

## **Background paper 1**

### **The History and Character of Soho**

Originally grazing farmland, in the 1530s the area of what is now Soho was taken by Henry VIII as a royal park. The name Soho first appears in the 17th century and is believed to derive from the old 'soho!' hunting call. It developed south of what is now Oxford Street, following the path of an ancient Roman road from Hampshire to Colchester and later turnpike linking London to Oxford.<sup>1</sup>

Soho covers two historic parishes – St Annes, east of Wardour Street and St James to the west. The St Annes section formed a single estate, the northern part of which was given in the 1660s by King Charles to the Earl of St Albans. After 1734, the freehold passed to the Earl of Portland. Meanwhile the southern part was sold by the Crown in parcels in the 16th and 17th century, with part going to the Earl of Leicester. This part of Soho was laid out according to a regular street pattern, with Soho Square as its main public space.

The St James section was partly sold off by the Crown to landowners in 1560. The area was already divided up into a complicated pattern of leasehold and freehold properties based on the original field boundaries (see Figure BP 1.1). As a consequence, development was more piecemeal than in St Annes, with more pockets of regular developments based on the estates around Golden Square, Great Pulteney Street and Great Marlborough Street (Soho Conservation Area Audit, pp.8-9). This is the basis of the current street pattern, mixing typical 17th century estate layouts with a more fragmented and tighter urban morphology.

Apart from Oxford Street, which developed from the nineteenth century onwards as a the UK's principal shopping street, two other periods of major street construction have had a formative influence on the structure and functioning of the Soho area.

Regent Street, originally known as New Street, was completed in 1825 and followed the 1811 plan of John Nash who envisaged it as a wide boulevard terminating in a sweeping curve serving to separate the fashionable area of Mayfair from the more down-at-heel area of Soho. The route served to maximize the development potential of the frontage land on both sides, and still owned by the Crown Estate.

In the late nineteenth century, as part of the major infrastructure interventions of the Victorian street engineers, Charing Cross Road (1887) was constructed following a north-south route, serving to separate Soho from what is now Covent Garden. A short time before, Shaftesbury Avenue (1884-6), separating Soho from Chinatown, had been constructed to provide an east-west link between Piccadilly Circus, at the end of Regent Street and its eastward extension via High Holborn to the City.

As well as clearly delineating the area, these surrounding streets are the key to understanding how the area works in land use and activity terms. Oxford Street and

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<sup>1</sup> This and the following sections on the historical development of the area are primarily drawn from the account given in the Conservation Area Audit: Soho and Chinatown (Westminster City Council. 2005).

Regent Street are huge daytime magnets for visitors, with more than a million shoppers using the West End during peak periods like the recent traffic-free days.<sup>2</sup>

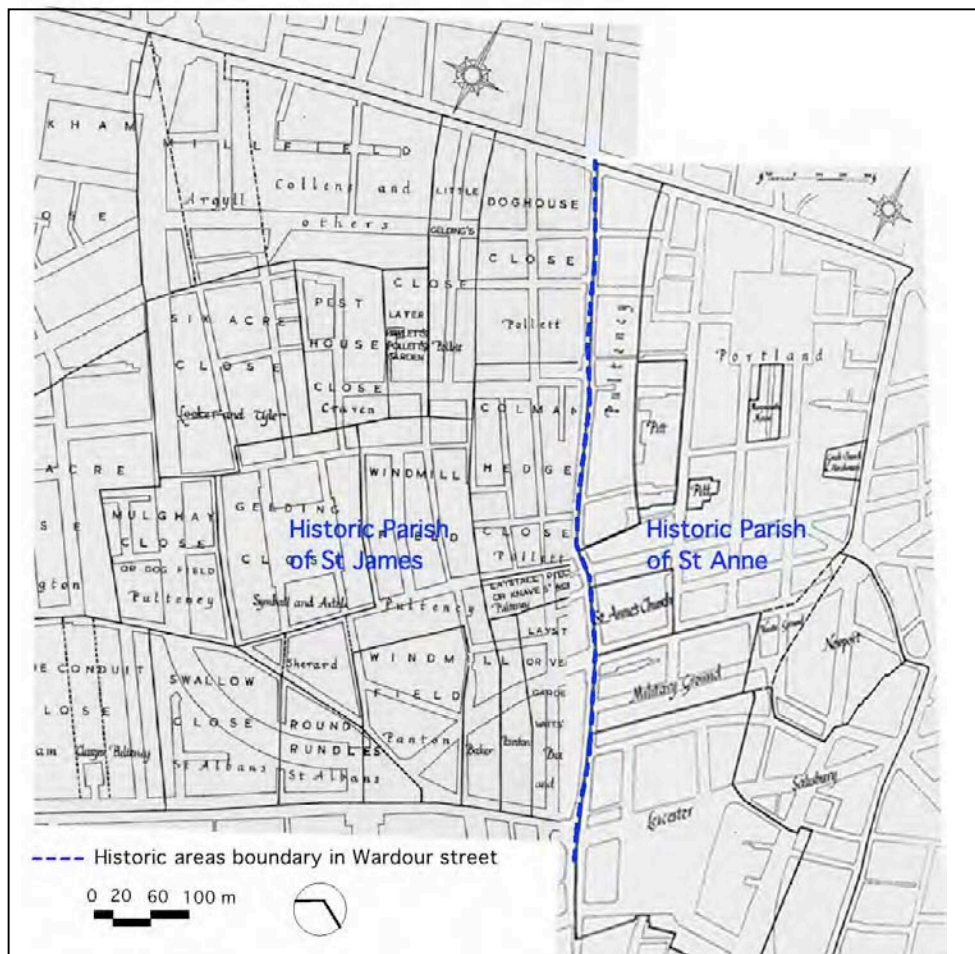


Figure BP 1.1: Plan showing historic parishes and field boundaries Plan overlaid on the present street pattern

(Source: *the Survey of London*; reproduced in *Soho and Chinatown Conservation Area Audit* (Westminster City Council 2005, p9); adapted by the Max Lock Centre)

This series of developments gave rise to the particular morphological character of Soho and Chinatown, with its tight urban grain circumscribed by major shopping or entertainment focused streets

The main, high value retail properties within the study area form a band one block deep long the southern edge of Oxford Street, east of Oxford Circus, and the eastern edge of Regent Street, south of Oxford Circus.

However, visitors to these particular streets, also filter through the side streets to use nearby services, cafes, restaurants and bars in Soho proper, forming a wider zone of retail-influenced activity (see Figure BP 1.2). The retail penetration of Soho is extended into the Carnaby Street area with its wide range of small, specialist clothing

<sup>2</sup> Five million people use the areas a week according to the ORB study (Westminster City Council. 2008. *ORB Oxford, Regent, Bond Street Action Plan*. [www.westminster.gov.uk/environment/planning/majorprojects/thewestend/council/orb/>](http://www.westminster.gov.uk/environment/planning/majorprojects/thewestend/council/orb/>)).



stores. To the East, Charing Cross Road, with its concentration of book and music stores, serves a similar specialist retail, service and catering function.

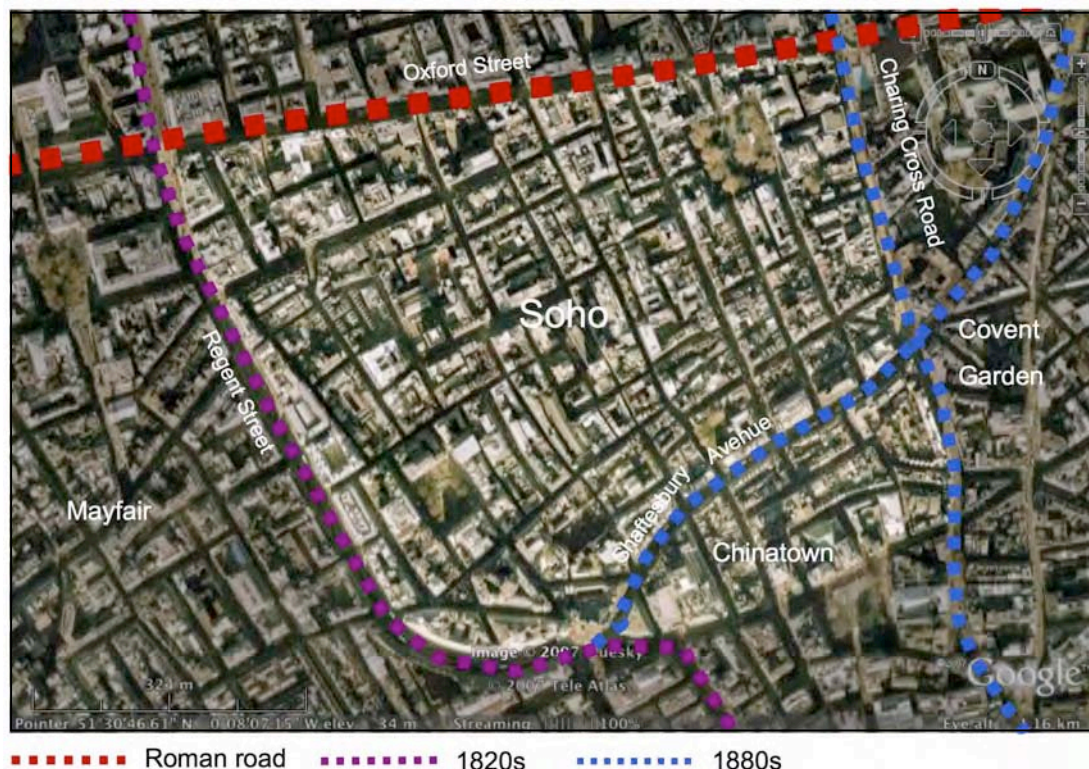


Figure BP 1.2: Historical development of main streets



Figure BP 1.3: Oxford Street forming the northern boundary of Soho

(Source: Hawkes J. 2000. *Over London: A Century of Change*. London: HarperCollins Illustrated, p.55)

Both Charing Cross Road and Regent Street at its southern end link into the West End's central tourism, entertainment and nightlife area, focused around Piccadilly Circus, Leicester Square and Shaftesbury Avenue, with its various theatres, and more recent larger scale buildings. These streets and places serve as conduits for

large numbers of night-time visitors, with 12 million visitors a year to the Theatre district.<sup>3</sup> Again many of these filter off through side streets into Chinatown and Southern Soho which have become major day and night-time attractions in their own right.

Between the retail and entertainment dominated activity zones, the central heart of Soho is a mixture of residential and office-based uses, with restaurants and bars pepper-potted throughout the area, particularly along the main north-south streets. There has been some limited larger scale residential and office development during the twentieth century, including on sites struck by bombs during the Second World War, resulting in a few high rise buildings and larger office blocks.

However, most of the buildings in this area, and indeed in Soho as a whole, are on small narrow plots and rarely more than four stories high. This fine-grained urban structure encourages dynamic, mixed-use occupancy, ideally suited to incubate the growing media-based industry that has established itself in the area. Typically, buildings occupied by a single business user sit side-by-side with others that contain shops, cafes or restaurants with small offices or flats above.

While the distinctive contemporary character of the areas described here are readily identifiable, the basic pattern of urban form and development of Soho established over three centuries means that there are no clear internal boundaries defining activity character areas and land use zones. The characteristic, high density, small scale mix of different uses can be found in every part of the district, save the principal street frontages. This allows the natural ebb and flow of different land uses over time, with the adaptation of the historic built fabric to changing market conditions.

The persistence of this morphology since Soho was originally developed is the key to its historical and contemporary social, economic and cultural character, and to its ongoing value as a cultural and economic asset to London as a whole.

In the 17th and 18th century, Soho was mainly residential, a mixture of grander houses in the better laid out areas around the two squares, and cheaper, narrow fronted properties elsewhere. However, Soho never really achieved the fashionable status of some of the surrounding development, and relative neglect by the wealthy provides a key to its character.

As the properties began to deteriorate in the early part of the 18th century, any wealthier families moved away to newer developments to the north and west. The area attracted foreign immigrants, including Greeks and French Huguenots, as well as artists and craftsmen, taking on its characteristic bohemian character. Tradesmen who operated from their houses often occupied the smaller properties. Many serviced the movement of the retail centre westward along Oxford Street from Holborn and the city towards Regent Street and Marble Arch.

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<sup>3</sup> Westminster City Council. 2005. *Theatreland*.  
<[www3.westminster.gov.uk/docstores/publications\\_store/Theatreland\\_Draft\\_Strategy.pdf](http://www3.westminster.gov.uk/docstores/publications_store/Theatreland_Draft_Strategy.pdf)>.



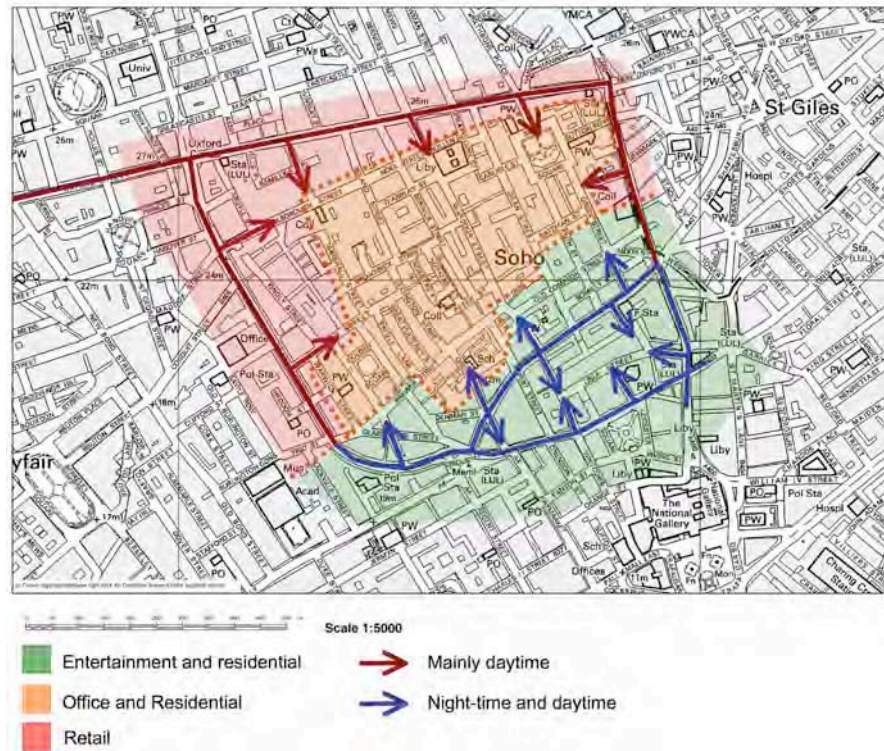


Figure BP 1.4: Soho and Chinatown: land use and activity zones  
(Source: Adapted from Digimap)

Soho has a strong 24/7 culture throughout its area but is particularly so in the southern mainly entertainment area where daytime tourism and sightseeing is concentrated.

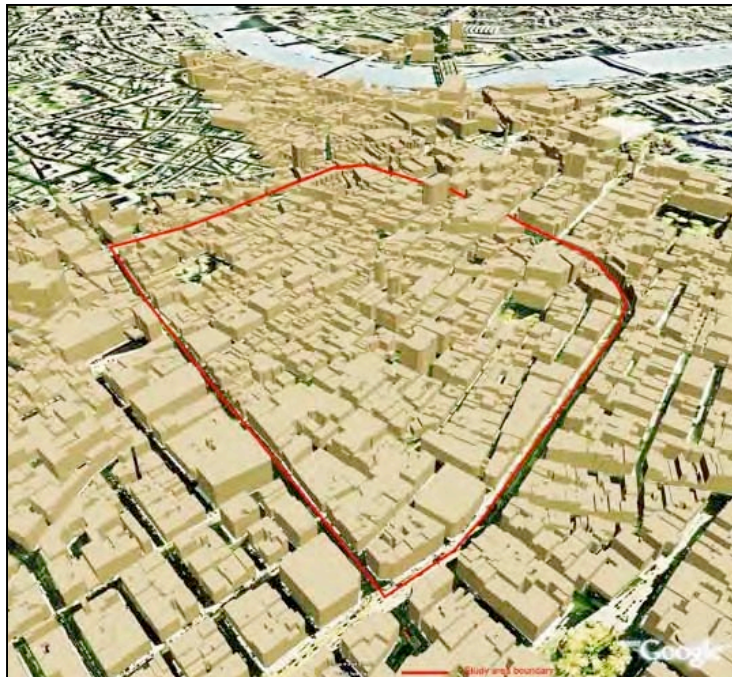


Figure BP 1.5: Soho and Chinatown urban form: Generally 4-6 stories punctuated by a few residential and office towers.

(Source: Virtual London model, CASA University College London)

There was considerable redevelopment throughout the 18th century, with long leases granted to encourage the development of mass-produced housing. Most of the great houses in the area were redeveloped and the population increased considerably. By the middle of the nineteenth century, Soho was one of the most densely populated poorer districts of London and attracted the attention of philanthropists. A number of hospitals and charity houses were built, as well as blocks of new model dwellings, some of which can still be found in Brewer Street and Ingestre Place.

Immigrants continued to settle in the area, setting up small businesses, and the area became more commercial in character, a centre for antiques, textiles and other small industries. Originally serving the immigrant communities, Soho established a reputation as a food and drink quarter, a reputation that grew after the First World War, attracting writers, artists and intellectuals to its pubs and the middle classes to its restaurants. The 1950s brought Chinese immigrants from Hong Kong to settle in the cheap rental area around Gerrard Street and cater for the growing taste for Chinese food. With its concentration of restaurants, shops and periodic colourful festivals, London's Chinatown later became a major tourist attraction.

Also after 1918, Wardour Street became the focus of the emerging film industry, and Denmark Street and Charing Cross Road for musical instruments and publications. Soho began to become a venue for music and nightclubs. Known for vice and prostitution from the 19th century onwards, it became the UK's most famous red-light district and emerged as a centre for erotic shows during the Second World War. Its most famous venue, Raymond's Revue Bar, opened in Brewer Street in 1958. Stricter licensing laws in the 1980s subsequently reduced the sex trade and, although it continues, its presence is far more muted within a broader mix of entertainment-focused activities.

The 1950s also brought jazz and Ronnie Scotts to Frith Street, beatniks and coffee bars, particularly centred around Carnaby Street, which led on to this area becoming a youth fashion centre for London in the 'swinging sixties'. Long also a focal point for the gay community, the gay culture has become particularly prominent in the Old Compton Street area since the 1980s, adding to the liveliness, flux and cosmopolitan character of this part of Soho.

### **Land use and floorspace**

The land use maps published in the Conservation Area Audit identify the ground floor uses by Uses Class Order (Appendix BP 1.1 below). Many ground floor shops and services have other business and residential uses on the upper floors.

From the information available to us for this study, it is difficult to define an accurate measure of the floor space allocated to different uses with the area. In fact, in some parts of the area, the planner's land use classification is unlikely to tell us what the reality of the building use is. In the case of Chinatown, for example, which is very much dominated by the Chinese and other East Asian communities, the upper floors may switch regularly between retail and other business uses (Interview, Jonathan Lane, Shaftesbury PLC, Appendix 3). On this basis, Shaftesbury have been one of the key stakeholders on the development of draft Special Planning Guidance by the City Council that takes this into account and sets an interesting precedent for planning guidance in this kind of dynamic and vibrant, mixed use area.



In order to make an approximate estimate of different types of floorspace, and pending better data, we have identified a number of land use zones by their predominant land use activity. The categories employed relate in the main to the 'character areas' of Soho identified above.

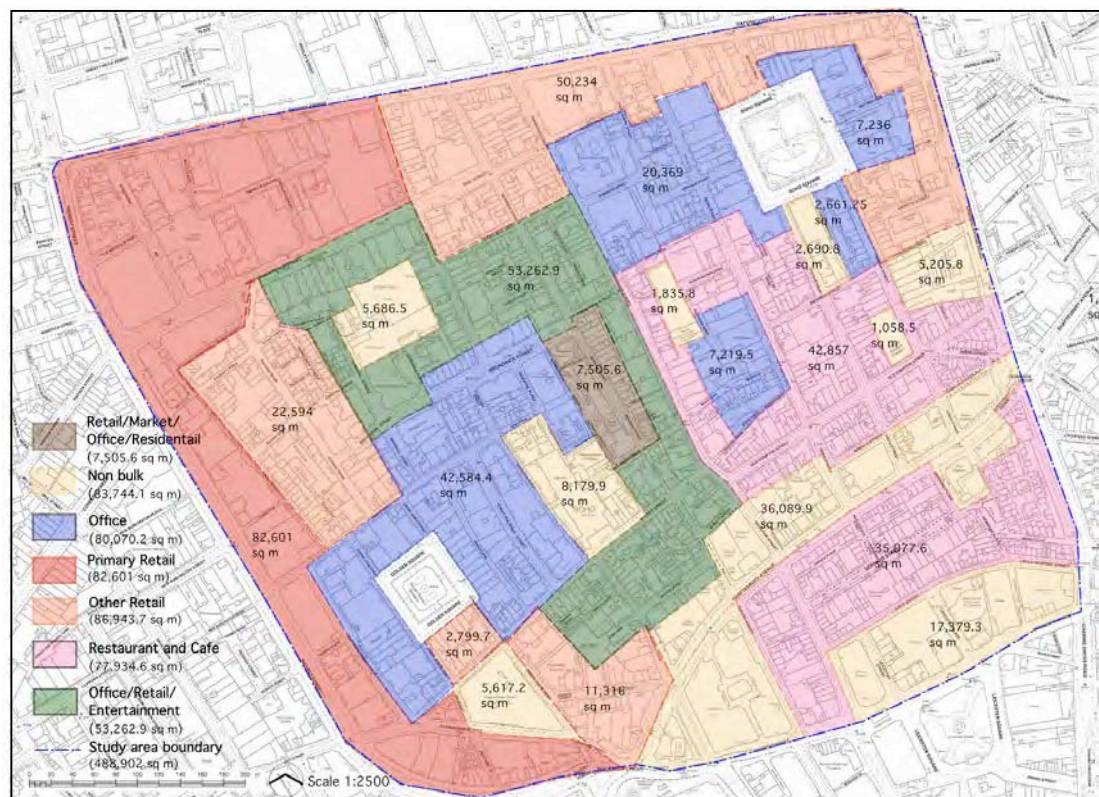


Figure BP 1.6: Land use zones by predominant activity  
(Source: Max Lock Centre on Ordnance Survey map)

This is based the land use definitions used in the Department for Communities and Local Government Commercial and Industrial Floorspace and Rateable Value *Statistics 2005* (See Appendix BP 1.2 below).<sup>4</sup> Using an estimate of site coverage and building density for the different zones, our preliminary estimate of floorspace is as follows:

| Land use                           | Area m <sup>2</sup> | %          |
|------------------------------------|---------------------|------------|
| Residential                        | 131,000             | 8          |
| Retail                             | 242,000             | 15         |
| Catering                           | 172,000             | 11         |
| Offices                            | 890,000             | 56         |
| Other uses (hotels, theatres, etc) | 148,000             | 9          |
| <b>Total</b>                       | <b>1,583,000</b>    | <b>100</b> |

<sup>4</sup> Catering uses in the CLG definition is included within Retail. We have distinguished between then as the entertainment areas is clearly different in land use character terms from the primary retail area.

*(note: percentages rounded up or down and do not add to 100)*

It should be emphasized that the methodology employed here is no more than a first estimate upon which a calculation can be made to give an idea of the scale of carbon emissions that Soho produces, and the relative importance of the different sources. This enables us to make a more considered analysis of the effectiveness of different retrofitting measures at this stage. More accurate estimates of floorspace by use would require detailed physical and owner/occupier surveys that are beyond the scope of this study, and detailed processing of data that is available from official sources. This kind of data collection and analysis would be essential for any follow up study.



**Appendix BP 1.1: Use Classes Order 2005**

This is a general guide only and is not intended to be comprehensive or a substitute for taking detailed professional advice. No liability is accepted for the information it contains or for any errors or omissions

| <b>TCPA use classes order 2005</b><br><b>(Effective 21st April 2005)</b> |                                   | <b>Use / Description of development</b>   | <b>Permitted change</b>   |
|--|-----------------------------------|---|---|
| A1   | Shops                             | Retail sale of goods to the public - Shops, Post Offices, Travel Agencies & Ticket Agencies, Hairdressers, Funeral Directors & Undertakers, Domestic Hire Shops, Dry Cleaners, Sandwich Bars - Sandwiches or other cold food purchased and consumed off the premises, Internet Cafes. | No Permitted Change   |
| A2   | Financial & Professional Services | Financial Services - Banks, Building Societies and Bureau de Change, Professional Services (other than Health or Medical Services) - Estate Agencies & Employment Agencies. Other Services - Betting Shops, Principally where services are provided to visiting members of the public | A1 (where there is a ground floor display window)   |
| A3   | Restaurants & Cafes               | Restaurants and Cafes - Use for the sale of food for consumption on the premises. Excludes Internet Cafes (now A1)  | A1 or A2  |
| A4   | Drinking Establishments           | Use as a Public House, Wine Bar or other Drinking Establishment   | A1, A2 or A3  |
| A5   | Hot Food Takeaway                 | Use for the sale of hot food for consumption off the premises   | A1, A2 OR A3  |
| B1   | Business                          | (a) Offices other than in a use within Class A2 (Financial & Professional Services) (b) Research and Development - Laboratories, Studios (c) Light Industry   | B8 (where no more than 235m <sup>2</sup> )  |
| B2   | General Industrial                | General Industry (Other than Classified as in B1) The former 'Special Industrial' Use Classes   | B3 - B7, are all now encompassed in the B2 Use Class<br><br>B1 or B8 (B8 limited to 235m <sup>2</sup> ) |

|                            |                              |  |                                    |
|----------------------------|------------------------------|--|------------------------------------|
| B8                         | Storage or Distribution      | Storage or Distribution Centre - Wholesale Warehouses. Distribution Centres & Repositories   | B1                                 |
| C1                         | Hotels                       | Hotels. Boarding Houses & Guest Houses. Development falls within the classes if 'no significant element of care is provided'   | No Permitted Change                |
| C2                         | Residential Institutions     | Hospitals, Nursing Homes, Residential Education and Training Centres. Use for the provision of residential accommodation and care to people in need of care.   | No Permitted Change                |
| C3                         | Dwellinghouses               | Dwellings for individuals, families of not more than six people living together as a single household. No more than six people living together includes - students or young people sharing a dwelling and small group homes for disabled or handicapped people living together in the community.                                   | No Permitted Change                |
| D1                         | Non-Residential Institutions | Medical & Health Services - Clinics & Health Centres, Crèche, Day Nursery, Day Centres & Consulting Rooms (not attached to the Consultants or Doctors house) Museums, Public Libraries, Art Galleries, Exhibition Halls, Non-residential Education and Training Centres, Places of Worship, Religious Institution and Church Halls | No Permitted Change                |
| D2                         | Assembly & Leisure           | Cinemas, Dance and Concert Halls, Swimming Baths, Skating Rinks, Gymnasiums, Bingo Halls & Casinos, Other Indoor and Outdoor Sports and Leisure Uses, not involving motorised vehicles or firearms.  | No Permitted Change                |
| Sui Generis (see footnote) |                              | For example: Retail Warehouse Clubs, Amusement Arcades, Launderettes, Petrol Filling Stations, Taxi Businesses, Car / Vehicle Hire Businesses & the Selling and Displaying of Motor Vehicles, Nightclubs, Theatres, Hostels, Builders Yards, Garden Centres  | No Permitted Change (see footnote) |

Footnote:- Whilst the most commonly found uses are contained within the 1987 Use Classes Order, there are many uses that are not specifically categorised by the four main use classes.

These uses are classified as sui generis. We have tried to illustrate some of the sui generis uses in the above table, but they are not intended to be exhaustive. Sui generis uses are their own specific use and planning permission is normally required for any change of use

*(Source: Sutton Council <[www.sutton.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/FB8A7EB6-04FE-4CA3-994F-E7CE0642482D/0/003USECLASSESORDER2005.pdf](http://www.sutton.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/FB8A7EB6-04FE-4CA3-994F-E7CE0642482D/0/003USECLASSESORDER2005.pdf)>)*



**Appendix BP 1.2: Department for Communities and Local Government  
Commercial and Industrial Floorspace and Rateable Value Statistics 2005 –  
Bulk and non-bulk hereditaments: England and Wales, 1<sup>st</sup> April 2005**

| <b>Bulk class</b>   | <b>Description</b>   |
|---------------------|--|
| Retail premises     | Premises that provide 'off-street' goods and services to the public. They include supermarkets, corner shops, local post offices, restaurant, cafes, launderettes and many others. Public houses and hotels are classed as non-bulk.   |
| Offices             | These include purpose-built office buildings, offices over shops, light storage facilities and light industrial activities. Larger banks, building societies and post offices containing substantial office space may be included in this class, rather than in the retail bulk class.   |
| Factories           | These range from small workshops to very large manufacturing units. Some industrial hereditaments where the rateable value is not primarily derived from floorspace (for example iron and steel plants) are classed as non-bulk.   |
| Warehouses          | These range from small storage units and depots to very large distribution warehouses. It also now includes virtually all car showrooms.   |
| Other bulk premises | A new classification for 2005 that includes mainly 'community' type establishments such as community centres, village halls and social clubs. Building use types are generally not available for this bulk class.  |
| Non-bulk            | The non-bulk group includes all hereditaments that would not appear in the other bulk class groups above. This would include premises such as car parks, sport and leisure facilities, public houses and public facilities such as schools, hospitals, museums and libraries. Building use types are generally not available for non-bulk hereditaments. |

*(Source: Department for Communities and Local Government. 2006. Commercial and Industrial Floorspace and Rateable Value Statistics 2005 (2005 Revaluation), London:ODPM. pp.46-7)*