

Climate Action, Housing and Regeneration Policy and Scrutiny Committee

Date:	7 December 2022
Portfolio:	Climate Action, Regeneration & Renters
The Report of:	Councillor Matt Noble
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- 1. Key decisions made in the preceding period since my last Policy & Scrutiny report dated 14 November:**
 - 25/11/22 – Use of Interim Management Orders to Tackle Rogue Landlords
- 2. The following report includes my priorities and delivery progress to date of the new administration.**

Climate Action

Environment Justice Measure (EJM)

At Full Council on 9 November, we proudly launched the EJM, a tool that supports the framework for a 'Fairer Environment' in Westminster. The EJM is a data tool that aims to highlight differences in how people are impacted by their environment and climate change. It also shows the distribution of green, sustainable resources and spaces across the City. Our aim is for residents to be aware of this information so together we can reduce these inequalities and invest in the local environment. The EJM can be found online following the link here: [Westminster's Environmental Justice Measure \(arcgis.com\)](https://www.westminster.gov.uk/environment-justice-measure)

Biodiversity and Greening Update

Officers continue to engage with a variety of new stakeholders to advance our aims of achieving a more biodiverse and greener Westminster. This also includes a closer working relationship with Natural England, to learn about what we can do to meet the requirements of the new Local Nature Recovery Strategy. At a project level we are currently in initial discussions with *A Tomorrow's Forests* at Westbourne Green to scope designs for a 'micro forest' formation and more wildflower planting in the park. Officers and Lead Members are working closely to establish a scope of work regarding biodiversity and greening aligning with the Fairer Westminster vision of the new administration.

Regeneration

Liaising with the Greater London Authority (GLA)

The service continues to draw down GLA Grant allocations by the March 2023 deadline. Schemes within the GLA's current Affordable Housing Programme 21-23 are required to start construction by March 2023 in order to claim funding. A working group and additional resources have been assigned to help resolve any dependencies and ensure schemes stand the best possible chance of claiming funding.

In addition, we are in liaison with the GLA regarding potential grant funding for Church Street and Ebury Bridge Regeneration schemes. There is positive ongoing dialogue and Westminster's programme continues to perform well and deliver much needed affordable housing which aligns with the GLA's objectives for funding.

The first decision making mechanism to support the aims of Fairer Housing in Westminster was approved by Cabinet on 17 October 22 with the adoption of the Truly Affordable Housing Strategy. All future decisions concerning changes to any of our development or regeneration schemes will be made via Cabinet Member Decision or at the discretion of the Executive Director for Growth, Planning and Housing for matters taken under delegated authority.

Church Street Programme Update

The Church Street Ballot continues to progress. Voting will be held from 28 November to 19 December. Results from the ballot will be made in my first report to the Committee in 2023.

Church Street Site A design is being updated by the architectural team to incorporate the tenure change to 70/30 affordable /Intermediate split. This is to specifically increase the number of family sized affordable rent units and a larger library space. Officers intend to submit updated drawings and reports to planning before Christmas. This will also include design amendments being made to incorporate new Fire Safety Regulations which are expected to be formalized in 2023.

There are 11 residential properties remaining in occupation, 6 of these are expected to be vacated shortly. The remaining 5 require further negotiations. There are also 12 commercial occupiers still in possession of the ground floor commercial units. Updated strategies for achieving vacant possession via negotiation are being assessed at the moment.

Church Street Green Spine

Following the successful completion of the Green Spine phase 1 project, feasibility for phase 2 of the scheme is underway. Early engagement has already taken place in the local area and the team recommends that a further round of engagement is carried out before progressing designs further.

Church Street Triangle Project

The Church Street Triangle public realm project is now complete and the next phase of works is underway which will see the refurbishment of two commercial units and the conversion of the adjacent toilet block. There will be shop front improvements and the units will house a new

Enterprise Space, retail and studio units, co working and event space. The toilet block will become a new café and toilet provision.

Cuttle Construction have been appointed to deliver the works with practical completion expected in Summer 2023 and the operator, Arbeit Studios, a mix-use creative workspace provider will manage the café and workspaces to ensure maximum use and benefit for the community.

Ebury Programme Update

The team are actively progressing the design development work associated with the delivery of a larger phase 2, incorporating more social homes. A planning application for this larger phase 2 is scheduled to be submitted in Q3 2023.

The Planning Inspectorate recently approved the Compulsory Planning Order (CPO) decision. Although only ever used as a last resort, the order provides the council with certainty that the scheme can be delivered as proposed. The team continues to work intensively with each remaining household to conclude voluntary acquisitions and temporary rehousing of tenants in accordance with the delivery programme.

Renters

House in Multiple Occupation (HMO) Update

In mid-November the Council won an appeal against a Civil Penalty Notice we issued against the owner of an unlicensed HMO. We successfully defended the appeal, resulting in a £9000 penalty for the landlord. We hope this sends a signal to all unlicensed landlords that we will continue to fight for the rights of those renting in the private sector, as everyone in Westminster should have live in a home that adheres to the highest quality of safety standards

Update on Short Terms Lets (STL)

For the period 2018 to present there are 1124 cases under investigation of unlicensed STLs. Work continues at the officer level to enforce against this activity. As an administration we continue to lobby Government for additional powers and clearer regulations around this sector growing increasingly popular in our City due to platforms such as Airbnb.

Recently, video evidence has been obtained for a problem property in the Paddington area, that proves breach of the 90-night calendar limit for residential properties to be short term let and thus will allow for enforcement proceedings to be initiated. This will take the form of an Enforcement Notice issued under Section 172 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 that will require the cessation of the short term letting use of the property. Officers will continue to inspect the property to further build the case and ensure compliance with the notice.

Westminster Landlords Forum

On Wednesday 16 November, we hosted the new bi-annual Westminster Landlords Forum, organised by the Private Sector Housing team contributing to our strategy commitment of meaningful and effective engagement with our key stakeholders in the private rented sector. The event was attended by approximately 50 landlords and property agents.

The forum involved presentations to the audience concerning key issues in the private rented sector, and important information regarding landlords legal responsibilities. Subjects discussed included new proposals for the new Decent Homes Standard in the sector, fire safety advice provided by London Fire Brigade, an update on property licensing within Westminster, and key information on electrical safety legal requirements in rented properties. The event allowed networking between attending stakeholders, and resolution of queries raised. Overall, feedback highlighted the benefits of the forum in providing relevant and interesting content for the audience, while also fostering a productive relationship with stakeholders.