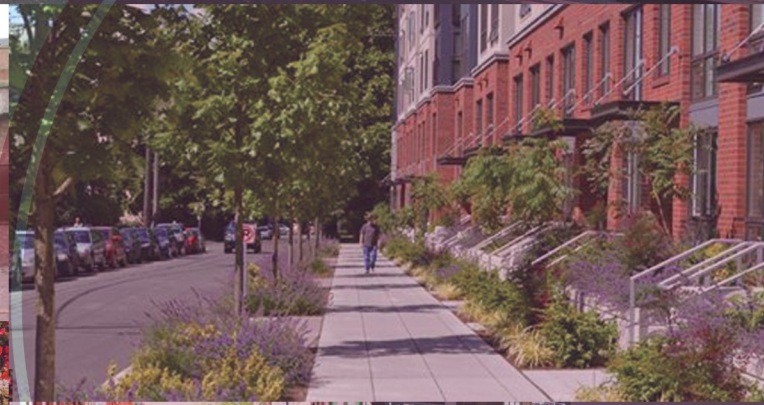


RBKC Future High Streets Workshops Report



THE ROYAL BOROUGH OF
KENSINGTON
AND CHELSEA



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Background

In July and September 2021 the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea convened a series of workshops on the future of the borough's High Streets.

The impulse for these workshops was the recognition that High Streets are important to how we live, the local economy, how we work, and how we socialise. As consumer patterns change and spending increasingly moves online, particularly in this time of Covid 19, residents' expectations of high streets are also changing.

In this context the workshops were set up by the council in a spirit of inquiry in order to support the borough's high streets and to make sure they continue to meet the needs of the borough's communities. Convening questions sought to explore:

“What can we influence as residents and the local authority? What opportunities do we have to think creatively, innovatively and form strong partnerships?”

With the overarching question for the workshops being:

How can our changing high streets meet the changing needs of our communities?

The public participation organisation MutualGain were commissioned as independent facilitators to coordinate, design and run online workshops for five areas and two sets of resident associations.

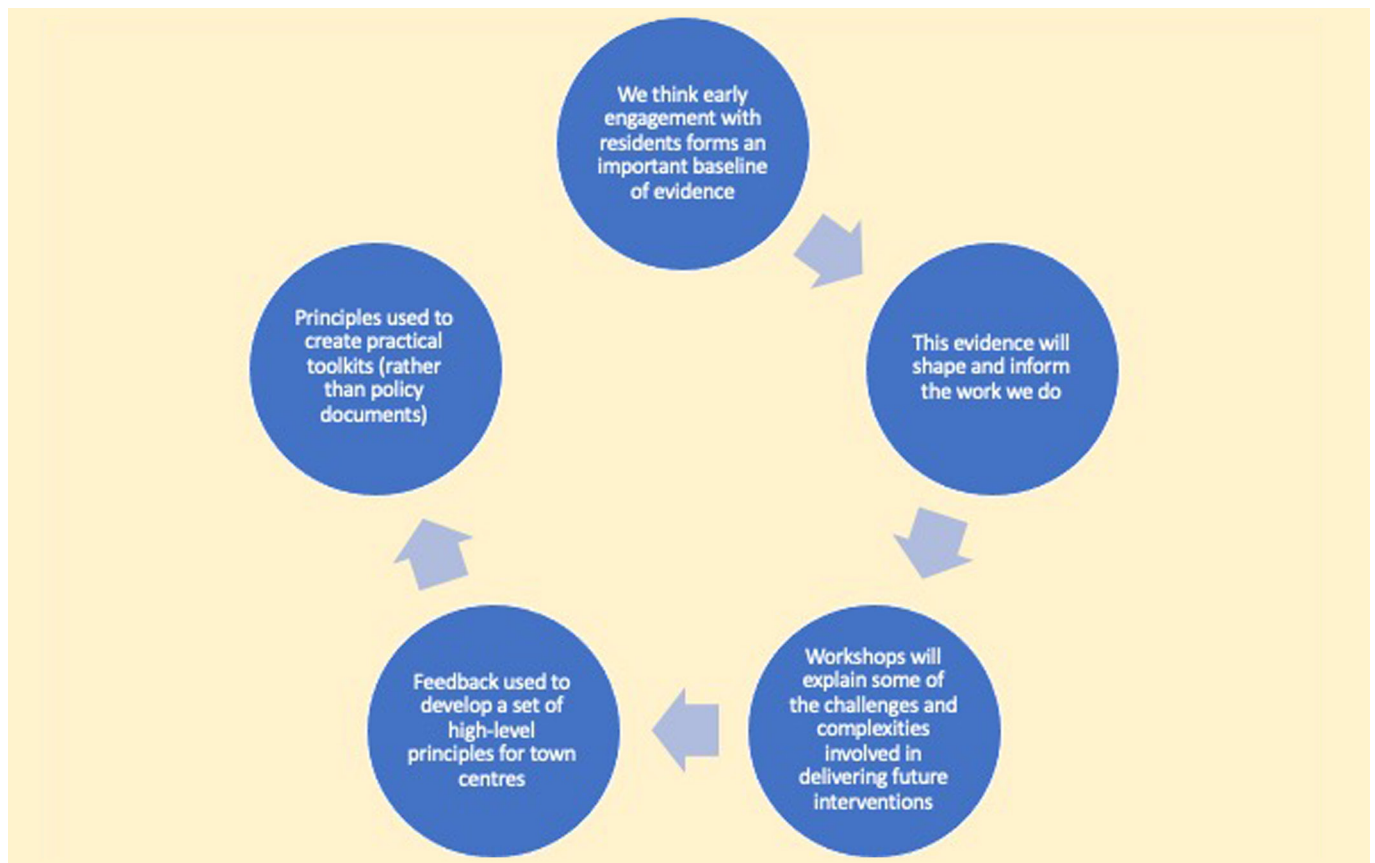
Inspired by examples of citizen deliberation and the proliferation of Citizens Assemblies throughout local authorities in the UK, RBKC council wished to move towards a similar approach. The ambition was to create forums grounded in informed presentations from experts, allowing for in-depth questions and conversation.

The workshops were therefore designed to explore different perspectives on the future of high streets via a range of independent speakers. Hosted online using the Zoom platform, residents were able to discuss and share their thoughts in breakout groups with facilitators and scribes.

The strategic aims of the workshops were to:

- provide a space for early engagement with residents to create an important baseline of evidence which will shape and inform the work the council does
- introduce residents into some of the challenges and complexities involved in delivering future high street intervention
- gather feedback to develop a set of high-level strategic principles for town centres which will in turn be used to create practical toolkits (rather than policy documents)

The toolkits will be fluid documents that are tailored to each town centre and something that everyone from residents to businesses can use.



Source: RBKC presentation from Future High Streets Workshop

These events alongside the asynchronous online Commonplace Future of High Streets engagement with over 200 respondents will provide information for more detailed stakeholder discussions at the end of this year 2021 and shape policy decisions.

Methodology

The engagement consisted of two types of workshop. The first were recruited via RBKC's newly formed Citizens' Panel. The second was an open invitation to local residents' associations.

Workshops for Citizens' Panel Members

The first type of workshop was intended to be delivered entirely in July with 5 three-hour events in the following areas and dates:

- Workshop One: Notting Hill Gate - 14th July 2021 / 18:00 – 21:00
- Workshop Two: Kensington High Street - 15th July / 18:00 – 21:00
- Workshop Three: Portobello Road - 21st July / 18:00 – 21:00
- Workshop Four: Kings Road/ Sloane Street - 22nd July / 18:00 – 21:00
- Workshop Five: Brompton Road - 27th July / 18:00 – 21:00

The aim for these workshops was to engage a representative sample of local residents and for this reason the council chose to recruit using the Citizens' Panel:

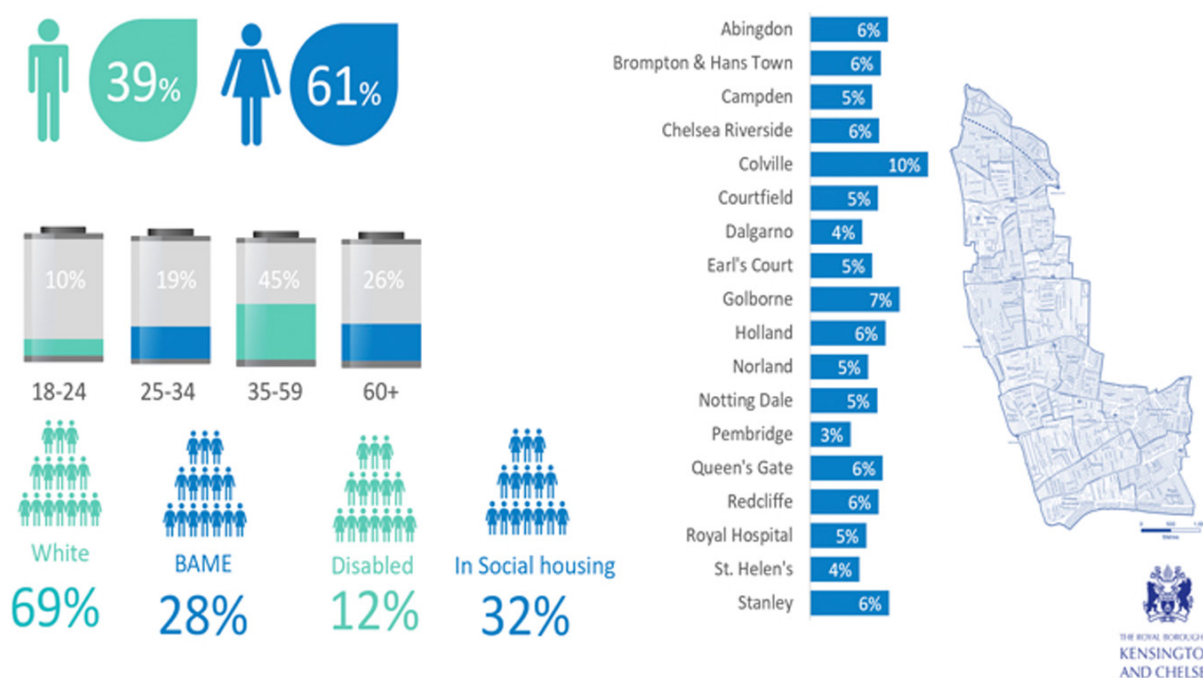
“The Citizens' Panel is an online group of up to 2000 residents who have agreed to give their views on consultation topics throughout the year. Panel membership is broadly representative of the borough's population to ensure that we hear a diverse range of voices.

By listening to a variety of local views, the Council can:

- Gather opinions to reflect the views of different communities
- Help ensure the high standards of Council services are maintained
- Help identify resident priorities for improving life in Kensington and Chelsea
- Reliably inform our decision-making process” (source: Citizens' Panel slides, July 2021, RBKC)

Below is an infographic of the membership of the Citizens' Panel to show how it is broadly representative of the borough's population. The aim for the workshops was to engage as broadly as possible across this demographic sample.

Panel Member Breakdown n=2005



Source: Citizens' Panel slides, July 2021 (RBKC)

An invitation email was sent out to residents of each of the areas relating to the different workshops. An incentive of £25 worth of Marks and Spencer shopping vouchers was offered in recognition of the time for anyone who would participate. The provision of financial incentives as part of the process is an integral feature of citizens' deliberation forums such as Citizens' Juries and Assemblies. It ensures that those who are not normally engaged are heard. All too often most public consultations end up engaging those who are already engaged.

Any citizen panel member who was interested in joining was invited to respond to the email confirming which one they would like to attend and to consent to being contacted further by MutualGain. Before the workshops, respondents received an 'onboarding' telephone call to receive further information and make sure they would be comfortable joining the Zoom platform.

Welcome packs

Residents who had expressed an interest in attending also received an email with a welcome pack to prepare attendees for the workshop. This included information on the overall purpose of the workshops, the speakers they would hear from, what would be discussed and some context with links to the local plan for each area.

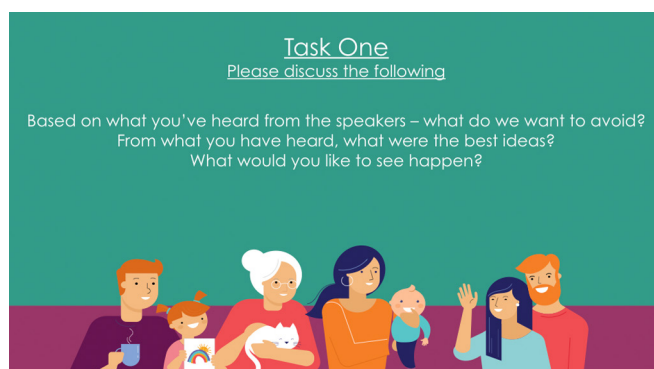
They were also given access to an online webpage with password protection where they could access the links to join the workshops as well as find information from each of the expert speakers in the form of a video and a question and answer template.

Structure of sessions

The workshops were designed as standalone sessions where participants could learn from expert speakers, discuss what they had heard and share their own experiences and views in small groups. The intended outputs were to understand the major themes for each area.

Each workshop was hosted by MutualGain with either Susan Ritchie or Andy Paice as an independent lead facilitator. There was also a team of facilitators and scribes from the planning team of RBKC council to facilitate the small group discussions in the breakout groups.

The workshops started with an overview of the topic of the Future of High Streets by Planning Projects Officer Catherine Harvey. Then the main body of the workshops consisted of three rounds of watching pre-recorded video presentations by two expert speakers followed by a round of facilitated discussions.



After listening to the two five minute presentations from the speakers participants had discussions answering two main questions (as shown on the 'Task One' image from the session slide).

Comments, ideas and questions were captured on (Miro) virtual sticky note boards.

Task One
Please discuss the following

Based on what you've heard from the speakers – what do we want to avoid? (10 mins)

From what you have heard, what were the best ideas?
What would you like to see happen? (10 mins)



[Click here for the next task](#)

What do we want to avoid?

- A lot of closed down shops on portobello
- Shops oriented at tourists but not toward local residents
- Lost a lot of the flavour around Portobello- too many tacky shops
- No where for people to sit near Portobello market- Pubs or Cafes are the only options
- Weekends are v busy but weekdays are v quiet. High streets need to work both ways and serve the whole area.
- Tourists might follow the more interesting shops- if they spring up elsewhere then they will move there.
- KHS is dying as we speak- the travel shops are very uniform
- Avoid closed shops**
- Kensington High Street- not enough people lived in that area relative to the retail density

What were the best ideas?

- A lot of churches- they would be good people to talk to for ideas.
- Arts and creative design- encourage small boutiques
- Council to try and control the Landlords to encourage less short-termism
- Terraced dining spilling onto the pavement- tables and chairs outside
- Incentivising Landlords?**
- Diversity and interesting businesses- not just the same tacky businesses
- Can we change business rates to try and encourage the businesses we want to see
- Walking down the Kings Road and seeing something different week to week
- The walk becomes an "exhibition"- an attraction
- Collaboration and seeing the High Street as an experience, considering it holistically rather than individual shops
- The section of the KR called KR Curve- business collaboration, business self improvement

What do you want to see happen?

- Could do with more benches and plant life around Portobello Road
-
-
-
- Social and religious aspects can go hand in hand
-
- Coffee and snack bars in churches! (Bow Lane City Church...)

After two rounds of listening to speakers and discussing what they felt they wanted to avoid and what they wanted to see happen in their high streets there was a plenary session where everyone got to hear what each group had to say.



Image: Reporting back on the discussions in the Plenary round. (MutualGain)

In the third and final round of discussions the groups also discussed what they felt had been the main topics of discussion that should be remembered from the evening.

During this round the lead facilitator and tech support looked at what was emerging on the Miro boards and identified what they judged to be some of the key themes. These were entered into a Zoom poll for a temperature check for what were felt to be the most important themes of the evening's discussions. The poll was repeated twice for first and second choices.

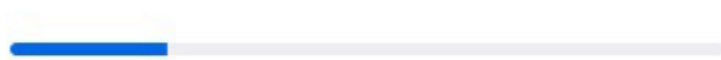
1st Zoom poll from Workshop 5

Poll ended | 1 question | 9 of 9 (100%) participated

1. 1. What themes must be at the forefront of any future high street design? (Single Choice) *

9/9 (100%) answered

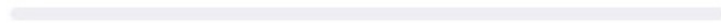
Community uses: social,religious, cultural (2/9) 22%



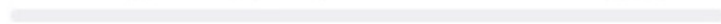
More independent, diverse shops and pop ups (5/9) 56%



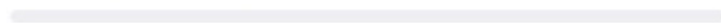
Safety of High Streets (0/9) 0%



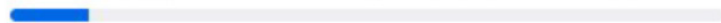
Protecting existing shops (0/9) 0%



Access for cycling (0/9) 0%



Creating opportunities for young people (1/9) 11%



Making streets adaptable (office, exercise, (1/9) 11%

At the end of the workshop participants were told how they would receive their vouchers and what the next steps were for including residents in formulating strategies for Kensington and Chelsea's high streets. The evening finished with residents entering one word into the Zoom chat to sum up their experience of the event.

Workshop schedule

Welcome, Introduction to the Citizens' Panel, Zoom and Participation guidelines

Meet your neighbour (icebreaker activity)

Overview of topic of Future of High Streets (Catherine Harvey RBKC)

1st round of Speakers (5 mins each):

Cllr Catherine Faulks - RBKC Lead member for the economy, employment and innovation

Claire Harding - Research director, Centre for London

1st round of discussions:

- what residents want to avoid
- what they would like to see

2nd round of speakers:

Daniel Partridge - Director of Partnering Regeneration Development Ltd. (PRD)

Chris Bruntlett - Cycling and sustainable transport campaigner

2nd round of discussions:

- what residents want to avoid
- what they would like to see

BREAK

Plenary – hearing back from groups on discussions

3rd round of Speakers (5 mins each):

Mike Kiely - Chartered Town Planner. Chair of the Planning Officers Society

Mathilde Lebreton - Architect with GLA

3rd round of discussions:

- what residents want to avoid
- what they would like to see
- what were the main themes that emerged

Plenary & Zoom Poll - Temperature check on preferred themes to be mindful of

Next steps (Catherine Harvey)

Information for receiving vouchers. Close of meeting

Speakers

Prior to the workshops a wide range of speakers were identified by the RBKC to present on the realities and what could be the future of the High Street.

Each was given a template with the following questions:

- What is your passion / specialism / position on the future of high streets?
- Your perspective on what needs to happen for the future of high streets?
- Thinking about critics and/or alternative views to that which you have put forward above – what would they say about your perspective and idea and what would be your response?

Their responses to these questions were posted on the online webpage for all the participants to access. This was also the basis for the video recording that was edited and shared with the workshop participants during the sessions.

The following six speakers shared their views with the participants. A quotation from their template responses gives an essence of their presentations to the resident participants.



Cllr Catherine Faulks - RBKC Lead member for the economy, employment and innovation.

"We know that people quite rightly feel strongly about what future High Streets should look like – and we also know that they don't necessarily all agree! We need to find solutions that bring stakeholders together by looking at ways that High Streets support local people's needs but also can be more innovative and dynamic to bring back the life blood to our city."



Claire Harding - Research director, Centre for London.

"We need to give communities much more of a say in how their high streets are managed... We really don't want lots of empty buildings on our high streets. To help communities do this, we need to address the issue of commercial landlords who don't keep their buildings in good repair or leave them empty."



Daniel Partridge - Director Partnering Regeneration Development Ltd.

"We think that high streets can and should have a bright but different future, in which new mixes of uses will be found, which better meet the needs of local communities and go beyond the traditional retail model.....People want to reconnect and the importance of the 15 minute neighbourhood in the economic recovery cannot be overstated."



Mike Kiely - Town Planner. Chair of the Planning Officers Society.

"High Streets are facing huge structural changes... There is no evidence that supports the view that the market when left to its own devices will produce an optimum result or even a desirable result. Faced with pressures that indicate a declining market, many landowners will prioritise short term gains over long-term investment."



Mathilde Lebreton - Architect, urbanist and artist working at Greater London Authority Regeneration team.

"I think this unusual and difficult time also somehow represents an opportunity for new ideas to find a space, be tested and inform the future of our high streets, with a more ecological approach. I think Local authorities are thinking much more boldly and creatively about flexible use responses, particularly in terms of streets and outdoor spaces."



Chris Bruntlett - Cycling and sustainable transport campaigner, Dutch Cycling Embassy.

"If you design a city for cars, it fails for everyone, including drivers. If you design a multi-modal city that prioritises walking, biking and public transport, it works for everyone including drivers" Citation from Brent Toderman shared by Chris.

Workshops for the Resident Associations

These took place once the Citizens' Panel workshops were completed. Two workshops took place on 22nd and 23rd September.

The first on 22nd September had representation from the following resident and traders' associations:

- Old Court House Residents
- South Kensington & Queen's Gate Residents Association.
- Vicarage Court
- Ilchester Estates
- Holland Park Avenue Traders Association
- Market Streets Action Group (MSAG)
- Pembridge Association
- Princes Gate Mews RA
- Brompton Association

The second on 23rd September was a workshop specifically for the Kensington Society.

These workshops had a different format lasting 90 minutes, without the expert speakers' videos.

Catherine Harvey and Sue Foster of RBKC gave an overview of the Future of High Streets work. After this participants went into small groups to share thoughts and where they might like some clarification on any terms, points or process. In an open session, questions were then clarified by Catherine and Sue.

Then in breakout groups with RBKC facilitators the groups discussed how they saw the future of high streets in the light of these questions:

- What are the important points for the group to consider when doing this work?
- Are there any red lines? Or aspirations that you particularly want to share?

In the plenary everyone could hear back from the other groups' discussions. The evening finished with residents entering one word into the Zoom chat to sum up their experience of the event.

Attendance

It was initially envisaged that there would be approximately 30 residents per area workshop, however attendance was much lower than anticipated.

Workshop One (14th July): Notting Hill Gate - 13 attendees

Workshop Two (15th July): Kensington High Street - 17 attendees

Workshop Three (21st July): Portobello Road - cancelled due to low attendance*

Workshop Four (22nd July): Kings Road/ Sloane Street - 17 attendees

Workshop Five (27th July postponed to 1st September): Brompton Road & other areas combined - 7 attendees

*6 turned up (3 at beginning 3 later - they were informed another session would be arranged)

There was a total of 60 attendees.



Demographics of Attendees

Anonymised demographic data was sourced from the RBKC Citizens Panel database.

Attendees of Workshops (for Citizens' Panel Members)	Citizen Panel figures
Female 69%, Male 31%	Female 69% , Male 31%
Ages	Ages
18-24 0%	18-24 10%
25-34 10%	25-34 19%
35-59 52%	35-59 45%
60 and over 38%	60 and over 26%
No disability 95%, Disabled 5%	Disability 12%
White 70%, BAME 30%	White 69%, BAME 28%
In social housing 28%	In social housing 32%
Colville 11%	Colville 10%
Abingdon 10%	Abingdon 6%
Royal Hospital 8%	Royal Hospital 5%
Golborne 8%	Golborne 7%
Stanley 8%	Stanley 6%
Chelsea Riverside 7%	Chelsea Riverside 6%
Notting Dale 7%	Notting Dale 5%
Norland 7%	Norland 5%
Earl's Court 7%	Earl's Court 5%
Queen's Gate 5%	Queen's Gate 6%
Brompton and Hans Town 5%	Brompton and Hans Town 6%
Courtfield 5%	Courtfield 5%
Holland 5%	Holland 6%
Campden 3%	Campden 5%
Redcliffe 2%	Redcliffe 6%
Pembridge 2%	Pembridge 3%
St Helens 2%	St Helens 4%

As can be seen, the representation of those attending the workshops follows fairly closely the makeup of the Citizens Panel with the exception of the younger age group who did not respond to the invitation.

Results

Findings from each workshop

The following observations were produced as a result of MutualGain analysing the Miro boards from each session with the RBKC facilitator and scribe teams after the workshops had finished. They were then cross-referenced with what had emerged in the feedback from groups in the recorded plenary sessions.

The findings are represented as headlines from the discussions and a collection of the some of the discussions taking place around those main themes that emerged. It is also important to note that any statements recorded in this results section are indications of what emerged rather than consensus statements held by everyone present.

Also to provide a temperature check of what the attendees felt were priorities, the results of the Zoom polls have been included.

In each workshop there was some overlap between people commenting on different areas and high streets around the borough. Also the fifth workshop was a session in which people were grouped from different areas. Therefore the comments included here reflect the fact that a variety of areas were mentioned rather than trying to isolate comments to specific areas.

Workshop One (14th July): Notting Hill Gate

A thoroughfare

One of the most frequent points emerging from the first workshop was that Notting Hill Gate is a main thoroughfare and as such feels like a place people pass through rather than a place that people gather and stick to. It was felt that this degraded the atmosphere and the air quality due to the traffic.

A need to cultivate a unique identity

In general there were more comments that had a negative outlook on the area with people feeling it was ugly, dominated by traffic and lacking in green spaces and the kind of shops people wanted with too many cafes and restaurants.

There was a sense of a lack of local identity and that places like Westfield and Kensington High Street fulfilled the need for chain stores and that there was no need for Notting Hill Gate to have smaller clones of these large stores. Cultivating a unique identity was therefore a strong theme. One idea was that larger chains should subsidise smaller businesses and give them a tax break. Avoiding empty shops was seen as important to stop the area feeling sad.

The impact of tourism

There was a lot of discussion around tourist traps particularly Portobello Road which was seen to be becoming too generic and losing its uniqueness and variety of small shops that had made it attractive. The shops there were seen to be tourist traps (a place that attracts and exploits tourists) with very little interaction between tourists and locals. There was a sense that places which fulfil resident needs function better than places that are predominantly tourist traps.

The role of markets

Golborne Road was mentioned as a model of market that works better than Portobello with a great mix of food and local shops with locals using it and people coming in from different areas. In group one there was a lot of support for the idea of farmers markets which pull in local people and tourists. Markets and events were seen to encourage connections and social interaction.

Community Uses

There may be a role for the Council to play, bringing in the community in supporting residents' views and visions over promoting the area to tourists. Some of the community uses that were expressed include:

Yoga and more community and pop up events with activities for families and cultural attractions that go beyond retail. The Coronet Theatre was noted as a place that had tried to create an exhibition space. Students used to sell and be more active on Portobello Rd which was seen as something to re-encourage. Creating 'a vibe' with buskers and different attractions.

Green spaces and seating

There were many comments for more green spaces and planters to make the area more pleasant and attractive, but also that trees that might damage structure and using planters could be preferable.

Seating and planting had overall support. A need for seating was expressed: *"somewhere to put yourself down to gather yourself and rest"*. And there were comments regarding the need for this to take into account accessibility, perhaps co-designing with people with special needs.

Accessibility

Lack of accessibility also came up regarding the underground stations and the impact of parking restrictions and of Deliveroo using parking spaces. Discussions around disabled access highlighted the need for thinking about things from tree planting (sap), to parking, to shop front access, to toilets - and how those are signposted.

Inclusivity

Inclusivity was also a strong theme with questions around how to get young people to participate in local and community activities. Also the need for young people's voices and how to bring in young people or the homeless to participate in discussions like these to shape the area.

Pedestrian areas

Generally the idea of having more pedestrian areas was supported but it was felt that it should be managed carefully. Traffic free areas are important: high streets-need spaces where people can stop and have conversations and pavements need to be made safe.

The workshop ended with a Zoom poll curated from themes that had emerged.

The results were as follows:

What theme must be at the forefront of any future high street design?

1. Flexible spaces (activities, work, social scene, accessible for age and abilities) 31%
2. Unique shopping experience (local, independent products, local character) 25%
3. Community led spaces (diversity contributing to activities and events) 23%
4. Green and clean spaces (trees, planters, low pollution) 17%
5. Relaxing (balance between pedestrianisation/seating) 3%

NB. The percentage scores of the Zoom polls have been calculated by giving 1 point to votes from the 1st round of voting and ½ point for the second round (second choice) voting.

Workshop Two (15th July): Kensington High Street

Issues around movement - no clear way forward.

Issues that were noted by participants were that Kensington High Street is used as a big and important thoroughfare with the speed of traffic being problematic for pedestrians. The plenary report back mentioned that one group didn't see any real difference between cyclists and cars in terms of their threat to pedestrians, and how they affect the pedestrians.

People not abiding by the rules was something that was mentioned with scooter users and cyclists not respecting the indications for different road surfaces at the side street junctions such as a pedestrian crossing. There were comments about drivers pulling off the main road sometimes at speed and creating a safety hazard.

General comments were that the street feels busy and traffic dominated, yet there was no overwhelming support for cycle lanes, even from cyclists. It was felt that during construction traffic was made even worse by the cycle lane and loading and unloading was 'abysmal' and caused a lot of traffic.

Identity is getting lost

There was an inquiry around how to make the high street something that it is known for what it provides or what its attractions are. This used to be the outdoor shops and travel agents but some of them are now closing.

There was a desire for there to be cultural events and attractions, to make use of the Town Hall Square and build on the successes of Sloane Square and to highlight and support Farmers markets.

Places to sit

There were a number of comments in this workshop and others that people liked the new benches in Kensington High Street. There was a clear desire for spaces to sit with more trees rather than planters.

There was also a specific point about the new benches in KHS being good for people with mobility issues.

Branding around Design Museum

There were comments raised about using the Design Museum on High Street Kensington as a thematic pull, an asset that could define the street and be used for branding.

Role of landlords

The example of Marylebone was shared as a positive example where a sole landowner has improved the area. Some comments suggested experimentation could be enabled by more flexibility, reducing paperwork and legal hurdles. It was suggested there could be measures to help landlords be responsive and avoid taking a dependable tenant e.g. Starbucks and a need to help landlords find other motivations besides financial rewards.

Ways forward...

Suggestions to improve this included:

Support for the notion of 'meanwhile uses' particularly if it meant encouraging SME and startups to use the space.

Offer entry level rents for pop up shops, be flexible but support successful businesses to remain permanently on the High Street.

Use side streets effectively, support the hinterland space around town centres for example with al fresco dining and pedestrianised areas.

Comments suggested the high street needs more space for experiences such as sports, yoga, art and cinema.



Accessibility

Some people mentioned that older people felt unable to do things like use the high street without using cars particularly when carrying heavy shopping and that fast moving traffic made it feel dangerous.

The workshop ended with a Zoom poll curated from themes that had emerged. The results were as follows:

What theme must be at the forefront of any future high street design?

1. Street Markets and cultural, sporting, artistic events 48%
2. Collaborative and community spaces 20%
3. Travel - how to best use streets 17%
4. Local business - independent/larger chain stores, landlords and rents 15%

Workshop Three was cancelled - due to low attendance

Workshop Four (22nd July): Kings Road/Sloane Street

Cultural heritage

Whilst there was a focus on past glories of Kings Road, there was a theme in this session of aspiring towards new glories for the future built on the uniqueness of amenities, activities and shops. An idea was shared of using the entire street going from Sloane Square down to Worlds End to celebrate the vibrancy and history of the area, all the artists that have been there right the way through to the punk rock era at the World's End and using those spaces to celebrate, rather than it just being a static space.

Provision for working people

There were calls from this workshop to make sure the area caters to the more working class demographic. Events by the local landlord tend to cater for a wealthier demographic. It was felt that community events matter and that residents should be looked after more than or equal to visitors. What is there that the community can be involved in?

There were also calls for more active working class involvement in decisions being made.

It was expressed that there is a lack of health related services in the area (GPs) and shops for daily needs such as groceries. This is hard especially for young people in the borough who can't afford to get private health care or to find appropriate health care. This was mentioned by a practitioner, who highlighted that there was also poor mental health provision.

The shops also tend to serve visitors and wealthy residents and there is very little range for daily supplies e.g. Tesco, Sainsburys.



Community Uses

There were suggestions that there could be better utilisation of public space on Kings Rd, turning it into a space where there are performances and celebrations. It was mentioned that this is already happening around the Duke of York square.

Other statements for community uses included:

- Cultural events take up open green space too often on Kings Rd (race tracks for instance).
- The opportunity for food projects such as sustainable fair trade grocers, farmers markets etc.

It was thought that Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) could be effective but how do people feed into that as residents?

Cycle Routes

Differences of opinion were expressed from “*We need more cycling as it is greener and cleaner*” to a discussion as to whether people want the High Street to be just for bicycles and pedestrians. Some mentioned the construction alone as a reason to not create cycle lanes because there would be a while of construction on Kings Road in order to change it. Also, the fact that there are people who do need to access the route by car was mentioned. The issue of age was also seen as a prohibiting factor for cycling with some older people feeling intimidated by the traffic.

Green spaces

Discussion relating to green spaces included the desire for proper green spaces that function as outdoor areas for the community.

There was some feeling that flower pots on the street are not a replacement for green space as they remove pavement space and cause problems and therefore can't be considered green.

The workshop ended with a Zoom poll curated from themes that had emerged. The results were as follows:

What theme must be at the forefront of any future high street design?

1. Community use and social interaction 43%
2. Arts, culture and celebration of the area's heritage 33%
3. Protecting existing shops services and activities 10%
4. Health provision 9%
5. Traffic Management 5%
6. Access for cycling 0%

Workshop Five (1st September): Brompton Road & other areas combined

This workshop had a mixture of people from different places so it didn't have the same place-based character to the discussions. In the final round of discussions one of the two groups came up with the following 4 categories of themes that it felt was important to focus on:

- Commercial
- Environmental
- Cultural
- Inclusivity

Commercial

The theme of encouraging landlords to take risks to allow more creative uses of space emerged again in this workshop. The idea emerged of having a hub or an area that would allow pop up shops would be beneficial. More diversity in shopping was discussed and not just boutiques, but also leisure, food and outdoor kitchens.

Environmental

Despite this being a chosen theme, there were relatively few comments in this workshop on planting and greening.

Cultural

Places for people to meet each other where they can stop with outdoor seating was desired.

Lots Rd was seen as a good example of small creative spaces. The Alfresco dining was also something that was liked. Areas in East London e.g. Shoreditch were seen to be more exciting, creative and attractive to younger people whereas Kensington and Chelsea was now seen to be a bit passé.

Some of the feedback from the plenary included the following: *“create the High Street as a place you go to for experience, maybe a different experience every day of the week, so that there's some sort of timetable, a place for all types of people and families, and budgets. A place for everyone.”*

Inclusivity

It was felt that there needed to be more provision for young people and that in general more people should be at this event.

The workshop ended with a Zoom poll curated from themes that had emerged. The results were as follows:

What theme must be at the forefront of any future high street design?

1. More independent, diverse shops and pop ups 45%
2. Community uses: social, religious, cultural 22%
3. Making streets adaptable (office, exercise, creative spaces) 18%
4. Creating opportunities for young people 11%
5. Safety of High Streets 4%
6. Protecting existing shops 0%
7. Access for cycling 0%

At the end of the sessions groups were invited to share one or two words that represented how they felt about the workshop and what had been discussed. The totality of the contributions from the workshops have been made into the following word cloud. (NB this only took place in workshops 2 and 4).



Workshops for the Resident Associations

22nd September Residents Associations workshop

11 participants

In this workshop with a number of residents' associations and traders' associations present, the participants discussed two main questions:

- What are the important points for the group to consider when doing this work?
- Are there any red lines? Or aspirations that you particularly want to share?

Council action and the power of landlords

There was a recognition that councils are limited in their scope of action for the high streets and that the majority of decisions are taken by private sector landlords influenced by market forces. For example, what happens in Kings Road is mainly decided by Cadogan and Sloane Stanley.

It was felt that residents are often not the beneficiaries of maximising business spaces and that areas where landlords don't link up lead to undesirable areas. An overarching principle was resident involvement and there was a call for residents having a role in 'curating' and deciding what goes where to avoid decline.

This inquiry centred on questions of 'How can we incentivise the right type of businesses? Could businesses pay a levy to support the high street?' There were positive contributions, understanding that change is possible and examples were given of Marylebone, Chelsea, Victoria and Westborne Grove where high streets have improved.

Some also recognised that all high streets are different and that there is no one size fits all approach.

Forum for Kings Road?

It was suggested that there should be a forum of the council, landlords, RAs and amenity groups to discuss the future of Kings Road where it was felt that there was too much rubbish and poor air quality due to loading and unloading.

Community safety and accessibility is important

The residents raised concerns about anti-social behaviour and safety which had not emerged much in the other workshops. It was expressed that people need to feel safe and that there should be a police presence. There were concerns of bicycles and scooters on pavements, sharp corners on seating and rubbish left everywhere being a danger to the visually impaired.

Shopping experience

There were comments that retail customer services should be improved. Having empty units should be avoided and could be filled by smaller retailers. There was a desire for practical needs shops 'that people actually want to use such as 'post offices, ironmongers, supermarkets, book shops, cobblers etc'.

Need for vision and inspiration

There were suggestions that the council should draw on inspiring examples from abroad and look into 'Sticky streets' - having something that draws people in, makes them pause and increase dwell time. Other aspirations were seasonal based activities such as Christmas markets, crafts, public art and meaningful greening.

At the end of the session the group was invited to share one or two words that represented how they felt about the workshop and what had been discussed. This was made into a word cloud.



23rd September Residents Association Workshop - Kensington Society

7 participants

This group had an energetic session which included a lot of place based discussions.

Better signage

It was felt that signage could be improved and used as a way to highlight and celebrate the culture and history of the high streets (architecturally) and the borough.

It was suggested signage should not add to street clutter, that it can be done tastefully such as plaques on buildings or using existing posts. There was also a desire for an app or online element that would help wayfinding and cultural signposting.

Make use of the side streets.

Local vs central streets - Alfresco dining was seen as better in smaller centres whereas high streets have too much foot traffic and can feel 'unrelenting'. Invest in the local small streets with activities and shops that you can't get online.

It was felt that the edges of centres and smaller centres were most at risk of losing amenities for residents and that local communities will fall apart if these aren't made stronger.

Role of tourism?

In general the RAs had mixed views of the contribution of tourism to the area. There was a suggestion that it would be useful to have data on how much tourists spend.

More for young people

It was felt that it was key to have activities in high streets and that they could be a fun and experimental place with climbing bars and the promotion of sports, or a place where young designers could influence the area.

Reflection on how the engagement went

Next steps

The results from this report along with those from the Commonplace platform will feed into the baseline of evidence that will be used in subsequent stages of the community engagement on the Future High Streets in the borough.

What went well

RBKC engaged a cross-section of the community using the Citizens Panel to discuss the issues of the Future of the borough's high streets.

The discussions that took place were committed. Residents engaged with the subject matter and shared examples from their lived experience as well as commenting on what they heard from experts.

The discussions were civil. The facilitated conversations meant that people were held in a safe space where they could share their views and have a chance to be heard.

They were informed. The fact that participants received information prior to the sessions and were then able to listen to experts during them meant the discussions were influenced by more than individuals' opinions alone.

RBKC council had been inspired to move towards a model of community engagement that incorporates elements of citizen deliberation grounded in informed presentations from experts, allowing for in-depth questions and conversation. This series of workshops has seen a positive first step in that direction.

Limitations of the workshops

One of the main limitations of this project has been low attendance.

Whilst there hasn't been precise research into the reasons for the low turn out the following points are likely reasons:

- Generally it is more difficult to engage residents in the summer months. Most of the Citizen panel workshops took place in July during a very hot spell of weather. Attending Zoom meetings that were publicised as lasting 3 hours could have seemed too much for residents to attend after a day's work. Feedback to that end was given to MutualGain staff during the onboarding calls as a reason why some had decided not to attend.
- July was also a time when Covid 19 restrictions were being lifted and staying indoors for a council meeting may have seemed less appealing.
- Members of the Citizens Panel were incentivised to attend with the offer of £25 worth of shopping vouchers in line with the Council incentives policy. Assemblies and Juries which operate on a similar principle of rewarding participants for their time and effort are also much longer and so there is a cumulative larger incentive for those who commit to them.
- A standalone event is perhaps easier to click to agree to and then not attend.
- With regard to the recruitment from the Panel, members who lived in the proximity of each of the High Streets were initially targeted for specific workshops. Unfortunately, due to low response new invites went to additional members of the Panel and respondents had the option to choose which of the remaining workshops to attend. Although the Panel overall is broadly representative, it is still difficult to get a representative group to agree to participate in workshops.

The format of the sessions enabled participants to listen to experts in 5 minute video presentations; however it's unclear the extent to which the participants were fully able to digest this information and use it in their discussions.

Potential ways forward

A format in which the participants are able to listen to experts then have a question and answer session with them would make for an easier and perhaps more enjoyable experience.

A longer deliberative format gives participants a sense of signing up for and investing in something meaningful. An experience extending over more than one session would enable more time for participants to build a relationship with the subject matter and the process. It would also create conditions for greater buy-in to the process and engagement with materials such as the information templates provided online.

RBKC council is interested in citizen deliberation engagements. The main drawback of Citizens Assemblies and Juries is they are costly, and require staff resource over a long period of time.

One possible compromise could be to experiment with engagements that consist of three two hour sessions. The first session would be where the residents listen to experts and take notes, the second where they discuss and deliberate the pros and cons of what they've heard and the third where they collectively work together to draft recommendations and vote on them.

This format would also provide conclusive output where the attendees converge on shared recommendations.

In terms of recruitment, the drawback of sending invitations to a Citizens Panel is that the final attendees who respond and attend may still not be representative in terms of the diversity of people in the borough even though they are part of a more representative panel.

It is worth considering recruiting participants via the 'sortition' method of randomly sending invitations to residents, creating a pool of respondents from which a final stratified sample is selected to match the demographics of the borough on chosen criteria. This makes a representative sample of attendees much more likely.

Ways forward for the next steps of the RBKC Future High Streets engagement

The workshops have brought out a large number of comments on what isn't working in the high streets and less in terms of what is working that can be built upon, or ideas for solutions to existing problems.

This is nevertheless useful information and could be put forward as a list of things identified as not liked or not working well. In an initial stage this can be used to check with other residents to see if these are indeed the main problems.

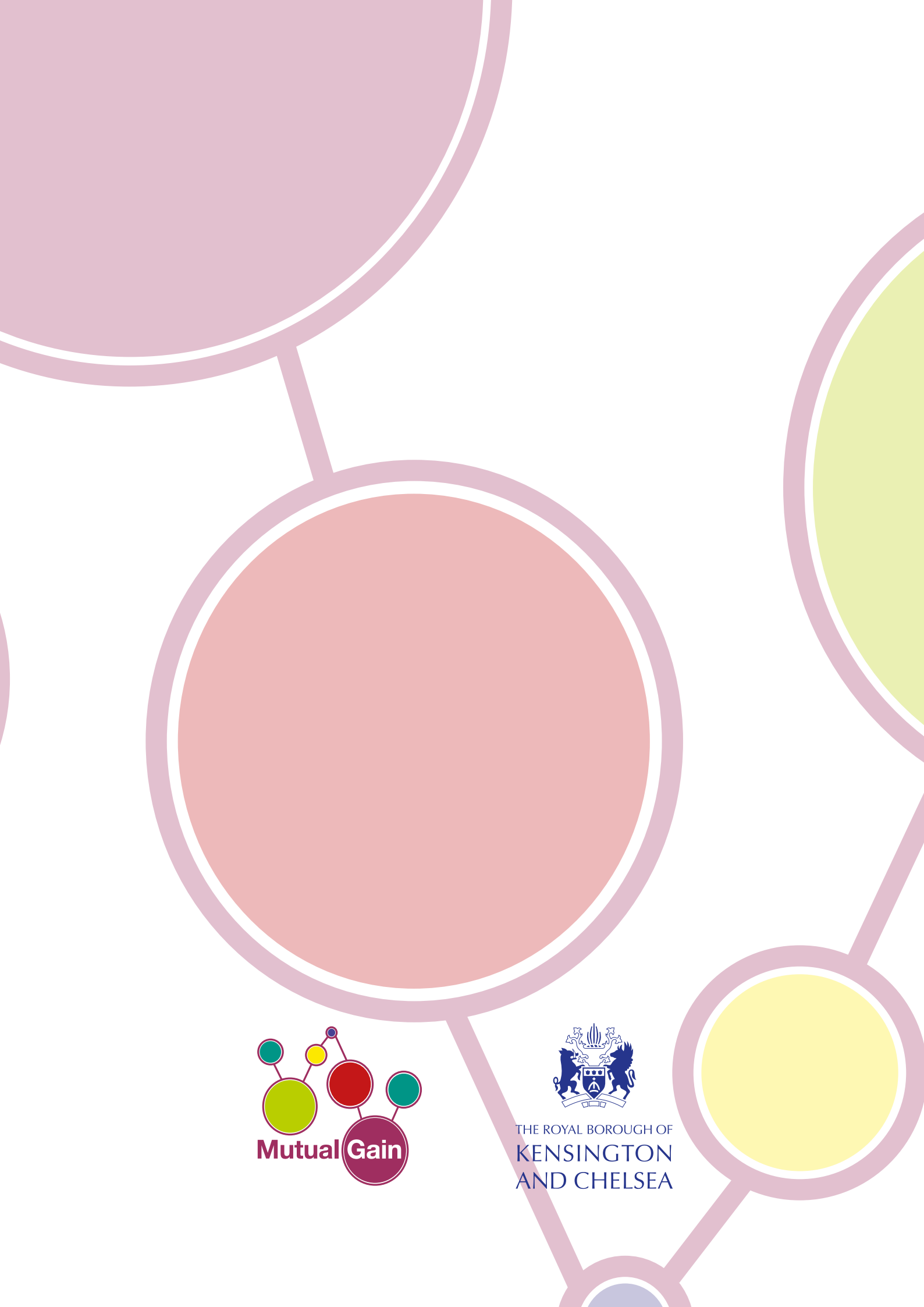
Having drawn out fully what isn't working, the emphasis could then be switched to more solution-focused sessions.

For these sessions it would be useful, to help residents with their suggestions, to clearly delimit the scope of action the council has. Presenting lists of what the council can do, where it can have influence and what it can't do could help bring focus and usefulness to the discussions.

About MutualGain

This public engagement and report was delivered by MutualGain, specialists in community engagement. MutualGain's raison d'être is to **“empower organisations and communities to reconnect in the social space that lies between the state and the individual”**. As a limited company with a social purpose, we aim to promote greater participation and active citizenship within our democracy and increase social capital for the mutual benefit of all.

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THE ROYAL BOROUGH OF
**KENSINGTON
AND CHELSEA**