it relates to a change of use	Revise wording to state either that this applies to all new build development; or that it does not apply to all changes of use

KD1	Kingston First supports this policy in general, however it is not specific	Commit to a Design SPD for Kingston Town Centre
KD4 J	The commitment to a high quality public realm is supported, in particular the mixed use streets.	Specify Kingston Town Centre as an important destination for mixed-use streets.
KD8 C, D and E	While Kingston First supports a policy on commercial frontages and signage as an important way to ensure the retention of a high quality environment, this policy appears overly prescriptive, the wording of clauses 'C', 'D' and 'E' should allow for some flexibility to ensure that development is not hindered and new businesses and services are not put off.	Reword to be less prescriptive, especially with regards to Clauses C and D which may be off-putting to potential occupiers of the buildings and therefore hinder the variety and mix of uses that are aspired to in Kingston Town Centre.
KD12	Kingston First supports the aspirations to conserve and enhance Kingston's historic environment. It is important to recognise how heritage policies impact development in terms of the requirements for new occupants of historic buildings and associated changes of use. For example, although internal alterations to allow for eg fitting rooms, partitions or storage areas may require Listed Building Consent, visual support in policy for the reuse of buildings would give new occupants, businesses, service etc the confidence and assurance they would need in order to be encouraged take up these spaces and keep the ground floors active and in their optimum viable use. In particular this supports point 2.	Include stronger visual support in this policy that is alluded to in point 4 for internal changes to Listed Buildings where this will not harm the heritage status of the building. This should reference ground floor uses in Kingston Town Centre.
KD13	Kingston First supports the ethos of this policy, particular the flexibility to allow for works to heritage assets where they do not cause harm.	As above, a more obvious support for internal alterations where these would not be harmful at ground floor levels in the town centre would help with encouraging different, varied businesses to move into those buildings, which in turn would ensure that they remain in their optimum viable use, ensuring their upkeep and long term preservation.
KH1-7	Kingston First is supportive of new, high quality homes to meet identified need. References to PTAL ratings and town centres highlights the need for the social, community and general services to be in place, which is referred to throughout these representations.	

KH2	This policy gives specific advice on the delivery and mix of affordable housing, which Kingston First supports. However, equal weight and prescription should be given to affordable work space in order to stimulate ground floor uses and ensure that Kingston town centre comprises a varied mix of uses, and does not become entirely residential.	
KE1 B (4)	While Policy KE1 (4) refers to working with relevant partners to bring forward affordable workspace, this policy is vague compared to the policies for affordable housing. There is also no definition of how the Council will engage or work with relevant partners. Given Kingston First's position in the town centre, it would be useful to reference Kingston First in this policy and state that they will be consulted and empowered to help deliver this policy.	Reference Kingston First within the policy and commit to consulting and engaging with them.
KE1 B(6)	Clause (6) refers to the night time economy. Recently, night clubs have been lost to other development and Kingston First should be consulted and engaged to help advise on and deliver the reinstatement of night time uses.	Refer to the suggested mechanisms to achieve the objectives of the policy.
KE1	Kingston First is supportive of the direction of main town centre uses towards the town centre; and the growth of tourism and visitor accommodation. Again, though, this policy does not set out a meaningful mechanism by which this can be achieved. Kingston First considers that stakeholders and partners require further empowerment through a commitment from the Council to positively engage with and, importantly, consult with them to deliver these objectives.	Include commitment to engage with relevant stakeholders
KE2 D	Kingston First is generally supportive of this policy. However, the clause under part D needs to recognise the constraints and challenges that COVID-19 has placed on employment floorspace since 2020. There should be further flexibility to allow for an equivalent town centre use. This would also ensure that ground floors do not change to residential. Active town centre ground floor uses should be permitted.	Revise wording to ensure that social infrastructure or commercial town centre uses do not need to provide the same level of marketing evidence as conversions to residential development at ground floor level.
KE4 B	This policy is strongly supported by Kingston First. Again, as mentioned above, this should include consultation and engagement with relevant stakeholders and partners, including Kingston First.	Kingston First should be mentioned within this policy as a stakeholder to be consulted.

	Kingston First has concerns over the reference to residential led mixed use development	The emphasis should be placed on a mixed use town centre, whereas this policy places the emphasis on residential led.
KE5 1	This policy is strongly supported by Kingston First. Clause 1 should be strengthened to stimulate, not just support, social infrastructure at ground floor level. This can be achieved through the suggested mechanisms described in these representations.	Strengthen Clause 1 to stimulate the provision of social, community and leisure infrastructure at ground floor level and include reference to the suggested mechanisms.
KE8	Kingston First appreciates and supports this policy to ensure that there is not an overconcentration of hot food takeaways in order to help to prevent obesity. In addition, there is an opportunity to widen this policy in relation to the town centre to relate to other fast eat offers to ensure that the balance of services/food/leisure/retail uses is balanced at the ground floor, to ensure that Kingston remains a place to shop, live, work and play.	Expand policy to ensure the sustainability of the town centre in terms of a diversity of uses at ground floor level and ensuring that there is not an over-proliferation of one type of use.
KE9	This policy is supported.	
KE8 and KE9	In a similar approach to Policies KE8 and KE9, the Council has an opportunity to ensure a variety of uses at ground floor levels within Kingston Town Centre through defining the volume of types of uses that would be acceptable. This is particularly important in relation to Use Class E, which could allow for an overconcentration of one particular use, to the detriment of the vitality and viability of the town centre.	Add a policy defining the parameters of volumes of use falling within Use Class E for Kingston Town Centre. Kingston First would welcome the opportunity to liaise with the Council on this policy.
KS1 A	This is supported by Kingston First, however the safeguarding of land in Kingston Town Centre may hinder equally important town centre uses being provided in ideal locations. The suggested mechanisms could help meet the aspirations of this policy, including re-providing such facilities in a more appropriate location while allowing other town centre uses in vacant buildings.	Reword policy to be more flexible in order to other town centre uses other than residential to occupy buildings as an alternative to allow them to be vacant.
KS2 A	Kingston First should be listed in this policy for collaboration.	Include a specific reference Kingston First as a community organisation.
KS4 C	This is supported by Kingston First, however the safeguarding of such facilities in Kingston Town Centre may hinder equally important town centre uses being provided in ideal locations. The suggested mechanisms could help meet the aspirations of this policy, including	Reword policy to be more flexible in order for other town centre uses other than residential to occupy buildings as an alternative to allow them to be vacant.

	reproviding such facilities in a more appropriate location while allowing other town centre uses in vacant buildings.	
KS5	The flexibility in the policy is strongly supported and it is suggested that this flexibility could apply to policies KS1, 2 and 4	Apply similar flexibility to policies KS1, 2 and 4.
KS8 A	This policy is strongly supported, in particular Clause 2. This flexibility could be applied to KS1,2,4 and 5.	Apply similar flexibility to policies KS1, 2 and 4.
KN1 A	The commitment to the preparation of Green and Blue infrastructure strategies is strongly supported and Kingston First requests to be involved in the preparation of these plans.	
KN1 B	This part of the policy could be strengthened and more specific, to identify the opportunity for better connections between green and blue infrastructure, and the protection of these should be given a stronger emphasis.	Reword the policy to remove 'wherever possible' and instead require the protection and enhancement of green and blue infrastructure.
KN1 C	Reference to visual quality is supported; however the policy needs to be strengthened to ensure that development is appropriate in terms of density and preservation of natural beauty.	Reword the policy to refer to the importance of the preservation of natural beauty/views and ensuring the appropriate development of the sites, including in terms of densities and built form.
KN3 B	Clause B of this policy refers to developments. This needs to be more specific and exclude development such as changes of use in town centre or minor developments as this will hinder development overall.	Reword policy to make it clear that it does not apply to developments such as changes of use within Kingston Town Centre.
KN4 A	This needs to be more specific and exclude development such as changes of use in town centre or minor developments as this will hinder development overall.	Reword policy to make it clear that it does not apply to developments such as changes of use within Kingston Town Centre.
KT1 B	This approach is strongly supported by Kingston First as traffic and parking both impact the experience of the user of the town centre. The local plan provides a genuine and significant opportunity to reorganise the train and bus interchanges in the town centre as explained at the beginning of this document, in order to both enhance the sustainable transport offer as well as release previously developed land.	Add a commitment into policy to improve the public transport interchange.
KT2 A	While the approach to sustainable travel is supported, this should be strengthened to emphasise the opportunity presented by the Local Plan to provide affordable, efficient and reliable public transport.	Commit to a transport and travel plan for Kingston town Centre to ensure that the opportunity for a step change in public transport is maximised.

KT4	Kingston First supports the flexibility in KT4 to allow for a proportionate approach to parking. In particular Kingston First wants to ensure that visitors and workers are not discouraged from visiting Kingston through lack of parking but equally wants to ensure that the quality of the environment and visitor experience is preserved.	
KT6	The reference to river transport and its preservation is supported. However this policy should be expanded to maximise the opportunities presented through the draft Local Plan to increase the prominence of the river, including through connectivity and also the unique opportunity the riverside presents for uses on and along it.	
KI1	<p>Kingston First supports the commitment to securing contributions to appropriate infrastructure.</p> <p>The suggested mechanisms directly relate to this policy and should be included in this policy to ensure that stakeholders and partners, including Kingston First, are positively consulted and empowered to help the Council provide the right infrastructure in the most appropriate place.</p>	<p>Include reference to the suggested mechanisms within this policy.</p>