

# Planning and Environment Reference Guide

Please notify any changes immediately by e-mail to [Jonathan.Manns@knightfrank.com](mailto:Jonathan.Manns@knightfrank.com) or to [planninginlondon@mac.com](mailto:planninginlondon@mac.com) with the subject 'planning in london directory'. The assistance of Jonathan Manns at Knight Frank and of GLA & POS is acknowledged.

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## LONDON BOROUGHS

<p><b>Simon Bullock</b> Principal Planning Officer Town Hall, Barking IG11 7LU T: 0208 227 3803 E: <a href="mailto:simon.bullock@lbbd.gov.uk">simon.bullock@lbbd.gov.uk</a></p>	<p><b>Seb Salon</b> Head of Strategic Planning and Development Wyncham House, 207 Longlands Road, Sidcup, Kent DA15 7JH T: 0203 045 7779 E: <a href="mailto:seb.salon@bexley.gov.uk">seb.salon@bexley.gov.uk</a></p>	<p><b>Bob McQuillan</b> Chief Planner Bromley Civic Centre, Stockwell Close, Bromley, BR1 3UH T: 020 8313 4441 E: <a href="mailto:bob.mcquillan@bromley.gov.uk">bob.mcquillan@bromley.gov.uk</a></p>	<p><b>Annie Hampson</b> Planning Services and Development Director PO Box 270 Guildhall EC2P 2EJ T: 020 7332 1700 E: <a href="mailto:annie.hampson@cityoflondon.gov.uk">annie.hampson@cityoflondon.gov.uk</a></p>
<p><b>Jeremy Grint</b> Head of Spatial Regeneration T: 0208 227 2443 E: <a href="mailto:jeremy.grint@lbbd.gov.uk">jeremy.grint@lbbd.gov.uk</a></p>	<p><b>Sue Clark</b> Head of Development Control T: 0203 045 7779 E: <a href="mailto:sue.clark@bexley.gov.uk">sue.clark@bexley.gov.uk</a></p>	<p><b>Marc Hume</b> Director of Renewal and Recreation Services T: 0208 8461 7987 E: <a href="mailto:marc.hume@bromley.gov.uk">marc.hume@bromley.gov.uk</a></p>	<p><b>Paul Beckett</b> Policy and Performance Director T: 020 7332 1970 E: <a href="mailto:paul.beckett@cityoflondon.gov.uk">paul.beckett@cityoflondon.gov.uk</a></p>
<p><b>Tim Lewis</b> Development and Building Control Manager T: 0208 227 3706 E: <a href="mailto:tim.lewis@lbbd.gov.uk">tim.lewis@lbbd.gov.uk</a></p>	<p><b>Adrian Cole</b> Head of Building Control T: 0203 045 5802 E: <a href="mailto:adrian.cole@bexley.gov.uk">adrian.cole@bexley.gov.uk</a></p>	<p><b>Steven Moore</b> Head of Building Control T: 0208 313 4315 E: <a href="mailto:steve.moore@bromley.gov.uk">steve.moore@bromley.gov.uk</a></p>	<p><b>Peter Shadbolt</b> Development Plans T: 020 7332 1038 E: <a href="mailto:peter.shadbolt@cityoflondon.gov.uk">peter.shadbolt@cityoflondon.gov.uk</a></p>
<p><b>Dave Mansfield</b> Development Control Manager Tel. 020 8227 3999 <a href="mailto:dave.mansfield@lbbd.gov.uk">dave.mansfield@lbbd.gov.uk</a></p>			
<p><b>Stewart Murray</b> Head of Planning North London Business Park (NLBP) Oakleigh Road South London N11 1NP T: 0208 359 4838 E: <a href="mailto:stewart.murray@barnet.gov.uk">stewart.murray@barnet.gov.uk</a></p>	<p><b>Chris Walker</b> Director of Planning 4th Floor, Brent House, 349 High Road, Wembley HA9 6BZ T: 0208 937 5246 E: <a href="mailto:chris.walker@brent.gov.uk">chris.walker@brent.gov.uk</a></p>	<p><b>Ed Watson</b> Assistant Director of Planning and Public Protection 6th Floor, Camden Town Hall Extension Argyle Street, WC1H 8EQ T: 020 7974 562 E: <a href="mailto:ed.watson@camden.gov.uk">ed.watson@camden.gov.uk</a></p>	<p><b>Mike Kiely</b> Director of Planning and Building Control Taberner House, Park Lane, Croydon, CR9 1JT T: 0208 726 6000 (central) E: <a href="mailto:mike.kiely@croydon.gov.uk">mike.kiely@croydon.gov.uk</a></p>
<p><b>Ros Ward</b> Strategic Planning and Policy Manager T: 0208 359 4657 E: <a href="mailto:ros.ward@barnet.gov.uk">ros.ward@barnet.gov.uk</a></p>	<p><b>Dave Carroll</b> Head of Policy and Projects T: 0208 937 5202 E: <a href="mailto:dave.carroll@brent.gov.uk">dave.carroll@brent.gov.uk</a></p>	<p><b>David Joyce</b> Head of Planning Policy T: 020 7972 5615 E: <a href="mailto:david.joyce@camden.gov.uk">david.joyce@camden.gov.uk</a></p>	<p><b>Tim Naylor</b> Head of Spatial Planning T: 020 8726 6000 E: <a href="mailto:tim.naylor@croydon.gov.uk">tim.naylor@croydon.gov.uk</a></p>
<p><b>Richard Morcom</b> Head of Building Control T: 0208 359 4646 E: <a href="mailto:Richard.morcom@barnet.gov.uk">Richard.morcom@barnet.gov.uk</a></p>	<p><b>Stephen Weeks</b> Head of Area Planning T: 0208 937 5238 E: <a href="mailto:stephen.weeks@brent.gov.uk">stephen.weeks@brent.gov.uk</a></p>	<p><b>Frances Wheat</b> Head of Development Control T: 020 7974 5630 E: <a href="mailto:frances.wheat@camden.gov.uk">frances.wheat@camden.gov.uk</a></p>	<p><b>Rory MacLeod</b> Head of Development Management T: 0208 726 6000 E: <a href="mailto:rory.macleod@croydon.gov.uk">rory.macleod@croydon.gov.uk</a></p>
<p><b>Richard Wilson</b> Head of Urban Design and Renewal T: 020 7974 5914 E: <a href="mailto:richard.wilson@camden.gov.uk">richard.wilson@camden.gov.uk</a></p>	<p><b>Richard Wilson</b> Head of Urban Design and Renewal T: 020 7974 5914 E: <a href="mailto:richard.wilson@camden.gov.uk">richard.wilson@camden.gov.uk</a></p>	<p><b>Rory MacLeod</b> Head of Development Management T: 0208 726 6000 E: <a href="mailto:rory.macleod@croydon.gov.uk">rory.macleod@croydon.gov.uk</a></p>	<p><b>Ric Patterson</b> Head of Building Control T: 020 8726 6000 E: <a href="mailto:richard.patterson@croydon.gov.uk">richard.patterson@croydon.gov.uk</a></p>

<p><b>Aileen Jones</b> Head of Town Planning and Surveying Perceval House, 14/16 Uxbridge Road, London, W5 2HL T: 0208 825 8446 E: <a href="mailto:jonesa@ealing.gov.uk">jonesa@ealing.gov.uk</a></p>	<p><b>Sue Foster</b> Head of Planning T: 0208 356 8134 E: <a href="mailto:sue.foster@hackney.gov.uk">sue.foster@hackney.gov.uk</a></p>	<p><b>Patrick Keyes</b> Head of Planning T: 01708 432721 E: <a href="mailto:Patrick.keyes@haringey.gov.uk">Patrick.keyes@haringey.gov.uk</a></p>	<p><b>Kevin O'Leary</b> Director of Planning 222 Upper Street, London, N1 1XR T: 0207 527 2350 E: <a href="mailto:Kevin.o-leary@islington.gov.uk">Kevin.o-leary@islington.gov.uk</a></p>
<p><b>Richard Johns</b> Head of Planning Policy T: 0208 825 8446 E: <a href="mailto:richard.jones@ealing.gov.uk">richard.jones@ealing.gov.uk</a></p>	<p><b>Chris Berry</b> Development Control Manager T: 0208 356 8067 E: <a href="mailto:chris.berry@hackney.gov.uk">chris.berry@hackney.gov.uk</a></p>	<p><b>David Lawn</b> Development Control Manager T: 01708 43723 E: <a href="mailto:david.lawn@haringey.gov.uk">david.lawn@haringey.gov.uk</a></p>	<p><b>Louise Reid</b> Development Control Manager T: 0207 527 8532 E: <a href="mailto:louise.reid@islington.gov.uk">louise.reid@islington.gov.uk</a></p>
<p><b>Stephen Tapper</b> Director of Planning and Transportation Civic Centre, Silver Street, Enfield, EN1 3XY T: 0208 379 3800 E: <a href="mailto:stephen.tapper@enfield.gov.uk">stephen.tapper@enfield.gov.uk</a></p>	<p><b>Jon Whitwell</b> Assistant Director, Planning Hammersmith Town Hall King Street, London W6 9JU T: 020 8753 3402 Email: <a href="mailto:jon.whitwell@lbhf.gov.uk">jon.whitwell@lbhf.gov.uk</a></p>	<p><b>Juliemma McLoughlin</b> Interim Head of Development Management T: 020 8753 3402 Email: <a href="mailto:juliemma.mcloughlin@lbhf.gov.uk">juliemma.mcloughlin@lbhf.gov.uk</a></p>	<p><b>Peter Lerner</b> Executive Director Planning and Borough Development Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea Rm 328, Kensington Town Hall Hornton Street London W8 7NX T: 020 7361 2944 E: <a href="mailto:Peter.Lerner@rbkc.gov.uk">Peter.Lerner@rbkc.gov.uk</a></p>
<p><b>Kerry Abbade</b> Director of Planning Policy T: 0208 379 4184 E: <a href="mailto:kerry.abbade@enfield.gov.uk">kerry.abbade@enfield.gov.uk</a></p>		<p><b>Janet Rangely</b> Head of Community and Spatial Development T: 01895 250 553 E: <a href="mailto:jrangely@hillingdon.gov.uk">jrangely@hillingdon.gov.uk</a></p>	<p><b>Derek Taylor</b> Head of Development Control T: 0207 361 2701 E: <a href="mailto:derek.taylor@rbkc.gov.uk">derek.taylor@rbkc.gov.uk</a></p>
<p><b>Julian Jackson</b> Development Control T: 0208 379 3857 E: <a href="mailto:julian.jackson@enfield.gov.uk">julian.jackson@enfield.gov.uk</a></p>	<p><b>Marc Dorfman</b> Assistant Director of Planning, Regeneration and Economy  Civic Centre High Road Wood Green N22 8LE T: 0208 489 5208 E: <a href="mailto:marc.dorfman@haringey.gov.uk">marc.dorfman@haringey.gov.uk</a></p>	<p><b>Geoff Elliott</b> Deputy Director of Planning and Community Services T: 01895 250 556 E: <a href="mailto:gelliott@hilliondon.gov.uk">gelliott@hilliondon.gov.uk</a></p>	
<p><b>John Comber</b> Director of Regeneration, Enterprise and Skills Crown Building 48 Woolwich New Road London SE18 6HQ T: 020 8921 6426 E: <a href="mailto:john.comber@greenwich.gov.uk">john.comber@greenwich.gov.uk</a></p>	<p><b>Paul Tomkins</b> Head of Development Management T: 0208 489 5167 E: <a href="mailto:paul.tomkins@haringey.gov.uk">paul.tomkins@haringey.gov.uk</a></p>	<p><b>Cathy Gallagher</b> Head of Development Control Civic Centre, Lampton Road, Hounslow, TW3 4DN T: 0208 583 4945 E: <a href="mailto:cathy.gallagher@hounslow.gov.uk">cathy.gallagher@hounslow.gov.uk</a></p>	<p><b>Julie Baird</b> Head of Planning Policy and Development Control Guildhall, High Street Kingston upon Thames KT1 1EU T: 0208 547 5322 E: <a href="mailto:julie.baird@rbk.kingston.gov.uk">julie.baird@rbk.kingston.gov.uk</a></p>
<p><b>Steve Merryfield</b> Development Planning Manager T: 0208 921 5217 E: <a href="mailto:steve.merryfield@greenwich.gov.uk">steve.merryfield@greenwich.gov.uk</a></p>	<p><b>Andy Parsons</b> Group Manager of Development Control and Forward Planning  Civic Centre PO Box 57 Station Road, Harrow, HA1 2XF T: 0208 726 6269 E: <a href="mailto:andy.parsons@harrow.gov.uk">andy.parsons@harrow.gov.uk</a></p>	<p><b>Michael Jordan</b> Head of Planning T: 0208 583 5331 E: <a href="mailto:Michael.jordan@hounslow.gov.uk">Michael.jordan@hounslow.gov.uk</a></p>	<p><b>Rob Dixon</b> Head of Planning Policy and Development Control T: 0208 547 5317 E: <a href="mailto:rob.dixon@rbk.kingston.gov.uk">rob.dixon@rbk.kingston.gov.uk</a></p>
<p><b>Steve Pallett</b> Head of Development T: 0208 912 5229 E: <a href="mailto:steve.pallett@greenwich.gov.uk">steve.pallett@greenwich.gov.uk</a></p>	<p><b>Les Simpson</b> Service Manager T: 0208 736 6150 E: <a href="mailto:les.simpson@harrow.gov.uk">les.simpson@harrow.gov.uk</a></p>	<p><b>Stuart Harrison</b> Head of Strategic Planning T: 0208 583 2000 E: <a href="mailto:stuart.harrison@hounslow.gov.uk">stuart.harrison@hounslow.gov.uk</a></p>	<p><b>Michael Scott</b> Manager of Planning T: 0208 547 5318 E: <a href="mailto:Michael.scott@rbk.kingston.gov.uk">Michael.scott@rbk.kingston.gov.uk</a></p>



**Sue Foster OBE**  
Headhousing, regeneration, and environment  
Town Hall  
Brixton Hill, SW2 1RW  
T: 07932 449 369  
E: jsmith6@lambeth.gov.uk

**Zbig Blonski**  
Head of Strategic Planning  
T: 0207 926 1233  
E: zblonski@lambeth.gov.uk

**Michael Copeland**  
Conservation and Urban Design  
T: 0207 926 1215  
E: mcopeland@lambeth.gov.uk



**John Miller**  
Head of Planning  
Laurence House  
1 Catford Road  
London  
SE6 4RU  
T: 0208 314 8706  
E: john.miller@lewisham.gov.uk

**Timothy King**  
Head of Development Control  
T: 0208 314 9785  
E: timothy.king@lewisham.gov.uk

**Brian Reagan**  
Planning Policy Manager  
T: 0208 314 8774  
E: brian.reagan@lewisham.gov.uk



**John Hill**  
Head of Planning and Public Protection  
Merton Civic Centre  
London Rd, Morden SM4 5DX  
T: 020 8545 3052  
Email: esenquiries@merton.gov.uk

**Maggie Brian**  
Interim Manager, Development Control  
T: 020 8545 3099  
Email: esenquiries@merton.gov.uk

**Paul McGarry**  
Physical Regeneration Manager  
T: 020 8545 3041  
urban.design@merton.gov.uk

**Chris James**  
Interim Manager, Spatial Planning  
Policy  
T: 020 8545 3041  
policyandinformationteam@merton.gov.uk



**Seema Manchanda**  
Head of Physical Regeneration & Development  
London Borough of Newham,  
Town Hall Annexe, 330-354 Barking  
Road,  
East Ham, London E6 2RP  
T: 0208 430 2000 Extension: 22309  
seema.manchanda@newham.gov.uk

**Len Davies**  
Head of Building Control  
T: 0208 430 2000 Extension: 47222  
len.davies@newham.gov.uk

**Peter Rose**  
Head of Development Control and Planning  
T: 0208 430 2000 Ext. 27167  
peter.rose@newham.gov.uk



**Chief Planning and Regeneration Officer : Chris Berry**  
Chris.Berry@redbridge.gov.uk  
PO BOX No.2 Town Hall  
128-142 High Road Ilford  
Essex, IG1 1DD  
T: 0208 708 2068

**Head of Development Control John Pearce**  
T: 0208 708 2052  
john.pearce@redbridge.gov.uk

**Head of Planning Policy & Environment: Emma Watson**  
T: 0208 708 2235  
emma.watson@redbridge.gov.uk

**Heads of Building Control Amrick Notta**  
T: 0208 708 2525  
amrick.notta@redbridge.gov.uk

**Head of Regeneration: Mark Lucas**



**Trevor Pugh**  
Director of the Environment  
Civic centre., 44 York Street  
Twickenham, TW1 3BZ  
T: 0845 612 2660  
customer.service@richmond.gov.uk

**Robert Angus**  
Head of Development Control  
T: 0845 612 2660  
E: customer.service@richmond.gov.uk

**Philip Wealthy**  
Head of Planning Policy  
T: 0845 612 2660  
E: customer.service@richmond.gov.uk



**Gary Rice**  
Head of Development Control  
Chiltern House  
Portland Street, SE17 2ES  
T: 0207 525 5657  
E: gary.rice@southwark.gov.uk

**David Woolmer**  
Head of Building Control  
T: 0207 525 5588  
E: david.woolmer@southwark.gov.uk

**Simon Bevan / Julie Seymour**  
Heads of Planning Policy  
T: 0207 525 5411 / 0207 525 0508  
E: simon.bevan@southwark.gov.uk  
Julie.seymour@southwark.gov.uk



**Darren Richards**  
Head of Planning  
24 Denmark Road,  
Carshalton SM5 2JG  
T: 0208 770 5070  
E: Darren.richards@sutton.gov.uk

**Karen Fossett**  
Head of Development Control  
T: 0208 770 5070  
E: Karen.fossett@sutton.gov.uk

**Jeff Wilson**  
Head of Strategic and Environmental Planning  
T: 0208 770 5070  
E: jeff.wilson@sutton.gov.uk



**Stephen Irvine**  
Development Control Manager  
Mulberry Place (AH)  
PO Box 55739  
5 Clove Crescent  
London E14 1BY  
T: 0207 364 5355  
E: planning@towerhamlets.gov.uk

**Terry Natt**  
Strategic Applications Manager  
T: 0207 364 5204  
E: planning@towerhamlets.gov.uk



**Shifa Mustafa**  
Chief Executive of Planning  
Sycamore House, Town Hall,  
Forest Road, London E17 4JF  
T: 0208 496 6826  
Central: 0208 496 3000  
E: shifa.mustafa@walthamforest.gov.uk

**Vernon Herbert**  
Executive Director of Planning  
T: 0208 496 6876/6882  
E: Vernon.herbert@lbwf.gov.uk

**Julian Ruax**  
Head of Building Control  
T: 0208 496 6770  
E: julian.ruax@lbwf.gov.uk



**Seema Manchanda**  
Assistant Director of Planning Services  
Wandsworth High Street  
London SW18 2PU  
T: 0208 871 6626  
E: smanchanda@wandsworth.gov.uk

**John Stone**  
Head of Forward Planning  
T: 0208 871 6627  
E: jstone@wandsworth.gov.uk

**Bob Foulger**  
Head of Building Control  
T: 0208 871 7616  
E: bfoulger@wandsworth.gov.uk



**Rosemarie MacQueen, Strategic Director, Built Environment**  
PO Box 240, Westminster City Hall, 64  
Victoria Street, London SW1E 6 QP  
T: 020-7641-2455  
RMacqueen@westminster.gov.uk

**John Walker**  
Operational Director Development Planning  
T: 020-7641-2524  
E: jwalker2@westminster.gov.uk

**Barry Smith**  
Operational Director City Planning  
T: 020-7641-2923  
E: barrysmith@westminster.gov.uk

OTHER ORGANISATIONS

Please notify any changes immediately by e-mail to [Jonathan.Manns@knightfrank.com](mailto:Jonathan.Manns@knightfrank.com) or to [planninginlondon@mac.com](mailto:planninginlondon@mac.com) with the subject 'planning in london directory'.

**Department for Communities and Local Government**  
Eland House  
Bressenden Place  
London SW1E 5DU  
T: 020 7944 4400  
E: enquiries.br@communities.gsi.gov.uk  
planning.policies@communities.gsi.gov.uk

Frameworks)  
T: 020 7983 5750  
E: martin.scholar@london.gov.uk

**Greater London Authority**  
Boris Johnson  
Mayor of London  
Greater London Authority  
City Hall, The Queen's Walk  
More London, London SE1 2AA  
T: 0207 983 4000  
E: mayor@london.gov.uk

**Government Office for London**  
Riverwalk House  
157-161 Millbank  
London SW1P 4RR  
T: 020 7217 3111  
Email: enquiries@gol.gsi.gov.uk

**Andrew Melville**  
Head of Planning  
T: 020 7217 3111  
E: andrew.melville@gol.gsi.gov.uk  
**Penny Bramwell**  
Head of Sustainable Development  
T: 020 7217 3111  
E: penny.bramwell@gol.gsi.gov.uk

**Giles Dolphin**  
Assistant Director Planning  
T: 020 7983 4271  
E: Giles.dolphin@london.gov.uk

**The Planning Inspectorate**  
Registry/Scanning  
Room 3/01 Kite Wing  
Temple Quay House  
2 The Square  
Temple Quay  
Bristol BS1 6PN  
T: 0117 372 6372  
E: enquiries@planning-inspectorate.gsi.gov.uk

**Colin Wilson**  
Senior Manager, Planning Decisions  
T: 020 7983 4783  
E: colin.wilson@london.gov.uk

**Justin Carr**  
Strategic Planning Manager  
(Development Decisions)  
T: 020 7983 4895  
E: justin.carr@london.gov.uk

**Christine McGoldrick**  
Strategic Planning Manager  
(Development Plans)  
T: 020 7983 4309  
E: christine.mcgoldrick@london.gov.uk

**English Heritage**  
Covering: Greater London.  
English Heritage  
1 Waterhouse Square  
138 - 142 Holborn  
London, EC1N 2ST  
T: 020 7973 3000  
Fax: 020 7973 3001  
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**Martin Scholar**  
Strategic Planning Manager (Planning

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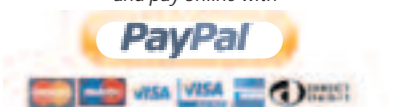
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Sir Terry Farrell's regular column.

High Streets provide both the framework for our urban arrangement and the centre of life in our city, says Terry Farrell



A healthy mix of uses will encourage the development of a vibrant civic artery at Earls Court High Street.

Beleaguered as they may be by the economic conditions and developments such as out-of-town shopping centres and internet shopping, our High Streets are an essential resource that London would be unrecognisable without. One of the lessons of world's most liveable metropolis is that we live in a network of urban villages that have grown into one another along these linear arteries, with their transport, bustle and commerce. The appeal of High Streets to urbanists goes much further than retail. High Streets aren't there because of shops, shops flock to High Streets because they are in fact the place in the city for all forms of cultural, civic, social and economic exchange; the urban engine room where footfall is generated by a rich and diverse mix of uses.

High Streets provide both the framework for our urban arrangement and the centre of life in our city. Two-thirds of Londoners live within ten minutes walk of one and outside the Central Activity Zone they are home to more than half of London's jobs. They are conveniently local, well served by public transport and with the correct public realm improvements could contribute to making London a walkable city. High Streets have a fantastic heritage of historic and public buildings and spaces. In addition, almost half of all the developable brownfield land in London is within 200m of a High Street. Thanks to their existing communities and facilities, which are difficult and expensive to start from scratch, investment in High Streets is truly sustainable and delivers a high yield of measurable social benefits. It is clear

that architects, planners and urbanists have a key role to play in unlocking the rich heritage and immense capacity for regeneration latent in our High Streets through the re-use and improvement of existing places.

My company's masterplans for Earls Court and Embassy Gardens in Nine Elms use High Streets as a key placemaking feature. With the consultant Steve Smith, we have developed a number of initiatives that are also practical for regeneration.

The future of High Streets relies on their importance being recognised at a strategic level. At Nine Elms, We have used our reputation as strategic planners to step outside of our masterplan area and address the urban design strategy for the entire Vauxhall-Nine Elms-Battersea Opportunity Area (VNEB). At the moment, the VNEB is an urban island, separated from the surrounding neighbourhoods by a railway viaduct to the south and by the A3205, otherwise known as Nine Elms Lane, to the north. We have proposed, amongst a raft of other initiatives, plans to tame and urbanise Nine Elms Lane with the aim of creating a liveable High Street. By redesigning the public realm to address the balance between cars and pedestrians we aim encourage the connectedness of the site at right angles to the river and the Lane – shifting the perception of Nine Elms from a non-place that one travels through, to a place of character where life happens.

At Earls Court, our masterplan is based around the principle of "Four Villages and a High Street". We will use the High Street in classic fashion: to

encourage the four existing urban villages; Earls Court, North End, West Kensington and West Brompton; to grow into one another. The High Street at Earls Court will act as a continuum between the different character areas; not a singular place but a composition of many incidents, episodes and spaces to be enjoyed in part or as a whole.

Landscape will play a key role, as it does throughout the whole Earls Court masterplan, and the street environment will be pedestrian friendly, with space on the pavements for shops and businesses to occupy the street.

The demand for retail space is influenced by convenience, quality of place and variety of choice. We aim to encourage a diversification of uses for the high street, centring healthcare, cultural and civil amenities and new typologies of business and professional services like informal "workspace clubs" on the high street.

By bringing life back to the High Street, putting it at the centre of our aspirations for the area, and recognising its capacity as a conduit for investment and ideas, we may encourage retail back to the High Street at Earls Court, but then again there may be plenty of more interesting things to do than shop. ■

NOTES:  
Embassy Gardens is being masterplanned by Farrells for The Ballymore Group: <http://www.ballymoregroup.com>  
Earls Court is being masterplanned by Farrells for Capital & Counties Properties PLC: <http://www.capitalandcounties.com/>  
<http://www.myearls court.com/>

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9th September 2011, Norton Rose Law Firm, London



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