

Environment and Customer Services Policy & Scrutiny Committee

Date:	7th March 2016
Classification:	General Release
Title:	Westminster's Open Space and Green Infrastructure Strategy
Report of:	Director of Policy, Performance and Communications
Cabinet Member Portfolios	Sustainability & Parking and City Management & Customer Services
Wards Involved:	All
Policy Context:	City for All: Heritage, Westminster City Plan: Strategic Policies, Mayor's London Plan, Mayor's London Infrastructure Plan to 2050
Financial Summary:	This report seeks Policy & Scrutiny Members views on the context and suggested structure and contents of 'Westminster's Open Space and Green Infrastructure Strategy'. There are, therefore, no financial implications as a result of this report.
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1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 Westminster has an impressive open space and green infrastructure network. Over half of the City's open spaces have a heritage designation, with 85 London Squares and 21 English Heritage listed parks and gardens, including the five Royal Parks. These unique landscapes are assets that can reinforce a sense of place and identity, improve health and wellbeing, boost environmental resilience and make the city a more attractive and prosperous place. We want to ensure we have a robust framework in place to continue to support and enhance this valued network.

- 1.2 In 2015, the Council published its 'Greener City Action Plan' including the commitment to publish an updated Open Space Strategy, to bring the existing strategy up to date, amalgamate it with the Council's statutory Biodiversity Action Plan, and to incorporate recommendations for green infrastructure. The benefits of open space and green infrastructure are widely recognised, including improving amenity and well-being, increasing resilience to climate change, enhancing townscape quality, improving air quality, enhancing biodiversity, as well as economic benefits. Greening initiatives are of increasing interest, particularly from the BIDs, Great Estates and developers/occupiers with these wider benefits in mind.
- 1.3 This report seeks the views of the Policy and Scrutiny Committee; prior to a draft strategy being produced. To aid discussion there is a suggested structure/ contents of the proposed Open Space and Green Infrastructure Strategy for Westminster (as was provided for the Walking and Cycling Strategy) affording Members the opportunity to make suggestions on the proposed topics covered before its structure is formalised. Proposals for the vision, ambition and principles that should guide the Strategy have been included for comment by Members.
- 1.4 It is important to make clear that this is a set of ideas to stimulate feedback from colleagues which will be taken in to account in finalising the structure prior to the working up of a complete draft by early summer. At this stage it is envisaged that, with the Chairman's permission, the Committee will be consulted on the draft, as will the wider public / interested parties, with an agreed draft strategy published in mid-2016. It is intended that the Strategy will be a 'living document' that will be reviewed and updated regularly as appropriate.

2. Key Matters for the Committee's consideration

- 2.1 Some key questions on which the Committee may wish to provide a view are as follows:
- i. What is the Committee's view on the proposed structure of the Open Space and Green Infrastructure Strategy for Westminster?
 - ii. Are there any topics or issues additional to those in the proposed structure which the draft Strategy needs to highlight and address?
 - iii. How might actions emerging from the draft Strategy be prioritised for implementation, especially considering that many will be brought forward by partners external to the Council?
 - iv. Can the Committee give consideration to realistic core targets that might be used to monitor outcomes and delivery of the Strategy?
- 2.2 An additional consideration is whether the Committee wish to establish a Task Group to review a draft of the Strategy prior to consultation and then prior to adoption. This would ensure the opportunity to input and further scrutinise the Open Space and Green Infrastructure Strategy for Westminster as it develops.

3. Background and Context

- 3.1 The council previously published an Open Space Strategy (OSS) in 2007 prepared in response to the requirements set out in PPG17 “Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation”. This guidance is now superseded by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2012), which states “Planning policies should be based on robust and up-to-date assessments of the needs for open space, sports and recreation facilities and opportunities for new provision.”
- 3.2 The adopted OSS has the status of supplementary planning guidance. It provides an evidence base for policy and supports decision-making for development management planners in negotiating planning conditions, negotiating s106 contributions and informing our open space/green infrastructure priorities for CIL, which will be chargeable from 1 May 2016.
- 3.3 Although adopted in 2007, the OSS is based on data collected from 2004-5, analysis of which was used to map areas of need and deficiency and help set priorities for improvements across the City. Over ten-years on, the OSS needs updating to remain robust, useful for both Westminster officers and external stakeholders and evidence based to be able to withstand scrutiny at public inquiries and eventually at examination in public for a revised Local Plan. A map of existing open space in Westminster is included at Appendix 2.
- 3.4 It is also intended that the revised Strategy will incorporate an updated version of the Council’s Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) adopted in 2008 and similarly due to be updated. There is a statutory duty associated with the BAP, to have regard to conserving biodiversity as set out in the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006). It makes consideration of biodiversity an integral part of policy and decision-making throughout the public sector. The Mayor’s London Plan and ‘All London Green Grid’ (SPG, March 2012) advise that delivery of local BAPs should be linked to open space strategies.
- 3.5 The revised Strategy will also set out priorities for investment in other types of green infrastructure. The NPPF defines Green Infrastructure as, “a network of multi-functional green space, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities”. It is a ‘catch all’ term for infrastructure that includes water spaces alongside other features within the built environment that are ‘green’ in function. So although the term incorporates open spaces it goes further and also includes smaller green verges, green walls and roofs, trees, etc. It is fast gaining recognition as an important type of infrastructure and sits alongside ‘grey’ infrastructure in the Mayor’s London Infrastructure Plan to 2050.
- 3.6 The revised Strategy will link in with other existing Council policies, strategies and programmes as the themes within it will cut across departments, for example Active Westminster Strategy, Greener City Action Plan, Health and Wellbeing Strategy, Air Quality Action Plan, Walking and Cycling Strategies, Tackling Childhood Obesity Programme.
- 3.7 Some of the policy context at a national, regional and local level is listed in Appendix 1.

3.8 Economic benefits of green infrastructure

- 3.8.1 There is a growing evidence base to support the economic benefits of green infrastructure. This is fast gaining momentum in the private sector as a serious consideration and is reflected in BID Action Plans, with public realm and green infrastructure improvements at the top of their “to do” lists.
- 3.8.2 Defra’s “The National Ecosystem Assessment” (2011) started to put a value on ecosystems, suggesting that the health benefits of living with a view of a green space are worth up to £300 per person per year, in part by providing areas for people to exercise but also because simply looking at nature lifts people's spirits. A recent report, *Valuing London’s Urban Forest (2015)* estimated the financial value of London’s trees at £132.7 million achieved through giving value to the benefits they bring such as in providing storm water attenuation, improving air quality and storing carbon.
- 3.8.3 The Landscape Institute’s, “Profitable Places” (2014) quotes property agent Savills in showing how investment in the public realm can potentially double average values of flats in parts of London. In 2005, CABI Space found that property values in England went up by as much as 34% (with a typical increase of 5–7%) for properties that had park views and were near parks. A greener environment not only increases land value and desirability for an area but also improves workers’ health and wellbeing, therefore having a positive impact on productivity.
- 3.8.4 In addition to the BIDs, many other private sector stakeholders in Westminster such as the Great and Landed Estates and individual developers and occupiers recognise the importance of green infrastructure in their areas and on their buildings - not only for its aesthetic value in attracting workers, visitors and businesses but also in the contribution it makes to issues such as flood prevention, improving air quality, combating the urban heat island effect, as well as health and wellbeing.
- 3.8.5 The Victoria Business Improvement District published a best practice guide to Green Infrastructure Audits (2013) in which they refer to the economic benefits arising from green infrastructure, from increased trading and reduction in crime.
- 3.8.6 The Wild West End Partnership is an initiative involving the Crown Estate, Grosvenor, Shaftesbury, Howard De Walden Estate and the Portman Estate. It has been set up to promote green infrastructure and biodiversity in the West End. The initiative highlights some of the benefits including improved air quality which has the potential to reduce incidences of asthma and a knock-on impact on health spending. A map of the Wild West End area can be seen in Appendix 3.
- 3.8.7 The West End Partnership’s “WEP Projector” is a useful tool in mapping public realm projects in the West End area, a significant number of which include some element of green infrastructure. Crossrail will bring more people than ever before to centre of London, placing additional pressure on existing green space, and increasing the value of green infrastructure further to help relieve the intensity of the built environment.

3.9 Social, health and wellbeing benefits of green infrastructure

- 3.9.1 The links between open space/green infrastructure and health and wellbeing are well documented. Both physical and mental benefits are to be gained by living and working in a “greener” environment.
- 3.9.2 The Land Trust’s, “The Value of our Green Spaces” (2016) estimates that every £1 it invests in its parks and nature reserves contributes £30 towards health and wellbeing benefits and £23 towards crime reduction and community safety.
- 3.9.3 These benefits are demonstrated in Chicago where green roofs were introduced across 10 per cent of the buildings in the city, removing 17,400mg of nitrogen dioxide each year. They estimate that the improved air quality and therefore health benefits could save somewhere between £17m and £65m in public health costs annually.
- 3.9.4 The Mayor of London has produced guidance on increasing open space and access to nature in the All London Green Grid. This recognises the many benefits of open space including the promotion of healthy living, through access to sports facilities, parks and play facilities which is central to encouraging more active lifestyles and improved mental wellbeing. They also recognise how a green infrastructure network can encourage sustainable travel choices by increasing the attractiveness of walking and cycling. The RIBA published a report in 2014 that demonstrated how vital green space in cities is to public health. ‘City Health Check – How Design Can Save Lives and Money’. This compared three major health issues: diabetes, obesity in children, and physical activity in nine cities, and reported that England’s obesity epidemic could be eased if better public spaces and green infrastructure were prioritised.
- 3.9.5 Nature Deficit Disorder, a term coined in America, largely affects children in inner city, built up areas who spend a large amount of their free time indoors engaged with screen-based activities rather than experiencing the natural environment. The links to childhood obesity are clear. The barriers to accessing open space need to be understood and then measures put in place to address them. This may be simply a lack of green space but there may also be cultural or social implications.
- 3.9.6 The “Green Spine” project in Church Street is an example in Westminster where grey will become green infrastructure in one of Westminster’s most deprived wards. Existing streets will be turned into a linear park through the middle of the area, providing places to sit, play and enjoy nature. An extract from the “Church Street and Paddington Green Infrastructure and Public Realm Plan” (2013) can be found in Appendix 4 showing a conceptual image of a section of the green spine. Much of Church Street falls into an area of open space deficiency and this initiative will help to address this. The scheme is currently in its early development and the first phases are planned for delivery in 2018.
- 3.9.7 The Strategy will link in with the emerging refresh of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and take these issues into consideration.

4. Informing the Strategy

4.1 The Strategy must be evidence based in order to set robust priorities and stand up to scrutiny.

4.2 In 2014/15 all open spaces in Westminster were systematically audited (both public and private) to determine the quantity and quality of provision in the City. The audit findings were compiled into a huge database which will underpin much of the Strategy.

4.3 Below are some headline statistics from the audits:

- 203 open spaces were audited in Westminster, including the River Thames and Grand Union Canal. 70% of the open space has public access. The table below provides some further detail:

Open Space	No. of sites	Total area (Hectares)
Public open spaces	103	436
Private open spaces	98	109
Waterways	2	71
TOTAL	203	616

- The Royal Parks account for over 80% of Westminster's open space. The majority of public open spaces (56%) are small, under 0.4 hectares in size.
 - There are 32 Sites of Interest for Nature Conservation (SINC) within Westminster, encompassing 77% of all open space, both public and private spaces and the waterways.
 - A targeted audit of green infrastructure looked at 30 sites, including green roofs and walls, 29 of which were considered to be of high to medium benefit to biodiversity.
- 4.4 A public consultation exercise was also undertaken and views collated through a series of face to face interviews in selected parks, on-line questionnaires, and at various community events. This has provided an important snap-shot of resident and visitor's views on Westminster's open spaces.
- 4.5 In December 2015 a stakeholder event was held to bring together those with a more professional interest in Westminster's open spaces. They were informed about the work involved in the preparation of the Strategy and their thoughts on aspects of key elements recorded.
- 4.6 All this information will be used to inform the Strategy. All those who participated in the stakeholder event and all owners/managers of spaces who cooperated in

the audits will be given the opportunity to comment on the draft strategy before it is finalised.

5. Emerging priorities for Westminster's residents, workers and visitors

- 5.1 861 people who live, work or visit Westminster were engaged in the consultation element of the study, either via face to face interviews, questionnaire surveys or at community engagement events. The majority visit parks and open spaces in Westminster on a very regular basis (at least weekly).
- 5.2 Overall, those engaged are highly satisfied with the quality of open spaces in Westminster. 87% of respondents stated that the open space they visit most frequently was either "excellent" or "very good". By and large, parks and open spaces are perceived to be well managed and maintained, as well as easily accessible and safe. People most valued the open spaces for their ease of access and convenience, attractiveness and cleanliness. They appreciated the quiet and peaceful feel of parks as places to sit and relax. Many visit parks to access nature and they appreciate the variety of trees.
- 5.3 Two main priorities for improvement for residents and visitors emerging from the consultation exercise were improved cleanliness and more or a wider variety of trees and flowers. Many suggestions for improvement centred around improving the natural feel of spaces; improvements to the wildlife and biodiversity value of open spaces was strong theme.
- 5.4 The main priorities relating to facilities in open spaces were improved seating, provision of toilets, and improved play facilities.
- 5.5 These user priorities will be taken forward into the Strategy and will inform the recommendations to be translated into an Action Plan. Funding and resourcing for schemes identified as priorities from the strategy will be managed on a site by site basis and may be through S106 contributions, CIL for city-wide green infrastructure, private and third party funding as part of their own strategies and plans, or a combination of these.
- 5.6 The City Survey also provides a useful source of data for residents who may not be regular park users. This information will also be incorporated into the Strategy.

6. Westminster's Open Space and Green Infrastructure Strategy - Suggested Structure

- 6.1 As with the original Open Space Strategy in 2007, the revised Open Space and Green Infrastructure Strategy will set out Westminster's vision for open spaces, but this time it will also cover biodiversity and green infrastructure. It is intended that the "look and feel" of the Strategy will be different to the 2007 version. It will have more of an online presence with links to related policy areas and documents, in the same way as the Greener City Action Plan.

- 6.2 The suggested structure/contents set out below is to stimulate feedback from Policy & Scrutiny Members which will be taken into account in finalising the structure prior to the working up of a complete draft this spring. With the Chairman's permission, the Committee will be consulted on the draft, as will the wider public / interested parties, with an agreed strategy published for consultation in late spring/early summer and a final strategy published by autumn 2016. It is intended that the Strategy will be a 'living document' that will be reviewed and updated regularly as appropriate.

1) Introduction

Context – setting the scene, reference to 2007 Strategy, Westminster in the regional and national context in relation to open space, biodiversity, and green infrastructure. Statutory obligations in relation to biodiversity.

Benefits – of the Strategy and its outcomes to residents and visitors to Westminster. Economic benefits. Benefits to wildlife and for biodiversity. Indirect benefits to other policy areas such as air quality, flood risk, and health and wellbeing.

2) Biodiversity and Open Space in Westminster

Amount, type and distribution – showing a clear picture of Westminster including maps and diagrams

Audit – including scope and methodology and comparison with 2007 Strategy

Key findings from audit and consultation – a summary of the key findings and inclusion of recommendations

Open space deficiency maps – taken from analysis of the data from the audits, this section will include a series of maps showing need and deficiency in open space, play space, access to nature, for example.

Impact on other policy areas – links with flood risk maps and air quality maps, for example.

3) Vision / Strategy Priorities

Vision – overall vision for open space, biodiversity and green infrastructure in Westminster. Eg, "To improve our environment by becoming a more sustainable, resilient, greener city, to improve wellbeing and health, maximise access to nature and make the city a better place for Westminster's residents and visitors."

Open Space – the strategy priorities for open space will be outlined in this section, taken from the analysis of the audits and consultation data. The set of recommendations will be listed under four headings – resilience, health and

wellbeing, engagement with the natural environment, and biodiversity and nature conservation.

Biodiversity – a statutory requirement to identify priority habitats and priority species. Further recommendations will stem from analysis of the audit data.

Green infrastructure – network of small interventions create the opportunity to make a meaningful difference when considered together in terms of green corridors for wildlife, contribution to air quality, and contribution to flood prevention, through attenuation for example. Outline priorities for investment in different types of green infrastructure and where they would make the most difference across the City (linked to air quality and flood prevention, for example, as well as deficiency in open space).

4) Delivery / Action Plan

The Strategy will include an Action Plan to set out how priorities and recommendations will be delivered. Delivery is likely to be through a variety of means including:

External partners - One of the biggest areas of opportunity for delivery will be through external partners and third party organisations. For eg:

- West End Partnership including the Wild West End initiative;
- Business Improvement Districts – the majority see public realm improvements, including green infrastructure, as priorities;
- Community organisations, for example, the Queen’s Park Community Council. Also, where Neighbourhood Plans are emerging across the City, public realm and green infrastructure play a part
- Housing Renewal schemes, eg in Church Street renewal area the Green Spine will be an exciting example to turn grey into green infrastructure
- Development – through policy requirements, S106 and through the Mayor’s CIL.

Local, regional and national initiatives and programmes – opportunities for delivery may arise through initiatives and programmes with links to the priorities set out in the Strategy, either within Westminster or externally. For example, recently funding became available through Public Health’s Tackling Childhood Obesity Programme to set up a food growing programme which is enabling elements of green infrastructure through food growing plots on otherwise “grey” space in housing estates and school grounds. Regionally, the “Making a B-Line for London Partnership” has submitted a Heritage Lottery Bid to link green spaces for pollinating insects across London and will add value to green infrastructure schemes.

Management of open space and green infrastructure – opportunity to address some priorities may arise through changes to management of open space. The main opportunities will be via Council contracts (WCC and CityWest Homes) but possibly also through private contracts, through sharing of the audit data, including recommendations for each site, and maybe also in conjunction with BIDs as drivers for improvement in their areas. There are also opportunities through volunteering.

5) Monitoring and Review

Overall, the Strategy and Action Plan will need to be reviewed by officers on a regular basis. A bi-annual review of the Action Plan is suggested.

There are also monitoring systems in place that the Strategy should link with, for example the WEP Projector (a tool to monitor projects undertaken through the West End Partnership). GiGL (Greenspace Information for Greater London) is the capital's environmental records centre and collate information on biodiversity.

Opportunities to enable the public to engage in monitoring, particularly of the natural environment, will be explored and there may be links to be made with GiGL's online data portal.

7. Communications and Engagement

- 7.1 A launch event and workshop was held at Regent's Park in March 2014 with stakeholders and partners to begin the Strategy refresh process, provide information on the approach and set a vision going forward.
- 7.2 Engagement with park users and owners of private gardens and squares took place as part of the audit and consultation process in data gathering to underpin the revised Strategy.
- 7.3 A second stakeholder event and workshop was held in December 2015 to share emerging results from the audits and investigate priorities for the Strategy.
- 7.4 A consultation draft of the Open Space and Green Infrastructure Strategy will be circulated in late spring 2016. It is anticipated the Strategy will be adopted in autumn 2016.

If you have any queries about this Report or wish to inspect any of the Background Papers please contact Rebecca Cloke, rcloke 020 7641 3433

Appendices

1. Statutory and Policy Framework
2. Plan showing the distribution of Westminster's open spaces in 2016
3. Wild West End concept plan
4. An extract from the "Church Street and Paddington Green Infrastructure and Public Realm Plan" (2013)

BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. Greener City Action Plan (2015)
2. Westminster City Plan: Strategic Policies (2013)
3. Westminster Open Space Strategy (2007)
4. Westminster Biodiversity Action Plan (2008)
5. National Planning Policy Framework (2012) Department for Communities and Local Government
6. London Plan (2015) Mayor of London
7. All London Green Grid: Supplementary Planning Guidance (2012) Mayor of London
8. London Infrastructure Plan (2014) Mayor of London
9. Green Infrastructure Audit: Best Practice Guide (2013) Victoria Business Improvement District
10. Valuing London's Urban Forest: Results of the London i-Tree Eco Project (2015)
11. The National Ecosystem Assessment (2011) DEFRA
12. Profitable Places (2014) The Landscape Institute
13. The Value of our Green Spaces (2016) The Land Trust
14. City Health Check – How Design Can Save Lives and Money (2014) Royal Institute of British Architects
15. Church Street and Paddington Green Infrastructure and Public Realm Plan (2013) WCC (Grant Associates)

APPENDIX 1: Statutory and Policy framework

European

- European Union Habitat Directive

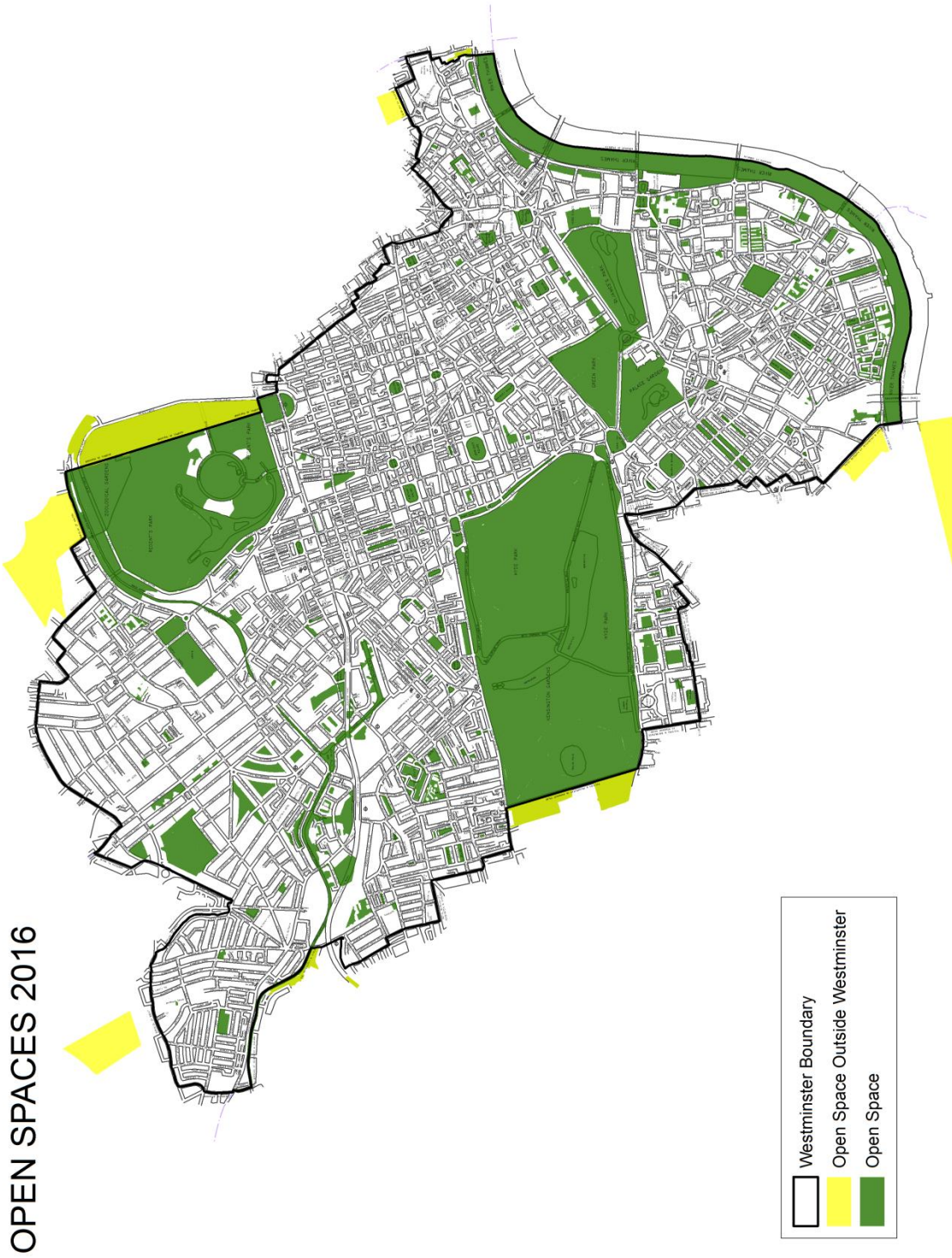
National

- Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006)
- Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) as amended
- Habitats and Conservation of Species Regulations 2010
- Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services (2011) DEFRA
- Natural Environment White Paper - The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature (2011) HMG
- National Pollinator Strategy: for bees and other pollinators in England (2014) DEFRA
- National Planning Policy Framework (2012) Department for Communities and Local Government
- Planning Practice Guidance (2016) Department for Communities and Local Government
- Circular 06/2005 Biodiversity and Geological Conservation – Statutory Obligations and their impact within the planning system (2005) ODPM

London

- The London Plan (2015) Mayor of London
- London Infrastructure Plan 2050 (2014) Mayor of London
- All London Green Grid Supplementary Planning Guidance (2012) Mayor of London
- Connecting with London's nature: The Mayor's Biodiversity Strategy 2002
- London Biodiversity Action Plan

APPENDIX 2: Plan showing the distribution of Westminster's open spaces in 2016

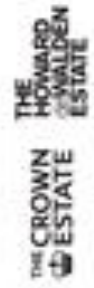


APPENDIX 3: Wild West End concept plan

Wild West End Concept



Partner organisations



GROSVENOR

Shaftesbury



THE PORTICO GROUP

In conjunction with



MAJOR OF LONDON

ARUP

APPENDIX 4: An extract from the “Church Street and Paddington Green Infrastructure and Public Realm Plan” (2013)

THE GREEN SPINE A UNIQUE LINEAR PARK

The Green Spine is a new linear park that provides a pedestrian-orientated route running north-south through the area linking the new Lisson Gardens, Broadley Gardens, Church Street, the new Luton Street development, Fisherton Estate and Orange Park.

The Green Spine is planted generously with forest-scale trees with an under-storey of small trees and lush ground cover. Informal play spaces, seating, community gardens and wildlife-friendly planting beds are located along its length. This unique green route encourages healthy living by promoting an active life style through walking, gardening, play and exercise, as well as creating a healthy environment and addressing the effects of climate change by creating shade from the summer sun, filtering the air, reducing flooding, providing places to locally grow food as well as forage.

The intention is that the Green Spine is a space predominantly for people, away from cars. There are lengths of the street that are pedestrian only with limited vehicular access, with others accommodating single lane traffic and limited parking. The unique nature of the Green Spine is a wonderful opportunity within the urban environment to provide space to sit and play and be stimulated through beautiful, bio-diverse gardens and engaging public art.



1. ILLUSTRATIVE VIEW OF FISHERTON STREET, LOOKING SOUTH
2. DIAGRAM ILLUSTRATING THE COMPONENTS OF THE GREEN SPINE; TREE PLANTING, EDIBLE LANDSCAPE, PLAY OPPORTUNITIES, SUSTAINABLE DRAINAGE