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**Portfolio:** Planning and Economic Development

**The Report of:** Councillor Geoff Barraclough

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**1. The following key decisions have been made in the period since my last Policy & Scrutiny report dated 22 September:**

- 21 September 2022 – NNDR Localism Relief to support meanwhile use activations as phase 3 of the Activations and Meanwhile Use Programme
- 07 October 2022 - Westminster City Plan Partial Review - Regulation 18 Notification and update to the Westminster Local Development Scheme
- 17 October 2022 – Amended Street Naming and Numbering Guidance

**2. The following report includes my priorities and delivery progress to date of the new administration.**

## **Economy**

### **Award winning Meanwhile Activations Programme**

At the Federation of Small Businesses' (FSB) Local Government Awards 2022, Westminster was awarded the title of Best Programme of Businesses Support in Greater London for the Meanwhile Activations Programme. The award recognises the work to date and future planned activity to enliven vacant and underutilised spaces and provide a unique opportunity for small businesses to trade in the West End. The council was also shortlisted for the 'Future Ready' category, for the Westminster Works hospitality and leisure recruitment scheme, and the 'All-round Business Friendly' category, for our inclusive and comprehensive business support.

### **Westminster Investment Service**

In October 2022, the council welcomed two international delegations exploring London as a potential investment location. Firstly, a 3-day international retail mission of 16 high-growth brands were welcomed to London through the West End Future Occupiers Programme and secondly, a group of German Cleantech companies. The Investment Service hosted an introductory session to highlight the council's support for incoming businesses, provide an overview of Smart City's Cleantech Strategy, our emerging Green Economy approach and build connections with potential investors aligned with our sector focus.

## **BIDs Engagement Framework**

In collaboration with Westminster's 17 Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), a new framework for engagement between the council and BIDs has been agreed. Refreshed forums now include:

- Quarterly Cabinet Member and BID CEO Roundtables – with a strategic focus on joint working and collaboration
- Quarterly BID Forum – allowing for more operational discussions at resolutions at senior WCC Officer and BID representative level
- Bi-annual Cabinet Member and BID CEO 121s.

## **Job Fair**

On 31 October the Westminster Employment Service will be holding a jobs fair at Lords Cricket Ground with employers confirmed including Tesla, Google, the NHS, Westminster City Council and many others. They will be promoting vacancies paying at least the London Living Wage.

Originally 900 tickets were made available for residents. This was increased to 1200 to accommodate demand.

## **Westminster Works (Hospitality & Leisure service)**

The Service to support the Hospitality and Leisure sectors to attract and retain talent, was launched at the Thistle Hotel, Marble Arch. Over 100 businesses have registered for support from the project which received widespread extensive broadcast and written media coverage including packages and interviews that ran on BBC One, BBC World, Sky News, LBC, the Daily Mirror. The launch video is available [here](#).

The focus for Q3 will be marketing the project to employers and residents.

## **Cost of Living Campaign with Businesses**

A bulletin promoting community projects and voluntary community sector organisations in need of urgent support has been shared with businesses with the aim of generating financial and in-kind support. A match making event on 29 November is being co-ordinated with One Westminster to promote connections and local giving. Other activity as part of this campaign will include social media and profiling of contributing businesses and focussing Social Value activity on this theme.

## **Westminster Employment Service - Coaching**

The HELP team within WES Coaching has been approached to pilot an initiative to pre-empt Ukrainian families approaching Housing Solutions at risk of homelessness as their host accommodation comes to an end. The pilot will work initially with 20 families providing training and employment support for six months.

WES Coaching is continuing its outreach activities to engage more residents with the service, the Church Street based employment coaches have extended their remit to cover Queens Park and Westbourne. The HELP café which normally operates from Alfie's Antiques Café, Church Street will transform into a portable model, appearing at a Northwest Westminster café from January 2023.

In conjunction with Public Health the Coaching service is delivering financial capability training to 20 Community Champions – the aim being to help Community Champions feel more comfortable talking to residents about financial issues – the Community Champions will then signpost residents

who would benefit from a one-to-one tailored assessment (typically 6-8 hours) with trained WES coaches to help residents reduce debt, maximise income and effectively budget.

## **Markets**

We have procured Rebel Business School to run two programmes of digital skills training. The first is a series of two-week courses focused on business and digital skills. Over the last year we have run four of these two weeks courses. The second programme is support tailored for our market traders which begin at the start of October. Two-hour sessions are being run every Monday evening and will continue to run through to the end of March 2023.

In partnership with Public Health, Westminster Markets have launched “Healthy Start Initiative” which enables people on low incomes to use their healthy start card to buy fresh produce at our markets. This allows people to buy fresh produce locally rather than relying on supermarkets which often have more limited choice can be more expensive. The scheme also supports new and expectant mums to have access to milk products.

## **Place-shaping**

### **High Streets**

#### **Harrow Road**

The Harrow Road Place Plan project programme has been developed and was submitted in October for Cabinet Member review. This includes projects at Harrow Road Open Space, Maida Hill market and Westbourne Green.

An inception meeting with Flamboyant is taking place on 22 October as part of the Levelling Up Fund Round 2 Bid which will seek investment to bring forward the complete refurbishment and reactivation of Flamboyant Carnival Arts.

## **West End and Central Activities Zone**

### **Strand Aldwych**

The construction works at Strand Aldwych are in the final stages and due for completion in November 2022 with a launch planned for Tuesday 6 December. Detailed plans for the launch event are in development. A Cabinet Member decision on the management model is being prepared for later in the autumn.

### **Soho**

WCC has confirmed it will fund the waste education/enforcement post requested in the recent ‘Soho Comes Clean’ report produced by the Soho Neighbourhood Forum. This will be a crucial first step to taking forward the report’s main recommendations.

Proposed monitoring work will begin soon after the review with Ward Councillors and key stakeholders is completed. Once results from the monitoring work have been analysed, specific decisions will be made around the suitable next steps for future investment in Soho backing the Soho Neighbourhood Plan. The monitoring work will be completed using the WCC Soho Capital Programme.

## **Town Planning and Planning Policy**

### **City Plan Review**

We launched the first formal stage of consultation (known as Regulation 18 consultation) on our proposed partial review of the City Plan on 7 October. The consultation closes on 18 November.

To better align the City Plan with the recently published Fairer Westminster Strategy, the consultation sets out our intentions to amend policies on affordable housing to secure more genuinely affordable housing, and introduce a stronger preference for the retrofit and refurbishment of existing buildings rather than demolition and redevelopment. It also sets out the intention to incorporate Site Allocations into the City Plan, which was previously addressed through a separate document.

Site Allocations will set out site-specific guidance on key named development sites that can help meet our housing and commercial growth targets, and need for supporting infrastructure, should be developed. They will likely include guidance on what types of land use are supported, how much new floorspace we think a site can reasonably accommodate, and design considerations such as how the development should respond to the townscape and heritage value of the surrounding area.

Once the consultation has closed, the responses will be used to form or revise policy wording, based on any necessary evidence base which will be commissioned. The Council will use the period between Regulation 18 consultation and the formal Regulation 19 consultation (expected towards the end of 2023) for on-going informal engagement with stakeholders as policies evolve. This will likely take a range of formats including questionnaires, meetings, and workshops. This will help build consensus as the plan is progressed and before the next round of formal consultation.

### **Article 4 Direction**

Our proposed Article 4 Direction to remove permitted development rights for changes of use from Class E (commercial uses such as shops, restaurants and offices) residential in the Central Activities Zone (CAZ) was modified with immediate effect by the Secretary of State on 22 July 2022. The Direction (which means planning permission is required for such change of use proposals) now covers a smaller geographical area than we originally proposed, although covering key areas of the borough.

Our separate Article 4 Direction proposing similar protections for the core areas of high streets outside of the CAZ – e.g. areas such as Harrow Road and St Johns Wood, is intended to formally be ‘confirmed’ i.e. brought into force in December 2022 – 12 months after it was originally proposed. To date the Secretary of State has not indicated any intention to modify what we originally proposed for this Direction.

### **Pimlico Neighbourhood Plan**

Pimlico Neighbourhood Plan was supported at referendum on Thursday 22 September 2022. Over 90% of residents that voted were in favour of using the plan to help decide planning applications in the neighbourhood area.

As the referendum was successful, an ‘Adoption Statement’ to formally ‘make’ (i.e. adopt) the plan in accordance with regulations is now being prepared and will be published shortly. This will set out that the plan now has development plan status, meaning it will be used alongside the council’s own planning documents and the Mayor’s London Plan in determining planning applications in the Pimlico Neighbourhood Area.

### **Retrofit and Retrofit Task Force**

As noted above, the City Plan review has now been launched and will consider the need for a new retrofit policy which will seek to ensure that the retrofit and refurbishment of existing buildings is prioritised to help meet our net zero goals. Also within this work area, we have now established a Historic Buildings Retrofit Task force, focused on the specific challenges of retrofitting Westminster's exceptional historic built environment. The first workshop with the task force took place on 10 October and included a range of external stakeholder representatives. Initial outcomes of the workshop are to be produced and published later this month with a detailed plan of future work areas to follow. In addition, we have published the first of our Retrofit How to guides on windows and a series of simple guides for householders on other retrofit measures will follow.

### **Design Review Panel**

We have begun to scope work on establishment of a Westminster Design Review Panel, as set out in the manifesto. We are currently undertaking background research and scoping to ensure any such panel will follow best practice and promote the highest possible standards of sustainable high quality design which is suited to Westminster's special context.

### **Community Infrastructure Levy**

At the 17 October Cabinet meeting, we agreed our report 'Priorities for the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and update to the CIL Spending Policy Statement and governance arrangements', which updates policies and governance to set a new, more flexible and inclusive direction for the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) in Westminster.

The Council has formally adopted a new CIL Spending Policy Statement, which sets local policies and priorities to inform funding decisions. The document identified five priorities for CIL spending, in line with the Fairer Westminster Strategy: affordable housing (enabling); the green transition; sustainable and active travel; community facilities; and accessible and inclusive public spaces. It introduces new policies, notably one to allow CIL funding to support operation and maintenance of infrastructure; we are no longer limited to building a community centre but can now provide the staff needed to run it.

The new governance processes abolishes the Cabinet CIL Committee. Strategic CIL funding decisions will be taken by the CRG and cabinet/council, and Neighbourhood CIL applications will be decided by the Cabinet Member or the cabinet. These changes are part of a broader audit and review of CIL processes to inform potential changes to optimise efficiency, effectiveness, and transparency.

### **Asset of Community Value**

The Curzon Mayfair was designated an Asset of Community Value (ACV) in August and the landowners right to request a review of the decision expired in late September, cementing the protections given to the cinema by ACV status. Local campaigners including the Mayfair Neighbourhood Forum welcomed the decision, driven by their concern that the landlord is intent on forcing the Curzon out of the property.

ACVs are buildings or land with a use that furthers the social wellbeing or social interest of the local community. With evidence that most cinema-goers are local, the council found that the Curzon

provides a distinct cultural use and is an important community asset for the area. ACV status prevents landowners from selling the building prior to a six-month moratorium intended to provide the local community an opportunity to raise funds to purchase it themselves.

## **Smart City**

### **Air Quality Data Platform**

An application programme interface (API) will be made available for third parties such as universities, citizens, and businesses to freely access the data and create their own value from it. The progress to date has comprised the development of a prototype on which we sought user feedback from our communities, including residents and businesses. Using this feedback, we have refined our requirements for a platform and are currently procuring a development team to build the minimum viable product.

### **Connect Westminster**

The latest Connect Nations report was released at the end of September. Full Fibre availability in Westminster is currently 63.7% which equates to 104,846 premises. Westminster currently sits as the 34<sup>th</sup> most connected Local Authority in regard to Full Fibre availability.

The Connect Westminster Business voucher scheme was launched in August 2017 with a funding pot of £2m. Businesses with a connection that has speeds less than 30Mbps are eligible for a grant of £2,000 to upgrade to a gigabit capable connection. Vouchers have made large areas of the borough commercially viable for broadband providers to invest, accelerating their rollout plans. There has been a significant improvement in broadband speeds for voucher recipients with a 2,000% average increase in download speeds and a 9,900% increase in upload speeds.

#### *Delivery to date*

Total vouchers paid: 864

Funding distributed to SMEs: £1.7m

Active providers: 40

### **Small Cell Concession**

Westminster already has extensive 3G coverage but due to increasing demands on the network connectivity can be very slow and based on both anecdotal and tangible evidence is having an increasing impact on residents, businesses and visitors. Increased 4G and 5G coverage can be achieved through the deployment of Small Cells.

In 2017 the Council ran an open tender process to establish a concessionaire for street assets in relation to the deployment of small cell technologies (4G, 5G and Wi-Fi). It gave access to all of the Council's non-cherished street lighting assets and street signage assets. Ontix were successful in securing the contract, and this has now been operating since June 2018. In this time, they have built 116 small cells and deployed 100 wi-fi access points.