



Environment Policy and Scrutiny Committee Briefing

Date: Monday 19th January 2015

Briefing of: Cabinet Member for the Built Environment

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1. Neighbourhood Planning

- 1.1 The City Council continues to experience a huge level of interest in neighbourhood planning, far greater than any other London borough.
- 1.2 Once neighbourhood areas have been designated, communities in these areas will be able to apply to become the designated neighbourhood forum for that area for the next five years. As a representative neighbourhood forum, these groups will be able to undertake neighbourhood planning and produce their own statutory neighbourhood plan.
- 1.3 Westminster designated the first neighbourhood forum in Mayfair in January 2014. At the Forum's request, officers are now engaged in helping them form their various working groups. An officer attended the Mayfair Neighbourhood Forum Steering Group on 19th November 2014 and also met with the Forum's chosen consultants just prior to Christmas. The Forum have undertaken informal consultation within the neighbourhood area, and are beginning to work on their neighbourhood plan by discussing a potential vision and associated objectives.
- 1.4 Neighbourhood forums in Soho, Church Street Ward, and Westbourne were designated in August 2014. Belgravia and Notting Hill East Neighbourhood Forums were designated in October 2014. Public consultations for the St. James's and Fitzrovia West Forum proposals closed in August 2014, with Cabinet Member reports now in final draft to enable me to take a decision in each area. Public consultation on the Pimlico Neighbourhood Forum finished in October 2014 and officers met with its representatives on 1st December to discuss potential recommendations.
- 1.5 Consultation regarding the application received for Marylebone Neighbourhood Forum is due to conclude on 21st January, whilst representations regarding the proposed Victoria Neighbourhood Forum can be submitted up until 20th February.

- 1.6 The application for the creation of Vincent Square Neighbourhood Area had its period for representations extended over the Christmas period. Further engagement is also continuing on the proposed Covent Garden Neighbourhood Area.

2. Westminster's City Plan – consultation booklets

- 2.1 Officers are continuing to take forward work on the detailed City Management policies which will be incorporated with the Strategic Policies to form Westminster's City Plan – a unified local plan for the City. This builds on previous work on the City Management Plan initiated in 2007. The current stage is the publication of a series of topic-based booklets for informal consultation. We are also taking the opportunity to review the strategy more broadly and ask key consultation questions in the latter booklets, including questions around how to achieve the desired growth in a Westminster context.
- 2.2 The Committee was updated on previous policy booklets in June 2014, whilst the Energy and Heritage, Views & Tall Buildings booklets formed a substantive item on the Committee's agenda on 10th November 2014.
- 2.3 I formally signed off the Spatial Policy & Implementation and Mixed Use & Office to Residential Conversion policy booklets prior to Christmas and they were both issued for formal public consultation on 15th December 2014. That consultation will last until 27th February.
- 2.4 I signed off the final tranche of City Plan policy booklets – Energy, the West End, Affordable Housing and Heritage, Views & Tall Buildings – for public consultation earlier this month.

3. Development of a Westminster Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

- 3.1 CIL is a new levy which is the government's preferred vehicle for replacing significant portions of section 106 contributions. It can be charged on developments in a local authority's area with the money raised being used to pay for the provision, improvement, replacement, operation or maintenance of infrastructure that is needed as a result of development.
- 3.2 The development of a Westminster CIL was tabled as a substantive item for this Committee's consideration on 1st April 2014. At that meeting it was agreed that the Committee should have an active and, where possible, formal role in the ongoing development and future governance of the Westminster CIL. A substantive item covering progress and governance arrangements, including the Preliminary Draft Charging Schedule (PDCS), was discussed on the Committee's agenda on 10th November 2014.

- 3.3 Officers continue to work on responding to the outcomes of the PDCS stage consultation, as well as meeting with BNP Paribas Real Estate to discuss the comments received and to establish a work programme and timetable going forward.

4. Crossrail

- 4.1 Crossrail (Line 1) is the largest infrastructure project in Europe, connecting Reading and Heathrow in the west through London to Shenfield and Abbey Wood in the east. Upon completion it will cover over 100km of track, including 21km of new twin-bore rail tunnels, through ten new stations. Its goals are to reduce journey times across London, ease congestion and offer better connections for passengers.
- 4.2 Crossrail (Line 1) is currently on time and on budget. The tunnelling and civil engineering was completed in 2014 and the stations, with their commercial developments, are scheduled for completion by 2018.
- 4.3 The City Council bid for Crossrail Complementary Measures (CCM) funding, which was an additional sum of £28.5m made available by TfL for public realm enhancements along the Crossrail route. The City Council's CCM Scoping Applications were submitted to TfL on 1st August 2014, for surface level improvements around the Westminster stations (Paddington, Bond Street and Tottenham Court West).
- 4.4 TfL have notified the City Council that in view of the level of extra support already provided, they were not able to provide funding from this source. However, we are continuing under the aegis of the West End Partnership with TfL and Crossrail to investigate further funding options and improvements. These opportunities have already proved promising in looking to ensure we have an improved public realm in these sites for the opening of the new railway in 2018.
- 4.5 Crossrail Line 2 is a further proposed sister line to the one already underway. Its preferred route, announced on 28th October 2014, links their proposed new Crossrail 2 station at Victoria to Clapham Junction via a new station on Chelsea's Kings Road.
- 4.6 The proposed route would traverse Westminster through Tottenham Court Road and Victoria. It is now clear that, as proposed, the construction of Crossrail Line 2 will require the use of Victoria Coach Station's Departure Hall site to allow the site to be used for construction works and a ventilation shaft. The construction of Crossrail 2 is expected to start from 2020.
- 4.7 A wider review of safeguarded routes was launched in November 2014. Officers are in the process of preparing a response to the safeguarding consultation ahead of the 29th January closing date.

- 4.8 Whilst continuing support for Crossrail Line 2, there are a number of issues on which we will be discussing impacts and options with TfL to ensure residential amenity, continuation of business and the best package of transport measures will be provided. The further development of the project and later reviews of the safeguarded route, which are all due later this year, will enable discussions on the project itself and for the diverse impacts at Victoria and in Soho be considered further.

5. Victoria Area Schemes

Victoria Coach Station

- 5.1 The construction and operation of Crossrail Line 2 at Victoria is expected to force the Coach Station's closure in the early 2020s, meaning its relocation needs to be secured imminently.
- 5.2 September 2014's Grade II Listing of the Coach Station's Departures Hall is unlikely to impact significantly on the short-term coach operations and long-term future and redevelopment of this site.

Victoria Station

- 5.3 Network Rail continue to develop their master plan to improve conditions in the mainline station and are seeking funding for their proposals within the mainline station, with bridge strengthening works over their tracks scheduled for the spring. TfL are developing their options for the removal of some bus services from the front of the station and are considering future arrangements for the Inner Ring Road around and through the area.
- 5.4 London Underground's Victoria Station Upgrade (VSU) works are progressing as planned, with the new northern ticket hall due to open in 2016. Once VSU have finished their works in Bressenden Place, the land will be returned to Land Securities to allow them to develop the eastern part of their 5.5 acre Nova scheme.

6. Victoria – Nine Elms Bridge

- 6.1 Wandsworth Council launched their bridge design competition on 8th December 2014. Their appointed consultants are seeking to set up a residents' review panel, including representatives from local communities in Wandsworth, Lambeth and Westminster, to consider competition entries.
- 6.2 The City Council continues to hold serious concerns about the proposed landing sites in Westminster, but will continue to work with the Partnership, Wandsworth Council and TfL to try and find a less detrimental solution.

7. Thames Tideway Tunnel

- 7.1 The Thames Tideway Tunnel is a proposed new 16 mile-long sewer project required to protect the tidal river from increasing pollution.
- 7.2 The Thames Tideway Tunnel Development Consent Order was approved on September 12th 2014. Following approval, Thames Water hosted a Thames Tideway Tunnel Planning Forum to update affected local authorities and key stakeholders on the project, legal agreements, forums and working groups.
- 7.3 A Thames Tideway Tunnel inter-borough meeting was held on November 21st. The City Council has signed a Service Level Agreement with Thames Water for full cost recovery for non-statutory work associated with implementation of the Development Consent Order.

8. Garden Bridge

- 8.1 The London Garden Bridge is a proposed new public garden crossing of the river Thames, linking the South Bank to Temple station. It is designed by Thomas Heatherwick and led by the Garden Bridge Trust.
- 8.2 A full planning application for the Garden Bridge was submitted by TfL on behalf of the Garden Bridge Trust, on 29th May 2014. The application was approved by Lambeth Council on 11th November 2014 and by my Planning Applications Committee on 2nd December 2014. The Mayor of London gave his approval to the Garden Bridge project before Christmas.
- 8.3 The Trust plans to begin building the bridge later this year, pending raising their target funding, with an anticipated opening in 2018.

9. Development Planning

- 9.1 My previous update to the Committee highlighted the Department for Communities and Local Government's (DCLG) technical consultation on planning. Chief amongst Westminster's concerns was the proposed removal of the exemption currently granted to the Central Activity Zone (CAZ) for offices (B1(a)) to become housing (C3) as permitted development subject to prior approval.
- 9.2 The City Council provided a response to the formal consultation, as well as supporting a letter co-signed with the Mayor of London, Planning Officers Society London, British Property Federation and London First, outlining our opposition to these measures. We are expecting the government to publish their response by the end of January.
- 9.3 Furthermore, before Christmas the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) published a set of revisions to the National Planning Guidance. These chiefly relate to Section 106 obligations imposed on developers and the financial incentive offered to developers called 'vacant building credit'.

The new guidelines now advise that schemes delivering 10 units or less do not have to provide Section 106 contributions towards local infrastructure, education provision and more importantly affordable housing. Our current policy requires affordable housing targets when a development includes at least ten units, whereas now we can only trigger this on schemes of eleven units or more.

More important for Westminster is the 'vacant building credit' incentive. This credit will apply to any unoccupied building being brought back into use or being demolished to be replaced by a new building. In short, it will mean that any affordable housing contribution sought from developments will only be triggered on any increase in floorspace and not, as is currently the case, on the entire square footage. The previous floorspace of the vacant building either being brought back into use or redeveloped will be netted off, meaning that affordable housing contributions from these types of development will significantly decrease.

There is still much detail to be released around these new guidelines and officers will examine them very closely as the picture becomes clearer. The implications of these proposals are being examined as they stand with colleagues in other authorities in order to form a unified response.

- 9.4 From April this year, it will be compulsory for all new developments to include a Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS). These systems are designed to reduce the potential impact of new schemes on surface water drainage discharges.

The DCLG has announced that from April, local planning authorities will have responsibility for approving and maintaining SUDS, despite the concerns raised by more than two-thirds of those responding to the government's consultation on the issue. The full details on how we will carry out this function are still awaited, but it will inevitably create an added pressure on our planning officers during the pre-application stage.

- 9.5 In the calendar year of 2014 the City Council received a total of 12,845 planning applications. This shows that there is no sign of a reduction in the schemes coming before us as we remain the busiest planning authority in the country.