



Environment Policy and Scrutiny Committee Briefing

Date: Tuesday 8th September 2015

Briefing of: Cllr Robert Davis MBE DL, Deputy Leader and
Cabinet Member for the Built Environment

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1. Neighbourhood Planning

Designated Neighbourhood Forums

- 1.1 The Mayfair Neighbourhood Forum was designated in January 2014. The forum held a series of consultation events during June and July in order to seek views on the proposed plan objectives. These relate to housing, local retail, amenities, public space, traffic and architecture.
- 1.2 The Soho Neighbourhood Forum was designated in July 2014. An officer attended the inaugural forum general meeting on 8th July. This was attended by over 150 residents and business representatives. At the meeting, attendees elected sixteen steering group representatives (eight resident representatives and eight business representatives). Some initial discussions of key issues took place, in relation to living in Soho, working in Soho, and the built environment.
- 1.3 The Westbourne Neighbourhood Forum was designated in July 2014. They have begun work on their neighbourhood plan with our officers and have engaged with consultants appointed by the Government fund, known as Locality, to assist.
- 1.4 The Church Street Ward Neighbourhood Forum was designated in August 2014. The forum is looking to hold their inaugural community meeting. The forum has successfully received a £8,000 grant from Locality. The forum is also hoping to use a vacant unit on Church Street as a 'pop-up' consultation space in September and October to help engage with the local community.
- 1.5 The Belgravia Neighbourhood Forum was designated in October 2014. Officers are assisting the forum in communicating its role to local residents.
- 1.6 The Notting Hill East Neighbourhood Forum was designated in October 2014. The key issues that the forum is currently interested in are public realm, housing unit sizes and community cohesion. Members of the steering group met with officers in August to discuss development control issues and, in particular, recent decisions regarding mansard roof extensions. Further assistance has also been provided in relation to applying for Locality grant funding.
- 1.7 The St. James's Neighbourhood Forum was formally designated on 5th February this year. The forum's steering group was formally elected at a public meeting on 2nd June with a City Council officer providing support. In addition to a general discussion of neighbourhood planning procedure, the group highlighted the need to further publicise and promote the forum within the area, culminating with a 'launch' meeting (and AGM) in November.
- 1.8 The Fitzrovia West Neighbourhood Forum was formally designated on 5th February. The key issues the forum will be looking into include affordable housing, development pressures, independent businesses, public realm, transport, greening, and night time activity. The forum have organised separate working groups to assess these issues.

- 1.9 The Victoria and Knightsbridge Neighbourhood Forums were designated on 20th July, whilst the Marylebone and Maida Hill Neighbourhood Forums were designated at the end of August.

Neighbourhood Forum Applications

- 1.10 The Cabinet Member Report designating the Pimlico Neighbourhood Forum will shortly be submitted to me following changes the forum has made to its constitution.
- 1.11 Following a low response rate to the initial consultation, the decision was taken to undertake an additional three week period for representations on Churchill Gardens Neighbourhood Forum. This was completed on 12th June and generated an improved response, the majority of which were positive. The designation report to approve the forum will be published shortly.

2. Westminster's City Plan

- 2.1 I have previously outlined our intention to enact non-immediate Article 4 Directions to help combat both the loss of office space to residential accommodation and the proliferation of basement extensions. An Article 4 Direction is an order made by the Council which withdraws permitted development rights for certain works, thereby requiring a planning application to be submitted.

In July we submitted our two Article 4 directions to the government which will restrict developers' ability to undertake both basement developments throughout Westminster, when directly beneath the footprint of the building, and restrict office to residential conversions within the currently exempted area. These will take effect one year from their publication on 22nd July 2016.

- 2.2 As highlighted in my previous reports to the committee, in light of certain immediate pressures on the built environment in Westminster, I have sought to fast-track certain elements of the overall City Plan revisions which we have been consulting on since October 2013. These elements which I have brought forward cover basements, mixed use and office to residential conversion, Special Policy Areas and energy.
- 2.3 The basements revision is currently out for its statutory consultation which we then intend to submit to the Secretary of State. This consultation will close on 9th September. This revision is to be combined with the non-immediate Article 4 Direction which I outlined above. The new policy itself will be in place by the end of the calendar year.
- 2.4 The mixed use and office to residential conversion revision is also out for its statutory consultation, which closes on 9th September. In the meantime, as I have said publically for the past six months, in light of the damaging losses of office space seen in Westminster we have enacted an interim position as of 1st September. This new approach will seek to determine applications under a presumption in favour of sustainable development. Given the impact of the office losses we have seen on jobs and growth, conversions to residential within the Core Central Activities Zone, Paddington Opportunity Area and our named key commercial streets will not be

assessed as constituting sustainable development. Therefore office to residential conversions will not be permitted in these areas, although applications validated before 1st Sept will continue to be assessed under our prior framework.

- 2.5 The Special Policy Areas revision covering Harley Street (for medical uses), Portland Place (institutional), East Marylebone (wholesale showrooms), Savile Row (tailoring), St James's (art galleries, private members' clubs and unique retail) and Mayfair (art galleries and antiques) is anticipated to be published for statutory consultation in October or November this year.
- 2.6 The energy revision relates to reducing energy consumption and delivery of local energy infrastructure. It is anticipated that statutory consultation will begin in late autumn this year.
- 2.7 Our single local plan document entitled the Westminster City Plan, which will unify all those different policies we have proposed, is expected to be ready for consultation in the New Year.

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

- 3.1 Consultation on the CIL draft charging schedule closed on 24th July. Officers are currently in the process of analysing these responses, as well as arranging meetings with those local residents groups who have responded in order to explain the issues and answer questions.
- 3.2 In parallel to this, the consultation on the draft Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) covering use of s106 planning obligations and other planning mechanisms has opened, with documentation being sent out to all members and external stakeholders for comments.
- 3.3 Work on governance options for the CIL is continuing. Proposals covering monitoring, collection and spend will be reported to me shortly.

4. Crossrail

Crossrail Line 1

- 4.1 A decision is imminent on the application to reinstate the London Underground worksite at Marylebone Lane to provide improved public realm adjacent to the new entrance to Bond Street Underground Station. This will include hard and soft landscaping and provision for the ventilation for a beneath-ground substation. The upgrade of London Underground's Bond Street Station is being undertaken in conjunction with the Crossrail works and will provide access to and interchange with Crossrail when it opens in December 2018.
- 4.2 Applications for other Crossrail public realm reinstatement works at Bond Street, Paddington and Tottenham Court Road stations are expected this summer.

- 4.3 Great Portland Estate have also commissioned the public realm consultancy Publica to develop a public realm strategy for Hanover Square and the gardens, including the surrounding area, as part of longer term public realm improvements to the area. I am working closely with all parties to develop these proposals and ensure their proper implementation. Public consultation on these schemes will follow early next year.

Crossrail Line 2

- 4.4 The revised Crossrail Line 2 Safeguarding Directions were issued on 24th May with immediate effect. Many of the City Council's concerns have been met, specifically the removal of Soho Square Gardens as an Area of Surface Interest. The revised safeguarding now includes the roads around the Square but not the Gardens.
- 4.5 TfL are developing the route within the updated safeguarded boundaries, as well as the branch lines at either end of the Crossrail 2 route, in readiness for a further round of public consultation this autumn. The next round of consultation will provide more detail on the scheme and stations, reflecting the concerns expressed during the safeguarding consultation.
- 4.6 Officers will continue to work closely with TfL in developing the proposals in Westminster, a series of meeting have taken place TfL in the lead up to the autumn and the public consultation.
- 4.7 TfL is keen to provide key stakeholders with an opportunity to share their views and identify key local issues prior to the next formal consultation in the autumn. TfL are working with the City Council to set up two Crossrail 2 Community Working Groups in Victoria and Tottenham Court Road. Those meetings are now scheduled for 14th and 22nd September respectively. The groups will be separate from the Crossrail 1 Community Liaison Panels. A briefing for all Members on Crossrail 2 is also being held on 3rd September.

5. Victoria Area Schemes

- 5.1 London Underground's Victoria Station Upgrade works are progressing as planned, with the new northern ticket hall due to open in 2016, alongside Phase 1 of Land Securities' Nova scheme. The original pedestrian crossing on Bressenden Place by Victoria Street will be brought back into use in mid-September. Officers are currently reviewing the options for retaining the temporary pedestrian crossing on Victoria Street by the Cathedral piazza. This crossing had been intended to be removed upon reintroduction of the original crossing, but given its benefit to pedestrians a funding arrangement is being finalised to bring it up to permanent standard.
- 5.2 TfL are reviewing options for the possible relocation of Victoria Coach Station to make way for Crossrail Line 2 works to the departures hall site in the early 2020s. Whilst Network Rail continue to develop their masterplan for improvements within the Station, their bridge strengthening works to Ebury, Elizabeth and Eccleston Bridges are due to start soon.

- 5.3 Together these works will allow for further consideration to be given to the future of the Inner Ring Road around and through Victoria and the operation of buses to improve traffic flows and enhance the pedestrian experience. We await details of TfL's proposals later this year.

6. Victoria – Nine Elms Bridge

- 6.1 Following the Bridge Design Competition organised by the London Borough of Wandsworth, a shortlist of four design teams was announced on 17th March.
- 6.2 Stage 2 of the competition began on 11th May and at its completion Wandsworth will announce their preferred landing site. Although this process is scheduled to be finalised in September with a winning design team announced, this is still not a live development project and there is no commitment in place from Wandsworth, TfL or others that the bridge will actually be built.
- 6.3 Officers continue to reiterate the City Council's strong objections to the proposals. We continue to receive letters of objection to the bridge.

7. Proposals for Introducing a Two-Way Operation to Baker Street

- 7.1 The consultation on the proposed Baker Street Two Way project closed on 31st July.
- 7.2 The committee is to receive a verbal update on the project from Graham King, Head of Strategic Planning and Transportation, at its meeting on 8th September.

8. Marble Arch Observation Wheel

- 8.1 Since its installation on 14th July, close to 25,000 people have made the trip around the Marble Arch Observation Wheel. Following this extremely successful summer tenure, the wheel will be dismantled on 7th September.
- 8.2 A further 20,000 people also entered the free event site at Marble Arch during this period, taking advantage of the additional seating and the hot and cold snacks also available on the site, creating a family friendly and welcoming environment in what has become an under-appreciated public space and area of historical significance in Westminster.
- 8.3 In that same vein of raising the area's profile, this Christmas we will also be installing a sponsored digital advent calendar at Marble Arch. Plans are also being developed to accompany this with a festive maze and tree, helping to create a link between Oxford Street's Christmas rush and Winter Wonderland in Hyde Park.

9. City of Sculpture

- 9.1 As part of the Shubbak festival of contemporary Arab culture, a series of concrete sculptures by Lebanese artist Ziad Antar have been installed in Riverwalk Gardens and will be in place until November. The pieces are recreations of some the sculptures found in the city of Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, which is famous for its public sculpture park.
- 9.2 An application has been approved for Bushra Fakhoury's *Danse Gwenedour* for installation at Marble Arch in early 2017. The piece depicts a traditional dance performed by French villagers in Bretagne.
- 9.3 The two Henry Moore sculptures installed at Berkeley Square have been followed by a piece by Helaine Blumenfeld OBE. The sculpture entitled *Mysteries* was first exhibited at Salisbury Cathedral in 2013.

10. Green plaques

- 10.1 Below is a brief outline of significant forthcoming green plaque commemorations.
- The National Sporting Club in King Street, Covent Garden. The club was founded in 1891 and has been credited with doing more for the sport of boxing in Great Britain than any other organisation. Its first president was Hugh Lowther, the 5th Earl of Lonsdale, after whom the famous title belt is named.
 - Anthony Powell at his birthplace in Ashley Gardens, SW1. Powell was the author of the acclaimed twelve volume work 'A Dance to the Music of Time', as well as working as a celebrated critic and reviewer.
 - William Henry Hudson at 14 Leinster Square in Bayswater. Hudson authored the acclaimed romance novel 'Green Mansions', as well as being an accomplished naturalist and founding member of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.
 - Cecilia Vajda at 105 Hallam Street, W1. Throughout a long and distinguished career in music as a teacher, conductor, performer, lecturer, writer and scholar, Vajda also become the foremost authority on the work of Hungarian composer Zoltán Kodály and his famed teaching methods.
 - William Shipley at 25 Henrietta Street, Covent Garden. As well as being a celebrated drawing master, in 1754 at site of Rawthmell's Coffee House Shipley founded an arts society which went on to become The Royal Society of Arts.
 - Somerset Maugham at 2 Wyndham Place. As a celebrated playwright, novelist and short story writer, Maugham was reputedly the highest paid author of the 1930s. His most notable works include 'Of Human Bondage' and 'The Letter', whilst many of Maugham's other pieces reflected on his career in the British Secret Intelligence Service during the First World War.

11. West End Partnership Public Realm Working Group

- 11.1 The final session of the West End Partnership Public Realm Working Group took place on 15th June. The meeting discussed the draft delivery plan and the huge contribution made by the public realm working group had made to its fruition. The delivery plan itself was launched on 18th June and outlines a forward programme of public realm schemes to be implemented over the next 15 years.
- 11.2 We are continuing to work with TfL and partners on these schemes, including the associated Crossrail over station developments at Hanover Square and our work with Camden on the Tottenham Court Road Two Way project. The West End Partnership delivery plan also set out our long term aspirations for Oxford Street West, as well as a joint project with the New West End Company, their proposed Property Owner BID, TfL and private partners to improve the streetscape in Bond Street. This project will seek to present proposals for improving the pedestrian environment and servicing capability, whilst maintaining Bond Street's position as one of the world's most prominent retail locations. It is our intention to consult on these proposals later this year.
- 11.3 At its next board meeting on 29th September, the West End Partnership will discuss and agree arrangements for the reconstituting of the former working groups into task groups, focussed on carrying out the delivery plan.

12. Development Planning

Permitted development rights – telecoms

- 12.1 The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) is conducting a consultation on the siting of mobile telecoms antennas, or monopoles, on the public highway. This is largely intended to solve signal issues in more rural locations, but given the proposal is to amend the national planning policy framework there would obviously be implications in Westminster. Our understanding is that the DCLG intends to allow such installations on pavements under permitted development rights, negating the requirement to submit a planning application to the local authority. We have submitted a response to this consultation outlining our strong opposition, should this be the case.

Staffing

- 12.2 Godfrey Woods was appointed as the City Council's Deputy Director of Planning in July. The post was created under the structure agreed through the council-wide reorganisation undertaken earlier this year and I am very pleased that Godfrey accepted this new role. Godfrey will now be John Walker's immediate deputy within Development Planning.
- 12.3 In general, the department is under pressure in terms of recruitment. It is currently proving difficult to recruit to open positions, barring the internal promotions which I have highlighted. Whilst vacancies are increasing, our workload as the busiest

planning authority in the country remains the same. Our senior team are continuing to work with HR to look at new ways to help retain staff and attract new talent.