



**Environment and Customer
Services Policy and Scrutiny
Committee Briefing**

Date: Monday 9th November 2015

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

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1. Development Planning

Permitted development rights – office to residential conversions

- 1.1 In October the government announced that the permitted development rights which allow office (B1 use) to residential (C3 use) conversions to be undertaken without submitting a planning application, would be made permanent. However, the exemption to these rights previously granted to Westminster's Central Activity Zone (CAZ) would stay in place until 2019.
- 1.2 It had previously been anticipated that this exemption would be removed by the government and so, back in July, we submitted an Article 4 direction to help prevent such conversions in the CAZ. In light of the extension of the exemption, our direction will now be withdrawn, as well as re-drawn. This will allow us to continue to work with the Mayor and our neighbouring boroughs on ensuring Article 4's properly translate over administrative boundaries.

Staffing

- 1.3 As noted in my previous report to the Committee, Godfrey Woods has been promoted to be Deputy of Planning with a city-wide remit. Accordingly I am happy to advise that Amanda Coulson and Steve Brandon have been successful in their applications for the vacant team leader posts within our Planning Team. Amanda will become the new team leader for North team, whilst Steve will become the team leader for Central Team where he has been acting up. Additionally, Mike Chatten will move from his current position in North team to head up South team.

2. Neighbourhood Planning

Designated Neighbourhood Forums

- 2.1 The Mayfair Neighbourhood Forum was designated in January 2014. The forum held a general meeting on 5th October and has produced a 'Consultation Report' which outlines the activity they undertook during the summer months. This report highlighted five key issues which the forum will try to focus on – a balanced range of housing, retention of existing and provision of new office accommodation, focussing the night time economy away from residential areas, improving amenity in public spaces and ensuring no net loss of parking.
- 2.2 The Soho Neighbourhood Forum was designated in July 2014. Our officer has been facilitating discussion of the key issues that the forum want to focus on, which so far revolve around living in Soho, working in Soho, and the wider built environment.
- 2.3 The Westbourne Neighbourhood Forum was designated in July 2014. The forum has engaged with AECOM, the consultants appointed by the Government neighbourhood fund known as Locality, to assist with their drawing up of a neighbourhood plan. Our officer is continuing to meet with the forum to discuss this process further.

- 2.4 The Church Street Ward Neighbourhood Forum was designated in July 2014. The forum are currently using a vacant unit on Church Street as a 'pop-up' consultation space to help engage with the local community.
- 2.5 The Belgravia Neighbourhood Forum was designated in October 2014. Our officer continues to assist the forum in presenting its programme of work to local residents.
- 2.6 The Notting Hill East Neighbourhood Forum was designated in October 2014. The forum are in the process of organising a walkabout with various officers during within the next month to identify issues and topics of interest.
- 2.7 The St. James's Neighbourhood Forum was formally designated on 5th February 2015. The forum held its first Steering Group meeting on 14th October and is in the process of applying for their grant from Locality.
- 2.8 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.
- 2.9 The Victoria Neighbourhood Forum was designated on 20th July. The forum will hold their inaugural meeting on 4th November.
- 2.10 The Knightsbridge Neighbourhood Forums was designated on 20th July. Our officer is currently engaged with the forum as they discuss their various areas of focus.
- 2.11 The Marylebone Neighbourhood Forum was designated on 7th September. Our officer is working with the forum's appointed neighbourhood planning consultants.
- 2.12 The Maida Hill Neighbourhood Forum was designated on 7th September. They have begun discussions of a forward programme with our officer.
- 2.13 The Pimlico and Churchill Gardens Estate Neighbourhood Forums were designated on 9th October.

3. Westminster's City Plan

- 3.1 I have previously outlined our intention to enact non-immediate Article 4 Directions to help protect Westminster from trends which are harmful to its character or prospects. An Article 4 Direction is an order made by the City Council which withdraws permitted development rights for certain works, thereby requiring a planning application to be submitted.

In April this year, the government amended the national Town and Country Planning Order to allow a premises to be changed from an A1 use (shops) to an A2 use (financial and professional services) without a planning application under permitted development rights. This has had a damaging effect on vital retail promenades across the city, particularly in areas such as Clifton Road, as local shops are lost to estate agents and related uses. As such, on 23rd October, I wrote to the Secretary of State

to give notice of a non-immediate Article 4 Direction filed by the City Council, which will remove this right from the Core Central Activities Zone, as well as our Named Streets and Parades, from October next year.

- 3.2 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.
- 3.3 One of the most important components of this fast-tracking has been my efforts to bring forward a revised basements policy by the end of the calendar year.

Thanks to the successful consultation period undertaken by officers between July and September, our emerging policy received minimal objections. Under the advice laid out in the National Planning Policy Framework, local authorities are able to begin applying, or 'give weight', to emerging policy before it has been to Examination in Public, in cases where the new policy is in its advanced stages and has received few unresolved objections.

Therefore, since 1st November, applications for residential basement developments have been subject to key elements of our emerging policy. In summary, those revisions ensure that basement developments to existing residential buildings, or buildings originally built for residential purposes, must:

- not extend beneath more than 50% of the site area
- provide a satisfactory landscaping scheme
- not result in the loss of trees deemed as having townscape, ecological or amenity value
- use natural ventilation wherever possible
- incorporate sustainable urban drainage measures
- protect the character and appearance of the existing building, garden setting and surrounding area

Additionally, there are also further elements of our new basements policy which were commented on during the public consultation. These have been classed as objections, but in reality simply call on us to go further. Therefore, whilst those requests to employ a stricter approach are considered, we will also apply the following elements of the new policy from 1st November onwards, in advance of the Examination in Public:

- limiting basement development to a single additional storey
- properly protect heritage assets and safeguard significant archaeological sites
- require a detailed structural method statement from a qualified engineer

- 3.4 The mixed use and office to residential conversion revision also completed its statutory consultation in September. Whilst our new approach to determining applications for office to residential conversion has been in place since 1st September, it has always been my intention to partner this with an updated mixed use policy. The current framework for requiring residential provision equal to commercial uplift is out of date and predicated on a market which struggles to bring forward any

kind of housing, as it was in the 1990s when the current mixed use policy was written. Given the rash of office losses to residential uses which we have seen over the past 4 years, some 125,000 square metres, this is clearly not the case anymore.

As such, I am keen that our mixed use policy encourages office development, in what is the engine-room of the nation's economy, by allowing extra commercial space to be provided without the requirement to also find additional housing. This of course will be balanced with the absolute need for new housing developments in the city, but will reflect the need to weigh that commitment against promoting economic growth.

- 3.5 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.

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

- 4.1 The Westminster Draft CIL Charging Schedule was submitted to the Planning Inspectorate on 9th October. The Inspectorate will now set a timetable for its implementation.
- 4.2 Work is continuing on the governance options for the CIL and how it is monitored, collected and spent, as well as reviewing Section 106 processes to improve efficiency and transparency.

5. Crossrail

Crossrail Line 1

- 5.1 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.
- 5.2 Applications for other Crossrail public realm reinstatement works at Bond Street, Paddington and Tottenham Court Road stations are now expected later this year as discussions on details continue. The aim is for all such works and the completion of the over site developments to be complete by December 2018.
- 5.3 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

- 5.4 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.
- 5.5 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.
- 5.6 Officers will continue to work closely with TfL in developing the proposals in Westminster, a series of meetings have taken place TfL in the lead up to the autumn and the public consultation.
- 5.7 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. The public consultation commenced on 27th October and runs until 8th January 2016. Officers will be reviewing the latest proposals and a report has been submitted to the Committee, whose comments will be incorporated into a fuller response to be reported to me in early January. In the meantime discussion on key issues already identified on local impacts in Victoria and Soho will continue.

6. Victoria Area Schemes

- 6.1 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 within the next month. 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.
- 6.2 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.
- 6.3 TfL are also progressing work to consider options for the reconfiguration of Terminus Place immediately to the north of Victoria Mainline Station to improve the public realm and the efficiency of bus operations there. Officers attended a meeting looking at this

project on 8th October and there are quarterly meetings now booked for them to discuss the forward programme with their TfL counterparts.

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

- 7.1 The public consultation on the proposed Baker Street Two Way project closed on 31st July. In September, an update note was sent to all those respondents who had given us permission to contact them after the consultation closed. This note outlined a number of changes which will be made to the design before the scheme is taken forward. The alterations are being made following some very clear issues emerging from the public consultation which I am committed to addressing before the project is taken forwards.
- 7.2 The project is a substantive item on the Committee's agenda for the meeting on 9th November.

8. Special Events

- 8.1 The 2015 Christmas installation at Eros on Piccadilly Circus began its build on 29th October, ready for unveiling in mid-November. This year will see the presents display returning to the famous statue, along with the surrounding electronic hoardings.
- 8.2 Building on the success of the Observation Wheel over the summer, later this month work will start on the installation of our digital festive calendar at Marble Arch. The calendar will be the largest outdoor screen in Europe and feature a countdown to Christmas, ensuring that everyone who passes through the area enjoys a bit more of the spirit of the season.

9. Green plaques

- 9.1 On 12th October Cllr Steve Summers unveiled Westminster's 113th green plaque, this time commemorating 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, and Cllr Summers was joined on stage by 8th Earl of Lonsdale to unveil the plaque with him.
- 9.2 Elsewhere, a summary of the forward programme of green plaques is below:
- 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.