

# Economic Development, Education, Community and Place Shaping Policy Scrutiny Committee

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**Portfolio:** Cabinet Member for Place Shaping and Public Realm

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## 1. The City Plan

- 1.1 A new draft City Plan was issued for informal consultation on 12 November until 21 December. The new draft Plan is the result of a complete review of the adopted City Plan (2016) and saved Unitary Development Plan policies (2007) and will create a single, up to date local plan to management development in Westminster. It also revisits the strategic direction of Westminster's planning policies and ensures the City Plan is aligned with City for All objectives and is fit for purpose into the next decades.
- 1.2 Our draft City Plan contains numerous new proposed planning policies. I detail below some of the headline changes.
- 1.3 In the area of housing we have made several changes so that our policies match the ambition we have for delivering more housing in our city. We have increased our overall housing delivery target to a 1,495 new homes per year. Of this housing we would expect an increased proportion (35%) to be affordable and this affordable housing to be split between 60% intermediate and 40% social provision. This particular change reflects the scarcity of intermediate housing in our City – while 25% of our housing stock is social housing, less than 2% is intermediate. We are also simplifying our mixed use policy so that only affordable housing is required to be provided and the

exemption from this policy for hotel development is removed. Finally, we are proposing a floorspace upper limit on new homes so that space in Westminster is used efficiently to give our city the housing we need.

- 1.4 Our proposed policies will allow for more flexibility in designated shopping centres to allow more leisure and entertainment uses. This will complement the existing retail offer and address the challenge to our high streets posed by the rise of online shopping. In order to further support economic growth we will also encourage the creation of a range of new workspaces of different types and sizes. We will replace our current Core CAZ (Central Activities Zone) designation with a more effective West End Retail and Leisure Special Policy Area designation and closer alignment of the CAZ boundary with the Mayor's CAZ.
- 1.5 The new City Plan overhauls our current design policies, simplifying them, with just one over-arching design principles policy supported by six more detailed subject specific design and heritage policies, such as a simplified basements policy. We will also require developments to be 'neighbourly' and demonstrate how they will minimise the impact of works on the surrounding area and its communities.
- 1.6 In terms of specific areas of the city we have created a new policy on the Church Street/Edgware Road and Ebury Bridge Housing Regeneration Areas within the spatial strategy of the plan to support and guide the housing renewal here and emphasise the importance of this site for the growth of the city. We have also proposed combining the St James's and Mayfair Special Policy Areas owing to strong similarities between both policies and the proximity of the areas. Finally, this plan proposed the creation of a new special policy area designation to protect Soho's unique function and character. The policy protects workspace for small and medium enterprises, specialist retailing, food, drink and entertainment uses and restricts the size of new hotels.

- 1.7 In addition to these key areas our City Plan contains policies to promote our environmental aspirations, manage irresponsible shisha premises, clarify our approach to building height and support our evening economy.
- 1.8 During the consultation, officers undertook over 40 engagement events with our stakeholders including neighbourhood forums, amenity societies, Business Improvement Districts, the Greater London Authority and the development industry. These events were primarily a listening and explaining exercise to gather initial thoughts on the draft policies and explain the rationale behind them. The consultation attracted 179 responses. This is a high number of responses for a consultation of this type and reflects the pro-active engagement the Council undertook during the consultation period.
- 1.9 Initial feedback indicates that a fresh approach to planning policy, and in particular the more streamlined approach to the policies, is very welcome. The scale and ambition of the plan received positive comments from a range of stakeholders. More flexible policies relating to retail are seen as reflecting a positive and pragmatic approach to the problems the high streets face, many stakeholders welcome the setting of a higher housing target to deliver much needed homes, as well as a higher affordable housing target.
- 1.10 Some respondents did ask for further assurances or changes to the heritage and design policies, car parking, mixed used thresholds and the maximum size of new homes. We are now reviewing all of the responses provided and assessing how best to respond to the feedback, either via tweaking our policies, clarifying details or reassuring stakeholders on the issues they raised.
- 1.11 Following this process there will be another round of formal consultation known as 'Regulation 19', after which the policies will be further refined. We will then submit the plan to the Secretary of State and begin the formal examination in public process. At the end of the process the Inspector will determine if the plan is sound. Assuming the plan is found to be sound, we hope to adopt the new City Plan late 2019/early 2020.

## **2. Oxford Street**

- 2.1 Since the last update we have undertaken a public consultation exercise for the Oxford Street District Draft Place Strategy and Delivery Plan. The public consultation took place from 6 November to 16 December and provided stakeholders with a variety of channels to be informed and respond to the consultation including: bespoke website, dedicated inbox, online survey, one to one meetings with key stakeholders, and consultation events throughout the six week period of consultation.
- 2.2 This was one of the largest consultations undertaken by the Council and also received one of the highest responses when compared to other consultations undertaken in recent years.
- 2.3 An independent firm has been appointed to undertake the analysis of the survey results and will be providing a report that will be appended to the upcoming Cabinet Report outlining the results.
- 2.4 The project team are reviewing the consultation results provided via the online survey and the letters also received which provided more detailed feedback. The draft Place Strategy and Delivery Plan will be updated to reflect any appropriate changes suggested by stakeholders and will be appended to the upcoming Cabinet Report. The Cabinet Report will outline the results and the changes to the updated Place Strategy and Delivery Plan.

## **3. Planning Review**

- 3.1 Last year Cabinet approved in principle measures to make the planning service more proactive, transparent and focused on delivery of our wider City for All strategy. Since then we have undertaken a wide consultation exercise on these proposed changes and how best to implement them.
- 3.2 In particular, we have developed suggested mechanisms to allow members of the public to speak at planning sub-committee meetings. These will take effect

from the first sub-committee meeting at the newly refurbished building at 64 Victoria Street. It is also proposed to facilitate live-streaming/recording of sub-committee, following the purchase and testing of the equipment needed.

- 3.3 Briefly, our recommendation for facilitating speaking at committee meetings are as follows. Those wishing to speak at a sub-committee meeting must register their wish to do so by noon on the Friday before the meeting. At the Planning (Major) Applications Sub-Committees our proposal is to allow a maximum of two speakers for and two against the proposal; for Planning Applications Sub-Committees 1, 2 and 3, this will be one speaker on either side. Where more people request to speak than the number outlined above, we will encourage the parties involved to agree between themselves who will speak or to share the time between them; should this not be possible we propose using a ballot system to determine who speaks. Each speaker will ordinarily be permitted a total of three minutes to speak. In addition, a speaking slot will be provided for the local amenity society to speak should they so wish. Ward councillors will also be allowed to make verbal representations.
- 3.4 The new Director for Place Shaping and Planning will be reviewing pre-application community engagement and delegated authority, and will report to both me and Planning and City Development Committee in due course.
- 3.5 We will review the functioning of this system for speakers continually with a more formal review after 6 months. The above recommendations regarding public speaking have now been endorsed by Planning and City Development Committee and we are proceeding with their implementation.

#### **4. Queensway**

- 4.1 Following my approval of the proposals, works are expected to begin on the first phase of this project on 21 January. A notification of works letter has been sent to all affected properties and businesses in the area and ward councillors and amenity societies have been notified. The first phase of works

are on the western footway between Moscow Road and Porchester Gardens. The second phase from Moscow Road to 71 Queensway, outside the Sainsburys Local (including the crossing area outside Bayswater London Underground Station) will be undertaken from 8 March 2019 to 11 April 2019. It is possible that the construction dates might slip for operational reasons, e.g. weather delays, but the methodology of carrying out the work is not expected to change. If this is the case, all affected businesses and residents will be forewarned.

## **5. Community Infrastructure Levy**

- 5.1 The Council has now collected £35.750m of CIL since the Charging Schedule came into effect in May 2016. This represents a further £5.538m collected since my last report.
- 5.2 The Cabinet CIL Committee met on 5 December 2018, where it approved funding of £3.262m towards 12 infrastructure projects from the Council's strategic portion of CIL funds, bringing the total amount allocated to £17.304m. The majority of these projects are public realm improvements to improve the pedestrian environment and road safety at various locations in the city.
- 5.3 The largest allocation in this round of funding was £0.977m for the Church Street Triangle project, which will be matched by funding from the GLA's Good Growth Fund. The project seeks to transform the 'Triangle', where Church Street meets Salisbury Street, to deliver flexible space for enterprise, arts, public events and community uses, support the existing cultural and business offer and strengthening the historic market. Physical interventions will allow innovation in design and use of the space, setting the tone for the delivery of the Church Street regeneration programme as a whole and ensuring that the community benefits from the regeneration in the immediate future.
- 5.4 Furthermore, the Committee agreed the process for allocating the neighbourhood portion of CIL, allowing the neighbourhood forums and other community groups to apply for these funds. This neighbourhood portion

represents approximately 15% of the total amount of CIL collected from development in each designated neighbourhood area. Officers are working on finalising the relevant documentation and the neighbourhood forums and other community groups will then be contacted to advise them of the bidding process. A briefing will also be sent to ward members to advise them of their role in this process.

## **6. Telephone Boxes and Advertising**

- 6.1 The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has now closed its consultation into Permitted Development Rights. The Council responded to the consultation and is particularly supportive of the proposal to remove the permitted development right currently in place for public phone boxes. The Council's, and my, view is that these phone boxes often do not serve the purpose they are supposed to and instead are used to generate income via advertising. Once installed they are frequently neglected and fall into disrepair and are open to misuse.
- 6.2 The Government's proposed changes in this area would require planning permission and advertising consent on new kiosks. This would further this Council's aspirations to remove redundant kiosks and resist their further proliferation.

## **7. Knightsbridge Neighbourhood Plan**

- 7.1 Following the successful referendum on the Knightsbridge Neighbourhood Plan, it was formally 'made' by the council on 11 December 2018.
- 7.2 The Knightsbridge Neighbourhood Plan is now a part of the statutory development plan for the Neighbourhood area. This means that its policies will be taken into account in determining planning applications there. Having a made Neighbourhood Plan means the 'neighbourhood portion' of CIL allocated to this neighbourhood area rises to 25% (up from 15% capped at £100 per council tax paying dwelling).

7.3 This is Westminster's first neighbourhood plan to go through the formal process and I would like to congratulate those involved for their hard work in getting to this stage.

## **8. Mayfair Neighbourhood Plan**

8.1 The Mayfair Neighbourhood Plan is the second neighbourhood plan to be formally submitted. Following extensive engagement between officers and the Forum, the Plan is currently in the early stages of independent examination. A more detailed briefing on the progress of the examination will be provided in due course.

## **9. Strand Aldwych project**

9.1 This project, which will introduce two-way traffic around Aldwych and create a new public space outside Somerset House, is now ready to proceed to public consultation. It has taken significant work with partners and stakeholders to get to this point; the feasibility of this project has been thoroughly assessed, including a TfL approved traffic modelling programme, as has the works' overall design concept. The Council and stakeholders agree that the project should make the most of the wealth of creative talent in the area and we are therefore working closely with Northbank BID to involve artists in the detailed design process.

9.3 We will go out to public consultation for six weeks on the project concept, beginning on 29 January. Consultation material will be available to view throughout the consultation period on a project website and at the King's Shop, on the corner of Strand and Surrey Street, and there will be various "pop up" events and exhibitions in the project area throughout the six week period. Flyers will also be available at local libraries and public venues.