



Cabinet Member Report

Decision Maker:	Cabinet Member for Built Environment
Date:	4 November 2016
Classification:	General Release
Title:	Review of recognised amenity societies
Wards Affected:	All
City for All:	This decision enables progress towards the City for All commitments for Choice and Heritage creating opportunities for residents to make responsible choices for their local area; and being involved in decisions to ensure that Westminster is a great place to live, work and visit.
Key Decision:	No
Financial Summary:	The resourcing of this consultation will be met from existing budgets.
Report of:	John Walker, Director of Planning

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 Westminster's recognised amenity societies make an invaluable contribution to planning across the City, providing comments on several thousand planning applications every year on behalf of local communities.
- 1.2 The council has historically undertaken a review of amenity societies every three years to ensure consultation arrangements remain effective. The last such review was in 2008, since which time a number of additional groups have asked to be formally recognised as consultees on planning applications and many areas have been designated as neighbourhood forums, introducing an additional layer of community participation in planning.
- 1.3 A further review is therefore now overdue and this report seeks authorisation to undertake this.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 That the Cabinet Member for Built Environment authorises the Director of Planning to undertake a review of recognised amenity societies in Westminster; and agrees the approach to this review set out in this report and the consultation documentation at Appendix 2.

3. REASONS FOR DECISION

To ensure that effective arrangements for consultation on planning issues with amenity societies are in place, that the role of different groups operating within particular areas is clarified and that consideration is given to whether any additional societies should be recognised.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 Westminster has a long-standing, positive relationship with local amenity societies across the City. Over the years, they have provided a strong voice for Westminster's residential communities and have made a significant contribution to the planning process.
- 4.2 The system of recognising amenity societies for the purposes of consultation on planning applications was formally adopted by the council in 1969, following the introduction of conservation areas through the 1967 Civic Amenities Act. Circular 61/68 advised local authorities to establish conservation area advisory committees but Westminster's then Town Planning Committee instead took the decision to expand the consultative procedures with amenity societies, asking them to demonstrate they had relevant expertise in relation to architecture, conservation and planning. This arrangement was approved by the Minister of Housing and Local Government as a suitable basis for local consultation.
- 4.3 These arrangements have proved effective. Most societies have members with in-depth knowledge of planning in their areas and, as standard consultees on planning issues, provide comments on several thousand planning, listed building and licensing applications every year. This input is highly valued by officers and members and considerable weight is given to the views of amenity groups.

4.4 The 18 amenity societies currently recognised by the council are listed in the table and shown on the map below:

1. Bayswater Residents Association	2. Belgravia Residents Association
3. Covent Garden Community Association	4. Fitzrovia Neighbourhood Association
5. Hyde Park Estate Association	6. Knightsbridge Association
7. Marylebone Association	8. North Paddington Society
9. Paddington Waterways and Maida Vale Association	10. Queen's Park Estate Society
11. Residents Society of Mayfair and St James's	12. St John's Wood Society
13. St Marylebone Society	14. Soho Society
15. South East Bayswater Residents Association	16. Westbourne Neighbourhood Association
17. Westminster Society	18. Thorney Island Society



- 4.5 In addition to the above recognised amenity societies, there are also a number of ‘semi-recognised’ societies: the Harrowby and District Residents Association, Pimlico FREDA and PRACT (Paddington Residents Active Concern on Transport). These groups operate in smaller areas, generally already covered by another recognised society, but are consulted where major or complex proposals affect their area. While most areas are represented by one recognised amenity society, there are some areas where boundaries overlap, and more than one recognised or semi-recognised group is operating, for example the areas covered by Pimlico FREDA and the Thorney Island Society are also represented by the Westminster Society.

Purpose/scope of this Review

- 4.6 The review will consider the make-up and structure of the existing recognised amenity societies and any recent changes to their membership or the geographical area they represent, as well as asking them if they are happy with these boundaries and any areas of overlap with other groups. This will allow the council to ensure that contact details we hold are up to date and that existing societies continue to provide effective representation for residents across Westminster are happy with boundaries of the area and any overlaps in boundaries with other groups and that overall they
- 4.7 A number of additional groups have requested that they are added to the list of formally recognised amenity societies: the Belgravia Society, the Mayfair Residents Group, the Pimlico FREDA, the Covent Garden Area Trust and the Cathedral Area Residents Group. Some are operating in areas which already have active recognised community groups and the review will consider these requests and seek to provide clarity on the roles of different consultee groups within each area. As digital consultation has made it easier to consult external stakeholders, it would be possible to recognise and consult more than one group in an area, as long as they can demonstrate they have sufficiently large and representative membership.
- 4.8 Further, the introduction of neighbourhood planning following the Localism Act in 2011 has led to a number of areas in Westminster being designated as neighbourhood forums, bringing a wider range of stakeholders with an interest in planning, who can formally request to be consulted on planning applications. There are now 21 Neighbourhood Areas and 15 Neighbourhood Forums, alongside the Queen’s Park Community Council (see map at Appendix 1). Those forums who have requested that they are consulted on planning applications are: the Belgravia Neighbourhood Forum, Knightsbridge Area Forum, Westbourne Neighbourhood Forum and Notting Hill East Neighbourhood Forum. The Queens Park Community Council is also consulted on all applications in their area. In some locations, there is an overlap with the work of the planning committees of recognised amenity societies. and these societies may no longer feel there is a need to continue to consult them as local amenity society in addition to a neighbourhood forum.
- 4.9 Where different groups and forums are operating in a single area, the review will therefore ask for information to establish whether they all still wish to be separately consulted and clarify which group or groups should be consulted. However, the review will seek to ensure that all areas covered by existing amenity societies are still represented and will ask societies to confirm that long-established boundaries will be maintained and no area will be left without representation.

- 4.10 Information received will then be reviewed and approval sought on a final list of recognised societies to be published on the website, alongside details of circumstances under which other groups may be consulted. This approach is in line with current government guidance in National Planning Practice Guidance¹ which suggests that in addition to statutory consultees, local planning authorities should *consider whether there are planning policy reasons to engage other consultees who – whilst not designated in law – are likely to have an interest in a proposed development (non-statutory consultees)*. It encourages local planning authorities to produce and publish a locally specific list of non-statutory consultees, which may be of assistance to applicants/developers.

Process and format for Review

- 4.11 A questionnaire has been prepared, based upon that used in previous reviews. A draft is attached at Appendix 2, along with some proposed text for the website. This will be sent to all of the existing recognised amenity societies and other local groups who have requested formal recognition.
- 4.12 The questionnaire asks each society for up to date contact information, some evidence (through a written constitution or similar) to demonstrate that they have a genuine community focus and membership representing a wide range of residents living in any given area, evidence that there are appropriate governance arrangements in place, details of finances and frequency of elections for committee members, as well as evidence that societies have access to expertise in relation to planning, design and conservation.
- 4.13 In addition, societies will be asked for their views on whether the introduction of neighbourhood forums has led or should lead to any changes in ways of working. They will be asked what joint working arrangements are in place with both forums and other groups working in the area, where applicable and also, whether there are any societies that no longer wish to be consulted and feel the forum provides adequate representation. This is only likely to be the case where a neighbourhood forum shares exactly the same boundaries as an amenity society area and the forum has requested to be consulted on planning applications. However, both Neighbourhood Forums and recognised amenity societies are valued stakeholders, and will continue to be consulted if they ask to be. If desired, both groups can make separate representations in relation to planning applications and any comments received will have equal status.
- 4.14 As digital working has been introduced since the previous review, societies will also be asked for feedback on how the arrangements for digital consultation are working in practice, to help inform the council's continuing digital transformation programme.
- 4.15 Societies will be given an eight week period in which to respond. The results of this review will then be reported back to the Cabinet Member, with recommendations for which societies should be formally recognised, and any other proposed changes to consultation arrangements, if appropriate.

¹ NPPG Paragraph: 022 Reference ID: 15-022-20140306

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no financial implications resulting from this review. Work on the review can be met from existing budgets and all consultation will be undertaken electronically, thereby minimising any costs from printing etc.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Local Authorities have discretion about how they inform communities and other interested parties about planning applications. Article 15 of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015 sets out minimum statutory requirements for publicity and notification of adjoining occupiers and Article 18 sets out other statutory consultation requirements. In addition to minimum requirements set out in legislation, national guidance suggests local planning authorities should consult more widely and recommends that councils produce and publish a locally-specific list of non-statutory consultees.

7. BUSINESS PLAN IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 Delivery of effective and streamlined digital consultation with our residents is one of the ways we will deliver our City for All commitments for Aspiration and Heritage. The ability to enable and empower communities to get involved in decisions about their areas is one of the key tenets of the City Council's 'City for All' three-year plan. In particular, it meets the City Council's vision for 'A City of Choice' through creating opportunities for residents, businesses and visitors to make choices for their local area; and 'A City of Heritage' which aims to ensure that Westminster is a great place to live, work and visit.

8. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

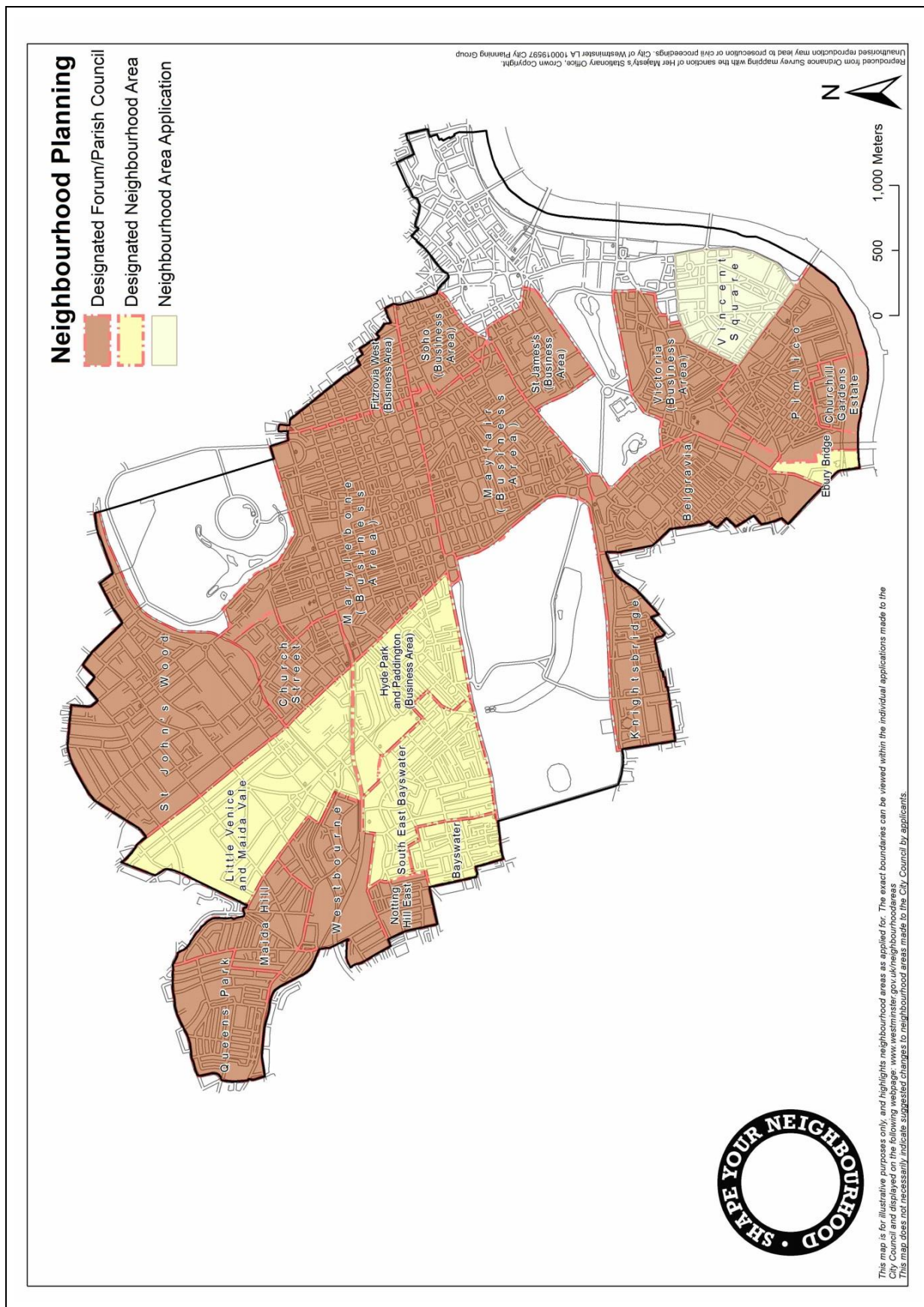
- 8.1 The purpose of the review is to ensure consultation on planning matters is inclusive and effective. The questionnaire asks societies to demonstrate that they are representative of their local communities, ensuring there is as wide as possible a spread of community representation across the City of Westminster.

9 CONSULTATION

- 9.1 The review will be undertaken in consultation with recognised amenity societies and other relevant groups, as set out above. It is proposed to discuss this at Westminster Amenity Societies Forums and/or separate meetings can be held with individual societies bringing together representatives of different amenity societies or forums operating in the same areas, where necessary.

If you have any queries about this Report or wish to inspect any of the Background Papers please contact: Jane Hamilton on 0207 641 8019 or email jhamilton@westminster.gov.uk

Appendix 1: Neighbourhood Forums and Areas in Westminster



Appendix 2: Consultation Questionnaire for Amenity Societies

Westminster Amenity Societies Review 2016 (text for website)

Recognised Amenity Societies provide a strong voice for Westminster's residential communities in relation to planning issues. Where societies have been formally recognised, they are consulted on all planning applications within a specified area and sit on the Westminster Amenity Societies Forum (WASF).

This review is being undertaken to ensure that the information the council holds about the recognised amenity societies is correct and that individual societies remain active and representative of a particular area. Maps showing the existing amenity societies and areas represented can be downloaded below. We will also consider whether any additional societies should be recognised for the purposes of consultation on planning applications, or if there are societies that are no longer operating and/or no longer wish to be consulted. If a neighbourhood forum is almost exclusively made up of residents and is consulted on and responds to planning applications, there may no longer be any need for a separate recognised amenity society. However, both Neighbourhood Forums and Recognised Amenity Societies will continue to be consulted on applications if they ask to be. Both groups can then make separate representations in relation to planning applications and all comments received will have equal status.

Following the review, information will be collated and submitted to the Cabinet Member for the Built Environment for a decision on which societies should be formally recognised. The council will then publish a list of recognised amenity societies and other consultees on planning applications on the website.

To be formally recognised, societies should be able to demonstrate

- wide representation of residents across a particular area;
- an effective structure and governance arrangements; and
- access to expertise in planning, conservation and design.

Generally, societies which cover very small areas will not be designated as recognised amenity societies.

Please fill in the questionnaire below, if you are an existing recognised amenity society and wish to continue to be consulted on planning applications or if you wish to become a recognised amenity society.

Questionnaire (to be re-designed/formatted for publication)

1. Name of the Amenity Society

--

Recognised amenity society

Semi-recognised/Other Society
seeking formal recognition

2. Main Contacts, name address and email (Include Chair and contact for consultations-if different). Please also provide a link to your society website.

3. Purpose of the Society and written constitution.

Please provide a copy of your written constitution and, if not set out within the constitution, summarise the objectives of your society below.

--

4. Area Represented

Numbered maps of each current amenity society area are on the website [here](#) (*link to be included*). Please confirm the map number of the area you represent and that the boundaries shown on the map are correct/ explain reason for any changes. If you represent a different/new area, please upload an amended version as necessary showing the area you are seeking to represent. In most cases, we will expect you to confirm long-established boundaries are to be maintained and no area which is currently represented should be left without representation. In all cases please justify why the boundaries you have drawn are appropriate.

Map number of area represented:

Justification for proposed boundaries and reasons for any suggested boundary changes:

Revised map uploaded Yes/ No

Is membership restricted to residents living in the area shown on the map supplied?

Yes/No If no, please provide details of any wider area covered or non-residents and businesses from within or outside the area who are allowed to join and confirm percentage of members who live within the area.

Are there any other groups or neighbourhood forums you are aware of which also represent your area? Yes/No If yes, please identify below.

If there is a neighbourhood forum operating in the same area, do you want to continue being recognised and consulted as an amenity society in addition to the neighbourhood forum? Yes/No

If there is another recognised amenity society already operating in the same area, are you happy to continue to operate with overlapping boundaries? Yes/ No

If no, please explain why not and any changes to boundaries which should be made.

If another amenity society which is not currently recognised is operating in the same area as you and has sufficient representation, do you think that they should also be formally recognised? Yes/ No

If no, please explain why you do not consider this is appropriate, below.

--

If you consider it is appropriate to have two groups being consulted on applications in the same area, please describe how/if your roles differ and any joint working arrangements which are/ will be put in place:

--

5. Membership

Please provide details of your membership, including any who qualify for free membership. A copy of your latest annual report with financial information and accounts should also be provided with this questionnaire.

Type of Membership (e.g. single, family, household, business, associate etc.)	No. of Members	Annual Subscription
Total		

No of members are resident in the area.	
---	--

What have been your total membership figures for each of the past 3 years?

Year	Membership
2013-2014	
2014-2015	
2015-2016	

Please provide any detail you can which illustrates how representative your society is of all parts of the community in the area, including the number of members per street, spread of your society's membership within the area represented e.g. by post code.

6. Structure and Governance

Where not set out in the constitution, please give details of the structure of your society and working arrangements including planning related sub-groups, partners and their roles. You should include a description of how members of your Committee are nominated and how often your committees are elected.

Please list key officers and Committee members and their positions.

Name	Title/ Position	Email

Please provide details of qualifications and experience in planning/architecture, conservation and design/traffic/and environmental fields members of your Committee or their advisers hold:

How are officers of your Committees nominated and how often are elections held?

7. Meetings

Please specify how often society meetings are held, including when your AGM is held and how many members normally attend?

8. Responding to Planning Applications

Please detail how your society makes comments in respect of planning applications and other planning, traffic and environmental issues - Are these comments agreed by a planning subcommittee or by an individual member and do they have particular qualifications in architecture/ planning? How are the views of your members normally obtained to feed into the planning response?

Please provide detail of the number of responses you make per year:

9. Communication

How do you keep members and organisations in your area informed of planning applications and how do you feed their comments into your response? What other media/ means of communication do you use to involve and inform you members? Provide web-links if possible.

Please list below or attach separately the names of other organisations in your area to which you pass on information received from the council?

Please use the box below to provide your feedback on how the Council’s move to digital working and electronic consultation is working in practice and details of any ways in which the processes could be improved to facilitate effective consultation.

Please use the box below to provide any other comments or suggestions for ways in which the planning department can improve joint working with the amenity societies and forums.

Submitting your questionnaire:

Please return your questionnaire and attachments to the following email XXXX by XX

Declaration of Interest

I have <no interest to declare / to declare an interest> in respect of this report

Signed:

Date:

NAME:

Councillor Robert Davis, MBE, DL

State nature of interest if any

.....
.....

(N.B: If you have an interest you should seek advice as to whether it is appropriate to make a decision in relation to this matter)

For the reasons set out above, I agree the recommendation(s) in the report entitled **Review of recognised amenity societies** and reject any alternative options which are referred to but not recommended.

Signed

Cabinet Member for *Built Enviornment*

Date

If you have any additional comment which you would want actioned in connection with your decision you should discuss this with the report author and then set out your comment below before the report and this pro-forma is returned to the Secretariat for processing.

Additional comment:

.....
.....
.....

If you do not wish to approve the recommendations, or wish to make an alternative decision, it is important that you consult the report author, the Director of Law, City Treasurer and, if there are staffing implications, the Director of People Services (or their representatives) so that (1) you can be made aware of any further relevant considerations that you should take into account before making the decision and (2) your reasons for the decision can be properly identified and recorded, as required by law.

Note to Cabinet Member: Your decision will now be published and copied to the Members of the relevant Policy & Scrutiny Committee. If the decision falls within the criteria for call-in, it will not be implemented until five working days have elapsed from publication to allow the Policy and Scrutiny Committee to decide whether it wishes to call the matter in.